

COSMOPOLITAN

JULY-AUGUST 2026, ₹200

INDIA

Beauty Reimagined

How Gen Z Is
Redefining the Rules

COSMOPOLITAN
INDIA

Readers'
Choice
Beauty
Awards
2026

Are You Too
Happy Being
Single?

Wearing
the **South**
Asian
Identity

Stars Who
Break the
Script

Randeep
Hooda

Parvathy
Thiruvothu

Alaya F

PV SINDHU

INSIDE THE COMEBACK THAT
MADE HISTORY



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*Cosmopolitan
Readers'
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Our cover star PV Sindhu is (seriously) THAT girl.



Photographer: Sushant Chhabria

Stylist: Nishtha Parwani

Makeup and Hair Artist: Chriselle Ann Baptista

On PV Sindhu: Embellished dress, Lovebirds; rings, RAF and Ayana Silver Jewellery; watch, Titan Glamour Quartz Analog Blue Dial Silver Stainless Steel Strap Watch for Women, from the Titan Purple Glamour Collection



visit our website

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Alaya F Is Tuning Out the Noise



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The Sammy Watch

COACH

Editor's Letter

This issue marks a personal milestone—one year at the helm of *Cosmopolitan* India. But I have struggled to write this editor's letter. Blame the heft of emotions that the entire nation is gripped by. The student protests, centred in Delhi, sparked conversations that travelled across geographies, generations, ideologies—and, inevitably, our Instagram feeds. Whatever side you may be on, here, the win is for democratic rights and recourse, and for a generation that is at the core of this magazine—Gen Z. As everyone celebrates their resilience, we also celebrate their creativity, discipline, and their ability to redefine and humorously own their 'unseriousness'.

Although team *Cosmo* started working on this issue months back, the Beauty Reimagined theme evolved to capture the current moment. Our cover star, ace badminton player PV Sindhu, recently made history by becoming the first Indian to win the Japan Open—an important career win that came after a string of losses and unfortunate injuries. Athletes have a way of pushing through, and there are many stories across our pages that encapsulate victories that inspire. We also spotlight the aesthetic fatigue and mental and physical struggles of a generation that is perpetually online—from body image issues often rooted in filtered visuals on social media, to dangers of trends like looksmaxxing.

Meanwhile, our vibe check section is full of discoveries—be it a comprehensive coffee catalogue that spans the entirety of the country, or a list of unique finds that travel from thrift shops of Harajuku to vintage haunts in Kyoto. Finally, the issue introduces *Cosmopolitan* India Readers' Choice Beauty Awards, for which you, the reader, nominated and eventually voted for your favourite products across categories. It seems Gen Z is increasingly calling the shots—and this issue is proof.



Love,
Snigdha

Snigdha Ahuja
Editor



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Beauty: A portrait series celebrating six creatives who found confidence by embracing every part of themselves.



Beauty: The internet is teaching young men to optimise their faces. But who really profits from the pursuit of perfection?



Culture: A personal essay on migration, queerness, and how moving across borders transformed one wardrobe into a map of identity and belonging.

Life: An exploration of how Gen Z is redefining resistance through memes, music, social media, and unapologetic activism.



FEED your HEART with Olives from Spain



Carolina Marín
Badminton World Champion



Try snacking something NEW!



olivesfromspain.in

Contributors



Amoli Goyal
STYLIST

Sun sign: Sagittarius

Go-to coffee order: Hazelnut flat white on calm days, double espresso on hectic work days.

A beauty habit I inherited: Good food, good sleep, simple skincare—that's all my mom ever preached.

In this issue: Styling actor (and recent National Award winner!) Randeep Hooda for *Cosmo's* digital cover.

p.102



Chriselle Ann Baptista
HAIR & MAKEUP ARTIST

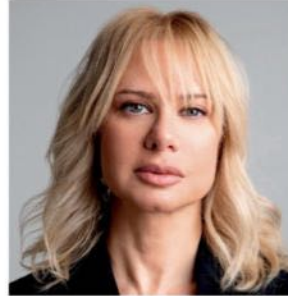
Sun sign: Scorpio

Go-to coffee order: Iced almond milk latte.

A beauty habit I inherited: Long and sound sleep. No makeup can outdo a well-rested face.

In this issue: Hair and makeup for *Cosmo's* cover star PV Sindhu—keeping beauty and hair natural with a less-is-more approach.

p.90



Eleni Chatzinikolidou
HAIR & MAKEUP ARTIST

Sun sign: Leo

Go-to coffee order: Vietnamese coconut coffee.

A beauty habit I inherited: Never skip a proper face cleansing routine, and start the day with a spoonful of extra-virgin Greek olive oil.

In this issue: Makeup for digital cover star Neha Kakkar—a girl-next-door look.

p.110



Kanak Sharma
CINEMATOGRAPHER

Sun sign: Capricorn

Go-to coffee order: I'm a black coffee person.

A beauty habit I inherited: Both my curly hair and nightly hair oiling routine come from my mom.

In this issue: Shot the BTS video for *Cosmo's* cover star.



Sarang Gupta
PHOTOGRAPHER

Sun sign: Pisces

Go-to coffee order: A cortado.

A beauty habit I inherited: To stay well-groomed and smell good at all times.

In this issue: A fun, quirky shoot with actor Parvathy Thiruvothu who was last seen in Malayalam thriller *I, Nobody*.

p.126



Sheefa Gilani
STYLIST

Sun sign: Leo-Virgo cusp

Go-to coffee order: Vietnamese cold brew with a caramel drizzle.

A beauty habit I inherited: Applying lime on my hair to bring out the natural highlights and keep dandruff at bay.

In this issue: Styling digital cover star, Alaya F.

p.116



Suraj Nongmaithem
PHOTOGRAPHER

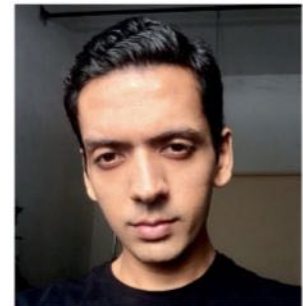
Sun sign: Taurus

Go-to coffee order: Iced cold brew.

A beauty habit I inherited: Always drink plenty of water.

In this issue: Shot photos for *Cosmo's* Readers' Choice Beauty Awards and a profile featuring some really cool Gen Z creatives.

p.29 and p.45



Sushant Chhabria
PHOTOGRAPHER

Sun sign: Libra

Go-to coffee order: An iced pour-over.

A beauty habit I inherited: Exercise, plenty of water and sleep, and staying stress-free beats any skincare routine.

In this issue: Shot *Cosmo's* cover star, badminton champion PV Sindhu.

p.90



Play

Fresh off the Feed

Are you in the loop or out of it? Only Thyme will tell.



Mirzapur: The Movie

September 4, In theatres

The highly anticipated movie of the Prime Video series is set to hit box office. The ensemble cast will return to the big screen, including actors Pankaj Tripathi, Ali Fazal, Rasika Dugal, Shweta Tripathi, and more. Directed by Gurmmeet Singh, the battle for Mirzapur's throne will continue. Expect fights, bloodshed, and lots of drama.



Verity

October 2, In theatres

WDYM, another one of American author Colleen Hoover's books is getting a theatrical release? *acts shocked* Based on the 2018 BookTok sensation, this adaptation stars Anne Hathaway and Dakota Johnson, among others. The story follows a struggling writer Lowen Ashleigh (Johnson), who is invited to finish author Verity Crawford's (Hathaway) series of novels, and a slew of secrets unveil.

Locked In

Your bimonthly reminder to stop rewatching your crush's IG Stories and watch these instead.

By Ananya Rai



Dark Matter Season 2

August 28, Apple TV+

Based on American author Blake Crouch's bestselling book by the same name, the second season will take the story of physicist and professor Jason Dessen (Joel Edgerton) forward. The ten-episode season will come out with one episode every Friday through October 30, which means we're staying in on Fridays starting August 28.



Ted Lasso Season 4

August 5, Apple TV+

Believe in the power of the moustache because Ted Lasso is back with another season. This time Lasso (Jason Sudeikis) will make a return to Richmond to coach a second division women's soccer team. The ensemble will be joined by new cast members including Tanya Reynolds, Jude Mack, and Faye Marsay.



How to Rob a Bank

September 4, In theatres

As the name suggests, this David Leitch movie revolves around a group of bank robbers (not The 1975 song), their popularity (an occupational hazard), and an ambitious heist. The ensemble cast is led by Nicholas Hoult and joined by Zoë Kravitz, Anna Sawai, Rhenzy Feliz, Christian Slater, Pete Davidson, and John C. Reilly.



One Night Only

August 14, In theatres

When singles Allie (Monica Barbaro) and Owen (Callum Turner, aka Mr Dua Lipa) meet in New York City on the one night of the year when single people are allowed to have sex, a series of events keeps them from doing just that. Directed by *Friends* with *Benefits*' Will Gluck, the movie will also have appearances from Maya Hawke, Julia Fox, Este Haim, Ziwe, and King Princess. We're—you guessed it—sat.



Drishyam 3

October 2, In theatres

The Ajay Devgn-Tabu starrer adaptation of the Malayalam franchise has a third installment lined up for fans. While the Malayalam version is about family drama, according to director Abhishek Pathak, the Hindi one is more of a family thriller. And, if you've seen the first two, you know the significance of the release date. Booking tickets as we speak. Not available yet? Don't care!

Mihir Ahuja Is in It to Win It

The actor on chasing purpose over perfection, why success hasn't quietened his nerves, and the simple two-word mantra that's carried him through it all.

By Bani Sachar

There is a certain kind of actor who arrives with fanfare, and then there are those who believe in soft landings—Mihir

Ahuja belongs to the latter camp. From his early roles in *Super 30* (2019), *Made in Heaven* season 2 (2023), and *The Archies* (2023), to growing into the character of Flying Officer CH Bal Reddy aka Baldy on Netflix's upcoming military drama, *Operation Safed Sagar*—his trajectory has been defined less by spectacle, more by momentum. He

answers questions the same way he seems to approach his career. Rarely rushing to fill the silence. However, success hasn't made him any calmer: "The nerves only increase," he admits, almost sheepishly. While filming itself rarely unsettles him ("you've done your homework by then") the days leading up to a

release are another story. Sleepless nights have quietly become a part of the process. "You just want people to like what you've made. That's the pressure that gets to your head." It's a refreshingly honest confession in an industry that often mistakes confidence for certainty. And, that's what makes Ahuja so easy to root for.





GOOD NERVES

Ask the 28-year-old to reflect on the last few years, and he won't tell you about growing visibility or bigger opportunities. Instead, he goes back to a phone call that changed everything. He was cast in *Operation Safed Sagar* by filmmaker Oni Sen barely two days before he was expected to report to an Indian Air Force station—any actor would tell you that isn't nearly enough time to prepare for a role. Looking back, though, the actor believes the timing couldn't have worked out better. "Whatever happens, happens for a reason," he says.

Inspired by the Indian Air Force's aerial operation during the 1999 Kargil War, the film features an ensemble cast including Siddharth, Jimmy Shergill, and Abhay Verma. For Ahuja, those 10 days spent around real fighter pilots was his best prep—not inside a rehearsal room, but standing on an airbase, watching aircrafts take off, observing officers whose lives inspired the series, and absorbing a world that most civilians never get to see. His voice noticeably lifts as he talks about the MiGs, the excitement cutting through an otherwise measured conversation. "We were the last civilians to sit inside those MiGs before they were decommissioned," he says. "I got to touch them, feel them... they were actually part of the Kargil War."

BEYOND THE UNIFORM

Before arriving on set, Ahuja had pages full of questions about the war. Meeting the officers quietly changed the questions he wanted to ask. "It's not easy to talk about war," he says. Instead, he watched. The firmness of an army handshake. The quiet discipline. The way they carried themselves. Those observations eventually found their way into his

performance, but what stayed with him long after filming wrapped was something far less tangible: Perspective. Filming at over 16,000 feet in Himachal Pradesh's Shinku La Pass, the cast battled low oxygen levels and steep climbs. It was physically exhausting, but the discomfort only reinforced his admiration for the people whose stories they were attempting to honour. "They climbed those mountains carrying weapons," he says. "We were struggling to climb them empty-handed." There's one memory he returns to more than any other. A woman officer gifted every cast member a squadron cap before filming came to an end. As we speak, he's wearing it. His smile arrives before the words do, "It stays very close to my heart."

**"I think we're
the ones who
complicate love.
The emotion is still
the same."**

THE ENSEMBLE EFFECT

For someone who's worked alongside everyone from the fresh-faced cast of *The Archies* to industry veterans, Ahuja has developed an approach that keeps him grounded. "I enter every set with a blank slate." Some of those lessons are unexpectedly ordinary. Lunchbox conversations with Shergill often revolved around nothing more than what each of them had packed for the day. Ask him about Dia Mirza, however, and he pauses before answering. "When she talks to you, she's just with you," he says. "She's completely present." He compares that generosity to the quality people often associate with superstar Shah Rukh Khan—the rare ability to make the person in front of you feel like they're the only one in

the room. There's a pattern in the stories Ahuja chooses to tell. They're rarely about fame or the proximity to it. He remembers generosity before celebrity, presence before performance. Even while talking about some of the industry's biggest names, what stays with him isn't their stature, but their kindness.

LOVE, SIMPLIFIED

The conversation inevitably finds its way to love, and Ahuja's outlook feels surprisingly uncomplicated. "I think we're the ones who complicate love," he says. "The emotion is still the same." There are no sweeping declarations or cinematic ideals. His definition of love is refreshingly practical. Less grand gestures, more everyday choices.

Dating apps and social media may have changed how people meet, but he believes old-school romance hasn't disappeared. We've simply become better at overthinking it. His relationship advice arrives wrapped inside something as ordinary as an air conditioner. "If your partner doesn't want the AC on, maybe you switch it off," he laughs. "Sometimes you adjust. Sometimes you compromise. Both people have to." He's currently single, but there's no cynicism in the way he talks about relationships. Just the quiet belief that love, much like life, works best when you stop trying to overcomplicate it.

THE LONG GAME...

Towards the end of our conversation, I ask Ahuja what he'd tell the younger version of himself. He doesn't hesitate. "*Ho jaayega* (it will happen)." The phrase has quietly become his daily mantra. Whenever doubt creeps in, whenever life refuses to move at the pace he'd like, those two words are enough to steady him. "I keep telling myself that, every single day." Later, when I ask what he hopes people associate with his name five years from now, he pauses for noticeably longer. "As someone who never stopped trying." ■

Turn Up the Volume For Mary Ann Alexander

The emerging R&B singer-songwriter won't tone her feelings down for you.

By Ananya Rai

If you had asked teenage Mary Ann Alexander what she wanted to be when she grew up, you would've gotten a different answer every year. As an only child raised in a house full of creatives, the now 25-year-old dabbled in a bit of everything. Her father, a playback singer in the Malayalam film industry, passed down his genes to Alexander, and she ran with it. She was a regular at school youth festivals and at every event that had a stage and a microphone. She was everywhere but in class. But, when the time came to choose a career path, she didn't go the artistic route. Having seen the playback singing industry up close, her father advised against it. Music was supposed to be a hobby, not something you built a life on.

Alexander enrolled at St Joseph's College in Bengaluru for a bachelor's degree in visual communication—a compromise that gave her the freedom to feel creative while also having a job. It turned out to be the right call, though not quite for the reasons she expected. “After I finished college, I kind of gained faith that an artistic career is not something that can't be done,” she says over the phone, before we're briefly interrupted by her doorbell. Alexander has lived alone in Bengaluru ever since she moved from Trivandrum for college. “I do really well for myself when I'm alone and have a lot of solitude,” she admits.

Even though singing was not unthinkable, Alexander did not have a blueprint she could follow. And so, she started teaching music at the Trill Route School of Contemporary Music, while also doing her own thing on the side. At the academy, she built connections that would eventually shape her career—including her now manager, Sange Wangchuk, who was a drum instructor at the institution. “He [Wangchuk] would give me challenges like, ‘Hey, I have booked you a gig in two weeks. Can you write yourself a set? I don't want you to be doing

covers. Can you do all of your own songs?’ And I would be like, ‘I have two songs.’ And he would say, ‘Exactly, write more.’” So she did. And then, of course, there was social media.

If you're chronically online (like most of us at *Cosmopolitan* India), chances are you've seen at least one of Alexander's Reels. She has a finsta too, no less. It's where she gets to be raw, funny, and relatable, without crowding out the music on her main account. After releasing her debut EP *Love or*

“When I was a child, I was always told, ‘Oh my god, why are you so emotional? Why do you cry so much?’ So when I finally found the space to just put all of those big feelings in, it was very relieving.”

a Lesson in March, Alexander took a work trip (she rarely travels for leisure) to the US. Other than discovering the man-made magic of Tide pens, she spent time in LA and NYC meeting artists and getting a shot at showcasing her work. And, in true Angeleno fashion, she also made the rounds on a couple of podcasts, including Cam Sullivan-Brown's *Chillin With Cam* and *The Noah Rymysza Interview*.

HEART ON HER SLEEVE

Alexander has been a recording artist since she was seven. She wrote *Over the Ocean* (2019) at 15 for a movie her friend's father was directing, and refuses to call it an accurate representation of who she is today

(in her defence, she was practically a child). Needless to say, her songwriting has evolved since. *Love or a Lesson* was made without any strict rules. “I decided I'm not going to think too hard about what I want this project to be. I would just let the music guide me and then we can make sense of it later.” The result is anything but cloying. Her latest music video for the track *Too Much* off the EP has more than 2 million views within a week of its release. The song captures the exhaustion of being told to feel less when you're someone who feels everything, deeply—a sentiment she immortalises in the lyrics: “Guess I'm running too fast for your tempo / Thought you hold me through it all / But you only love it when I play it small / But I want to have it all.”

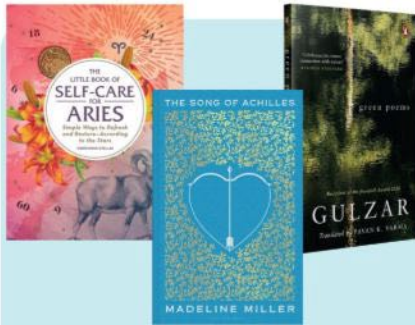
R&B didn't originate in India, but Alexander found her way to it through the internet—and once she did, it made complete sense. “I got very drawn to the genre maybe because of the kind of person I am. I have a lot of big feelings and emotions,” she reflects. As a songwriter who pulls almost entirely from her own life, she found in R&B permission to be vulnerable. “When I was a child, I was always told, ‘Oh my god, why are you so emotional? Why do you cry so much?’,” she shares, adding: “So when I finally found the space to just put all of those big feelings in, it was very relieving.”

Currently working on performing live sets and recording a second EP, Alexander feels she has learnt one of the most important lessons—if not the most important—any artist could learn: Do not wait for inspiration. “Don't wait for some divine source to come to you—you have to be able to sit down and do it diligently, and you will enter a flow state.” Her favourite thing to say right now is that she wants to be God's favourite collaborator. “Because when you're in that flow state, you get ideas from this source, and it almost feels like it's a collaboration between you and God. And I say God, but God just means whatever you want that feeling to be.” ■

Read the Signs

Books you should be adding to cart, based on your zodiac sign.

By Team Cosmo



♈
ARIES

War and Verses

Feisty and adventurous—all the Aries in the room, raise your hands if you feel the vibe! Ares, the god of war in Greek mythology not only underlines your name, but mirrors the passion you hold and yield. Pick up Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* that revisits the Trojan War, Constance Stellas' guide to self-care for your sign and for Aries lovers, and nature-dipped verses by poet-lyricist Gulzar to fall in love deeper.

♉
TAURUS

A Thing of Beauty

For Taureans, who invest in commitment and loyalty, American psychologist and writer John M. Gottman's iconic work needs to be on their must-read list. For the aesthetic and beauty-loving self, we have legendary couturier Jean Paul Gaultier's (also a Taurus) 1990 photo book and couturiers Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla's *India Fantastique Fashion* as an unputdownable collectible.



♊
GEMINI

Classic Case of Cool

Don't call them two-faced—they are just multifaceted. For Geminis, it's about curiosity, indulgence, and that secret party to which they will always have an invitation. So, we curated some fiction and fun—the ambition of Scarlett O'Hara, the endearing adventures of Rebecca Bloomwood, and Anneloes van Gaalen's *Never Leave the House Naked*—where fashion jargon comes out to play.



♋
CANCER

Heart to Heart

Oh, Cancerians! Soft, protective, love to love and be loved. *Cosmo* recommends Joanne Harris' 1999 novel *Chocolat*, which is deliciously sensual, alongside the worldwide bestseller *Eat, Pray, Love*—both of which were adapted into films. Top the journey with *Love Her Wild* by the anonymous poet, Atticus, who went from Insta-popularity to being a global force in millennial-coded poetry.

♌
LEO

See Them Roar

The mighty Leo loves to make an entry—and if you want to bookmark something for the fire sign, you better make it epic. Homer's ancient Greek epic, *The Odyssey*, is for the literary smugs (and well, for Christopher Nolan fans), while the dystopian hit *The Hunger Games* follows. Add some drama with journalist Sara Gay Forden's *House of Gucci*, which deliciously unravels murder, myth, luxury, and lore.



♍
VIRGO

Under Control

Take out a pen and note this down, dear Virgo. The pragmatism of the earth sign translates into its love for transparency, order, and action. *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* is an obvious choice for this curious, meticulous sign, while both John Grisham and Stephen Hawking bring layered fact and fiction to the table—just how Virgos like it.



Pretty Powerful

Venus rules Libra, and brings with it romance, charm, and as the scale symbolises, balance and harmony. For its love of beauty, Design Museum's *Fifty Shoes That Changed the World*, while English Romantic poet John Keats and the global sensation *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life* invites ideas of natural symmetry.



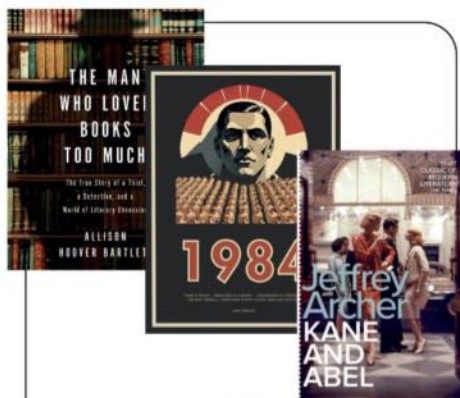
Out Of Office

The Sagittarian centaur wants to explore, and in that pursuit seems to seek life's biggest adventures. Driven to polish its intellect and knowledge, *Cosmo* recommends classics like *Gulliver's Travels*, and modern-day adventures with layered learnings and symbolism, including the work of Andrew Sean Greer and Dan Brown.



Seeking and Finding

Like fellow Earth sign Virgo, Capricorns thrive on pragmatism and purpose. Discipline, authenticity, and enigma connect with Capricorn's inner selves—Haruki Murakami's *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* and bestsellers like *Normal People* and *Shantaram* will pique the interest of the sign.



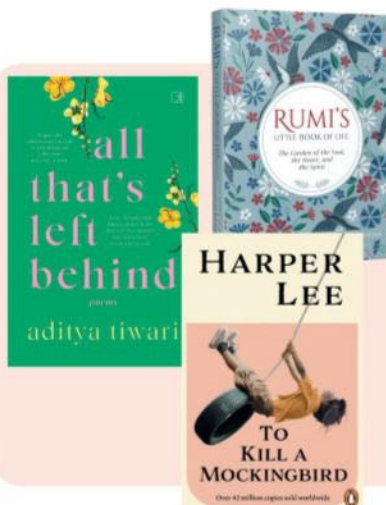
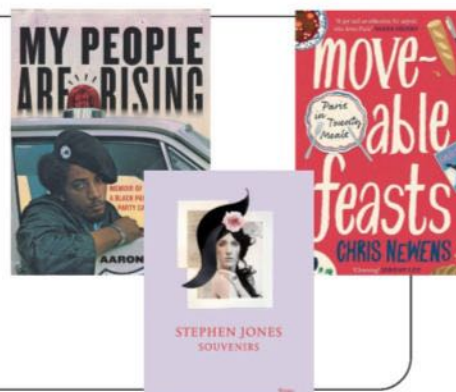
Mystery Wagon

Confidence and a captivating personality follows in the footsteps of this water sign. For Scorpions, who love to engage with mysteries and storytelling with a side of world-building, add the intriguing tale of book thief John Charles Gilkey documented in *The Man Who Loved Books Too Much* to the reading list, alongside the dystopian universe of *1984* by George Orwell and Jeffrey Archer's classic, *Kane And Abel*.



Personal Art

Many confuse Aquarius for a water sign, but it's actually an air sign—known for intellect and analytical thinking. Think leadership, craftsmanship, and experimentation—everything that defines the Aquarius spirit. So, *Cosmo* picked a revolutionary, a milliner, and a writer who takes a culinary voyage.



Feeding the Soul

The dream brigade, assemble! Pisceans are known for being creative, artistic, and gentle, and nothing resonates with them better than moving stories and poems that help with an emotional escape. From author Aditya Tiwari's *All That's Left Behind* to the Pulitzer Prize-winning *To Kill a Mockingbird*—the water sign immerses in the story it reads.

How Book Clubs Anchor the Great Indian Offline Revival

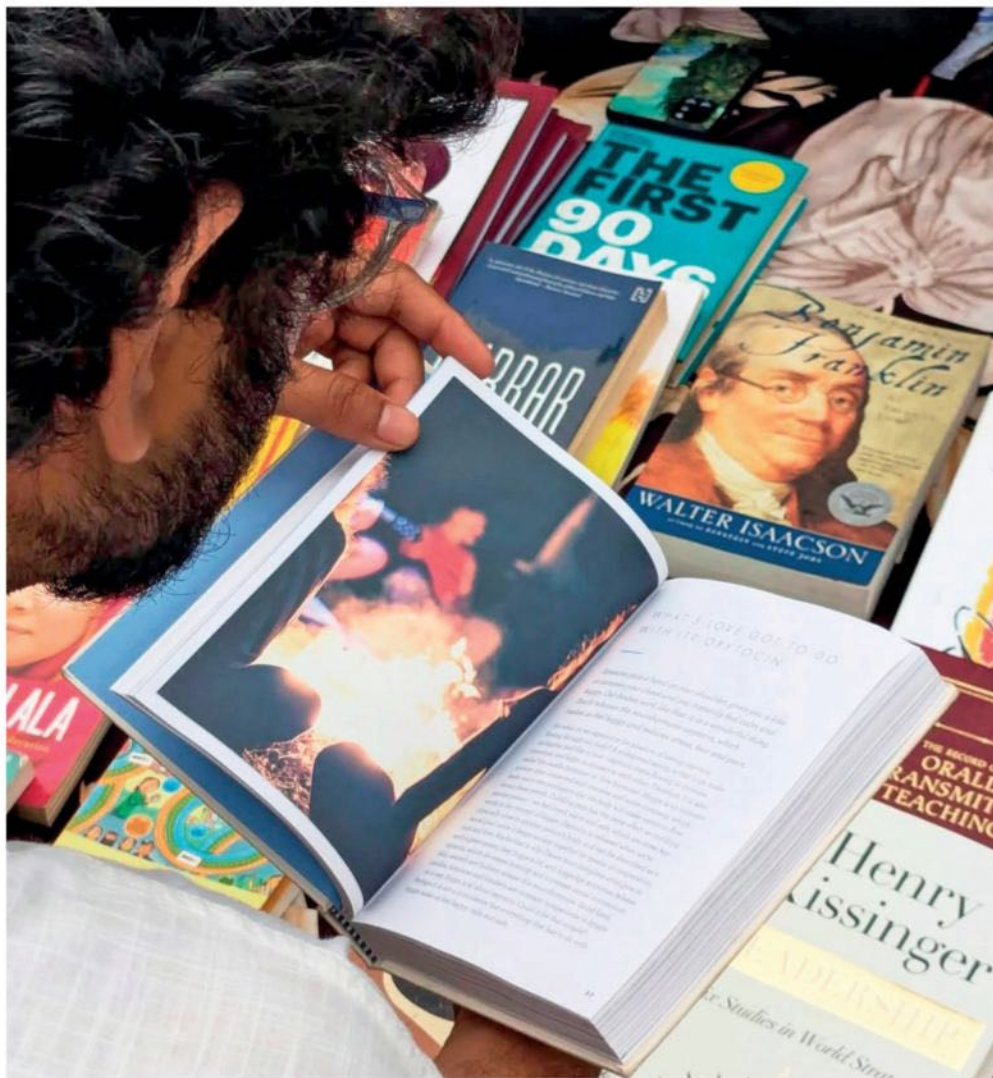
Silent reading communities, pop culture-inspired clubs, and books interpreted through music. Reading is hot again, and it's bringing people out of their homes.

By Darshita Goyal

For years, there was only one way to have a book club. The group would pick a title for the month and then come together to break down the plot and character development. The books were probably by literary greats and stood as a declaration of how smart the members were. By virtue of the skill they demanded, the gatherings carried a sense of exclusivity, much like most social clubs from the past.

Yet today in the 2020s, you can erase this prescriptive definition of book clubs. Look at the thriving sister communities of Cubbon Reads in Bengaluru, Pune Reads, and Delhi's Lodhi Reads. New age book clubs function as silent reading gatherings where anyone—across age group and experience—is welcome to bring a text. Every weekend, hordes of reading enthusiasts in different cities sit together in public parks, noses buried in titles ranging from newspapers and academic directories to children's magazines.

At the end of their meet, they often exchange notes and stack up all the texts for a photo. But that's it, no mandatory interrogations on which author, how many pages, or favourite





Left: A reading session in progress at Cubbon Reads, Bengaluru; right: Lodhi Reads, Delhi's annual fundraising book sale

lines. Perhaps the free entry and reduced stakes make the weekly commitment attractive. “There are few avenues today for people to engage in leisurely activities without having to pay,” says Ritika Chawla, co-founder of Lodhi Reads. “The club creates a feeling of community without any pressure to socialise.”

In an era when overwhelming screen time and remote jobs have created an epidemic of social isolation, book clubs provide gentle respite. They present an easy avenue to be around people IRL while leaving it entirely up to the attendee on just how much—or how little—they prefer to interact with others. As studies reveal heightened social anxiety among Gen Z and millennials, these no-questions-asked gatherings become training wheels to return to big group settings offline. Take Prakriti Singh, a 31-year-old from Bengaluru who started her book club, *Let It Linger*, in 2025, with the intention to step out of the house more.

“Despite being a homebody, remote working made me crave meeting people,” she says. “I

“ The book club creates a feeling of community without any pressure to socialise.

— Ritika Chawla, Co-founder, Lodhi Reads

wanted to create a space for other anxious introverts like me. We have one attendee who only says two lines every session. Yet, he hasn’t missed a single club meet in the last year. That’s the feeling I cherish.” Although Singh’s club follows a more traditional approach, where the whole group reads one title together, the discussions go far beyond the book itself. The room doubles as a hype house where members share their own writing for honest feedback. On other days, you can expect passionate debates on the best cover for your Kindle while every meet ends in an unofficial visit to California Burrito. The hang doesn’t end at the book, it

only provides an entry point making the great outdoors feel easier to navigate.

BETWEEN THE LINES

As kids, in-person social interaction was programmed into the every day, whether it was evening playtime with friends or weekly activity classes. Adult life lacks this consistency. Hustle culture keeps the daily so packed that even catch-ups with friends are booked on calendars and planned weeks in advance. This routine makes it easy to forget about socialising offline altogether. Ask yourself how many days have you gone without consciously meeting anyone outside work or home? In contrast, a fortnightly or monthly reading meet is a small but sure way to ensure you spend active time offline, with and surrounded by new energy.

“My day became a series of productivity check lists: Work, workout, cook, eat. Book club is my time to let go of optimisation and be present,” says Kriti Agarwal, a Mumbai-based nutritionist who runs a book club with her friends. With more people seeking a break



Snapshots of Lodhi Reads, Delhi's annual fundraising book sale



from performance, Singh also intentionally opts for fictional titles that provide entertainment without the added task of skill or personality development. These gatherings aim to reclaim reading for reading's sake. This is especially important as social media fatigue pushes people to more analogue forms of leisure.

The numbers reflect the shift too. At the 2026 Jaipur Literature Festival, co-director William Dalrymple reported that over 44,000 books were sold as authors saw some of the longest signing queues in the festival's history. Similarly, the Kolkata Book Fair in February drew a record footfall of 3.2 million visitors, up from 2.7 million last year. It helps that pop culture is adding clout to books as well. From *Off Campus* and *Heated Rivalry* to *House of the Dragon* and *Wuthering Heights*, some of the year's most anticipated and loved releases have been adaptations of successful titles. In fact, some book clubs embrace this twist with multidisciplinary meetings.

Bengaluru-based Anoop Prakash recently started a book club with her colleagues, where each month they interpret a title through music, food, or film. "My aim is to make reading the portal for us to engage in more social activities together; books are how I see the world and now we

It helps that pop culture is adding clout to books as well. Some of the year's most anticipated releases have been adaptations of successful titles.

have a club for it," the 28-year-old shares. This month, they will read Caro Claire Burke's *Yesteryear*, where each member will make an extensive recipe from scratch to poke fun at tradwife culture. In June, they read Gabrielle Zevin's *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* and marked the meeting with a visit to a video game arcade. Directly or indirectly, these social groups contribute to the return to reading, and publishers recognise the value they bring.

HARDCOVER, SOFT LAUNCH

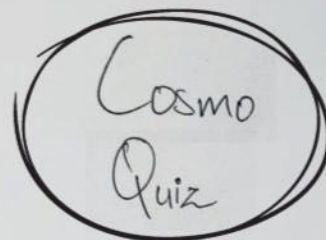
Prerna Singh, head of publicity and marketing at Hachette India, reveals

that book clubs have become core to planning a title's roll-out. "They are one of the most powerful forms of word of mouth we have seen," she says. "We actively facilitate author interactions exclusively for members and plan giveaways around new releases to drive engagement and conversation." Ask Kavita Jhala, who sits on both sides of the coin as an author of rural fiction book *Gram Shots* and the founder of Kaffeinated Konversations, an Indore-based reading society. Founded in 2016, long before BookTok and Bookstagram made book social gatherings cool, the club has invited authors including Chitra Divakaruni, Shunali Khullar Shroff, and Kiran Manral for discussion.

The 43-year-old started the community to carve more room for homegrown writers and readers to discover each other. Now, the members have grown into lifelong friends who gift each other flowers for Valentine's Day and write postcards while on holiday. Jhala is not surprised in the least about book clubs' role in providing solace offline. "Literature changes lives. From the patronage of poets in kingdoms and caffeinated meetings in pre-independent India's coffee houses to what we have today, book clubs never disappear, they just have a new name in each generation." ■

Sakshi Shivdasani

The podcaster and content creator famously doesn't give a f*ck. She still gave us five minutes for a Cosmo quiz.



Age:

29

Home town:

Mumbai

Sun/Moon/Rising:

Leo, Aquarius, Pisces

My screen time:

7 hours

My first celebrity crush:

John Abraham

Book I'm currently reading:

Wedding People

Three things in my bag at all times:

Air pods, indie wild lip gloss, face mist

Biggest icks in a relationship:

Whining and dressing badly

Last thing I googled:

Where can I find a thrifted Gucci Jacket

Reality show I'd absolutely win:

None, Never

Dream Moment of Silence guest:

Just Me and Naina

If I was at Cosmo, I'd want my job to be:

Person who has a lot of ideas and no motivation to execute them

Portrait of Sushi and I:







INTERNET'S RUDEST BARISTA BABISTA RUDEST INTERNET'S

...is actually very nice.

By Ananya Rai

There is a woman in New York who does not drink coffee, yet there she is, standing behind the Brooklyn Coffee

Shop counter, reading a provocative book—a different one every time, there is no world in which she’s actually finished any of them. She is full of disdain, has a vocal fry, and she is mean. She is the archetypal barista every city in every country seems to produce, and she appears on my screen at 6pm, New Delhi time. “Is New York the new New Delhi?” Carrie Bradshaw once wondered, and now so do I.

Writer and actor Pooja Tripathi, the aforementioned barista, has just woken up; it’s 8:30am in New York. I, meanwhile, am sitting across the world in a full face of makeup, as if I’m the one being interviewed. Truth be told, I wanted to make an impression (and hide the face that had survived a full day of office air) on her, or on Thyme, her alter-ego, I’m not quite sure.

Thyme is an unbothered, anti-authority barista at the Brooklyn Coffee Shop (BCS), a fictional hipster cafe in New York, created and written by Tripathi. Alongside her co-worker Cale—played by Darryl Gene Daughtry Jr (DJ), Tripathi’s longtime friend—the two are usually too emotionally exhausted to even make a drink. Each episode brings an even more eccentric customer through the door, played by an actor or comedian on rotation, which has included Padma Lakshmi, Kumail Nanjiani, season regular Benton McClintock, and singer Becky G, among others.

But the Webby Award-winning show is about more than just coffee (some would argue that it’s not about coffee at all), it’s a social satire. Even though its references skew distinctly American, the characters are somehow universal. There’s the privileged, bratty schoolboy (who has his own intern) enrolled at the prestigious Timothée H Chalamet Academy for Boys. The brunch girl running late

to her girl’s girl club debrief, who gets lectured on fair compensation for labour. The girlboss feminist who insists on a female buffalo’s milk but can’t be bothered to tip the woman behind the counter. And of course, the situationship girl, who is spiralling because her situationship hasn’t texted back in 25 hours and 19 minutes, not that she’s counting.

A couple of years before BCS became a thing (in 2023), Tripathi was already making sketches on social media on an iPhone in front of a green screen, until her cinematographer friend offered to shoot them in a real coffee shop. “It’s so funny how there are these media companies that plan these things out. They are like, ‘Oh, we have a five-year plan and we want to do this...’” she says. “With me, it was just that my boyfriend was like, ‘I think

you need to do these weekly.’”

Tripathi and DJ, who have recently moved to a new and much larger space since their old location shut down, used to help each other with self-tapes for auditions before they became co-workers. She knew she had to write a character for him in the show when she saw the Juilliard audition for a live action remake of *The Fairly OddParents*. “He was so funny in it. It was different from other auditions he typically did that I’d helped him with,” shares Tripathi.

As with most creative decisions on the show, Tripathi casts each guest by instinct. The pipeline for finding them has grown considerably: “We get tons of DMs and emails,” and not only from actors, but from management teams, PR companies, and shows looking for a promotional boost. “We have a





huge spreadsheet of all the people that could be on the show. But it comes down to me just feeling if the person works or if they might bring something we haven't seen before on the show."

Tripathi is a compelling actor because for most of her viewers, it's hard to tell where Thyme ends and she begins. Even something like smiling gets read as a character bleed. "I posted some headshots the other day and I'm smiling in them, and so many comments were like, 'This is AF and I'm disturbed by this.'" Some of the overlap is earned, though. Tripathi admits sharing Thyme's wackiness. She's also big on all kinds of crazy lattes (without caffeine) they come up with at BCS. She loves her golden milk and beetroot latte, the works. Much like Thyme, Tripathi views the world in an alternative way. But she believes that

unlike her character, she's much easier to work with. "I don't think that I'm rude like her. I'm a lot nicer."

POOJA, BC (BEFORE COFFEE SHOP)

As the only child in a South Asian household, Tripathi wasn't expected to become the ultimate cliché, but she was still expected to go to medical school. And if that wasn't going to be the case, there were four other things lined up. "When it was clear that there was no hope, everyone kind of gave up and I just did my own thing." She pivoted to business school instead, as a way to buy herself time. After graduating, she landed in fashion, until it became clear that working a corporate job just wasn't for her.

While still at her desk job, Tripathi started working on *Amsterdam*

Ave. (2019)—a six-episode web series—with her friend Dionne van den Berg, who also funded it. The show landed her a manager and she started auditioning regularly, even as she juggled several odd jobs for five years. "I'm actually quite risk-averse, which is funny because I ended up taking so many risks." Looking back, Tripathi can tell that there were hints all along. Like the time she took a class about comedy writing, or when she became the star of a play in her senior year of high school. "It wasn't that hard to become the star of the play, not that many people auditioned," she sells herself short, but it was still the first time she had ever done anything like that.

With BCS having hit a few milestones, like a weekly episode cadence and brand deals to sustain itself, Tripathi is now looking to expand the universe further, starting with more supplemental content on YouTube. "I think we can definitely be selling merch too, which is something that I'm trying to work on. And there's an opportunity for a live aspect of the show where maybe we have an experience where you can come and order from us for a couple of hours. I would also love to do a branded Brooklyn Coffee Shop coffee that we could sell."

For Tripathi, the whole ride has been surreal. She's always looking forward to her next email. As she puts it, "the amazing thing about the internet is that you never know what's coming around the corner." While she knew BCS was distinct enough to land, she had no idea it would travel as far as it has, India included. "A lot of these experiences or the satire that we portray feels so New York City. And I was worried maybe at first that it was too niche, but I think with globalisation, there's an element of this in every city." As for the love from India, her theory checks out: She's Indian, playing a character Indian actors would never get to play. Touché, how many Indian Marxist baristas do you know? ■

Glow

Skin in the Game

Everything worth putting on your skin, hair, and body.



drop the FILTER

What makes these six creatives different? Let's hear from them.

Photographer: Suraj Nongmaithem
Creative Director: Tongpangnuba Longchari
Makeup Artist: Choi Haokip
Hair Artist: Sonia Nayar Sethi



GEYING

wouldn't
change a
thing

intentional
life

discovering
and
rediscovering

confident

TATTOO ARTIST

tattoos
and
piercings

work
in
progress

aligned
with
who
I want
to be

**"THAT FACE IS A PRODUCT
OF GREAT LOVE."**

REM

MODEL | DJ

a fun
girl
living
her
life

no
longer a
woman
in STEM

being
able to
express
yourself
is a gift

i run
the sickest
"underground"
parties
in this
country

p0lluti0n

"HATING ON OLD
YOU IS SO PASSÉ."

PRABHLEEN KAUR

STYLIST | CREATIVE DIRECTOR

smile
that
wasn't
rehearsed

recognising
yourself
before
anyone
else
does

creating
rather
than
consuming

non
curated

free to
play with
colours,
makeup,
outfits

less
interested
in perfection

**"COMFORTABLE IN MY
OWN SKIN."**

KELCYSTARR

DJ

confident
and
rebellious

take
creative
risks

became
the
person
i always
imagined

expressing
myself
through
music

unconventional

most
alive

exactly
where
i'm
supposed
to be

**"NEVER AFRAID TO
THINK DIFFERENTLY."**

AMAN LAHAR

MMA FIGHTER

i don't
measure
myself
only
by wins
anymore

figuring
things
out

growth
comes
from the
difficult
moments
just as
much
as the
victories

discipline

the most
grounded
and the
most like
myself

the fight
tribe

**"NEVER
STOPPED TO APPRECIATE
WHERE I ALREADY WAS."**

ANGOM

FASHION DESIGNER | SKATEBOARDER

i feel most
like myself
when I'm
creating

chasing
every
day

curious

express
myself
freely

still
figuring
things
out

don't
have to
pretend
to be
anyone
else

passion

**"BECAME THE PERSON
I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE."**

Lust List

Beauty finds that make us sit up and take notice.

By Itisha Arya



Glow Getter

Want to smell like a literal snack? This shimmer-infused lotion pairs deep hydration with a heavy dose of sparkle and a cosy mix of whipped vanilla and soft cashmere. It's perfect for layering, leaving your skin sheen-laced, and honestly, with no crumbs.

Bare Vanilla Shimmer Fragrance Lotion, Victoria's Secret, ₹2,699

Smush-Your-Pout Era

Forget the high-maintenance lipsticks because your pout is officially entering its soft-blur era. Smushy Matte Lip Balm lends a soft-focus finish with zero dryness, thanks to mochi rice powder and sugar ceramides. Just swipe and smush, and yes, it comes in 12 summer-ready shades, because we all love options, don't we?

Smushy Matte Lip Balm, NYX Professional Makeup, ₹899



Serum-dipity Set

Rough textures and stubborn patches have nothing on you. Try this body serum to even out bumpy spots and pair it with the peptide and vitamin C face serum to plump skin and target pigmentation. Consider your head-to-toe routine elevated.

SOOPER DUO Face + Body Serum Set, Boofootel, ₹3,100



Dull Skin? We Don't Know Her

This weightless cream-gel hybrid is a total powerhouse, melting in with a fresh, velvet finish. Packed with vitamin C, niacinamide, and hyaluronic acid, it's a literal cheat code for firming and evening out skin tone. Plus, the luxury citrus-floral scent turns your routine into a whole vibe. Cue the instant radiance.

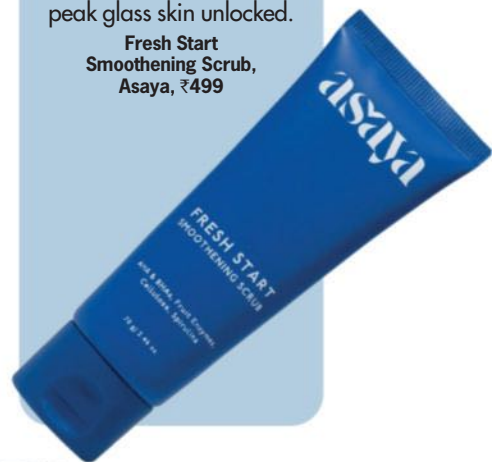
Power Shake Bouncy Cloud Cream, KIKO Milano, ₹1,950

Gunk Be Gone

Weather sabotaging your skin? Not on our watch.

This scrub is a literal Ctrl+Alt+Del for summer build-up. It physically pills up to melt away clogged pores in five minutes flat. Wash it off and boom—peak glass skin unlocked.

Fresh Start Smoothing Scrub, Asaya, ₹499



Curl, Care, Repeat

One tube, two jobs, zero excuses. Double Take is a lash duo that just gets it—volumising mascara on one end, lash serum on the other, because your lashes deserve a 9-to-5 and a night shift. The only overtime your lashes will ever thank you for.

Double Take Lash Boosting Care Serum + Volumizing Mascara, Sammmm, ₹1,000





Brow-nie Point

Fake the ultimate full-brow look with zero effort. This pen's microtip mimics real brow hair with total precision—offering 24-hour water-resistant hold that won't budge. Use the built-in spoolie to blend it out seamlessly. Available in four shades.

MicroStroke Brow Pen,
Anastasia Beverly Hills, ₹3,500



Pout-O-Meter

Ditch basic balms. This lip plumper drops a weightless, water-like gloss finish with a sheer wash of colour that feels like total nothingness. Packed with natural oils, it locks in juicy hydration for up to 12 hours while giving you that effortless, volumised bounce.

Waterism Lip Plumper,
TIRTIR, ₹1,200



Smart Skin Flex

Unsubscribe from the anti-ageing fearmongering. embrace pairs fast-acting retinaldehyde for early renewal with deep-working retinyl propionate for long-term gains. Proof that ageing is a privilege, not a flaw.

Embrace Smart Retinoid ONight Serum, d'you, ₹3,400



Eight Steps, Cancelled

Why spend half your pay cheque and time on a massive skincare shelf when you can get toner, serum, and moisturiser in a single bottle? This product contains multi-hyphenate milk that eliminates the need for layering by condensing eight benefits into a weightless texture.

It's non-sticky, making it an absolute lifesaver on humid days.

One-Step Wonder, Antinorm, ₹1,199



Blush Please

Your shortcut to that post-gossip, rosy-cheek vibe across five shades. It's packed with botanical actives, shea butter, and rosehip oil to juice up your skin and blur pores—all while disguising as your new favourite makeup staple.

Good Glow Dewy Crème Blush,
GoodSide, ₹1,770



It-Girl Duo

Dial up the drama with this twist-open eyeshadow palette featuring plush mattes and 3D shimmers that blend like an absolute dream. Complete the look with a velvet liquid lipstick that packs rich, smudge-free colour while rosehip seed oil and lemon myrtle juice up your lips. It's basically a full glam reset in just two steps.

Eye Palette + Lipstick Set,
Muzigae Mansion, ₹2,940



Your Beauty Shelf Called. It Wants a Gadget

From LED masks to airbrush systems, seven fashion insiders share the beauty tech they actually use.

Words by Tanishka Aggarwal

Design by Ashi Kulshreshtha

When asked if they swear by beauty, many of the people we interviewed for this story had similar first reactions: “Nah, I’m pretty low maintenance” or “I’m more analogue than I’m tech.” The awareness was high, adoption pretty low. Market data suggests something similar: It’s new, it’s early. But it’s coming.

Almost every cosmetic giant is now hedging its bets on beauty tech. With a compound annual growth rate of 22.8 per cent between 2025–30, the Indian beauty tech sector is set for a boom much like skincare in recent years, as per research platform Horizon Databook.

We interviewed seven folks who’ve hitched their wagon a little earlier than most. And, their recommendations come tried and tested.

Ashima Kapoor

Makeup Artist

When first asked to talk about a beauty tech device she uses herself or on her clients, senior beauty artist Ashima Kapoor’s first reaction is “Oh dear!”. She politely declined, saying she tends to stick to the old school basics in her makeup techniques. However, a few minutes later, she calls back excitedly asking me if her professional TEMPTU AirPod system falls in this sphere (ChatGPT nudged her, too).

That perfectly-‘airbrushed’ magazine cover glam that’s always hard to come by? The TEMPTU Air Premier Airbrush Kit is the answer. A technique dating back to the 1900s, in film and television, HMU artists worked with the traditional cup-and-gun design, she explains, where the makeup was poured directly into a small reservoir (cup) on the airbrush.

The new age TEMPTU, however, makes the process faster, cleaner, and more hygienic. “The pre-filled cartridges,” she says, “allow instant shade changes without cleaning the airbrush, while the microfine mist gives a seamless, natural skin-like HD finish for bridal and editorial makeup.”





Kunal Walia

Head of Business, Louis Vuitton

"I've been using electronic brushes since forever," says Walia. His current favourite is the brush by London-based brand, SURI (Sustainable Rituals). Launched in May 2022, SURI's sonic toothbrushes feature brush heads made from plant-based cornstarch and bristles from castor oil. With a magnetic mirror mount and LED tech which kills bacteria, it's a tech-brush positioned as a luxe alternative to everyday brushing. "I feel it goes deeper [in cleaning]...and it's easy to navigate in areas a normal brush just doesn't reach," he says.

Walia also always wanted to try LED eye masks, which he finally picked up on his last trip to London. The results have been well worth the hype. "I do feel they instantly give your eyes a lift." His pro tip: Selfridges has some great options. "I am someone who is scared of injectables in general," he admits, "so I keep indulging in other alternatives."

Try out: Numour I-CONIC Smart Electric Eye Rejuvenation LED Mask



Akanksha Bhakoo

Stylist

For the Delhi-based celebrity stylist, her LED electric gua sha massager is an essential. "It's my favourite beauty hack for looking like I've had eight hours of sleep when I absolutely haven't," she sheepishly admits. "It depuffs, wakes up my face, gives me a bit of contour, and makes me look awake in minutes."

With back-to-back shoots, frequent travel, and unpredictable schedules, Bhakoo says she needs all the help she can get: "LED therapy is great, but honestly, the fake-well-rested effect is what keeps me loyal."

Try out: Numour G.O.A.T Smart Gua Sha



Akshat Kapoor

Brand Strategist, Advisor, and Marketer

While almost every beauty device comes with "science-backed" skincare tech, for many of us, it is also just a matter of trying to take care of ourselves. Delhi-based marketer Akshat Kapoor reaches for his at-home LED mask every once in a while as part of his beauty routine. "I don't know how much of a difference it makes, but it's the feel-good factor," he says. Kapoor's preference is the 3-in-1 LED Face Mask by Ahmedabad-based brand ProTouch.

"To be quite honest, I never really go for any [tech-based] treatments—massive oxy facials, sculpting, this and that, which a lot of other folks do." For Kapoor, the appeal lies in its convenience. It's "within the beautiful four walls of my home," he says, and unlike many in-clinic treatments, it's non-invasive, with nothing to inject and nothing to peel.



Ridhi Asrani

Jewellery Designer

A non-negotiable in Asrani's evening routine is her Amiro Spectra 5-in-1 LED Light Therapy Facial Mask. "I usually wear it while I scroll through Pinterest at night, or when preparing my morning beverage," says the Hyderabad-based jewellery designer. "I've never been particularly interested in beauty that promises instant gratification; I'm far more interested in the long game." For her, the mask's multiwavelength technology feels more "like skincare's chic overachieving cousin." Founded in 2015, the Shenzhen-based brand launched with a sensor mirror and moved to a LED light therapy mask in 2023. For Asrani, the allure lies in tech that makes her feel "a little more luminous, a little more rested, and a little more expensive."

Aparnaa Verma

Model

If there's anyone in the industry who can confidently give haircare advice, it's Aparnaa Verma—whose signature look involves her decadent, silver-streaked locks, a fashion favourite. It is thus fitting that for her favoured beauty tech, Verma talks of an LED Comb, picked up on her travels abroad. "What appeals to me is that it's a gentle, non-invasive technology that can support scalp health without adding complexity to my routine," says the Delhi-based model. As someone who appreciates evidence-based treatments, Verma's continued use of the product is proof enough.



Bonus: If buying another gadget isn't your thing...

Jeetinder Sandhu

Footwear Designer

And then there are those who'd like to leave the tech to the professionals. "I'm not very big on tech and beauty," says Delhi-based footwear designer Jeetinder Sandhu. "But one treatment I genuinely rely on is the HydraGlow facial." It's a multi-step salon treatment that cleanses pores and hydrates the skin intensely. Sandhu explains how the LED treatment at the end gives the skin an extra boost, leaving him with a glowing complexion. "With a busy schedule and frequent social events, it's an effective, low-maintenance way to keep my skin looking healthy and hydrated."



How to Recreate Maximalist Eye Looks IRL

By Urmi Pandit



The Smokey Cut Crease

Prepping the lids with a primer will boost colour pay-off and limit fading. Using a fluffy brush and a mid-toned shadow, map out the curve just above your natural crease, before defining with a deeper shade. To diffuse the edges? Blend with a gentle hand in back-and-forth motions. Carve the crease with concealer and a dense brush for precision, then top with a shimmer.

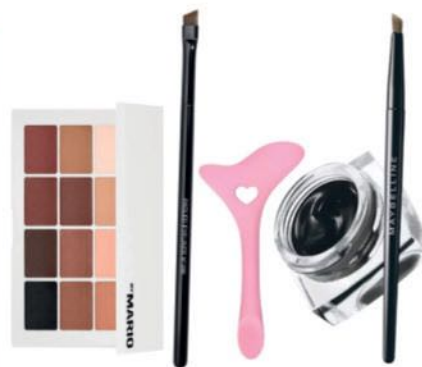


From left: M333 Large Rounded Blender Eyeshadow Brush, Morphe, ₹850; Bite-Size Mini Eyeshadow Palette, elf Cosmetics, ₹550; Photo Finish Intensify 24 Hour Shadow Primer, Smashbox, ₹2,600; Soft Matte Complete Concealer, NARS, ₹3,200



The Graphic Liner

A dramatic liner takes the spotlight here, so keep shadow nude and matte. Use an angled brush with a creamy gel formula for flexibility and longevity. Kayanara's hero stencil offers a range of wings; higher angles lift the eyes, while more horizontal lines elongate them. In case of mistakes, trace under your liner with concealer to sharpen the wing.



From left: Master Mattes Eyeshadow Palette, Makeup By Mario, ₹9,899; Angled Eyeliner Brush N°206, Chanel, ₹2,950; Eyeliner Stencil, Kayanara, ₹198; Eyestudio Lasting Drama Gel Eyeliner, Maybelline New York, ₹650

The Chrome Accent

Concentrate reflective, metallic powders in the inner corners of the eyes and midway across the eyelids. For contrast, pair them with a burnt orange or warm terracotta base shade. Our pro tip? Use only the tips of your fingers for application. For the hazy effect, think small dabs of pigment, not controlled placement.



Clockwise from top left: Dazzleshadow Liquid, MAC Cosmetics, ₹2,550; Super Shock Shadow, ColourPop, ₹749; Insane Shifters Eye Shadow, Charmacy Milano, ₹1,150; Major Dimension Essential Artistry Edit Eyeshadow Palette, Patrick Ta, ₹6,999



Lip Service

This summer is all about a juicy gloss.

Photographer: Kim Sun Hye; Words by Jasmine Hyman



"Using a stain with a thin tip allows for precise application that won't budge. This oil on top will hydrate, plump, and add pigment in one swipe."

— Jasmine Hyman,
Assistant Beauty Editor at
Cosmopolitan US

Loveshine Plumping Lip Oil Gloss, YSL, ₹4,000; Flushed Lip Stain, Summer Fridays, ₹2,110 approx.



"I love the look of a soft, overdrawn lip with a wet-like finish. I line my lips with this pencil for dimension, then layer on a glossy tint that settles into a long-lasting stain."

— Beth Gillette,
Beauty Editor at
Cosmopolitan US

JuicePop Box Lip Tint, Laneige, ₹1,350; The Overliner Lip Pencil, m.ph by Mary Phillips, ₹2,400 approx.

Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS



"I'm a lip minimalist, and this set requires no effort (or mirror) to get right. I scribble on the nude liner for quick definition and add the sheer pink gloss on top for a pillowy result."

— Lauren Balsamo,
Beauty Director at
Cosmopolitan US

**Lip Frame Defining Lip
Liner, Versed, ₹1,340 approx.;**
An-Gloss Ceramide Lip Tint, Anfsa
Skin, ₹4,310 approx.



"This Kulfi liner glides on without dragging and stays put all day, while Typology's oil has the pigment of a glossy lipstick but feels more like a yummy balm."

— Julee Wilson,
Beauty Editor-at-Large at
Cosmopolitan US

**Lassi Lips Staining Lip Liner, Kulfi
Beauty, ₹2,300 approx.;** **Tinted Lip
Oil T40, Typology, ₹3,160 approx.**



luxurious

Do Son Perfumed Cleansing Body Oil, Diptyque, ₹5,665 approx.



for that long-lasting fragrance!

Delicia Drench Shower Oil, Sol de Janeiro, ₹2,790



derm-recommended

Lipikar AP+ Gentle Foaming Cleansing Oil, La Roche-Posay, ₹1,910 approx.



for sensitive skin

Atoderm Huile de Douche, Bioderma, ₹1,699



extra foamy

Creme De Corps Smoothing Oil-to-Foam Body Cleanser, Kiehl's, ₹3,970

Oil's Well That Ends Well

The case for swapping your body wash for a shower oil. For one, they work while you rinse, and leave you without ashy elbows. Isn't that reason enough?

Compiled by Ananya Rai



hydrating

Kokum Almond Hand & Body Nourishing Cleansing Oil, Kama Ayurveda, ₹2,395



eczema-fighter

XeraCalm AD Lipid-Replenishing Cleansing Oil, Avène, ₹2,436 approx.



best overall

Almond Softening Shower Oil, L'Occitane, ₹2,650



Cosmopolitan
**Readers'
Choice
Beauty
Awards
2026**

The beauty shelf is crowded, but these 32 products rose above the rest. Voted by you, they're this year's standout picks across skincare, makeup, hair care, and body care.

Realisation: Diya J Verma
Photographer: Suraj Nongmaithem
Stylist: Tongpangnuba Longchari
Makeup Artist: Choi Haokip
Hair Artist: Sonia Nayar Sethi





SKIN

If great skin had
a fan club, these
picks would be
running it.



EVERYDAY CLEANSER
Simple Kind to Skin
Refreshing Facial Wash



SKINCARE TOOL
Tira Rose Quartz
Gua Sha



FACE OIL
Lawm From The Hills
Glow Drops



MAKEUP REMOVER
Beauty of Joseon Radiance
Cleansing Balm



FACE MASK
Farmacy Honey Potion
Plus Ceramide Hydration Mask



MOISTURISER
Antinorm
One-Step Wonder



SUNSCREEN
Lawm From The Hills
Sun Shield SPF 50+ PA+++ Sunscreen



TONER
Hyphen Hydrating
Ceramide Toner-Essence



MASCARA
Maybelline
 Lash Sensational Sky High
 Waterproof Mascara



TINT
Laura Mercier
 Tinted Moisturizer
 Natural Dewy SPF 30



LIP COLOUR
Bobbi Brown
 Crushed Lip Color
 in Babe



HIGHLIGHTER
MAC Cosmetics
 Mineralize Skinfinish
 Highlighter



EYESHADOW
MARS12 Shades
 Dance of Joy Eyeshadow Palette



EYE PENCIL
Lakmé
 9 to 5 Eyeconic Kajal



CONCEALER
Huda Beauty FauxFilter
 Luminous Matte Concealer



BLUSH
Rare Beauty
 Soft Pinch Liquid Blush



MAKEUP

These are the products
our readers reach
for when they want
compliments to follow.



HAIR

Good hair days don't
happen by chance.
These products made
sure of that.



CONDITIONER
Moroccanoil
Hydrating Conditioner



SHAMPOO
Olaplex N°.4 Bond
Maintenance Shampoo



DRY SHAMPOO
OlaplexN°.4D Clean
Volume Detox Dry Shampoo



HAIR STYLING TOOL
Dyson Airwrap
ID Multi-Styler



HAIR OIL
indē wild
Champi Hair Oil



HAIR PERFUME
indē wild Chandra Hair
& Body Perfume Mist



HEAT PROTECTANT
TRESemmé Keratin
Smooth Heat Protect Spray



HAIR TREATMENT
K18 Leave-in Molecular
Repair Hair Mask



BODY EXFOLIATOR
First Aid Beauty
KP Bump Eraser Body Scrub
10% AHA



BODY SERUM
The Derma Co
1% Kojic Acid Body
Serum-Lotion



BODY MIST
Victoria's Secret
Bare Vanilla
Fragrance Mist



BODY CARE TOOL
The Body Shop
Total Body Relaxer & Massager



BODY LOTION
Sol de Janeiro
Brazilian Bum Bum Cream



DEODORANT
Antinorm
Fresh With Benefits



HIGH STREET PERFUME
Kylie Cosmetics
Cosmic Kylie Jenner EDP



LUXURY PERFUME
Jo Malone London
Wood Sage & Sea Salt Cologne



BODY

This list is a love letter to silky skin, long showers, and products worth repurchasing.

Model: Vanshika Singh
Fashion Intern: Sunanda Das
Outfits: Casual Threat
Jewellery: AEQEA
Location Courtesy: Studio Yukii

One & Done

Less clutter, more pay-off: The beauty multitaskers pulling double (sometimes, triple) shifts.

By Diya J Verma

Heavy Lifter

This three-in-one beauty must-have primes, covers, and sets—all in a single step! Powered by the brand's True Comfort Complex, expect extended wear (up to eight hours) and breathable medium-to-full coverage for a natural matte, soft-focus finish.

True to Myself Natural Matte Longwear Foundation, Rare Beauty, ₹4,900



“I love the way my skin looks on set, so I wanted to create a foundation that gives me that same blurred, velvety look but is easy and comfortable enough for every day.

— Selena Gomez, Founder, Rare Beauty



Serving Face

As the name suggests, this multipurpose stick does more than one thing—and does it well. Use it as a blush, bronzer, or highlighter for a dewy, non-greasy flush. What's more? Its hydrating PlumpGlow Complex helps leave your skin barrier feeling ultra-moisturised.

Skin Enhancer Multi-Stick, Bobbi Brown, ₹3,250



Photographer: MEHTAB MANN; Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS

Triple Threat

A multitasker that preps, protects, and perfects your skin. Excess oil? Curbed. Uneven texture? Smoothed. Enlarged pores? Minimised. Bonus: A hint of tint for a radiant, au naturel veil.

Porescreen Mineral Tinted Sunscreen SPF 40, Dermalogica, ₹4,500



“ This multitasking mineral sunscreen lends a blurring, primer-like effect and adds just the right amount of tint for a radiant finish. Plus, two per cent niacinamide helps diminish the appearance of pores. So you're getting three benefits in a single step!

— Hinaa Khan, Education Head, Dermalogica India



One-Step Wonder

This hard-working formula packs a punch—five benefits in just one dollop! It moisturises, brightens, firms, and gives natural coverage while shielding against UVA and UVB rays. Slather on generously before applying makeup.

GenOptics Airy UV Cream SPF 50+ PA++++, SK-II, ₹6,099

Clean Slate

Here's another three-in-one essential that functions as a makeup remover, cleanser, and barrier-repair treatment. Apply to dry skin and massage gently until the jelly melts away makeup and other impurities.

Rose Jelly Balm to Milk Cleanser, Plenaire, ₹849



“ I'm a big fan of products that simplify a routine without compromising on performance. This one used in multiple ways ties the whole look together, ideal for busy mornings or when on the go. I sometimes use the brown shade as a bronzer on my clients too.

— Saikat Chakraborty, National Artist, MAC Cosmetics India



Double Duty

This velvety-smooth formula—a fitting extension of the brand's Powder Kiss range—blurs the lines between blush and lip colour. All it takes is a swipe across the pout and a few dots on the apples of the cheeks. Don't have an eyeshadow handy? Simply dab a little along the lids for a cohesive wash of colour.

Powder Kiss Lip + Cheek Mousse, MAC Cosmetics, ₹3,100

What's in My Bag?

Sunscreen, scent, and a few things that'll make you add to cart immediately—consider this your ultimate beauty bag inspo.

Compiled by Sunanda Das



Mae Hong Son
Lemongrass Hand
Cream, Intree,
₹1,180 approx.



Mini Invisimatte Instant
Setting + Blotting Powder,
Fenty Beauty, ₹2,075



Lip Glowly Balm,
Laneige, ₹750

John Dominic Rai Content Creator



Blindfold EDP,
L'OBJET, ₹16,350
approx.



Pocket Blush,
Rhode, ₹2,390
approx.



Relief Sun Rice
+ Probiotics SPF
50+ PA++++,
Beauty of Joseon,
₹1,500

Two blushes, two lip products, and a skincare routine that puts most of us to shame. John's bag is the edit we didn't know we needed—and the one we're absolutely taking notes from.



Match Stix Color
Adaptive Cheek
+ Lip Stick, Fenty
Beauty, ₹3,500



M.A.Cximal Silky
Matte Lipstick,
MAC Cosmetics,
₹2,550



Hasleen Kaur

Model | Actor

The frequent flyer who has her on-the-go skincare routine down to a science. From a hydrating mist that survives every climate to a Korean blush she wears three ways—Hasleen's bag is equal parts practical and polished.



Glued 4 Brows & Edges 2in1 Styling Gel, Got2b, ₹1,000 approx.

Lip Perfector, Clarins, ₹1,800



PantheCell Repair Cica Cream Mist, BIO HEAL BOH, ₹2,200



Oil-Free Matte Sunscreen, Beyond Beyond, ₹1,150



Un Jardin sur le Nil EDT, Hermès, ₹15,800



Souffle Color Pot, Dasique, ₹1,625 approx.



Secret Garden Edelweiss Hand Cream, Jigott, ₹250



Shaleen Khergamwala

Content Creator



Red Camellia Serum-in-Mist, N°1 de Chanel, ₹10,900



Hydrating Hand Cleansing Spray, HAAN, ₹650 approx.



Lip Butter Balm, Summer Fridays, ₹2,300 approx.



Two lip balms, zero apologies. Shaleen's bag is self-care in compact form—a mist for bad skin days, a Jo Malone spritz for instant mood lifts, and proof that looking after yourself doesn't have to be complicated.

Lip Glowly Balm, Laneige, ₹750



Cypress & Grapevine Cologne, Jo Malone London, ₹3,500





Sumaya Dalmia

Nutritionist

The ultimate light packer with a no-nonsense edit. Sumaya's bag skips the excess and keeps it real: Sunglasses, a trusty kajal, and AirPods because a workout without music simply doesn't count.



Radiant Creamy Concealer, NARS, ₹3,300

Extra Lip Tinted Balm, Bobbi Brown, ₹3,450

Original Detangler, Wet Brush, ₹899



Eyeconic Kajal, Lakmé, ₹300



Complete Hand Care, Hermès, ₹8,400 approx.

Sheena Rathi

Entrepreneur

Clean, classic, and unapologetically luxe. Sheena's five essentials say everything about her—SPF under makeup, a signature scent, and a hand cream to keep dryness at bay.



Baccarat Rouge 540 EDP, Maison Francis Kurkdjian, ₹28,900 approx.



Loveshine Lipstick, YSL, ₹4,300



FusionWater Magic SPF 50 PA +++++, ISDIN Fotoprotector, ₹2,850

Lip Soufflé
Matte Lip
Cream, Rare
Beauty, ₹2,500

Rare Beauty

Pot Rouge Cream
Blush, Bobbi
Brown, ₹4,600

Nikita Gupta

Entrepreneur

Green tea sachets, a jewellery piece for last-minute outfit saves, and a card that's always ready for a spontaneous splurge. Nikita's bag is casual, considered, and complete with all her essentials.

GIRNAR®

DETOX®
DAI KAHWA®
GREEN TEA

CREDIT
CARD



Nail That Matcha

Why just order it when you can wear it? Summer vibes meet colour-coded nail art in a set that pairs a fresh matcha, polka-dot twist with three-dimensional strawberries.



Care to Wish Upon a Willow?

This set drops you straight into the *Obsession* lore, complete with textured post-it notes replicating the exact ones Nikki leaves behind, and enough red splatter to make a crime scene investigator do a double take.



Nailed the Set-List

Manifesting headline energy on your fingertips is the only way to do a festival right, especially when you're attending Central Cee's massive Lollapalooza performance. This tribute perfectly bridges the artist's signature British vibe with high-fashion nail art.

Claws Out

Goodbye conventional nudes—Gen Z is turning their fingertips into 10-piece vision boards.

By Itisha Arya

Next-Gen Desi Art

More is more, and honestly, we're obsessed. This desi maximalist set translates traditional Indian art and rich textile patterns into 10 literal masterpieces—because your fingertips deserve nothing less than couture.



Mughal Art, Amplified

Transforming heritage into wearable art is the only way to do history justice, especially with this hand-painted set that layers floral motifs and gold-leaf architecture synonymous with Mughal-inspired details.



Floral Dream

Nail art is storytelling, and this set is a literal walk through a dream garden. Inspired by a calm moment among blooming flowers, it blends soft, nature-inspired florals with cosmic elements to add that astro vibe that *Cosmo* lives for.





Gotta Catch 'Em

From Jigglypuff's iconic attitude to Charmander's fiery tail, these glossy 3D figures are completely unapologetic about taking up space. Consider our inner child officially obsessed.



Dattebayo

Straight out of the Hidden Leaf village, this God Tier set is proof that your fingertips deserve full-on protagonist energy. It's got everything from a flawlessly painted Naruto Uzumaki and Kurama's iconic Nine-Tails chakra flames to a 3D bowl of Ichiraku ramen.

ALEXIA TILIA NAILS



Serving Main Course

Talk about a total Itadakimasu moment, this nail set is a feast for the eyes. It features micro-sculpted 3D ramen bowls, glossy sushi rolls, sunny-side-up eggs, all woven between delicate pink cherry blossoms. Honestly, if your fingertips aren't leaving people this hungry, your nail artist is definitely skipping the main course.

FIFA Fever

If your manicure isn't supporting your favourite football team with this level of dedication, it's time to sub it out. This set delivers a serious dose of football fever, sporting Argentina's golden 2022 FIFA World Cup trophy emblem and Messi's iconic number 10.



Rent Was Due

The ultimate "weird girl aesthetic" serve. This hyper-detailed *Smiling Friends* manicure takes experimental nail art to a whole new dimension—literally. Because let's be real, if your nails aren't a total conversation starter, what's the point?

GLOSSE STUDIO



Did Your Fitness Glow Up Era Skip Your Hair?

Turns out, your workout has a cheat code—and it's time to get to the (root) cause.

By Itisha Arya

I am a very recent, somewhat reluctant convert to the world of fitness. When January 2026 rolled around, my resolution for the year was simple, even if clichéd—to get fit. For years, my relationship with exercise had been theoretical, but this time, I actually laced up my sneakers, bought matching activewear, and committed. When I first started, I fully expected this phase of the journey to be an obsession with

the physical metrics—tracking muscle soreness, counting calories, and nervously eyeing my form in the Pilates studio mirrors. What I didn't expect was to become utterly consumed by what was happening to my hair.

Blame it on my Instagram feed. For months, I watched fitness influencers crush deadlifts in pastel co-ords, hair pulled into a perfectly snatched Hailey Bieber bun—not a single strand out of place. Kendall Jenner walking out of a reformer class

looking like an Alo Yoga ad, a silk scrunchie holding everything together as if gravity (and sweat) didn't apply to her. I bought into it completely.

BUN VOYAGE

Unless the paparazzi is waiting outside your West Hollywood Pilates studio, real sweat isn't camera-ready. Our obsession with chasing the clean girl aesthetic—specifically those perfectly slicked-back buns we see all over our feeds—has completely warped our understanding of actual scalp hygiene.



Instead, we're either glueing it down with heavy gels or stripping it bare out of panic.

"Many people mistakenly believe that the scalp needs to be completely free of products before exercising. In fact, the objective is to establish conditions that reduce sweating, friction, and excessive microbial growth," says Dr Priyanka Keshav, dermatologist, VLCC Group. So, what should you actually put on your hair before a workout? Less than you think. Layering up on heavy oils, thick leave-in conditioners, and styling gels right before a sweat session is a one-way ticket to a clogged scalp.

When those rich formulas mix with actual sweat, they create heavy debris that suffocate your hair follicles, leading to flare-ups of dandruff, scalp acne, and folliculitis. If you're prone to an oily scalp, Dr Keshav suggests swapping the heavy stuff for a lightweight serum packed with niacinamide or caffeine to keep things balanced. "Dermatologically speaking, starting with minimal product residue is the healthiest approach before any physical activity," she notes.

So, if we can't channel that Sofia Richie high bun energy on the treadmill, should we switch to ponytails? While it relieves the root tension a tight bun creates, it trades one problem for another—the constant swinging introduces friction and whip-like trauma along the hair shaft, chipping away at the cuticle. "But the ponytail is still the lesser evil," says Delhi-based cosmetic dermatologist and Isya Aesthetics founder, Dr Kiran Sethi. "A damaged shaft can be conditioned or trimmed. A dead follicle cannot be revived." To protect your edges from early retirement, the move is to opt for a loose ponytail right at the base of your neck, or a soft braid.

But, before you grab whatever generic hair tie is rolling around the bottom of your gym bag, you need to match your accessory to your movement. Dr Keshav suggests that for high-intensity cardio, silk

“ The objective is to establish conditions that reduce sweating, friction, and excessive microbial growth.

— Dr Priyanka Keshav, dermatologist, VLCC Group

scrunchies—despite being low-friction—might not give you the grip you need to survive a burpee.

PRO TIP

On high-impact days, reach for fabric-covered elastic ties instead. They keep your ponytail locked in place through even the toughest workout; no mid-session tugging required.

SWEAT HAS A TYPE

As it turns out, your scalp knows exactly what workout you did today, and it treats an intense Barry's Bootcamp class differently than a reformer Pilates session.

When you're crushing high-intensity cardio, your entire scalp and hair shaft become coated in an acidic, salty-sweat mix. Leaving sweat to dry on its own dehydrates the hair and can irritate the scalp. For this kind of all-over sweat, a post-workout rinse isn't optional. At minimum, rinse with lukewarm water to wash out the salt, then go in with a gentle, sulphate-free shampoo on the scalp and a rich conditioner from mid-shaft down.

WORKOUT HAIR ESSENTIALS



Original Classic Clean Fresh Dry Shampoo, Batiste, ₹1,499



Ultra Smoothing Shampoo, Bare Anatomy, ₹529



No. 4C Bond Maintenance Clarifying Shampoo, Olaplex, ₹2,950



Advanced Hair Growth Serum, Pilgrim, ₹795

Pilates or a heavy lifting session, on the other hand, plays by different rules. You might not be dripping from your forehead, but sweat pools heavily at the back of your head and the nape of your neck—made worse by the constant friction of leaning against a reformer pad or weight bench. “This creates a trapped, hot, humid zone,” says Dr Sethi. “It becomes a breeding ground for fungal acne and seborrheic dermatitis because of the trapped moisture. If the rest of your hair is dry, don’t strip it with a full wash. You need a targeted strike just where the sweat pools.”

This is exactly where the art of spot-clean saves your hair (and your sanity).

PRO TIP

If the top of your head is dry, you don't actually need to wash your entire mane.

“Section your hair and wash only the nape of your neck,” advises Dr Sethi, “using a clarifying shampoo or a targeted rinse containing zinc pyrithione or salicylic acid to neutralise fungal bumps before they can even start.”

THE MANE PLAN

This brings up the recurring dilemma for anyone hitting the gym three to four days a week: How often is too often to wash? If you’re working out that often, you’ve definitely stared in the mirror playing a risky game of “is daily washing destroying my strands, or is letting this salty pool marinate for 48 hours actively worse?”

According to Dr Keshav, leaving sweat and sebum on your scalp for 48 hours usually creates more problems than washing correctly does. We’ve been blaming the wrong thing—the damage from daily washing actually comes from scrubbing too hard, using water that’s too hot, or blow-drying right after, not the washing itself. When you workout regularly, scalp hygiene matters more than protecting your blowout. Let sweat and oil sit too long, and you’re looking

The damage from daily washing actually comes from scrubbing too hard, using water that’s too hot, or blow-drying right after.

at irritation, dandruff, and clogged follicles. While the exact wash frequency depends on your specific hair type, letting sweat marinate for days is a hard no.

But, what happens when you’re caught in that frantic post-workout scramble with exactly zero minutes for a full wash before a lunch meeting, or you need to bolt back to the office? “Start by ditching the tight hair tie immediately so your scalp can actually breathe and cool down,” says Dr Keshav. Next, gently dab the moisture from your hairline with a clean microfibre towel or cotton cloth—absolutely no aggressive rubbing unless you want instant frizz from the friction. “If you have a dry shampoo formulated for the scalp, mist it strictly at the roots to absorb excess oil, or use a soothing antimicrobial spray if you’re prone to hairline breakouts or folliculitis,” she adds.

DITCH THE DRYER

And then there’s the classic post-workout predicament: Reaching for the dryer while your roots are still damp with sweat. Dr Sethi advises against this, explaining that it essentially “flash-bakes” abrasive salt crystals right into your hair.

Because sweat is salty, blasting it with high heat dries it out instantly, leaving behind sharp salt crystals that grind against your hair like sandpaper. Worse, if moisture gets trapped inside the swollen hair shaft and heats up too fast, it can actually boil—creating tiny pockets of steam called “bubble hair,” which can make your strands snap off at the slightest touch.

When you look at the sheer physics of it, saving your hair from a workout requires a completely different cheat code. The secret to navigating a new fitness routine without sacrificing your strands comes down to a fundamental rule that my Pilates teacher drops during almost every class: “If your foundation isn’t stable, the rest of your form completely collapses.” As it happens, that rule applies just as much to your scalp as it does to your core. ■



Style



Runway Report

Inside: Outfits everyone wants a piece of.

POV: It's Witching Hour

The demise of beige has never looked prettier.



Maverick Sunglasses,
Versace, ₹59,000



Flutterby Metal and Enamel
Earrings, Valentino,
₹68,541 approx.



Cleo Strappy Heel,
For Love & Lemons, ₹26,800



Luna Scarf Tie Short,
Zimmermann, ₹56,500



Tulle Pina Top, PatBO,
₹41,026 approx.



The Ultraviolet
Dress, AKHL,
₹84,467 approx.



The Dandelion Twinkle
Mini Block Heels,
Papa Don't Preach,
₹26,500



Vivienne Fashionista Yoga
Bag Charm, Louis Vuitton,
₹1,64,000

Gold Standard

A win is a win—take it.



Clarck Pilot Sunglasses,
Versace, ₹59,000



Isolde Belted Ruched Crossbody Bag,
Charles & Keith, ₹13,999



Cadence Dress
Centurion, Staud,
₹65,700



DRIES VAN NOTEN



Monogrammed Velvet
Top, Balmain,
₹79,169 approx.



Sequin Skirt, PatBO,
₹96,060 approx.



The Raisin Necklace,
Jacquemus, ₹1,00,412
approx.



Two-Part Rhinestone Hoop Earrings, &
Other Stories, ₹4,344 approx.



Open-Toe Leather Mules,
Dries Van Noten, ₹95,900

Paint Me Pretty

Museum-worthy style? It's in your wardrobe, babe.



Red & Navy Alvina Sling Bag,
Ritu Kumar, ₹14,500



Coil Cateye Sunglasses,
Loewe, ₹46,800



Galileo Pink Resin
and Gold Plated
Necklace,
Completedworks,
₹56,100



Tangible Love Mini
Dress, Alemais,
₹56,947 approx.



Floral Print
Textured Satin
Pencil Midi Skirt,
Erdem, ₹1,75,320
approx.



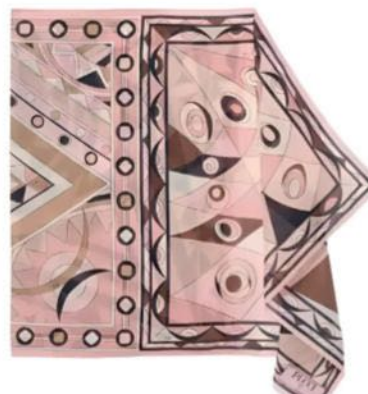
Nappa Leather Flat Slippers,
Dolce & Gabbana, ₹87,553 approx.



EMILIO PUCCI



Better Than Your Boyfriend's
Shirt, La Double J, ₹66,603
approx.



Sarong with Mixed Prints,
Pucci, ₹25,000

Craving Colour?

It's signed, served, and delivered.



Ho'okipa Ultra,
Maui Jim,
₹20,790



Havana Top,
Rat & Boa,
₹18,751 approx.



Pearl, Zirconia and
Green Quartz
Recycled Silver
Earrings,
Completedworks,
₹38,900 approx.



Larache 90 Suede
Mules, Manolo Blahnik,
₹89,815 approx.



Barb Slip Skirt,
Leset, ₹22,700



Sandy, Clare V,
₹19,900 approx.



LOEWE



Pot Bag,
ECCO,
₹17,999



Technical Faille Shirt,
Jil Sander,
₹98,080 approx.



Trap Pumps in Slick
Calf, Proenza Schouler,
₹66,100

PROENZA SCHOUER

Compiled by: SUNANDA DAS; Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS and GETTY IMAGES

On Your Marks

We are cheering for sporty sophistication.



Chase Tote Bag,
Miraggio, ₹5,999



Cable-Knit Cotton Polo Shirt,
Polo Ralph Lauren,
₹22,100 approx.



LVision Pilot Sunglasses,
Louis Vuitton,
₹65,367



Leather Belt,
Miu Miu,
₹79,000 approx.



Round Denim Jacket,
ALAIA, ₹1,77,100
approx.



Sophisticated Square Women Quartz
Green Dial Analog Stainless Steel
Watch, Calvin Klein,
₹ 16,800



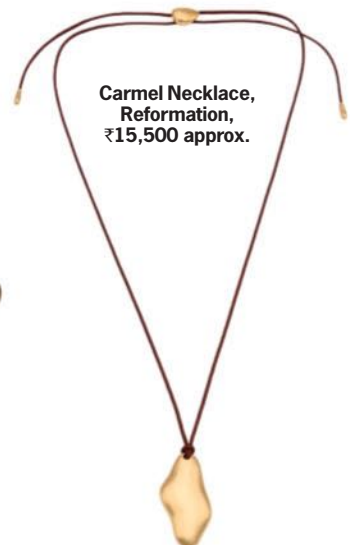
Nylon Shorts,
Made Some Sportswear,
₹21,719 approx.

VERSACE

LACOSTE



Hank Ballet Sneaker,
Tory Burch, ₹24,132 approx.



Carmel Necklace,
Reformation,
₹15,500 approx.



Alva Gemstone Stud Earrings,
Jennifer Behr,
₹24,921 approx.

The Romantic Revival

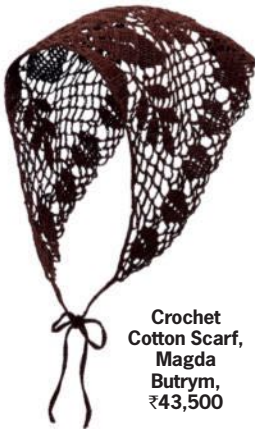
It's giving Gen Z-infused period drama.



Dolores Tassel Necklace,
Reformation,
₹15,500



Viola Top,
Doen,
₹34,579 approx.



Crochet
Cotton Scarf,
Magda
Butrym,
₹43,500



Flounced Lace Blouse,
& Other Stories,
₹12,452

CHLOÉ



Fiorenza Skirt,
Doen, ₹37,800 approx.



Satin Lace Skirt,
Mango, ₹5,900 approx.



Crossover Toe-Ring Strappy
Heels, Charles & Keith,
₹9,999

Make a Splash

All aboard, next stop paradise! Stuck on what to pack in your carry-on? We've got the answers...

Photographer: Lindsay Ellary

Stylist: Rebecca Jane Hill





On Miki (left): Top and shorts, both Paolina Russo; sunglasses, Oakley; necklace, Briwok; shoes, New Balance

On Callie (right) wears: Top and shorts, both Diane von Furstenberg; sunglasses, Valentino; earrings, Atri

Summer sunshine is the perfect excuse to inject colour, pattern, and texture into your wardrobe—all at once.

Top, Paolina Russo; shorts, Mother; socks, model's own; hat, Aujord; bracelet, Isabel Marant; necklace, Hera; shoes, Converse; pareo (used as towel), Alémais

Retro is in—think old school trucker caps, running shorts, and slim sneaker silhouettes.



The secret to staying cool in the heat? Cut-out jeans and asymmetric tees.

Top, Di Petsa; jeans, Leslie Amon at Koibird; hat, Zara; earrings and rings, both Missoma; necklace, Sandralexandra; bracelets, Maya Brenner; shoes, Dear Frances



Swimwear that's
stylish enough to
wear to the bar?
Count us in.



On Callie (left):
Swimsuit, Alémais;
earrings, Missoma;
bracelet (worn as
anklet), Anni Lu; shoes,
Ancient Greek Sandals;

On Miki (right):
Bikini, Missoni; shorts,
Timna Weber; necklace,
Lazy Goose Studio;
shoes, Lili Curia

Practical doesn't have to
be boring — stay safe in the
sun with a zip-through wetsuit.

T-shirt, Coach;
wetsuit, Finisterre;
bikini, Paramidonna;
earrings, Atri



**Dress up your
knitwear with
statement jewellery.**

Dress, Stefan Cooke;
shorts, Johanna Parv;
earrings, Ottoman
Hands; necklace,
Blumarine

A full-page photograph of a woman with dark hair pulled back, walking through shallow ocean waves. She is wearing a two-piece bikini with a gradient top transitioning from yellow to orange to pink, and high-waisted, light-colored bottoms with a wide, textured belt. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The water is a deep blue with white foam from the waves around her legs.

Models: Callie Dixon at Elite and Miki at Freedom Models; **Makeup:** Deanna Melluso at Forward Artists using Supergoop!; **Hair:** Erin Piper Herschleb at Tracey Mattingly using Oribe; **Global Editorial & Brand Director:** Chloe O'Brien; **Bookings Director:** Sophie Leen; **Fashion Assistant:** Angel Cordova-Todd; **Photo Assistants:** Lexi Wimberly and Shamar Marcus; **Location:** Windjammer Landing Resort & Residences, Saint Lucia. @windjammerlanding with thanks to Saint Lucia Tourism Authority and Timeless Tours @timelesstoursslu

**Have your
screen siren
moment—life is
more fun in a
pair of belted
bikini bottoms!**

**Bikini top, Lido;
bikini bottoms,
Kikki-G; earrings
and bracelet,
both Missoma**



Ashiva Shu

Ashiva Shu is a contemporary menswear label founded by Shivanshu Sonker, a NIFT Bengaluru graduate. Rooted in Varanasi's rich textile heritage, the brand works with *Banarasi* brocade, *Chanderi*, *mukaish*, and *zardozi* to create designs that offer something beyond conventional menswear—think lightweight sheer shirts with embroidered details, pleated separates, and dhoti-inspired drapes that also embody a queer universe.

The Gen Z Craft of Being Cool

Meet the brands and designers who are writing India's most exciting fashion stories, woven with textiles and a fresh point of view.

By Tongpangnuba Longchari

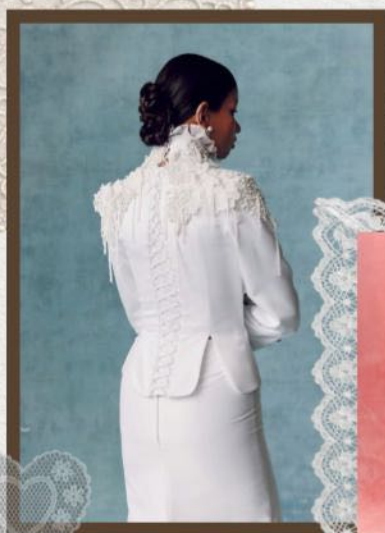


Motife

Mumbai-based brand, Motife, believes that craftsmanship is a living, evolving practice. The contemporary design house was established in 2022 by Udit Bhandari, with Manav Sharma as co-founder and creative director. Blending hand embroidery, thoughtful construction, alongside an artisanal touch, it builds on basics like the white shirt, cotton trousers, and denim pants with subtle hand embroidery.

With Nanai & Akimugha Yeptho

Born from a shared vision to redefine the wedding dress, With Nanai & Akimugha Yeptho is the label founded by NIFT Bengaluru graduates Akimugha Yeptho and Angela Lalramtiami. Drawing on the handwoven traditions of Mizoram and Nagaland, the brand transforms regional textiles into contemporary couture. From a dress crafted from handwoven Puan of Mizoram to a structured veil inspired by the Khang or Thul—a woven bamboo basket used across the Northeast of India—the inspiration is subtle yet defining.



Dhruv Bandil

Drawing from the visual language of his hometown of Morena, Madhya Pradesh, Dhruv Bandil creates clothing that sits at the intersection of sportswear, craft, and contemporary art. A graduate of NIFT Mumbai and Central Saint Martins, London, the designer reinterprets elements such as chain stitch, tie-dye, hand embroidery, and sculptural textile manipulation through experimental silhouettes and technical fabrics. Inspired by everything from temple architecture and local draping traditions to fine art, his work transforms cultural references into a bold design language.



Otsü

Named after the Ao Naga word for stories, Otsü is the brainchild of NIFT Mumbai alumna and stylist Asenla Jamir. Rooted in Nagaland, the brand reimagines the region's textile traditions and tribal design legacies through upcycling, handcrafted techniques, and a contemporary design language. While Otsü began with one-of-a-kind pieces crafted from vintage garments and fabric remnants, it has since evolved into a made-to-order, ready-to-wear label. Pick from their gender-fluid silhouettes and evergreen pieces like cotton bowling shirts.



Laturia Shop

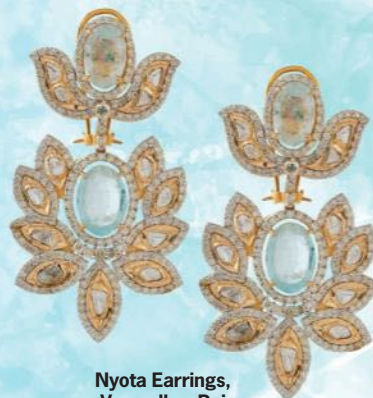
Driven by the passion for reimagining textiles, Laturia is Jaipur-based designer Mihika Meena's small-batch label that transforms vintage saris, *mashru*, and *ajrakh* weaves into contemporary everyday wear. Through thoughtful reconstruction, the brand gives heritage fabrics a renewed purpose, including upcycled shirts, khadi silk blends crafted into contemporary separates, and shirts and slip dresses made from heirloom saris.



**Aquamarine
Cocktail Ring,
Milo Jewels,
₹1,60,000**



**Ocean Petal
Silver-Gold
Victorian Drops,
Amrapali Jewels,
₹49,900**



**Nyota Earrings,
Vasundhra Raj
Luxury Jewellery,
price on request**



**Sterling Silver
Earrings With
Aquamarine &
Pearls, Diosa
Paris, ₹95,000**

Beyond the Blues

Aquamarine is the mood,
and we've got you covered.
Compiled by Ankita Malhotra



**Aqua Horizon
Ring, Jewels
by Shweta,
₹1,05,000**



**Azure Dream Bracelet,
Amaris Fine Jewellery,
₹10,03,000**



**Anastira Ring,
Zome, price
on request**



**Essenza Pavé
bangle,
Guess Jewellery,
₹12,995**



**Carved Aquamarine
and Morganite
Earrings, The Line,
₹5,15,000**

Melanin-rich skin is reactive in a way most skincare was never built to handle. A breakout, a few minutes of unprotected sun, or even aggressive scrubbing — any of it can send melanocytes into overdrive. What follows is dense, stubborn pigment that can take months, sometimes years, to fade. For decades, the global skincare industry didn't account for this. Its hero ingredients, its actives, its clinical trials — nearly all of it was developed for lighter, western skin tones.

Eeti Sharma has lived the same frustrating cycle for years — adult acne, followed by post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation that refuses to fade. That frustration is what sent her looking for answers no one in the industry seemed to have. What she found was a supply-and-demand failure hiding in plain sight — a massive global population with melanin-rich skin, and an industry that had never been designed for them.

"We spent years being told our skin was 'stubborn,'" says Eeti Sharma, Co-Founder & CMO, Asaya. "The data proved otherwise — our skincare just wasn't smart enough."

So she decided to build the skincare that should have existed already. Alongside co-founders Neeraj Biyani and

CODING THE PERFECT GLOW

Because adjusting your skin to Western formulas is officially over. Meet the homegrown, patented science engineered for the biology of Indian skin.

Mandeep Bhatia, Eeti launched Asaya with one mandate: stop adapting formulas for melanin-rich skin and start building from scratch for it.

The Melanin Gap

Asaya didn't launch with a broad product line-up chasing every skin concern at once. It went straight for the one that had followed Eeti and millions of Indian women for years: Hyperpigmentation.

The brand's in-house R&D team, carrying decades of collective experience from Unilever and L'Oréal, spent two and a half years in development, partnering with an advanced South Korean lab to get there. What came out the other end was MelaMe™ — a clinically proven, patented molecule engineered specifically for the cellular structure of melanin-rich skin, with visible results showing in clinical testing in as little as 14 days.

This is the part conventional brightening agents never get right — they work on the surface, while pigment forms much deeper. MelaMe™ was built to go straight to where the problem starts, working in two phases. First, it

inhibits overactive melanocytes, which are calmed before they can overproduce pigment. Then it breaks down: a process called melanophagy kicks in, disassembling existing dark spots and flushing the pigment clusters out. MelaMe™ went on to become the core technology behind every Asaya product.

Built To Keep Building

Today, Asaya has grown into a 25+ product lineup, offering hyperpigmentation solutions for both face and body. It's one of the rare clean D2C brands to hold a patent on its own molecular technology — and it's not stopping there. The brand is now expanding its research hub, with more proprietary molecules and technologies already in development.

Vegan, clean, and built on data from day one, Asaya isn't just reformulating skincare. It's rewriting the story melanin-rich skin has been told for years.

Website: <https://worldofasaya.com/>
Instagram: @worldofasaya

Eeti Sharma,
Co-Founder & CMO,
Asaya



How to Bag a Business

From spotting an industry gap to reading exactly what consumers want, Miraggio founder Mohit Jain shares insights into the Indian handbag market, smart design, and the function X fashion aesthetic.

By Itisha Arya

The industry has been widely divided into basic bags and expensive luxury—nothing in between. How did you make functional bags feel fashionable in this in-between category?

The lifestyle is changing dramatically for this generation. Take a corporate woman—she's earning her own money and is independent, and that purchasing power keeps growing. What she wants is variety: Multiple designs, silhouettes, and colours. Mass-market products didn't have design, they were commodities. Premium ones were too expensive to buy in variety. That's the gap we discovered and what Miraggio was built to fill.

Having built your brand before turning 30, what are the financial habits you'd tell every young entrepreneur to hone early on?

Financial discipline, above everything. You need absolute clarity on your objective and end goal, and you need to strategise constantly—what to spend, when to spend, every month, every quarter. Without that discipline, you might have the best idea and product in the world, but your targets stay on paper.

How should founders think about personal wealth while they're still

building the business?

If you want to build a large business, personal wealth creation can't be a priority, not for the first several years. Wanting to build both in parallel is idealistic, not practical. Competition today is intense—you need content, a team, infrastructure, and celebrities backing you—and all of it requires capital. It comes down to how much you have, and how much more you're willing to put in.

Fast fashion will always be cheaper. So why would women opt for your brand?

There have always been cheaper options out there, and brands have still managed to win. For us, it comes down to the community we've built. Any importer can sell you a product, but they can't sell you what Miraggio actually stands for. We've always kept women at the centre of everything we do, and that sense of belonging is what sets us apart.

With monthly drops, how do you design something that survives past the scroll and stays relevant for years?

Two things guide every launch. First, we think about the month itself—the mood, the colours, the silhouettes, whatever's happening culturally—and we try to build around real

trends, not fads. Second, we ask: Will someone still want to wear this in two years? That's what makes it timeless. Balancing those two things drives both relatability and repeat purchase.

Miraggio is known for structured, evening-ready bags. What led to the 'Made to Move' collection, the pivot towards pickleball and yoga?

It came from knowing our consumers deeply, not from them asking for it directly. We know how their lifestyles are evolving, and we evolve with them. Internally, our promise is to stay agile even 10 years in. So we saw the athleisure market growing, saw people wanting better gymwear and needing a proper bag to carry it all. That's how the 'Made to Move' collection came together—Pilates bags, pickleball bags, and yoga bags.

Every iconic handbag brand has that one bag. What's Miraggio's signature bag?

Sabrina Crossbody Bag and Denice Tote Bag are the two bags people searched for by their names, and both are our top sellers. Denice turned into its own franchise—Denice and Denice 2.0 have already launched, and Denice 3.0 may not be far behind. ■



THE NEW LANGUAGE OF LUXURY

In a world where a beautiful photograph doesn't always mean a beautiful garment, Latest Label is redefining luxury as a promise that's kept.

Luxury has quietly changed its meaning. It is no longer just a heritage logo or a runway debut. Today, true luxury is the confidence that what catches your eye is exactly what arrives at your door—impeccable tailoring, honest craftsmanship, considered details, and the reassurance that nothing was lost between inspiration and execution. This is the philosophy behind Latest Label.

The brand's story begins with a very modern problem. In a digital-first world, fashion often asks us to fall in love with an image long before we ever touch the garment. Too often, that anticipation turns to disappointment—a beautiful photograph doesn't always become a beautiful piece.

Latest Label set out to bridge that gap. Not with louder marketing, but with quieter excellence. Every collection starts with an unshakeable commitment to how a garment is made. Fabrics are

chosen for how they drape and feel against the skin. Silhouettes are refined until they flatter effortlessly. Every stitch, embellishment, and finish is examined, because the smallest details are often what make a piece unforgettable.

A global point of view

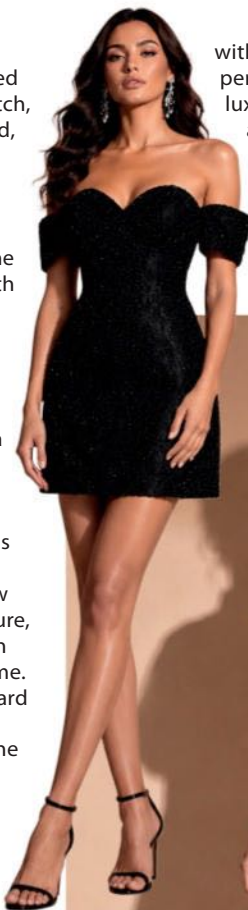
Latest Label draws inspiration from the world's fashion capitals and works with skilled ateliers and manufacturing partners across continents to create collections that feel worldly, yet timeless. Rather than chasing every trend, the brand filters them through a lens of lasting elegance—building a wardrobe that feels right today and still means something tomorrow.

This spirit of curation keeps the brand constantly moving. New arrivals land regularly, so every visit brings something unexpected—a new silhouette, an interesting texture, or a beautifully made occasion piece that wasn't there last time. Fashion, after all, should reward curiosity.

Just as important is the brand's willingness to stay flexible. Latest Label isn't bound by rigid rules—it believes modern luxury should adapt to the women who wear it. Listening, refining and evolving are as much a part of the design process as the very first sketch.

In an age where luxury is defined less by spectacle and more by authenticity, Latest Label stands for something different, a brand built not on show, but on substance. Elegance, here, is never an accident. It is designed with intention, made with care, and delivered

without fail. Because perhaps the most luxurious feeling of all is a simple one: Falling in love with a piece and finding that the real thing is every bit as remarkable as the promise.



SHOWCASE



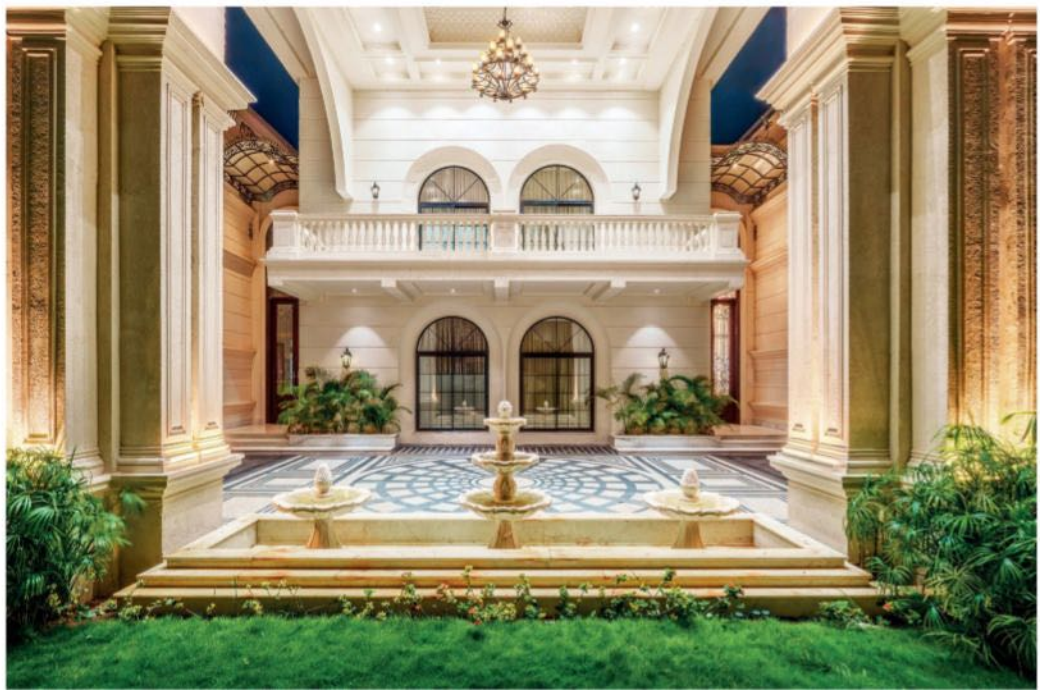
LUXURY, WITHOUT LIMITS

What happens when timeless glamour meets modern-day living? You get The White Manor – Ahmedabad's latest expression of refined luxury.

There's something undeniably romantic about a home that feels like it has always belonged to its surroundings. One that doesn't chase trends or try too hard to make a statement but exists simply with an air of permanence. Here enters The White Manor, a contemporary private residence inspired by the enduring language of European classicism in the heart of Ahmedabad.

Making an Entrance

Arrival at The White Manor is designed to feel like an experience itself. A monumental entrance pavilion sets the tone, with





soaring double-height arches and majestic fluted columns creating an immediate sense of occasion. The expansive forecourt, finished with intricately patterned stone paving, gradually reveals the scale of the residence as we move to the front door. With a coffered ceiling adorned with refined mouldings and a bespoke chandelier, it transforms the entrance into an architectural masterpiece in itself.

A Classic Silhouette, Reimagined

The facade of the villa takes its cues from



European architecture but interprets them through a distinctly contemporary lens. Carefully articulated mouldings, profiled cornices, and decorative pilasters create a rhythm across the elevation, while the soft ivory palette keeps the overall aesthetic sophisticated and restrained.

Ornamentation is used with restraint. Rather, it is the craftsmanship and proportions that shine. Because of this restraint, the architecture imbues the home with an impressive quality. The surrounding landscape plays an equally important role; manicured lawns,



sculptural planting, tropical greenery and elegant fountains soften the monumental scale of the architecture and provide a sense of calm.

All the Right Details

The interiors continue that story with a sense of warmth and ease, whereas the exterior sets the classical tone of the home. Bespoke furniture, handcrafted details, decorative wall panelling and architectural arches that speak the language of the formal living rooms. Each space has been meticulously curated to feel like one cohesive narrative, not a



series of design moments that are fighting for attention.

The material palette is anchored by natural marble, bringing an enduring sense of luxury and permanence to the interiors. Warm wood finishes add depth, and the intricate brass detailing adds a subtle gleam. The look is finished off with crystal lighting, hand-crafted furniture and sumptuous fabrics to create spaces that feel elevated yet comfortable.

The colour palette follows the same philosophy: Warm neutrals, muted greens, soft creams, and subtle metallic touches which let the textures and materials do the talking.

One of the most striking features of The White Manor is its extraordinary sense of scale. Generous ceiling heights and expansive living areas create interiors that feel open, airy, and flooded with light. The architecture has been carefully scaled and proportioned so that even the largest spaces feel intimate.

Designed for Real Life

As mesmerising as the mansion may be, the living experience is what ultimately sets the standard. The home moves from formal reception rooms to more informal living spaces, allowing it to comfortably handle both intimate family times and larger social occasions. Circulation paths have been carefully designed to encourage flow through the home while providing privacy where necessary.

The Woman with a Vision

This vision is manifested by Simran Boparai, Founder & Principal Architect of Simran Boparai Archtelier, whose work is based on luxury classical architecture and bespoke design. Her approach is a synthesis of creative vision, technical precision, and construction excellence, and all three elements are evident throughout The White Manor. Boparai is known for designing grand homes and sophisticated commercial spaces that showcase her commitment to timeless elegance and meticulous craftsmanship. Rather than treating architecture as a purely visual exercise, her philosophy centres on creating spaces where design intent and execution work seamlessly together. The result is not a simple, luxurious residence but one designed to endure.



Dilsher Sandhu and
Simran Boparai





Made to Last

At The White Manor, craftsmanship is what turns a beautiful house into something more lasting. Every stone joint, architectural detail, moulding and piece of furniture contributes to the bigger story of the home. The materials have been chosen with the test of time in mind, and the execution has been done with an exceptional level of precision by skilled artisans and craftsmen.

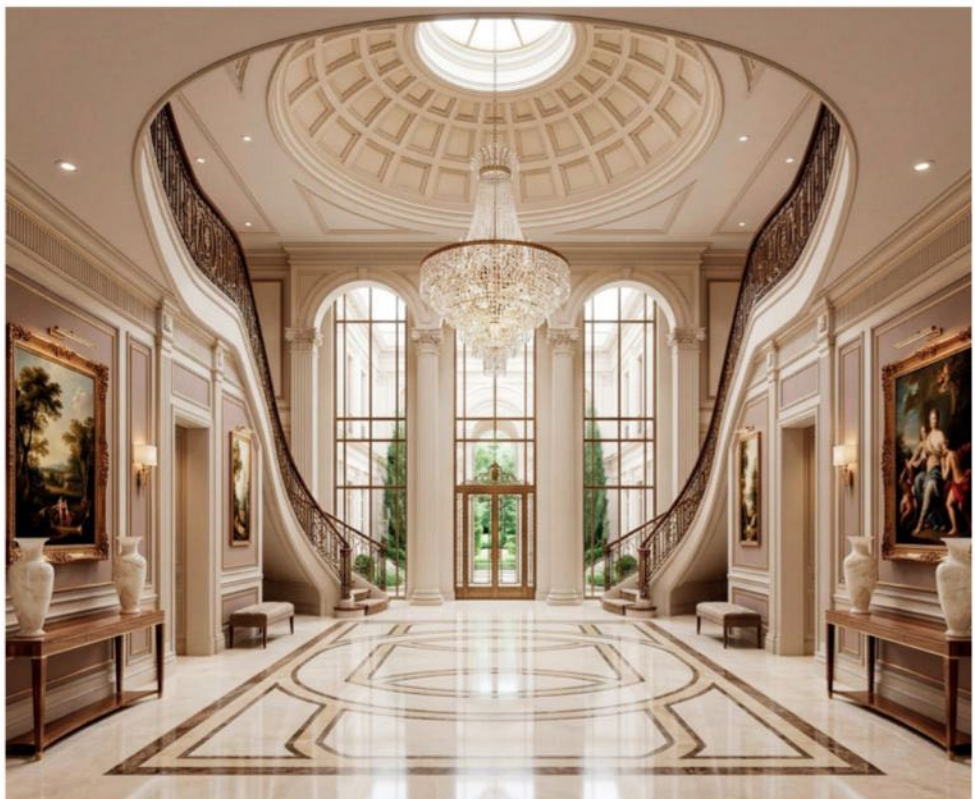
Although the home draws on European classical traditions, it has not been designed in a vacuum from its context. The design is sensitive to the climate of Ahmedabad, with broad overhangs to shield from the intense sun, large openings for natural airflow and robust materials selected with local climatic conditions in mind. One of the most undeniably compelling things about The White Manor is that it doesn't attempt to be fashionable. Rather, it seeks to be timeless.

Instagram: [@simrn.boparai](https://www.instagram.com/simrn.boparai)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/simranboparai/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SimranBoparaiArchitect>

Website: <https://simranboparai.com/>



DON'T YOU DARE WRITE OFF PV SINDHU...

Comeback, redemption, clapback, resurgence. The —
badminton ace, as our ruling generation would say: Is
(seriously) THAT girl.

Words by Snigdha Ahuja

Photographer: Sushant Chhabria

Stylist: Nishtha Parwani

Makeup and Hair Artist: Chriselle Ann Baptista

Cropped jacket and fringe dress, Chorus;
earrings and rings, Lune; shoes, Puma;
watch, Titan Aura Quartz Analog White
Mother of Pearl Dial Rose Gold and Silver
Stainless Steel Strap Watch, from the
Titan Purple Aura Collection



T

he first thing that strikes you when you are in the company of PV Sindhu is that she nudges—no—demands your attention. And it's not her posture that will put your tired spine to shame, nor her towering presence (all 5 feet 10 inches of it). It's the way she eases in and out of roles, with a certain girl-next-door humility that belies a career spanning almost two decades. At one moment she is on her phone sharing an inside joke with a family member, at another she is discussing her training schedule with her team. And even before we can order our *filter kaapis*, Sindhu is back in interview mode—without an ounce of tiredness on her face—even after hours of play. They say sportspeople are built differently. They are absolutely right.

When we approached Sindhu to be on the cover of *Cosmopolitan* India's July-August issue, it was supposed to be a story of a planned comeback. By the time I wrote this interview—the plan had come to fruition. On July 19, the 31-year-old badminton ace created history by winning the BWF Japan Open 2026, beating former world number one Akane Yamaguchi in Tokyo. The moment marks quite the milestone—it's not only the first major win for Sindhu in almost two years, but it is also the first time an Indian has clinched the title. "The impossible survives, until someone refuses to negotiate with it," Sindhu wrote on Instagram after her win, addressing an audience of almost four million on the platform.

Could she foresee it? Hard to say. Could she gauge the challenge and the stakes? Absolutely. Pusarla Venkata Sindhu was born in Hyderabad to parents who played professional volleyball—her father, PV Ramana, was conferred with the Arjuna Award (India's second-highest sporting honour) in 2000, and his daughter received it 13 years after him. Sindhu started playing at the age of eight, and what kept the two-time Olympic medallist on course is the kind of single-minded dedication that the sport demands: "When I initially started winning—I thought okay, now I need to master district, now state...now... wait what's next? When there's momentum, confidence follows automatically." Ask her what she would be if not a badminton player—she draws a blank. Ask her if she had to choose another sport, which one would it be? She draws a blank. It's a life that chose her and a life she would choose again.

In 2012, when Sindhu was just 17, she beat Olympic champion Li Xuerui on the latter's home turf. She recalls the match as a turning point in her career. Fast forward four years, and Sindhu bagged a silver at the Rio Summer Olympics, and in 2021, followed it with a bronze in Tokyo at the same event—making her among the most prolific badminton stars of our times.

SINDHU, OFF COURT

Magazine covers, campaign shoots, brand endorsements, runway appearances—it's not a new game for Sindhu. However, the last few years have shifted pace and perspective. The Japan Open victory came after nearly two years without a major title, following injuries and difficult losses. But, that's the thing about athletes—they push through, not only for themselves but the country they represent. That's quite the responsibility, accompanied by another that comes with being accessible to fans around the world. "I wish I could answer every DM I receive. Many young women write to me with messages like: 'I want to play like you.' Sometimes, I can't reply because of the sheer volume, but it is really good to be able to have a conversation with someone who follows you from across the world," she says, as she gets her hair ready for the next shot. In a makeshift green room at the Centre for Sports Excellence in Bengaluru, it is fascinating to see how young champions-in-the-making look at Sindhu with starry-eyed awe, when she takes her spot for the photos. "I like doing shoots...I like getting ready," she says nonchalantly, as we get a fleeting glimpse of the

Embellished dress, Lovebirds; rings, RAF and Ayana Silver Jewellery; shoes, Jeetinder Sandhu; watch, Titan Glamour Quartz Analog Blue Dial Silver Stainless Steel Strap Watch for Women, from the Titan Purple Glamour Collection



**“When I initially
started
winning—I
thought okay,
now I need to
master district,
now state...
now...wait
what’s next?
When there’s
momentum,
confidence
follows
automatically.”**

Jacket, Shwetambari; watch, Titan
Aura Quartz Analog White Mother
of Pearl Dial Rose Gold and Silver
Stainless Steel Strap Watch, from
the Titan Purple Aura Collection





Tank and trousers, 431-88;
earrings, Viange; shoes, Puma;
watch, Titan Purple Ceramics
Quartz Analog White Dial





woman behind the athlete.

A scan through her feed, and it is easy to see that when she is not in her high-performance sportswear, Sindhu loves dressing up—an OTT by Tarun Tahiliani halter dress, a blazer dress with oversized florals, and South Indian weaves as the surprise course: “Being a sportsperson sometimes means that you are too engaged with what you do—you are very protected in that bubble. And when you actually pop it, all of it becomes a discovery. Fashion is part of it—and the next thing you know, you are out of your sneakers. When it comes to dressing up for myself, I am the kind of person who really likes to experiment.”

The field uniform for sportspeople has always carried its own politics. From Wimbledon whites and performance-enhancing fabrics to debates around culture and gender-relevant costumes, the gaze and conversations keep changing, with the female body often at the centre of the discourse. And, when the public space is replaced by the private, the guards come down. For the shoot, Sindhu emerges as her most personal self—styled only in contemporary Indian brands, while ditching her favourite accessory of the season, Temple. The experimental wearable tech (worn on the temple, of course) tracks cerebral blood flow and neurological functions, and it caught the attention of news dailies when she debuted it at a match in Denmark, back in April. Style with an edge.

MIXED DOUBLES

In December 2024, Sindhu married Venkata Datta Sai, a businessman. The pair reconnected on a flight a couple of years prior, although they (and their families) had known each other for a while. What followed was love that eventually turned into marriage, marked by beautiful wedding ceremonies featuring celebrations that spanned Udaipur

Ask her what she would be if not a badminton player—she draws a blank. Ask her if she had to choose another sport, which one would it be? She draws a blank. It’s a life that chose her and a life she would choose again.

and Hyderabad. What does it take to make a marriage work—especially when the couple belongs to seemingly different worlds? Is it difficult for her partner to understand a lifestyle that includes rigorous training and constant travel? “Surprisingly, no. He has travelled all around the globe, is into adventure sports like biking, apart from being a thorough sports lover—and his interest goes beyond badminton. In fact, he understands the business and intricacies of my world much more than I do—for instance, all that’s happening off the court, which I am often unaware of,” she shares. And, although badminton takes her all over the world, there are many more discoveries and markers on the map that are on Sindhu’s wish list. “I love travelling, and if there was one place I would love to visit, it would be Iceland.”

Courting and the court has a ring to it—but the mixed doubles life has another geographical gateway that Sindhu credits for the person she is and has become. Having shifted to Bengaluru post marriage, she continues to enjoy and celebrate her South Indian identity: “Being from

the South, one will always have a deep connection to all that it stands for and offers. And well, more than anything, the food is amazing (she laughs). Nothing beats Hyderabad biryani.” And then, there are the textiles. “South India has a diverse tradition of crafts and textiles that I absolutely love,” she adds, as the conversation travels the folds of *pattu* saris (South Indian woven silks) and the tie-dyed art of *ikat*, which her home state is known for. For her wedding—among a palette of ivories, golds and *kanjeevaram* drapes—Sindhu wore a striking bridal Mysore silk *lehenga* by couturier Sabyasachi Mukherjee, another testament to her roots.

This love for the traditions and rituals she inherited has not always come easy, but with age and experience, her outlook has evolved. As we settle into hair and makeup for the shoot, Sindhu has just one request—to let her natural, South Indian curls stay. “My dad always says, ‘God gave you the best hair. You don’t have to change it.’” If there is one thing that makes an interviewer happy, it is authenticity—and today, it lights up our little green room. ■



Vest and pleated trousers, Chola;
ring, Misho; shoes, Puma; watch,
Titan Purple Ceramics Quartz
Analog White Dial Watch for Women

Cosmo Quiz

How many hours do you train?

Seven

How many days in a week?

Six

What's the last thing you watched?

His & Hers (so good!). We also finished *Bridgerton*.

What's your kind of music?

Sometimes fast-paced, sometimes soothing — just instrumental.

If not badminton, which other sport?

I would choose badminton over and over again.

A beauty product that's always in your bag?

Sunscreen.

A home beauty hack you swear by?

South Indian hair oil blends made at home by my mother and grandmother since I was a child.

What would the ultimate PVS jersey read?

An infinity symbol and the phrase: Live the way you love. Love the life you live.



Editorial Coordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Assistant Stylist: Samriddhi Vora
Line Producer: RD Ratnam
Location Courtesy: Centre for Sports Excellence



Brando men's jacket, Royal Enfield;
necklace, beaded bracelet, and ring, INOX
Jewelry; chain bracelet, ZEEV for Men;
black bracelet, SWASHAA; bike, Bullet 650
Battleship Blue, Royal Enfield



A person wearing a black leather jacket is sitting on a blue motorcycle with yellow stripes. The background is a textured, brownish-grey surface.

RANDEEP HOODA'S SILVER LINING PLAYBOOK

The actor-filmmaker and recent winner at the 72nd National Film Awards takes stock of life as he talks about 25 years of being in Bollywood, and how parenthood changed him.

Words by Karishma Upadhyay

Photographer: Taras Taraporvala

Stylist: Amoli Goyal

Makeup Artist: Renuka Pillai

Hair Artist: Shubham Yadav

Varsity riding jacket in red,
Royal Enfield; all rings, INOX
Jewelry; bike, Bullet 650
Battleship Blue, Royal Enfield





Shirt, Countrymade; pants, Massimo Dutti; shoes, Tod's; rings, ZEEV for Men and INOX Jewelry; beaded bracelet, ORIONZ; cuff bracelet and necklace, Viange



Outfit, Canali; shoes, ZEGNA; chain, Dhora; bracelets, ZACH and ZEEV for Men; rings, ZEEV for Men and INOX Jewelry

Randeep Hooda is seeing the world with new eyes. A month shy of turning 50, he is experiencing

parenthood for the first time. The actor-filmmaker and his wife, actor Lin Laishram welcomed their daughter in early March this year. “She’s so delicate and beautiful,” he says about their baby girl, Nyomica.

He can’t help but beam as he confesses to already being ‘wrapped around his daughter’s little finger’. “Everyone is,” he insists. Like most new parents, the couple is inundated with advice, opinions, and comments. “Everyone keeps telling us, ‘wait until she starts smiling back at you; wait until this or that (milestone).’ She’s already a great source of joy for everyone in our families—not just me,” he says.

Hooda’s month-long paternity break is almost coming to an end with his next—an untitled social drama about misleading advertisements, which is almost entirely based on his home state of Haryana. Leaving Lin and their weeks-old baby is not going to be easy on the new father: “I am going to come back as much as I can. I can potentially stay away for a few days but after that I am going to be like “I just need five minutes with my daughter and I’ll be satiated.”

STYLE AND THE CHANGING SELF

I should mention here that Hooda and I have known each other, on and off, for almost two decades. During an interview for another publication around the time he turned 40, he had spoken about why he thought marriage and fatherhood were perhaps not for him. “For the time I am making a film, I am completely immersed in the character. I come back and look at the person in my life like a stranger. I don’t want to subject my eccentricities on someone else. And, what would a relationship amount to? A few kids with an absent father...I am not interested,” he had said at the time. This, of course,

changed when he met Lin at actor Naseeruddin Shah's Motley theatre group. A decade-long friendship transformed into love and the couple tied the knot with a traditional Meitei wedding in Imphal, Manipur in 2023.

When I remind him of our conversation, he laughs, admitting: "A lot has changed, obviously." The credit, he quickly adds, goes to Lin. "While I still tend to get very involved in the films that I make, in Lin I have found a wonderful partner who understands my personal quests. Life is good after marriage, and I now feel a sense of completeness after the baby. It feels like there's a new energy infused into our family and not just in my life. She's too small yet, and everybody is still on their toes. But, it's all settling in."

Changes in Hooda's life post-marriage have been a mix of profound and subtle. One of them is his renewed interest in fashion. The actor has always described his

"While I still tend to get very involved in the films that I make, in Lin I have found a wonderful partner who understands my personal quests. Life is good after marriage, and I now feel a sense of completeness after the baby."

sense of style as 'classic' but Lin has been pushing him to be more experimental. "I have always dressed for the occasion, maybe even been a little underdressed. Now, Lin is also involved in picking what I wear, so there's often a dash of flair," he says. These conversations have helped the actor identify that one fashion trend he wants nothing to do with. "I don't understand the point of oversized clothing. Maybe it works for some pieces sometimes if comfort is key, but not everywhere," he adds.

UPPING THE GAME

It might seem like Hooda's life is in flux but there is one thing that hasn't changed—his passion for acting and storytelling. He discovered acting in



Heritage double pocket shirt in dark olive and heritage vintage cargo, Royal Enfield; rings, ZEEV for Men and INOX Jewelry; thread bracelet, Alto Vida Lifestyle; cuff bracelet and beaded bracelet, INOX Jewelry; metal beaded bracelet, ORIONZ; chopper MLG camo helmet with clear visor - battle green helmet, Royal Enfield; bike, Bullet 650 Battleship Blue, Royal Enfield

Editorial Coordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Set Design: Janhavi Patwardhan
Assistant Stylist: Astha Kothari
Fashion Intern: Prutha Agarwal



school but his doctor parents wanted him to have a 'proper degree.' He spent five years in Australia studying business management, and, it was only when he returned to Delhi and started a job with an airline that he engaged in amateur theatre. That's where filmmaker Mira Nair discovered him.

Hooda got his break in *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which revolves around a Delhi family dealing with major and minor crises as they prepare for a wedding. He played Rahul—a charming but laid-back cousin from Australia. In the 25 years since, his filmography is studded with solid performances and box office disappointments. From starving himself to play a real life political prisoner in *Sarbjit* (2016) to shaving a part of his head several times while making *Swatantra Veer Savarkar* (2024), his commitment to making his characters believable is unmatched. The film won him the Best Debut Director award at the 72nd National Film Awards, announced in July 2026.

"I think I've done the best I could with the opportunities that I've had. I've made about 40 films over these 25 years and that's not a lot of work. I've also had long breaks where I just walked away from the industry because the kind of films being made weren't really meant for me. One is always chasing quality," he explains. And, every time cinema didn't scratch that itch, Hooda quickly turned to theatre. He's been associated with Shah's Motley since they first worked together in *Monsoon Wedding*. Over the decades, he's shared the stage with Shah in *A Walk in the Woods* and in George Bernard Shaw's classic satire, *Arms and the Man*.

It was this training in theatre that helped Hooda when he had to step in to direct and co-write *Swatantra Veer Savarkar*. "Theatre really helps you visualise what you could do with a space and how to build a story. I had always thought I'd write and

"Theatre really helps you visualise what you could do with a space and how to build a story."

direct at a later stage in my life but I am happy to have gotten the opportunity already." Of the two disciplines, it's writing that the actor is enjoying. "Writing is very liberating. I've written a bunch of screenplays, most of which are adapted from real life and also some short stories in Hindi."

Long before the idea of side-quests as a form of self-care became a trend, they have been an integral part of Hooda's life. An avid equestrian, he's competed at the national level in dressage and show jumping. He is also a wildlife enthusiast and photographer who uses his platform to raise awareness about conservation. There was also a time when he was very passionate about playing the saxophone. "One should always have side quests or hobbies, as we used to call them. They help break routine and keep your mind fresh."

Almost midway through a year of milestones, both personal and professional, Hooda is excited. Before his daughter's birth, he wrapped a schedule for filmmaker Laxman Utekar's biographical drama *Eetha*, with actor Shraddha Kapoor, in Pune. He's also finished filming for the action-adventure-comedy *Matchbox: The Movie* with Jessica Biel and John Cena.

The film reunites Hooda with his *Extraction* (2020) director Sam Hargrave. "I feel like I want to work more. I want to push myself to try new things, work with different kinds of filmmakers." ■

COSMO QUIZ

A phrase you say all the time?

'All right, let's do it'.

My favourite cartoon character is...

I used to watch a lot of Sponge Bob with my niece, that's the character I remember watching a lot.

If you were an author, what kind of book would you write?

Maybe a non-fiction.

What's your spirit animal?

Used to be a horse, now it's a tiger. So somewhere in between.

If I weren't an actor, I'd be...

A naturalist or something.

My favourite drink in the morning is...

Lung-cleansing tea.

What sport are you the worst at?

Basketball or pool.

If you had to teach someone a skill, what would it be?

Time management.

The best exercise in the world?

Power lifting.

The one film I've seen more than five times...

*Every time I watch a movie, I find new things in it. If I had to pick one, it would be *Lawrence of Arabia*.*

Neha Kakkar
**OFF THE
RECORD**

Reclaiming her narrative, the music star is bypassing the static to finally play on the only frequency that matters—her own.

Words by Itisha Arya
Stylist: Zoha Castelino
Makeup Artist: Eleni Chatzinikolidou
Hair Artist: Nargis Shaikh



Tank top, GAP; jeans,
ANI Clothing; earrings,
Raj Diamonds

There is always noise around Neha Kakkar. The kind that followed a four-year-old onto *jagrata* (devotional vigil) stages in Rishikesh, where she sang not because she wanted to, but because her family needed her to. “We performed every night—not out of choice, but out of the pressure of not getting enough food if we didn’t,” she says, her voice entirely devoid of resentment. Decades and dozens of viral hits later, the noise for the 38-year-old singer has simply changed shape.

Kakkar’s journey from *Indian Idol* to a glittering Times Square billboard is a rare trajectory, and the numbers fully back it up. With a massive digital footprint that includes 76.2 million Instagram followers (at the time of going to press), she also ranks among the top 30 most-followed artists globally on Spotify, standing as the most-followed female Indian voice on the entire platform, as of June 2026. She is the first Indian singer to receive a YouTube Diamond Creator Award (in 2021) and the vocal powerhouse behind *Dilbar*—the first Indian track to reach number three on the Billboard YouTube Music chart back in 2018.

She will tell you, genuinely, that she finds this hard to process. “I still feel like that little girl who had big dreams,” she says. “There are moments when I look around at everything and genuinely can’t tell if this is real—like, is this actually happening to me, or have I just been dreaming this whole time?”

FULL CIRCLE MOMENT

There is a very specific moment when an artist moves from the charts to pop-culture ubiquity. For Kakkar, the groundwork started long before that moment arrived. In 2004, she relocated to Mumbai with her brother Tony Kakkar and, the following year, auditioned for the music reality show *Indian Idol Season 2*. She was eliminated early.

Cardigan, GAP; jeans,
Paige at The Collective



What followed were four years of peripheral work—an independent debut album, *Neha The Rock Star*, in 2008, background credits, and a minor Bollywood placement in *Meerabai Not Out*, the same year. She hadn't really found a spot in the notoriously hard-to-crack industry. This changed in 2012, when *Second Hand Jawaani* from the film *Cocktail* became her first song to register commercially, and the work started coming in. Her voice lived rent-free in every autorickshaw, every wedding playlist, and college fest setlist. What followed was akin to a domino effect. *Sunny Sunny*, *London Thumakda*, and more than 150 Bollywood credits amassed over the next decade.

The connection to music, she says, goes back further than her career does. “Whenever I heard a good

composition, I used to get literal goosebumps, even as a child. The moment I started speaking, my singing started right then and there.”

It explains why her return to *Indian Idol* as a judge marked a full-circle moment. “It was definitely a closure

“I feel other people’s emotions deeply—I absorb them. I suppose, in some way, I see myself in everyone I meet.”

to everything I’ve worked for, a sense of accomplishment,” she tells *Cosmo*. “Even as a judge, I never forgot what it felt like to be on the other side of that table. I would watch the contestants perform and see myself in them—that little girl who once stood exactly where they were standing.”

SOCIAL MEDIA PARADOX

Kakkar reigns as the most followed Indian musician and playback singer on Instagram, which means the praise and the vitriol arrive in roughly equal measure. So, how does she navigate that constant noise? “That’s just how it works—if you’re truly big, the love and the hate come together. Nobody bothers trolling someone who doesn’t matter.”

Even so, the weight of a constant spotlight catches up. When Kakkar posted a cryptic note in January 2026 about stepping away from work and relationships, it sent the internet into an immediate tailspin. “I was feeling a little overwhelmed that day,” she says. “I just said what I felt in that particular moment.” The post came down, and the news cycle moved on. “I’m here, I’m still working on my music, and I’m doing exactly what I’ve always wanted to do.”

The crying, emotional outbursts, the memes—it’s a part of her public image the internet has never quite let go of, and she doesn’t dispute it. “I don’t quite know how to put it into words,” she says, “but I feel other people’s emotions deeply—I absorb them. If someone around me is sad, I am sad too. I suppose, in some way, I see myself in everyone I meet.”

Whether she’s being memed for her tears or celebrated for her streaming milestones, Kakkar seems largely unbothered by either. “I’ve seen so much love and so much hate. Now, criticism doesn’t bother me,” she says, her tone entirely matter-of-fact over a voice note. The work, by that logic, is the only thing worth tracking. “I still have to make it bigger,” she says. “And I’m never going to stop dreaming.” ■

Tank top, Zara; pants, Karl Lagerfeld at The Collective; earrings and neck piece, Swarovski





COSMO QUIZ

Morning person or night owl?

Morning person, for sure.

Studio vibes or stage rush?

Stage rush, any day!

Fame or anonymity for a day?

Anonymity.

One international singer you would love to work with?

Selena Gomez.

A song you wish you had sung?

Hawayein, but as a duet with Arijit Singh.

The last song that made you cry?

Anything with a truly soul-stirring composition; great music always moves me to tears.

Your personal favourite from your own discography?

Do Gallan.

The biggest misconception about you?

That I'm always crying. I'm emotional, but only when it's genuinely meaningful—not over everything!

Draped dress, Stella McCartney for H&M; earrings, Raj Diamonds

Editorial Coordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Assistant Stylist: Aayushi Vaidya

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ALAYA F IS TUNING OUT THE NOISE

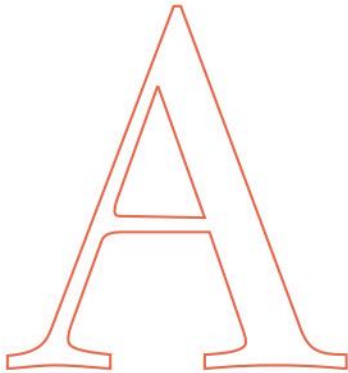
Behind the discipline and digital polish is an actor quietly building a life guided less by clutter and more by intuition.

Words by Diya J Verma
Photographer: Sushant Chhabria
Stylist: Sheefa Gilani
Makeup Artist: Mitali Vakil
Hair Artist: Sandeep Chaupal



Bodysuit,
Victoria's Secret;
jewellery, Messika





Alaya F doesn't quite fit the Gen Z mould. She moves with striking discipline, views problems as privileges, treats fitness as a lifestyle rather than a trend, and seems far more interested in intentional living than mindless scrolling.

At 5pm, she appears on our Zoom call—right on cue—while I battle an unforgiving internet connection. “Let’s keep our video turned off,” I suggest, apologising for joining a few minutes late. In an effort to recover from my flustered start, I quickly enquire about her day.

“A bit stressful, and a bit busy. There’s a lot of exciting stuff I’m currently working on. I wish I could tell you more,” she responds, prompting me to probe further. “Just a lot of very important discussions and decisions. However, I did manage to get some meditation in right before our interview. I needed to ground my energy,” she says, sidestepping the question.

A QUIET AWAKENING

Alaya admits she’s someone who tends to fill up her days no matter what. “I don’t have the ability to sit still for too long. I need a goal to work towards; to be building or creating something. I get a high out of it,” she explains.

There’s a refreshing assuredness to the 28-year-old, who recently adapted Andy Frisella’s 75 Hard Challenge into a personalised physical and mental routine. Yet, she confesses that fitness wasn’t her strong suit until the pandemic hit in 2020.

“I had never done yoga in my life before that,” she says, adding, “Fitness and social media sort of fuelled each other for me.” It was only during the second lockdown—when she began formally training with a yoga teacher in Goa—that her fitness journey kicked off.

“I think my body responded really well to it, and I ended up posting a lot of content. People simply assumed I was very disciplined and healthy...which certainly wasn’t the case. And then I was like, ‘You know what? I have two options here. I can either sit and feel like a fraud, or actually work towards becoming fit.’ I made my pick, and it completely transformed my life.”



I realised I had started making decisions based on outcomes rather than from the heart. I had stopped listening to my gut and became more focused on other people’s perspectives.

Breeze tote bag in red,
Miraggio; red jacket,
Dhruv Kapoor; pink set,
Victoria's Secret; pink
shirt, Maje; jewellery,
Nishani Studio and Kefi





Breeze tote bag in brown, Miraggio; outfit and jewellery, Hermès; footwear, Aldo



I've done a deep-clean. It's about filtering your circle of people—deciding who and what should get your attention so you're not stuck in an endless loop of decision fatigue.

FOCUS OVER NOISE

The actor's wellness approach has since evolved into something more holistic: A curated consumption of food, content, and people. Though social media falls under the purview of her work, Instagram notifications are perpetually turned off and the widget buried deep inside a hidden folder.

Instead, Alaya chooses to reorient her attention toward more meaningful content. "I like listening to inspiring people talk and filter out the rest. I used to enjoy reality television, but now it's just brain rotting, you know? I've been trying to make more time to read, meditate, and my walks are non-negotiable," she says.

For her, it's about fostering healthy micro habits that seem insignificant but pile up over time to create lasting change. "I've done a deep-clean. It's also about filtering your circle of people—deciding who and what should get your attention so you're not stuck in an endless loop of decision fatigue."

A similar philosophy extends to her career. Just six years old in the film industry—she made her debut alongside Saif Ali Khan in *Jawaani Jaaneman* (2020)—and with six major feature films under her belt, Alaya says she's far removed from the 22-year-old version of herself.

"It's strange. Just last night, I was feeling super nostalgic. Despite hailing from an industry family, I came in really raw and naive. I hadn't figured out my presentation—what works for my body type, hairstyles, makeup. And apart from the actual craft, I was completely clueless. It was only later that I realised acting is a very small part of the job. On a film set, just about 20 per cent of your time goes into acting. I was disillusioned with what I had signed up for."

STEPPING OUT OF FRAME

But over the last six years, she has grown to love even the parts of the job that she once didn't. Still, navigating the cynical world of cinema comes with its own highs and lows. Last year, the actor took an intentional break from Bollywood to turn her focus inward.

"I realised I had started making decisions based on outcomes rather than from the heart. I had stopped listening to my gut and became more focused on other people's perspectives," Alaya admits. "The more weight you give to other people's opinions, the less you can trust your own intuition. Somewhere in 2024, I felt the burden of that," she adds.

It's nearing 6pm, and I recall Alaya mentioning that she had to get a second workout in. Mindful of the minutes slipping by, I move things along. She goes on to tell me that she had an epiphany of sorts, which compelled her to take a break. "What do I want to do? What type of actor do I want to be? There's so much more to who I am and what I want to create over the next few years."

RAISING THE BAR

Alaya recently wrapped shooting two projects and is quietly building something she has been working on for the last year or so but doesn't yet have the liberty to talk about. The actor was last seen playing Veera Swathi

**I have never taken
my privilege or
access lightly. All of
it is a blessing, but
also the result of a
lot of hard work.**



Yellow set, Amo;
jacket, Sandro;
jewellery, Regalia
and Nishani Studio;
socks, Theater;
footwear, Aldo

in *Srikanth* (2024), opposite RajKummar Rao. And after having worked with actors and filmmakers of such calibre across genres, she holds herself to a much higher standard—often forgetting to take a moment to soak it all in.

“Along the way, I’ve learnt to count my blessings. If you surround yourself with good people and conduct yourself with integrity, you can find a sense of peace and grounding—even in an industry as mad as ours.”

Today, she pursues every project with the same enthusiasm that 22-year-old Alaya did. “I need to really believe in what I’m creating. I have to look at a project and be like, ‘I cannot wait to dive into this character and collaborate with these people.’ When I’m in, I’m all in—100 per cent.”

She also thinks it takes a certain kind of “madness” to work in an industry as demanding and unpredictable as theirs. “It’s very all-consuming, unstable, and can cause a great deal of insecurity. But if you’re going to be mad, you might as well be all mad and enjoy the ride.”

The actor will next be seen in *Storm*, an upcoming high-stakes thriller series produced by Hrithik Roshan’s HRX Films—streaming exclusively on Prime Video—that follows five women caught at the centre of a lethal scam unraveling through a web of lies. Alaya remains committed to choosing powerful roles with meaty parts. “That’s the template I’m following—I’m just doing work that I feel really passionate about.”

PRIVILEGE AND PERSPECTIVE

This is not to say she isn’t conscious of the conversations around nepotism and the overscrutiny that often comes with being a star kid. The daughter of actor Pooja Bedi and granddaughter of veteran actor Kabir Bedi, Alaya says, “I have never taken my privilege or access lightly. All of it is a blessing, but also the result of a lot of hard work. I’m just very grateful.”

More recently, she addressed online speculation around her appearance. “I was like, ‘What I’ve done with my own hard work, why are you giving credit to doctors?’ I just found it funny. Besides, I’m flattered. It means whatever I am doing is working. People often want a quick fix, but if you stick to the smaller things for long enough, you’ll see big results. I take it all with a grain of salt,” she laughs.

But beneath the candour and quiet confidence lies a deeper commitment to cultivating a healthier relationship with herself. “There is no relationship that supersedes the one you have with yourself. If you are able to cultivate a supportive and nurturing relationship with yourself, you are truly unstoppable. Nothing can break you, because you will always have you,” she concludes. ■



Overnight duffel bag in black, Miraggio; blazer, AK I OK Anamika Khanna; jewellery, Messika

Bikini top, Hunkemöller;
crochet dress, Lovebirds;
jewellery, Tiam by Anishka and
Renu Oberoi; footwear, Aldo

Editorial Coordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Set Design: Purnima Nath
Styling Assistants: Amisha Thakkar
and Aanchal Upadhyay
Styling Intern: Riddhi Sawhney



Cosmo Quiz

Your favourite cheat meal?

A burger and cookies!

A song that describes you?

Unstoppable by Sia.

A misconception about you?

That I've always been this disciplined and focused. I was actually quite the opposite—I cultivated these habits through a lot of effort.

Your guilty pleasure?

Tarot videos on YouTube.

Cats or dogs?

Dogs, always.

A movie character you wish to play?

If there's ever an Indian remake of *Thelma & Louise*, I'd want to do it.

Your latest read?

I'm currently reading *Start With Yourself* by Emma Grede, and I just finished *Mother Mary Comes to Me* by Arundhati Roy.



A woman with her hair in two buns, wearing a black dress with a red lining, stands in a room with white curtains. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

SHE PUTS POISE IN PERFORMANCE: PARVATHY THIRUVOTHU

Best known for her work in Malayalam cinema, this actor is as sharp, witty, and articulate as they come. She scoffs at so-called beauty standards, argues for gender equality, and is unafraid to stand up for what's right.

Words by Shraddha Chowdhury

Photographer: Sarang Gupta

Stylist: Yvonne Monteiro

A person is standing in front of a window with light-colored, sheer curtains. They are wearing a long, black, floor-length dress and a black headscarf. Their hands are resting on a white metal frame, possibly a bed or a stand. The lighting is soft, coming from the window, creating a calm and somewhat somber atmosphere.

Dress, Rajesh Pratap Singh; jewellery, Mozaati; footwear, CeeCee

Some actors entertain. Some shift conversations. Parvathy Thiruvothu belongs to the latter camp. Whether it's the emotionally loaded character of Anju in *Ullozhukku* (*Undercurrent*, 2024)—the most demanding role of her 20-year career, she says—the resilient Sameera in *Take Off* (2017), or the fearless acid attack survivor in *Uyare* (2019), Parvathy has come to be known for her layered performances in movies that matter.

“In the initial days of my career, I’d think a lot more about the character and subject of the movie,” shares the Kozhikode-born 38-year-old. “Today, it’s a lot more about what projects I want to be a part of as a whole and their collaborative nature.” In the Hindi film universe, she has starred opposite the late Irrfan Khan in *Qarib Qarib Singlle* (2017), and in *Kadak Singh* (2023) alongside Pankaj Tripathi.

Also an advocate for women’s rights, particularly in South Indian film industries, Thiruvothu is a founding

member of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) and actively campaigns for equal pay, gender equality, and safer working environments.

Evidently, this versatile actor is all about substance over spectacle. As we peel back the layers during our conversation, the cadence of her voice reflects the clarity of her thoughts—steady, unfaltering, and unmistakably honest. Here are excerpts from our chat.

You're known for choosing layered, disruptive roles. What's your gut-check before saying yes to a script?

More often than not, my gut screams “yes” the moment I meet the director. It's an energy thing. We connect on the intent behind why the film is being made, and whether I can be a part of their vision. Their excitement, their motive matters to me, because my efforts are guided by their direction.

What's been your most emotionally demanding role so far? And how did you unwind once it wrapped up?

Anju from *Ullozhukku* (2024) has been the most emotionally demanding role of my career, so far. Before I finally agreed to do

it, I turned down the movie for four years because I was scared. I was certain I'd fail to understand her and catch her nuances. But luckily, the director [Christo Tomy] came back to me all those years later because he thought I was ready for that kind of depth. I still wasn't sure! But I said yes, nevertheless. It was one of the best decisions of my life. To decompress later, I travelled abroad extensively. That usually does the trick.

You've been a part of a generation that's actively challenging how women are written. Is the industry moving beyond “strong female characters,” and are audiences ready for flawed, complex female protagonists?

Representation has definitely evolved over the past decade, especially since the pandemic and the massive OTT revolution came about. Though we're still playing it quite safe. The aspect of “unlikable” women is still an extremely uncharted space, which I'm hoping will flourish a lot more. These characters should not be reserved for just men, because all humans are flawed. This step could add a well-rounded approach to a show. The audience is as ready as we make them with exposure to different kinds of storytelling. So, the onus is not on them; it's on the creatives who need to double down on ensuring that newer experiences are created for them.

Fringe dress, Shwetambari;
shirt, Sanya Mangal; jewellery,
IAMA Jewels; footwear, Twirl
and Tote



Can you tell us the most romantic thing someone has done for you that had nothing to do with grand gestures?

There was a time when I had terrible issues with being able to sleep peacefully. Days went by without any restful sleep. Sometimes, you just need the presence of a loved one, even if it's them just doing their thing around the house, but near you. For me, that was one of the most romantic gestures ever—a space so safe that I could rest and rejuvenate.

Your take on beauty is surprisingly grounded.

Are there any habits you swear by?

I'm a skincare strategist. Considering I'm in my late 30s, I have many layers of skincare going on! I swear by deep moisturising masks at night and some lovely masks you can use on flights. Plus, a good sunscreen that doesn't cause breakouts is a non-negotiable.

What can Bollywood learn from cinema made across South India?

For one, that the market can be shaped beautifully by real stories. I wish Bollywood, in its own way, would be more attuned to storytelling rather than just the making, marketing, and glamourising aspect of filmmaking. One of the main reasons I believe Malayalam cinema is celebrated across the world is because it always starts with the spine of the film—the storytelling, the script—and everything else is there to complement it. If the story and screenplay is weak, no amount of marketing or hype can save a film.

“The aspect of ‘unlikable’ women is still an extremely uncharted space...these characters should not be reserved for just men.”

Is there a genre you haven't explored but are curious about? Tell us about the projects you have in the pipeline.

I've been extremely lucky to have had a strong career of 20 years. I've mostly taken on roles in the dramatic zone, so there are so many genres I haven't explored! Sci-fi, extreme thrillers, horror, comedy...I do have a cool mix in the pipeline. Two Malayalam films are rooted in reality—one more of a drama, but the other one is an out-and-out commercial thriller. In Hindi, too, I'm set to lead the crime thriller series *Storm* (2026) [Hrithik Roshan's debut as a producer with HRX Films].

What does a healthy relationship look like to you today?

A healthy relationship needs space to be so transparent and honest that one doesn't have to shrink themselves for any reason, especially when you're uncertain about having uncomfortable conversations. To be able to enjoy such freedom with another person takes a lot of work. It also takes courage to put your faith in someone to catch you when you fall.

How do you protect your own emotional well-being?

It is a matter of carefully picking your tribe. It's easy to be in an echo chamber. In fact, for the longest time, I assumed I had to stay safe with people who help me through any challenges. But now, I've started speaking



Jacket, Raw Mango;
hair accessory,
Archana Aggarwal

Parvathy, Unfiltered

Your dream role?

That of a dancer.

How'd your closest friends describe you?

Impatient.

A red flag you never ignore?

Lack of effort.

A green flag you wish people valued more?

Showing up.

A role that changed you?

Anju from *Ullozhukku*.

A song that feels like home?

To Build a Home by The Cinematic Orchestra.

Morning person or night owl?

Both in equal parts.

One thing you wish people asked you more often?

No such thing. Though I wish somebody would ask me to dance with them!

Your favourite binge?

Idli-sambar.

Your go-to self-care ritual?

Sleep.

A place you escape to?

My family.

If not an actor, you'd be?

A writer.

One thing you're currently obsessed with?

Workouts.



with those who outright disagree with me or the things I fight for, through exposure therapy [a cognitive-behavioural technique that helps people safely confront the thoughts, situations, or objects they fear].

How do you navigate beauty standards in an industry that can be so exacting?

Trying to understand how the so-called beauty standards came into the picture has been an anthropological adventure of sorts for me. The weight of these heavy expectations makes so many of us women shrink. There was once a time when people believed beauty and brains didn't go together. Similarly, if you were considered a feminist or from the intelligentsia, you'd be judged for wearing makeup. When did they become mutually exclusive? Who decided this? Why is every step towards self-expression turned into something we're punished with? So, here's my take: If a certain standard is being imposed on you, flip it and set your own rules. I'm having fun with it in my own way.

You come across as deeply introspective. What does your self-reflection practice look like?

At the risk of sounding too bookish or spiritual, every single waking minute of my life is a practice in self-reflection. I just am a deeply introspective person. I try to be in the present as much as possible. And I'm hyper-aware of my own patterns. I use it to my benefit and also to improve my work.

What does a perfect day off look like for you? Tell us what helps keep you grounded.

A perfect day would be spent with my parents and my dog. One where I could take a leisurely afternoon siesta, spend quality time with them, read a book, make coffee, sit in silence with my dog, and also get to go to bed early. I practice different kinds of meditation, based on where I might be. And these

days, I journal a lot more than before; it really helps me. I don't lean into routine too much. Spontaneity is where I usually find myself.

Finally, has your idea of success evolved over the years? From box office successes to, perhaps, something else...

Oh, it's evolved massively! While I'm no longer in a hurry to get anywhere, the goalpost certainly has moved beyond just being an actor. I wish to dive into the many aspects of filmmaking. To do that, one has to be brave enough to start, as it'd take me to the beginning of yet another stage of my career. I'd then consider myself successful, because it takes courage to start afresh. ■



Dress, Acquire; jewellery, IAMA Jewels

Editorial Coordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Assistant Stylists: Siyaa Mannuja and Ashi Singh



The Home and the World

A personal essay on migration, queerness, and discovering that the same clothes can signify belonging in one city and otherness in another.

By Anwesh Banerjee

Living across multiple cities takes a definitive toll not just on your aesthetic sensibilities, but also on your wardrobe.

Hear me out: Growing up in Kolkata in the noughties, “sustainability” and “tailoring” were not buzzwords that I had come across as part of an Instagram caption. Instead, they were among the many intangible inheritances of Bengali middle-class upbringing, which entailed biannual trips to Khadi Emporium, bulk-buying fabrics, and then making the inevitable visit to

your most faithful tailor. As one can imagine, long before India’s position as a global authority on craft was being debated every week, I took the presence of *maheshwari* checks, *ikkat* temples, and *ajrakh* florals around me as a given.

It was a repertoire of knowledge that I barely knew would come to be of immense use when I finally moved to New Delhi for my undergraduate degree, where my existing wardrobe—bereft of H&M T-shirts and Uniqlo denims—would prove to be the perfect fit for what my fellow students labelled the “DU aesthetic.” Soon my block-printed shirts, my

white-as-snow *chikankari* kurtas, and my handloom mandarin-collared short kurtas—collected and carefully made by my mother over years—became the envy of the roost. They not only marked me among my peers as someone with impeccable taste, but, when paired with my Decathlon tennis shorts, turned me into a living, breathing poster child of flamboyant, yet restrained, homosexuality.

Of course, there were others who pushed the limits of how newly discovered queerness ought to be expressed—*jhumkas*, *kadas*, and nail paint et al—but this was the first time that I found myself in a geographic

and cultural setting where my sartorial choices became a weapon I could wield at will. I took several trips to Janpath, Dilli Haat, and Lajpat Nagar, steadily adding to my wardrobe. There were reds, midnight blues, all shades of white, and a few carefully chosen pieces in black. By the time I was packing my suitcase for my postgraduate studies in London, I was ready to take on the Western metropolis with what I believed represented the very best of Indian craft.

FABRIC OF CHANGE

But no amount of reading Dickens, Hardy, or Woolf can prepare one for the coldness that awaits a transition like this. Upon my arrival, I was met with the harsh reality of accepting, first and foremost, that the very sun I had taken for granted was now a luxury that I needed to learn to use sparingly. There was little space now for my embroidered shirts, which more often than not disappeared beneath woollen overcoats and scarves, becoming invisible under layers designed for survival.

And, even before I could make peace again with the realities of building a winter wardrobe from scratch (the bare bones of the one I had built in Delhi, obviously quickly proved to be deeply inadequate), I was confronted with a harsher truth. Pieces of clothing that I had taken for granted over the past two decades no longer became my strongest expression of taste. Instead, they began to mark me in crowds—whether in university hallways, on the Tube, or along the cold aisles of a Tesco—as an outsider. An immigrant who was still struggling to fit in.

The mesh-topped, thong-sporting bodies of Soho and Hackney soon presented a language of queerness with which I had little familiarity. Every time my European friends walked up to hug me at a pub or a house party, they wore the same uncanny surprise across their faces. The very choices that had once made

me stand out with admiration were now an invitation for people to regard me as something exotic.

My initial reaction was a complete overhaul of my wardrobe. Shoving my shirts and kurtas into the absolute recesses of my closet, I began donning cheap white T-shirts from Primark—a subscription to the trappings of fast fashion that would have scared the living daylights out of my parents. I told myself it was practicality. But underneath those excuses of changing cityscapes and embracing alien cultures, was the quiet prayer for anonymity and sign to fit in that could perhaps be purchased against the price of a multipack.

**Pieces of clothing
that I had taken for
granted over the
past two decades
no longer became
my strongest
expression of taste.**

Closer to my first birthday away from home, I distinctly remember my mother calling and asking, “What would you like me to make you for your birthday?” For the first time in 23 years, I had no answer for her. The possibilities had always been endless: A shirt from Fabindia? A new set of cotton or fitted silk pyjamas? I took a breath and answered instead, “A white linen shirt would be perfect. You have my measurements, right?”

A month later, a distant relative brought with her a small brown cardboard parcel that carried within its folds my mother’s month-old promise: A crisp linen shirt, tailor-made for my body, that sat on my frame like second skin. As I stepped out in it on my birthday, I remember every friend in my seminar, for the very first time, complimenting my

outfit in the August sun. “You look so lovely. Must be so much fun to have something bespoke, tailor-made for you,” one casually remarked.

And that was when it hit me. In a desperate bid to champion the craft legacies of our subcontinent, we from South Asia have perhaps forgotten the quiet austerity of the design histories that we inherit from our everyday lives. Histories that include handcrafting garments built to last in the most severe of climates through thoughtfully sourced materials; objects that travel across borders with ease and endure the passing of years.

Today, after three years of living away from home, I own close to six such shirts, all of which I have shamelessly forced my mother to send my way to London. She, of course unaware of the lexicon of a Charvet or a Budd, sees my gradual discarding of embroidered fabrics and colourful prints as a shedding of my past; another excuse to dissolve into the crowds of a rainy, often sunless city that she is yet to visit.

But, I have increasingly come to see it differently. Because the question is no longer whether London sees me as South Asian. The truth is, that it always will. Whether I am wrapped in ajrakh cotton or crisp white linen, I continue to arrive in every room carrying an inheritance that precedes me. The difference lies in which parts of that inheritance I choose to foreground.

Today, the conversation around South Asian fashion on the global stage has lingered for too long on spectacle—on embroidery, ornamentation, and craft as performance as opposed to knowledge. There is immense pride to be taken in those histories, undoubtedly. But there is equal pride to be found in the quieter design traditions that have always existed alongside them: Traditions of tailoring, utility, longevity, and restraint. Clothes that do not merely mark our origins, but stand by quietly as we make homes elsewhere. ■



Has the Pilates Body Warped Our Idea of Self-Image?

Instagram sold us a fantasy: A body that's lean and permanently holding a matcha. But behind the obsession lies a bigger question—when did looking 'fit' become more important than actually being healthy?

By Bani Sachar

Back in the day, fitness was a relatively simple affair. It was your mum's evening walk. Your dad's Sunday badminton game. The aunt who attended yoga classes in the local park, not because anyone was watching, but because her knees hurt less afterwards. Exercise was woven into everyday life rather than curated for an audience. Then the internet happened. Somewhere between #ThatGirl morning routines, mirror selfies, and celebrity sightings at Pilates classes, fitness stopped being something you did for yourself and became a performance for others to see. More recently, the body positivity pendulum seems to have swung. Size zero is back in fashion, except this time it arrives wrapped in the language of wellness.

Image: GETTY IMAGES

PERFORMATIVE FITNESS

The irony is that Pilates itself was never designed to create an aspirational body type. Joseph Pilates developed the method as a system for rehabilitation and functional strength, built around alignment, breath, balance, and control. The transformation didn't happen because Pilates changed. It happened because wellness itself became visual.

Today, health isn't simply movement. It's stainless steel water bottles, 20g protein yoghurt, immaculate reformer studios flooded with natural light, matching activewear, ceremonial matcha, Oura rings, and more. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard argued that we increasingly consume symbols rather than reality. Scroll through Instagram long enough and it's hard not to feel that we've done exactly that with wellness. "The cold plunge, the retreat, the 'I don't drink anymore', the Whoop/Oura on your wrist, the padel court you've booked, the brands behind the gym sets you wear—these are statements as much as they are practices," says Akshat Rajan, 28, founder of studio space and wellness ritual brand, Akiko Wellness. "They communicate a certain kind of self-investment, socio-economic position, a certain tribe." Wellness has become a social language. The routines we adopt increasingly communicate who we are, what we value, and perhaps who we aspire to be. However, Rajan also asks the question sitting at the heart of modern fitness culture: Am I doing this to feel better, or to be seen doing it?

BEYOND THE AESTHETIC

Of course, aspirational fitness isn't new. Actor Jane Fonda had workout tapes. The '90s had 'heroin chic'. The 2010s gave us thigh gaps, detox teas, and "strong is the new skinny." Every decade invents its own impossible body. Ours simply arrives wearing Pilates socks. "The 'Pilates body' isn't actually a health marker. It's an aesthetic ideal. We've become very good at packaging

Wellness has become a social language. The routines we adopt increasingly communicate who we are, what we value, and who we aspire to be.

aesthetic ideals as wellness goals," says Raashi Chowdhury, 42, founder and chief nutritionist at Nutrition In Sync. Clients don't walk into her clinic asking to become thin. They talk about fatigue, digestive issues, irregular periods, fertility struggles, poor sleep, brain fog, and simply not feeling like themselves anymore. "The body goal is often standing in for a deeper need. Once we address the underlying issue, people usually realise they were chasing a feeling, not a number," she adds.

Social media has made movement more accessible than ever before. Women who may never have stepped into a traditional gym are trying Pilates, strength training, spin classes, and dance workouts because they first encountered them online. But, the same platforms also introduced relentless comparison. For content creator Taneesha Mirwani, 24, that scrutiny is constant. "If there's even a slight weight increase or any change in my appearance, I get called out. I've been shamed for not 'taking care of myself' when my weight has fluctuated." Ironically, it was only after she stopped chasing aesthetics that she began enjoying exercise.

Somewhere beneath the aesthetic pressure lies a much simpler reason to move. "Success in the gym shouldn't be measured solely by how you look. It should also be measured by how

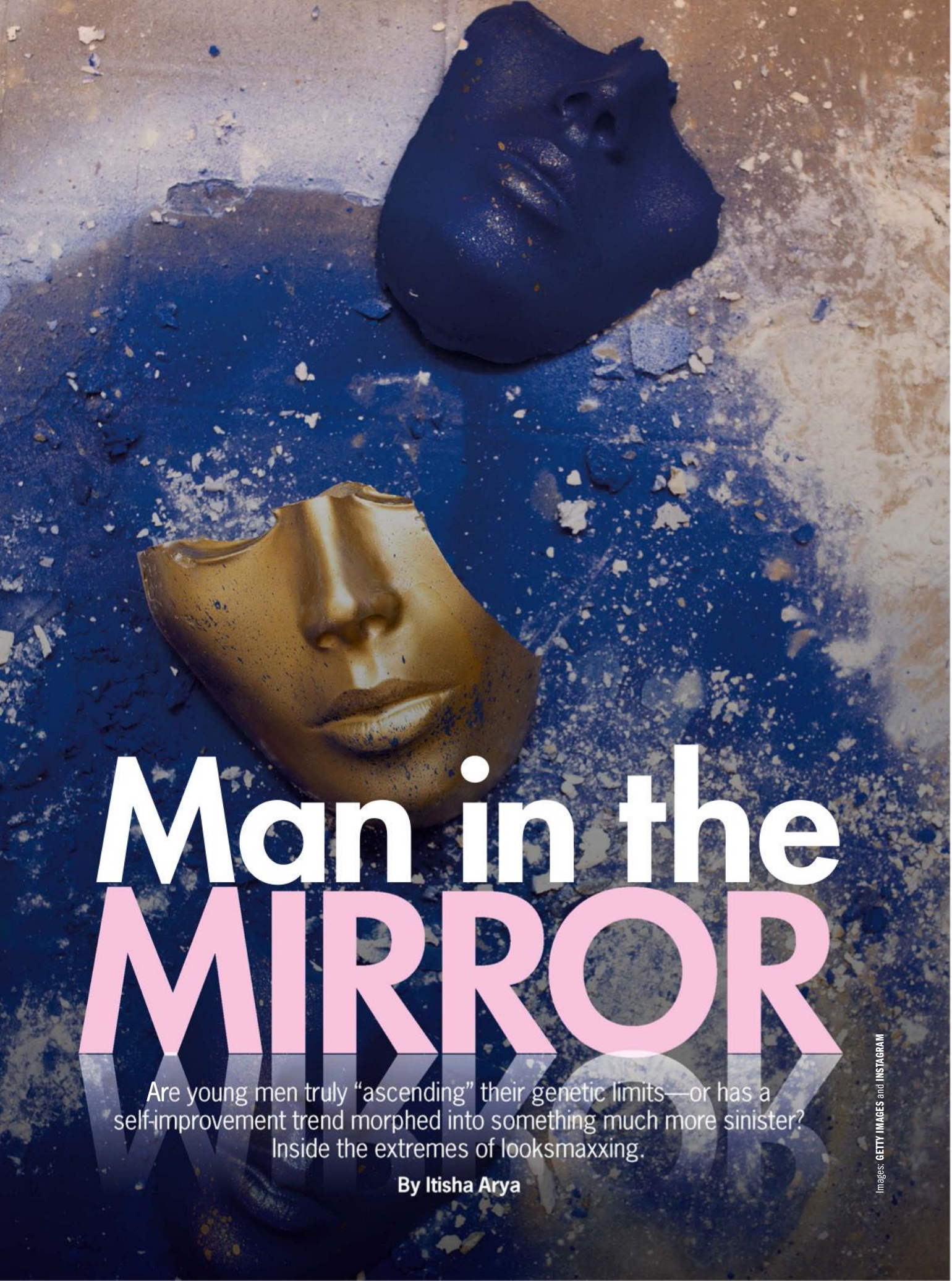
strong you are, how well you move, and whether you're making progress relative to where you started," says Sohrab Khushrushahi, 43, founder of SohFit & FuncLab. "Aesthetics is often a by-product of doing the right things consistently. If aesthetics becomes the only goal, people tend to make short-term decisions that aren't sustainable."

THE 'WHY' OF IT ALL

In our 20s, movement is often intertwined with identity. It helps us feel attractive, confident, or socially accepted. "Fitness has become a space that grounds me rather than something tied to a specific aesthetic goal," says Jenaya Desai, 24, marketing manager at Gaurav Gupta Couture. "A realistic fitness routine works around your life, not the other way around." By our 40s, annual health reports begin carrying more emotional weight than bathroom scales. For Gauri Devidayal, 45, director and co-founder of Food Matters Group, it wasn't appearance that transformed her relationship with fitness: "Some of my markers were off in my report a year ago. That's when I really woke up and took my health, fitness, and diet more seriously."

Wearables now tell us everything from sleep quality to recovery scores. Used wisely, they're remarkable tools. Used obsessively, they risk becoming another external authority. "The moment your Oura or Whoop score determines your mood before you've even gotten out of bed, the tool is running you," Rajan says. "You've just replaced the *Men's Health* cover with a dashboard."

Perhaps the healthiest metrics remain the least measurable. Do you wake up rested? Can you dance at weddings? Can you say yes to a spontaneous trek? Can you enjoy dinner with friends without mentally calculating how many burpees you'll need tomorrow? None of these moments generate viral content. Yet, they probably reveal more about health than any mirror ever could. ■

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a textured surface, possibly concrete or stone, with a mix of brown, tan, and blue-grey tones. Two broken pieces of masks are lying on this surface. The mask in the upper right is dark blue or black, with a realistic human face shape. The mask in the lower left is a metallic gold color, also with a realistic human face shape. Both masks appear to be shattered or broken apart, with sharp edges and missing pieces. The lighting is dramatic, casting shadows and highlighting the textures of the masks and the ground.

Man in the MIRROR

Are young men truly “ascending” their genetic limits—or has a self-improvement trend morphed into something much more sinister? Inside the extremes of looksmaxxing.

By Itisha Arya

What if your face wasn't something to live in but something to constantly work on? The internet has always found new ways to judge our appearance. Millennials had 'Hot or Not' (Gen Z, Google it). Now, a feed

full of strangers explains why your jawline or facial ratios could use work. There's a fix for every flaw, a tutorial for every feature, until nothing on your face is left alone. The latest name for this endless quest is looksmaxxing.

The cultural reference point of male attractiveness that once belonged exclusively to Hollywood and Bollywood stars, sports icons, or high-fashion runway models has now been claimed by a different class of microcelebrity: Lean, hyper-curated young men live-streaming technical breakdowns of their own skulls.

To dive deep into this specific corner of the feed is to witness obsession masquerading as strict discipline. The 'gram is flooded with teenage boys chewing on dense rubber blocks to bulk up their masseter muscles and chasing a body fat percentage low enough to hollow out their faces.

They split their efforts into two distinct camps: 'Softmaxxers' sticking to skincare, gym routines, diet adjustments, and hair protocols, and 'hardmaxxers' opting for invasive plastic surgery, cosmetic injectables, and riskier hacks. They grade each other on PSL—a rigid one-to-10 system running from the 'Subhuman', those written off as genetically unlucky, up to the 'Giga Chad', an internet-built ideal of hypermasculinity with a razor-sharp jawline, perfect symmetry, and carved-out cheekbones. Their ultimate goal is 'mogging'—completely outshining someone else in looks or presence. They chase ascending, the elusive climb up a genetic ladder.

MEET THE GIGA CHAD

The movement has existed for years but recently gained momentum on social media. Among its poster boys is Braden Eric Peters, a 20-year-old American influencer who goes by Clavicular and openly hardmaxxes—he walked New York Fashion Week in February 2026 and (FYI) has casually admitted to using crystal meth to suppress his appetite.

Hardmaxxing covers conventional procedures like jaw implants and nose jobs, but the community has also mainstreamed DIY hacks—mewing (pressing the tongue to the roof of the mouth to reshape the jaw), hunter eyes (an angular, upward-tilted eye look achieved through exercises or surgery) and, most disturbingly, bone smashing (deliberately breaking your own facial bones to force denser regrowth). "I don't think mewing alone dramatically changes your face as an adult," says Sanchit Kalra, a men's grooming and lifestyle influencer known online as *BeYourBest*, who tried the practice himself after seeing dramatic transformation claims online. "But it did make me more aware of posture, breathing, and tongue position. It became popular because

“When someone repeatedly strikes the facial bones, the body does not understand it as jawline improvement. It understands it as trauma.

— Dr Om Agrawal, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon

“Hardmaxxing focuses on the skeleton you were born with. When the perceived flaw is structural, a sense of permanent inadequacy sets in faster and digs deeper.

— Dr Chandni Tugnait, Psychotherapist and Director, Gateway of Healing

Disclaimer: The article contains references to self-harm, emotional distress, and procedures that are not medically sanctioned. Some readers may find the content distressing. Reader discretion is advised.



it's free, easy to try, and promises a visible change without surgery—which naturally attracts young men looking for self-improvement.”

BREAKING POINT

However, Kalra's mild lifestyle tweak is a far cry from the movement's dangerous extremes, where influencers like Clavicular have popularised heavy biological concepts for a teenage audience—most notably, Wolff's Law.

Named after a 19th-century German surgeon, Julius Wolff, it claims that bones adapt and remodel themselves based on the physical stress placed upon them. In a clinical setting, it explains why a tennis player's dominant arm has significantly higher bone density. In the looksmaxxing universe, however, it has been wildly misinterpreted to justify bone smashing. Teenagers are hitting their own cheekbones or jaws with blunt objects under the flawed assumption that the microfractures will heal back thicker, sharper, and more angular.

Jaashna Muthreja, 17, only talks about his routine with a few close friends. His family knows nothing—except when they catch him in the act and try to make him stop. Inspired by Clavicular, he started bone smashing a few months ago, using household objects before switching to a hammer for what he calls “better results and less damage to the skin.”

“I learnt Wolff's Law from that guy (Clavicular), but there was no evidence if this bone smashing works or not—so I decided to give it a shot,” he says. By day 40, the 17-year-old, who had been documenting his daily ritual on Instagram, was certain something had changed. “I think this method does work,” he says, “because it made my bones more prominent.” He points to shifts in his zygomatic bones, orbital rims, and jawline—changes he credits partly to meticulously scheduling calcium supplements to speed up his skeletal recovery. “All I want to do is mog,” he says. “I do see looksmaxxing as my main goal, and I am chasing



““I don't think mewing alone dramatically changes your face as an adult, but it did make me more aware of posture, breathing, and tongue position.

— Sanchit Kalra, Men's Grooming and Lifestyle Influencer

““I do see looksmaxxing as my main goal, and I am chasing perfection. It's a personal pursuit rather than something I'm forcing on anybody else.

— Jaashna Muthreja, 17



**The
list of what
can go wrong
reads like an
emergency room
intake form.**

perfection. It's a personal pursuit rather than something I'm forcing on anyone else."

Medical professionals are blunt about what's actually happening under the skin. "When someone repeatedly strikes the facial bones, the body does not understand it as 'jawline improvement'," says Dr Om Agrawal, a plastic and reconstructive surgeon. "It understands it as trauma."

The list of what can go wrong reads like an emergency room intake form: Swelling, bruising, complex fractures, bleeding under the skin, dental injury, nerve injury, chronic asymmetry, infection, or long-term pain. What worries him most is how casually the practice gets discussed online. "Some people use words like 'microfracture' very casually. A fracture on the face is still a serious injury. If a bone heals in an irregular way, it may not give definition. It may give deformity."

Long before TikTok and Instagram filters got their hands on it, this hierarchy already existed. On incel (involuntary celibacy) forums and sites like PUAHate, SlutHate, and Lookism.net—the very platforms that birthed the "PSL" acronym—users developed a vocabulary that treated attractiveness as something you could measure with precision.

Many of these spaces were also steeped in what researcher Jamilla Rosdahl, writing for *The Conversation*, an independent research journal, describes as the 'blackpill' ideology—a fatalistic world view that argues genetics dictate your future and that some people are destined to lose regardless of effort.

“ Looksmaxxing changes your life. People treat you better, because the general public is biased towards good-looking people.

— Vikram Aditya, 21

“ A fracture on the face is still a serious injury. If a bone heals in an irregular way, it may not give definition. It may give deformity.

— Dr Om Agrawal, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon



Looksmaxxing emerged as a response to that bleak belief. If genetics determined your rank, then every millimetre of improvement mattered. On social media, these dark ideas get a shiny, trendy rebrand. The creepy language of underground forums is replaced by slick video edits, glow-up challenges, and scientific facial ratings, tricking teenage boys into believing that a perfect face is the secret shortcut to confidence, money, and a successful dating life.

BUSINESS OF BEAUTY

Two decades after anonymous users began ranking strangers' faces, the same philosophy has become a viable business. That is the world Vikram Aditya, 21, operates in. His Instagram bio reads, "Make India Chad Again." Beneath it sits a link offering a "Scientific Face Analysis & Glow-Up Plan"—a paid consultation that promises to turn insecurity into a personalised roadmap for self-improvement.

"I give my clients a road map," he says. "Their flaws, their strengths, and their current facial rating out of ten." For the 21-year-old looksmaxxer, surgery comes up fast, and he doesn't hedge on it. "Surgery has the highest return on investment. If your lower jaw is recessed, implants or double jaw surgery is the most effective way to jump from a four to seven." He has tried most of it on himself first, from minoxidil to bimatoprost for eyelashes, retinoid cycles for skin, and more. "Looksmaxxing changes your life. People treat you better—because the general public is biased towards good-looking people."

Dr Agrawal has observed this shift. "Social media, filters, and looksmaxxing content has made men hyper-conscious about jawline, chin projection, and cheek hollowing," he warns. "People come in wanting major jaw implants or bone shaving when the actual issue is just poor posture, slight weight fluctuation, or literally just the distorting angle of a selfie lens."

POP CULTURE VALIDATION

What else is fuelling the obsession? Look no further than the global runway. Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho*—with his minute-by-minute exercise regimen and elaborate skincare routine—reads like an early template for looksmaxxing. Gen Z has completely revived him, and luxury fashion is capitalising on it.

Demna Gvasalia's Fall/Winter 2026 debut at Gucci earlier this year leaned hard into this same body-first, hyper-groomed sensibility—critics widely noted its direct homage

to Tom Ford's 1990s Gucci era, with muscle tees and skin-tight tailoring replacing the house's recent maximalism.

But, the crossover goes deeper than a shared mood board. Consider how Clavicular went from preaching dangerous hacks like "bone smashing" on his live streams to actually walking the runway—closing the Elena Velez show at New York Fashion Week and then opening for the streetwear label 424 in Paris. Actors Timothée Chalamet and Jeremy Allen White have slipped into this role almost by accident, their faces adopted online as shorthand for the exact lean, angular ideal the subculture measures.

WHO'S REALLY WINNING?

So, why are men chasing this in the first place? The shift isn't just aesthetic—it's psychological. "Body image conversations have mostly been centred on women, and almost always on weight or skin—things that felt within a person's control," says

Dr Chandni Tugnait, psychotherapist and director of Gateway of Healing, a holistic wellness and psychotherapy centre. "But hardmaxxing focuses on the skeleton you were born with. When the perceived flaw is structural, a sense of permanent inadequacy sets in faster and digs deeper. That is what makes it so hard to walk back from."

At the centre of the looksmaxxing phenomenon sit concerns that are far less aesthetic than they appear—body dysmorphism, disordered eating, and a fixation on appearance that starts to crowd out everything else. That obsession with bone structure, Dr Tugnait says, might stem from a deeper anxiety about a lack of control in other areas of life. "Careers feel shaky, dating feels confusing, and the economy is something nobody can control. The face feels different. It feels like something you can actually measure and fix."

So who's actually benefiting from all this? The answer is uncomfortably simple: Everyone selling the fix is also selling the insecurity. Supplement brands, cosmetic clinics, and influencers who monetise the exact despair their content stirs up.

As Kalra notes, "People think looksmaxxing is just extreme hacks. In reality, 90 per cent of the results come from boring basics like sleep, diet, exercise, skincare, and grooming. Social media overhypes the other 10 per cent."

In *Barbie*, Ken spends the entire movie trying to figure out what he's even for, beyond just standing on a beach and looking good. Looksmaxxing is the internet's answer to a question Ken never gets. The question these men are really asking isn't how to look better. It's when a face stops being something you live in and becomes a problem you're still trying to solve. ■

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NO NOTES Gen Z Is Signing Up...

...and hard-launching ways to protest that reflect the complexities of their generation.

By Snigdha Ahuja



I have never read the words ‘Gen Z core’ more times than I did in the past few weeks. Days before we went to press, Delhi’s Jantar Mantar and cities around India (and the world) stood in solidarity with students who exercised their right to protest, citing grievances against the current education system.

The youth movement lit up the streets and the protests were withdrawn once their demands were met—in an unprecedented victory for the generation, and its approach to make themselves heard.

For us observers of sub-cultural currents, it was interesting to see how democratic dissent was expressed—akin to the many chapters of history. Think the Women’s Suffrage Movement in the UK and the West during the early 20th century, where women’s right to vote and its symbolic white uniform became a soft war cry for the generation. The bra burners followed, and so did the Black Panthers, alongside many other communities, cliques, and covens (as they were often termed).

When it comes to Gen Z, it’s the style of protest that relays its own complexities. This is a generation born in a global economy underlined by declining salaries, attention deficits, and AI think tanks. Many get their news from social media (not all reliable), and they voice their

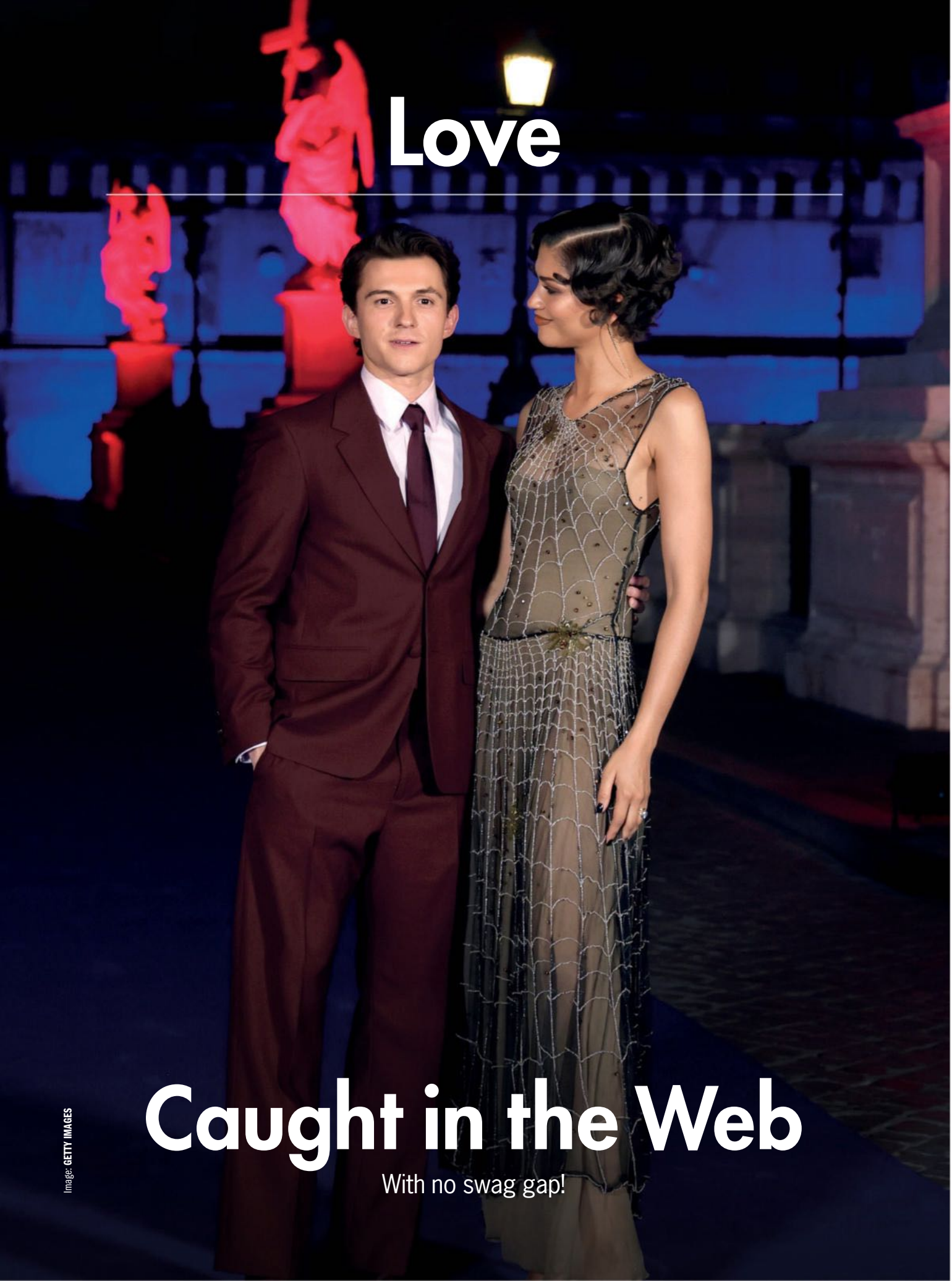
opinions on the same channel. For some, it’s a catch-22—content creators are left defending themselves, apologising to brands for delaying promised Reels at the risk of seeming tone-deaf, while fielding followers who tell them to “stick to their jobs” and remain apolitical. Is it worth losing followers and brand collabs that pay rent? Or, is it worth being called out for not using the same following for activism? For some, the answer is simple; for others, it’s more nuanced. Neither is incorrect.

The content coming out of the protests in India has been emblematic of this clamour. Think young individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community who had to defend not only their political asks, but also the way they dressed or spoke. A spotlight on small businesses that made #SendingSandosToStudents a thing, and coffee chains that were applauded for sheltering protesters, as the digital natives dissected playlists to eventually declare a 20-year-old Bollywood film soundtrack as the ultimate win. Every generation has voiced its opinions, and every resistance has offered a peek into the desires and disquiet it holds. Today’s youth is no different.

In 2019, the then-16-year-old Greta Thunberg delivered, perhaps, the most quoted protest slogan of recent years. The Swiss climate change

activist is among the prolific faces of youth advocacy in the world, and her words call upon generations that came before hers to be held accountable. “Adults keep saying: ‘We owe it to the young people to give them hope.’ But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then, I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is.” This urgency lies at the core of all Gen Z protests around the world, iterations of which have been witnessed across Nepal, Bangladesh, and other parts of South Asia and the Middle East.

But, what exactly is Gen Z core in the context of India’s student protest movement? A mix of angst and joy. You’ll find stories that are heart-wrenching, and then you will find a spark of hope—the same Thunberg once called out adults for promising. This ‘unserious’ digital documentation gave every doomscroller a reason to pause. For every satirical GRWM Reel where a protester called “a spine my favourite accessory,” to Strava Stats recorded @ Jantar Mantar. Call them anxious. Call them obsessive. But don’t call them apathetic. Gen Z will film the moment on iPhone Pros, Instagram will remember, and they’ll clock history even as they make it. ■

A man and a woman are standing on a red carpet at night. The man is wearing a dark red suit and a white shirt with a dark tie. The woman is wearing a long, sleeveless, light-colored dress with a dark, intricate pattern. They are both looking towards the camera. In the background, there are statues and a building illuminated with blue and red lights.

Love

Caught in the Web

With no swag gap!

Am I Too Happy Being Single?

Despite what the internet may tell you, there's no such thing. Inside the discourse around being unattached by choice.

By Kayla Kibbe



If you're a straight woman who's currently unattached and living your best life, I'd recommend keeping that to yourself. Not because the information itself is so very damning but because there's no socially acceptable way to convey it—no safe way for those words to land right now. Tell someone you're genuinely happy being single and they'll walk away assuming you're either secretly sad or secretly spiteful, hiding behind a smoke screen of delusion or smugness. You're either pitiful or bitter, a charity case or a lost cause. Either way, you sound like a liar.

After a few months of tracking each of her dates and noting down why they didn't work, Molly began to notice patterns emerging. "I found that the reason I didn't want to see someone again on multiple first dates was that I didn't think they were funny," she recalls.

The only exception is, as far as I can tell, if you make it clear that you're only okay with being single for now, that you just haven't met the right person yet, or aren't ready to start dating so soon after a break-up. In some cases, this kind of temporary singlehood is even encouraged. After all, you have to learn to love yourself first, right?

But the friend—or family member or colleague or mentor—who insists you need to figure out how to be happy on your own rarely means that you should be happy on your own forever. The subtext is that you should only do so in the interest of bettering yourself for a future relationship. Get your "slut era" out of your system now so you're not tempted to cheat down the line. Focus on bettering yourself today so you can soon be worthy of someone else tomorrow. And whatever you do, be careful not to prioritise yourself too much. You're loving yourself into a new relationship, not out of needing one altogether. If you're suddenly single

and content to remain so, you've gone way too far.

Or have you? It's the question at the root of this entire "too happy being single" moment, which asks whether being unpartnered and unbothered is the ultimate flex or a slippery slope to winding up forever alone. For every TikTok that tells us we're better off single than settling for the bare minimum from men, there's another post warning us not to get so used to riding solo that we end up surrendering to a lifetime of loneliness.

In my experience, the truth is definitely fraught but a lot more complicated. In a society that conditions women to pursue romantic partnership as the most important capstone of a female life well-lived, women don't just decide they like being single one day and accidentally unlearn centuries of internalised misogyny. The fear that we'll be too happy to get married once we get a taste of single life is as insulting as it is a hilariously transparent attempt to scare us out of our own liberation. And even if women becoming blissfully single to the point of forgoing romantic partnership were actually a problem, it wouldn't be our problem. It'd be the patriarchy's, which is a win in my book.

That said, I'd be lying if I said I'd never felt afraid, or that there's no

truth to the idea that women who do genuinely manage to embrace being single may find that status tough to give up. As a recovering male-validation addict who has drastically deprioritised my dating life in the past two years, I can confirm that if you stay single long enough to develop self-worth, it gets a lot harder to will yourself to go on a date and a lot easier to imagine a future in which you may never do so again. And with trends like decentering men, dating sabbaticals, and boy sobriety currently on the rise, I suspect other women may have also begun to stumble upon similar revelations.

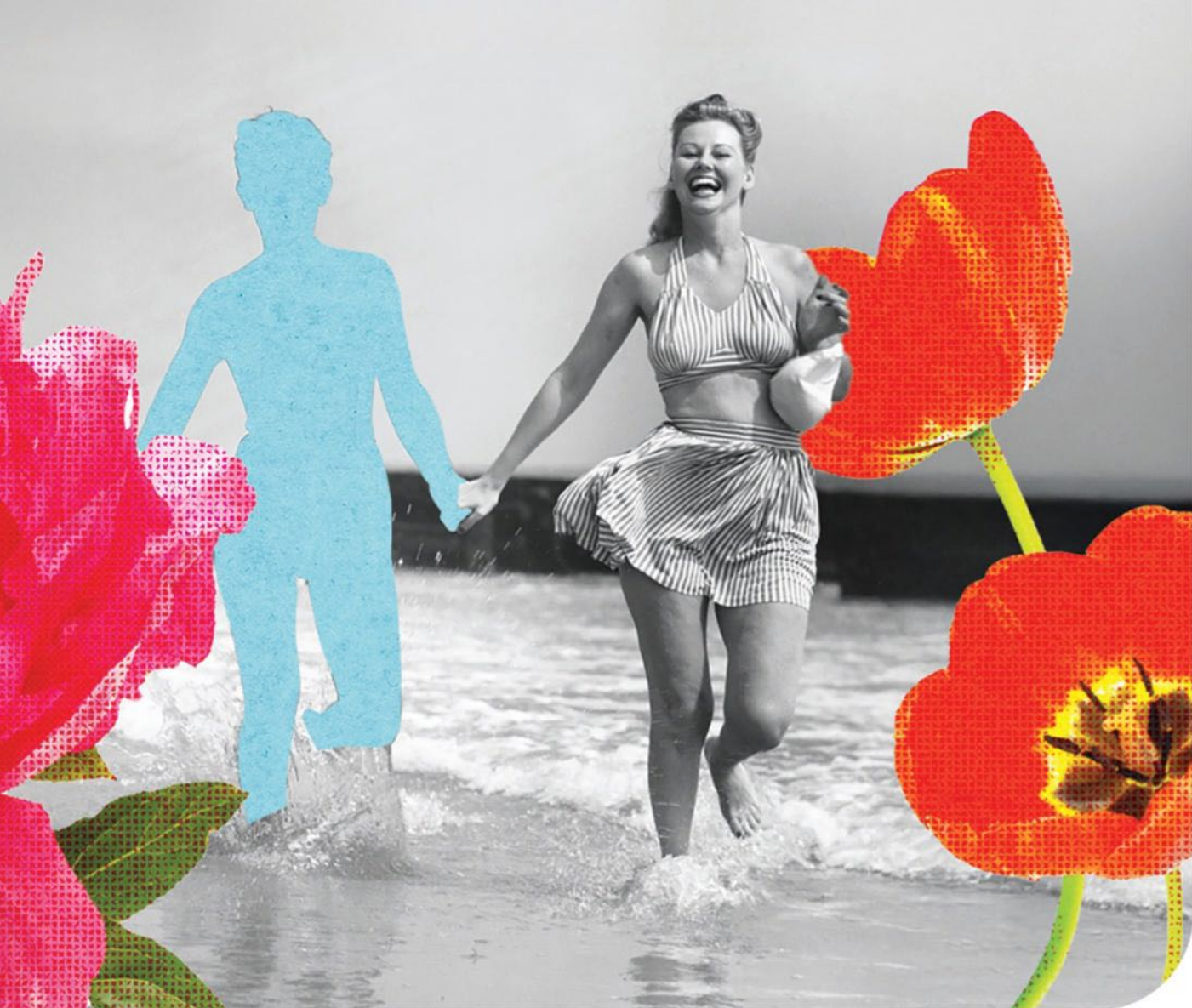
Still, as much as I reject the idea that women can be "too happy being single," I'm not immune to single guilt, even as a person who's been more or less single and more or less fine with it for most of my adult life.

Having grown up surrounded by nothing but positive models of dutifully norm-abiding relationships in a family with a shockingly low divorce rate, I have zero business being this chill about my single status. Yet somehow, from an early age, I had an inkling that I might like being single, and have a vague skepticism toward traditional relationships. Gradually, evidence seemed to suggest that I was right: Not only did I like being single, but it seemed like I might even prefer it. From my first-ever break-up, I've been keenly aware that I instantly feel more like myself—and more complete—once I'm out of a relationship. And that maybe that makes more sense than we've always been led to believe.

I've often framed my more or less long-term single status as something largely unintentional—not an accident but not an active choice either. More recently, it's occurred to me that maybe I've been choosing myself the whole time.

Even as I've grown more secure in my singleness—more aware that it is a choice and quite possibly the best

**Women don't
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one for me—I’ve always maintained that I remain open to the possibility of a long-term or even life partnership in the future. But these days, I’m not sure how much I really mean it. Time and again, I’ve proven more willing to sacrifice companionship for the sake of freedom than the other way around. And the longer I’m single, the happier I am to remain so.

I realise this may sound like proof of the “too happy being single” narrative that I’ve just rejected. But to me, it only confirms my suspicion that I am perhaps innately single rather than situationally so—that my singleness is not a matter of lacking a partner but of being a self-contained entity that would be more burdened than bolstered by any full-time addition. That I may, perhaps,

have been born to be single for life.

For the most part, this increasing embrace of my singleness feels like growth. But sometimes, I do wonder whether retreating from my dating life and distancing myself from the possibility of partnership is more about avoidance than evolution. I’m not worried that I’m too happy being single, per se, but I have considered that I may be getting too comfortable.

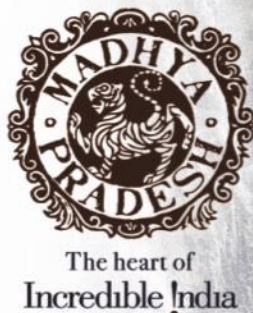
People convince themselves that they’re happy in relationships all the time when really they’re just too comfortable to risk rocking the boat. Am I doing the same thing with being single—deluding myself into thinking I don’t want a relationship in order to avoid the risks that come with pursuing one? Is this maturity or stagnation? Am I

enlightened or simply exhausted? Am I settling, after all, but just for myself?

Frankly, I can’t say for sure that any of these fears are totally invalid. If I’ve learnt anything from the public exercise in self-examination I call a career as a love and relationships journalist, it’s that every time I think I’ve ripped off the last Scooby-Doo mask to reveal which version of myself has been the real one all along, it turns out I’ve only uncovered another defence mechanism. It’s entirely possible that convincing myself I’m destined to be single for life when really I’m just settling for it is the latest in a long line of lies I didn’t know I was telling myself.

But even so, I’d still rather settle for myself than for anyone else. ■

This Monsoon, Let the Rains Lead You to the Heart of India



SHOWCASE

There are destinations that reveal themselves slowly, and then there is Pachmarhi in the monsoon.

As the first rains sweep across the heartland of India, the Satpura ranges undergo a dramatic transformation. Forests turn emerald green, waterfalls burst into life, rivers swell with renewed energy, and drifting clouds wrap ancient hills in an almost dreamlike veil. At the centre of this seasonal spectacle lies Pachmarhi, the Queen of the Satpura Range—and Madhya Pradesh's only hill station—where nature invites travellers to slow down and truly experience the monsoon.

Where Nature Comes Alive

The rains rejuvenate every corner of the region. Waterfalls such as Bee Falls, Apsara Vihar and Duchess Falls become even more captivating, their cascades thundering through dense forests and rocky landscapes. Trails weave through lush woodlands, hidden valleys and sandstone formations, revealing panoramic views at every turn.

What sets Pachmarhi apart is its location within a protected biosphere, where rich biodiversity meets ancient landscapes and mythological heritage—from the revered Pandav Caves to forest paths that feel untouched by time.



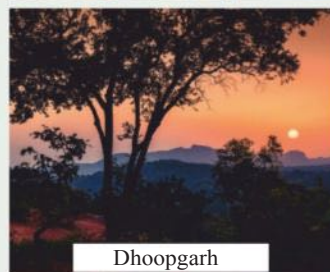
Bee Falls



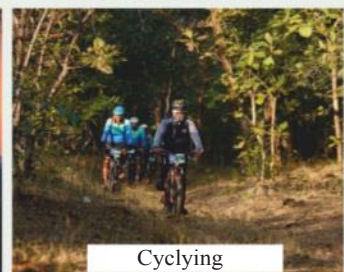
Apsara Waterfall



Rock Climbing



Dhoopgarh



Cycling



For birdwatchers, monsoon is among the most rewarding seasons. The forests resonate with the calls of the Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Crested Serpent Eagle and Grey-headed Fish Eagle, offering a glimpse into one of central India's richest ecosystems.



Trekkers too find endless rewards. Routes leading to Dhoopgarh, Madhya Pradesh's highest peak, become especially magical as clouds drift across the horizon and sunsets paint the sky in shades of gold and crimson.

RUN THROUGH PARADISE: PACHMARHI MONSOON MARATHON

42 km categories. Participants run through misty forests, rain-kissed roads and scenic trails, where every kilometre becomes a journey through one of India's most unique monsoon landscapes.

Adding to the excitement is the Pachmarhi Monsoon Marathon, scheduled for 26 July 2026.

Set against the rain-washed Satpura hills, the marathon offers a World Athletics and AIMS Certified Route across 5 km, 10 km, 21 km and



26 July, 2026
Sunday



Join the **PACHMARHI MONSOON MARATHON:**

<https://www.townscript.com/e/pachmarhi-monsoon-marathon-232014>

A Season to Celebrate

Beyond the marathon, Pachmarhi offers an experience defined by immersion rather than adrenaline. Nature walks, cycling trails and guided forest explorations allow visitors to engage with the wilderness at a slower pace—far removed from crowded hill destinations. For travellers seeking a refreshing escape, Madhya Pradesh Tourism invites you to discover a place where monsoon is not a season to avoid—it is a season to celebrate. This monsoon, let the rains lead you to the heart of India.

Follow MP Tourism on:



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The Summer AI Turned Sexy

Expert insight on the bots blowing up your phone.

By Kayla Kibbe



Image: ADobe STOCK

What's so appealing about AI sexting?

Generally speaking, people are sexting with AI because, of course, they are—sex has always driven the creation of new technology, and that technology, in turn, has bred new ways of engaging sexually with it, says psychologist Michelle Drouin, PhD. Sex therapist Casey Tanner adds, “Sexual communication can feel vulnerable or high-stakes. People use AI as a way to explore with a reduced fear of being rejected or getting it ‘wrong’.”

It's no surprise that artificial intelligence is having a sexual awakening.

Reports of people getting intimate with ChatGPT and the like have dominated the discourse as AI continues to make its way into nearly every aspect of our lives. And with the rise of virtual relationships has come AI sexting—and all its real-world implications.

Redditors are outing their partners for exchanging steamy texts with bots, while DatingAdvice.com partnered with the Kinsey Institute to determine whether sexting with an AI lover counts as cheating on a human one (per the survey, 32 per cent of respondents said it does). Nearly 20 per cent of people in a separate Lelo report said they'd passed off AI-written sexts as their own.

What does all of this mean for anyone dating or in a relationship right now? That's exactly what I asked leading sex and technology experts. Keep reading for their (entirely non-AI-generated) answers.

Are most people sexting with AI or just asking bots to draft their own sexts...

Both! Some are using AI to hone their craft for the benefit of human sext partners, says sex educator Sarah Tomchesson. Others are sexting AI directly as a substitute for human sexual interaction.

...and which is more common?

Reports of human-on-bot sexting may grab more headlines, but Tanner says the majority of people use AI as a behind-the-scenes way to enhance interhuman sexting: “It isn't always about finding a substitute for a partner. It's about finding the right words or testing ideas.”

Is it possible to become a little too dependent on AI sexts?

It is. “AI is a tool—not a reciprocal being. Tech should amplify erotic exploration, not override it,” says Tomchesson. “When AI becomes the only tool in your sexual toolkit, your capacity for intimacy can shrink. If you find that engaging with AI starts to prevent you from initiating human connection, pull back.”

Is it safe though?

It depends on how comfortable you are with risk. Tanner notes potential concerns around privacy, consent, and mental health. Tomchesson adds that any data shared with AI is not protected, so users should avoid sharing sensitive information when they can.

Are there any real benefits?

Absolutely.

Tomchesson compares sexting with AI to sexting with training wheels on, which may help users “learn the language that turns them on, build confidence, and explore fantasies.”



Third Time's the Charm

The Three Loves Theory says we fall in love thrice—each one arriving with a purpose and leaving behind a lesson?

By Diya J Verma

As we navigate the rigmarole of romantic relationships, we tend to learn a thing or two about life, love, and more importantly, ourselves. Some liaisons bring peak emotional intensity, others arrive with the sweetness of puppy love. In the end, each seems to move us closer to where we're meant to be—a placeholder in our evolution as individuals.

Over the years, many have attempted to make sense of how and why we fall in love. The late Helen E Fisher, American anthropologist and human behaviour researcher of the biology of love and attraction, maintains that for different people, love can start off with either lust, romantic attraction, or attachment, and that these overlapping—and often interlinked—systems are triggered by bodily chemicals.

Meanwhile, American psychologist Robert Sternberg proposes the Triangular Theory of Love, comprising of intimacy, passion, and commitment. But beyond biology and psychology, love is deeply personal...and human. And the Three Loves Theory builds on this experiential reality of falling not once, not twice, but thrice, until you find “the one”.

Image: SHUTTERSTOCK

THE FIRST LOVE

This is the all-consuming, high school kind of love that sweeps you right off your feet. A stepping stone, it resembles the magic you see in movies. You're experiencing that almost unfathomable butterflies-in-your-stomach feeling, and all's right in the world. You're living in a fairy tale, convinced your relationship will weather all storms. Unbeknownst to you, this is a trial run of love, and will likely leave you parting ways. This relationship tends to be more surface-level, shaped as much by external perception as by genuine compatibility. That's not to say the heartbreak isn't immensely painful, but you'll recover from it sooner than you think.

THE INTENSE LOVE

This one is known to turn your world upside down. It's a rollercoaster of a relationship—a mirror into your soul reflecting your deepest desires, wildest fears, and most irrational insecurities right back at you. Expect to feel *all* the feels: Jealousy, possessiveness, self-doubt. It'll teach you valuable lessons, helping you grow and evolve into the person you want to be—and be with. You'll experience high highs and low lows, trying to mould yourself and your partner into ideal versions. By the end of it, you know exactly what you want from a relationship.

THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Once you've healed from your intense love and know right from wrong, then comes a more unexpected love out of nowhere. It feels just right—no games, no drama. You're home. You readily embrace their imperfections, quirks, and feel more like yourself than ever before. When faced with an obstacle, you work together, not against each other. You're now committed to arrive at a solution for your future together. This relationship could mark the beginning of forever. You now realise true love exists, and it's possible to feel completely safe, adored, and protected.

The Ultimate

You say The Weeknd's provocative R&B is the last word in bedroom listening. We say you've barely scratched the surface. So we put the question to our readers—and they delivered 20 sultry soundtracks that'll have you in a chokehold.

As told to Diya J Verma



Alone With You
by Alina Baraz



Cola
by Lana Del Rey



Ecstasy
by Tinashe



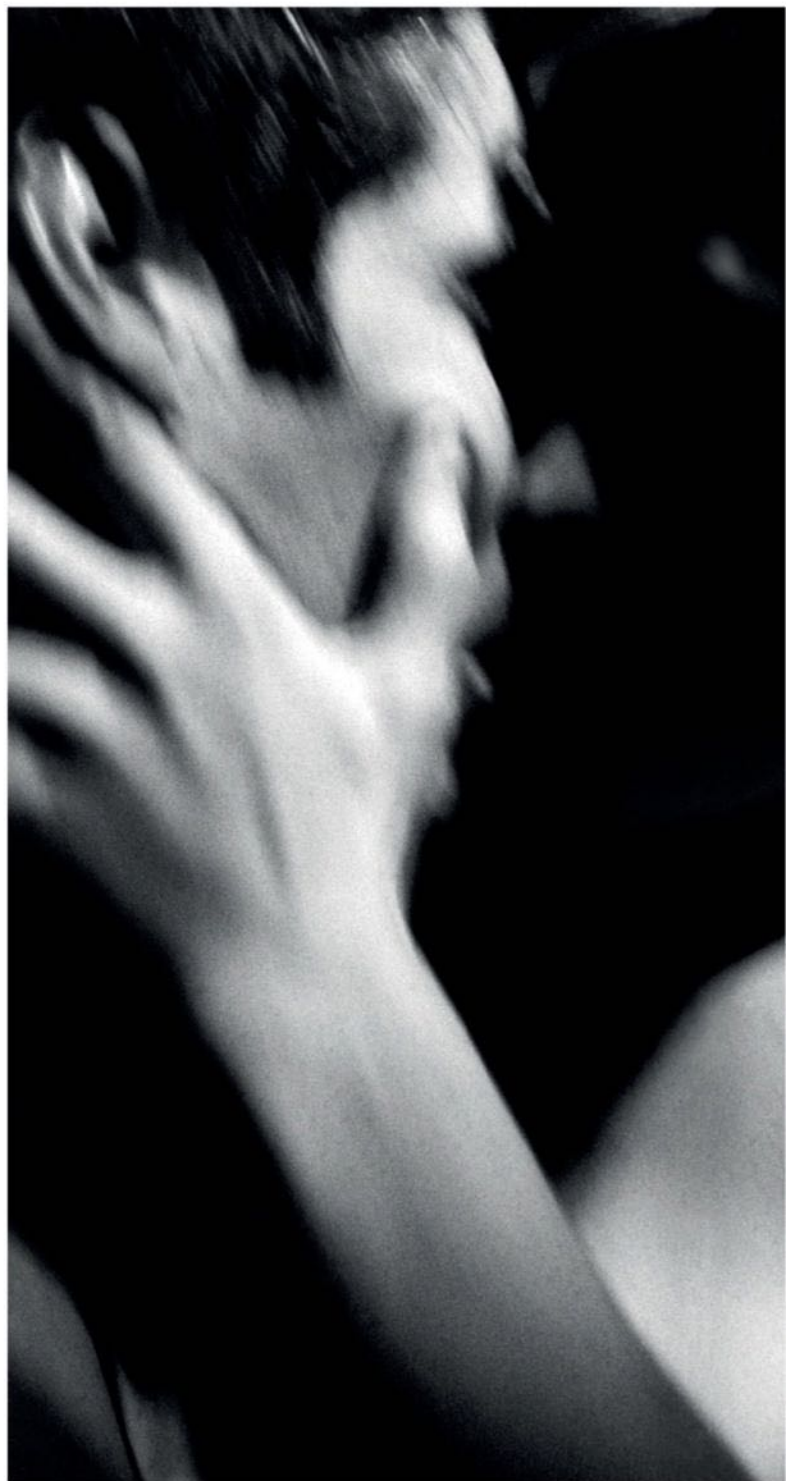
All the Time
by Jeremih ft. Lil Wayne, Natasha Mosley

"It's quite sexy, brings the stripper out."



Call Out My Name
by The Weeknd

"It's a slow burn that never really cools down."



Sex Playlist



Do I Wanna Know?
by Arctic Monkeys

"The song just sits in that space of anticipation and the guitar riff does the rest."



Good for You
by Selena Gomez

Go F*ck Yourself
by Two Feet

"Listen and you'll sense that the starting beat is hypnotic and sexy. A little dance and tease before you unravel."



Chills
by Mickey Valen
ft. Joey Myron

"Its dark, hypnotic vibe and smooth vocals bring to life lyrics that explore intimacy. Raw shivers triggered by passion."



Timeless
by The Weeknd
ft. Playboi Carti



LUNCH
by Billie Eilish



Earned It
by The Weeknd

"The tension is insane. Then, the beat drops and I'm in my element: Confident, in control, and just letting my body flow."



So High
by Doja Cat

Under the Influence
by Chris Brown

"The lyrics are sensual and the vibe is very sexy and romantic."



Sports Car
by Tate McRae



Skin
by Rihanna



I'm Yours
by Isabel LaRosa

"This song feels like falling for the person you're already in love with—the ultimate yearning-core anthem. Long distance has me living in constant longing, and 'you're so pretty it hurts' is basically my entire relationship in one lyric."



Sex on Fire
by Kings of Leon

I Put a Spell on You
by Annie Lennox

"It feels slow and sensual. It speaks to fascination and desire—and honestly, nothing would turn me on more than someone playing this for me."



Darlin'
by Jean Dawson

Vibe Check



The Mood Board

In defence of having a Hannah Horvath year: Convincing yourself you're the voice of this generation (or a voice of a generation), and making your personal crises everyone else's problem.

Cosmo Catch Up

1 Eye Candy

NorBlack NorWhite and Bhavya Ramesh joined forces to present 'STARE'—a jewellery and accessories collection

unpacking themes of femininity, vulnerability, and transformation. Comprising 13 statement pieces, a vegan leather bag, and a pair of socks, they feature cheeky iterations of fangs, lemons, tongues, chillies, snakes, the moon, and more—symbols often associated with warding off negative energies across Indian homes.



2 Community Milestone

High-performance sportswear brand one8, built by Agilitas and co-founded by Virat Kohli, recently honoured the 'Founding 5,000'—their earliest supporters and owners, at a large-scale event held in the capital. The gathering saw athletes, creators, consumers, entrepreneurs, and other industry leaders to celebrate the spirit of sport, community, and innovation.



3 Très Chic

Couturiers Rahul Mishra and Manish Malhotra took their

craftsmanship to the global stage at Haute Couture Week 2026 in Paris, in July. Mishra, who has been a regular on the calendar, showcased his Couture Fall '26 collection 'Devi', spotlighting feminine power in Hindu iconography via sculptured, embroidered, and hand-painted garments. Meanwhile, Malhotra paid homage to his late mother with a debut presentation at the event, titled 'Maa'. The collection was replete with signature embellishments and 3D embroideries.



4 India Debut

Brit brand Burberry launches its coveted cosmetic line in India. The house's Beyond Wear makeup collection features a foundation, concealer, primer, and setting and refining powder—plus, a complete wardrobe of lip and eye products.

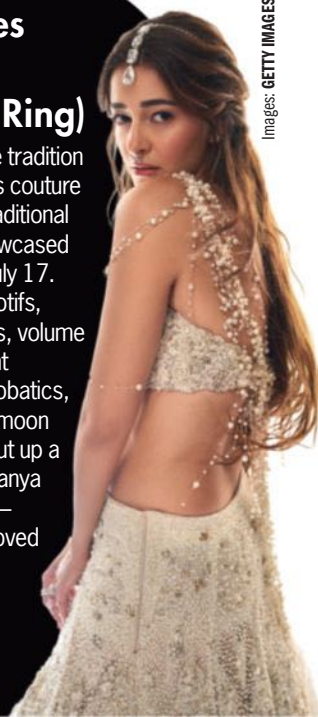
In Full Bloom

The water lilies of the Bassin Octagonal took centre stage at the Dior Women's Autumn Winter '26-'27 show—generously deployed throughout designer Jonathan Anderson's collection. Embodying a contemporary vision, the botanical motif punctuated the maison's iconic Lady Dior bag, Book Tote—extending the aesthetic to its accessories line as well. An ode to the seamless interplay of nature and design.



6 GG Vibes (and a Septum Ring)

Sticking to the tradition of unveiling his couture outside the traditional calendar, Gaurav Gupta showcased 'Light Song' in Mumbai on July 17. Playing with his signature motifs, colours, embroidered details, volume and structure, Gupta brought together iconic models, acrobatics, and the idea of the sun and moon (in design and concept) to put up a cosmic-cool show. Actor Ananya Panday closed the evening—complete with a Gen Z-approved septum ring.



Images: GETTY IMAGES and RESPECTIVE BRANDS

7

Coast to Kitchen

Reminiscent of the Mediterranean coast, French premium kitchenware brand Le Creuset launches the Bleu Riviera collection—a refreshingly rich shade of azure blue that evokes a mood of unhurried luxury. From a deep skillet to London mugs and salt and pepper mills, the palette pairs perfectly with natural textures and laid-back tablescapes, bringing effortless elegance to everyday dining.



12



The New Wave

It's 2026. If you're not collaborating with creators who shape the cultural conversation, how are you even staying relevant? "&Coach" gets it. "This generation doesn't want to inherit a prescribed version of aspiration—they want to shape identity for themselves, and they want to be a part of the process," says Joon Silverstein, Chief Marketing Officer at Coach. Their latest campaign strives to explore how brands build relevance by participating in culture.

Wild Card

An UNO x Comet sneaker collaboration certainly wasn't on our bingo card this year. Think house rules printed on the insoles, game strategies tucked beneath the back tabs, and Comet's signature logo incorporating the 'Skip' and 'Reverse' symbols. What's more? The pair arrives in a life-sized, UNO-inspired box with a custom branded dust bag, exclusive water-transferable tattoos, and other nostalgic keepsakes!



Glass Sanctuary

Dramique expands its universe with a quieter, more intimate counterpart: D'Glasshouse—a floor-to-ceiling, glass-enclosed space designed to harbour good conversation. Unlike Dramique's high-octane performances, this venue at The Grand invites a slower pace with botanical-inspired cocktails and a thoughtfully curated European menu. Worth the detour!



8



Stepping Up

After over a decade as the face of Fizzy Goblet, actor Kareena Kapoor Khan is stepping into a new role as a strategic investor in the homegrown footwear and accessories label. The move will see her participate more actively in the design process while driving brand awareness across India and international markets. Did you know this association began organically when Kapoor was first spotted wearing a pair of Fizzy Goblets at an event back in 2014?

11

Delhi's New Flex

Chapter2Drip—a gender-fluid streetwear label by actor Rhea Chakraborty and her brother Showik—has a new address in the capital. Alongside graphic tees and oversized silhouettes, the space will also host run clubs, coffee raves, and yoga and Pilates sessions for Delhi's style set. The brand's third experiential store sits at the intersection of style, self-expression, and community.



Cosmic Fun

You already have the predictions for the coming months ready so that nothing catches you off guard while you take a breather.

The universe has spoken: The coming months will be quite turbulent on an astral level (yes, we can expect a Mercury retrograde and two eclipses), although very aligned with the constellations that will surround us with their energies.

First, we will experience the season of Cancer (born between June 21 and July 22), during which we will feel more sensitive and closer to our loved ones. Then Leo (born July 23 to August 23) will take over, filling us with self-esteem so that we can enjoy a wonderful summer.

CANCER

In Love

They are intensity personified. They love deeply and with their whole being, but never from urgency or impulsiveness. They take great care of their partner because, when they fall in love, that person becomes their home and the centre of their life.

At Work

They are probably among the best people you can have on a team, not so much because of leadership qualities, but because they commit themselves and give their maximum effort.

If They Have Cancer Rising

They project sensitivity and warmth. They are like a magnet for others and enjoy surrounding themselves with new people to care for. It is their love language.

Moon Sign

With this placement in the birth chart, emotions are very unstable; they need security to feel well. In addition, they have the best intuition of the entire zodiac.

LEO

In Love

There is only one reason this sign can create drama: Not receiving attention. As in life, the lion needs reciprocity and to be the star of their own romantic comedy.

At Work

Natural leaders full of confidence who take on the roles that suit them best without hesitation. They are ambitious and seek recognition.

If They Have Leo Rising

Their ruler is the Sun, which is why they shine even in darkness thanks to their charisma, confidence, and presence. They attract attention effortlessly and always leave a mark wherever they go.

Moon Sign

Their emotions are more sentimental than they appear on the outside, although they do not hesitate to express them when necessary. They need validation and appreciate it when it is shown through affection.



ARIES

(March 21 – April 19)

The month of August will bring a new eclipse season, beginning with a solar eclipse in Leo on the 12th. This will open a very powerful new chapter for you. Changes are coming, along with opportunities to show your courage. This is your moment.



TAURUS

(April 20 – May 20)

Mercury retrograde will not last forever. The long-awaited moment will arrive on July 23, when it resumes direct motion. Until then, don't expect complete mental clarity, nor should you let your emotions weigh you down. Take time to heal and lean on those who care about you.



GEMINI

(May 21 – June 20)

Your favourite day of the summer is already marked: July 29. The reason lies in a full moon in Aquarius that will culminate a beautiful phase of connection with your friends through a major event, and may even help resolve conflicts you have been avoiding. Enjoy!



CANCER

(June 21 – July 22)

The new moon in your constellation on July 14 will be a very special moment to reconnect with yourself and with what you truly feel. Your intuition will be at its highest, so listen to it and express yourself without fear, especially regarding your future.



LEO

(July 23 – August 22)

Your connection with your community will be key once the full moon in Aquarius arrives on July 29. Your social energy will surge, and your focus will be entirely on friendships. This means it's the perfect time to celebrate, but also to open your circle to new (and surprising) people.



VIRGO

(August 23 – September 22)

Following your routines strictly and without flexibility may no longer bring the best results. You will learn this when Saturn retrogrades into Aries on July 26. You will reconsider the rules and structures you once thought were secure. However, you won't want to change everything overnight. Better to proceed step by step.



LIBRA

(September 23 – October 22)

Any summer romances that may arise this year will do so when Mercury resumes its normal motion on July 23. Until then, you may feel awkward with your words and your self-esteem may not be at its best. Don't worry—it's only the grey cloud of this astrological event.



SCORPIO

(October 23 – November 21)

If you experience everything intensely, what makes you think the August eclipse season will be any different? The first eclipse, a solar one, may affect an important area of your life. The second, a lunar eclipse, will make you realise what you have lost—or gained. Let yourself be guided by your feelings.



SAGITTARIUS

(November 22 – December 21)

This summer, your strongest asset is becoming the main character of your own story. The energies helping you do that will come from the Sun's annual visit to Leo on July 23, inaugurating its season. It will be a time of expansion and fun. Don't say no to any spontaneous plans.



CAPRICORN

(December 22 – January 19)

You are going to feel very Virgo-like when the Sun enters that sign on August 23. Vibrations focused on organisation, order, and rearranging priorities will be activated. Therefore, finish pending matters, face the future with confidence, and be careful not to become overly demanding of yourself. Perfection is not necessary.



AQUARIUS

(January 20 – February 18)

We don't want to sound negative, but that's what the end of eclipse season tends to bring. It will be the mixed nostalgia of a stage ending after having lived through a period of introspection that will make you rethink how you want to begin the next chapter. Keep that in mind.



PISCES

(February 19 – March 20)

On July 7, with Neptune beginning its retrograde motion in Aries, it will be time to come down from the clouds and face reality, even if you don't like it. You have lost focus on the practical steps needed to fulfill your dreams. Thinking before acting will save you from more than one drama.

Retro Rush

Nostalgia is not meant to be muted. Consider this a safe space for people who think “subtle” is a personality flaw.

Compiled by Itisha Arya



BLODBJÖRK
Vase, IKEA,
₹1,970



Metal TV Side
Table, Handicrafts
Town, ₹4,949

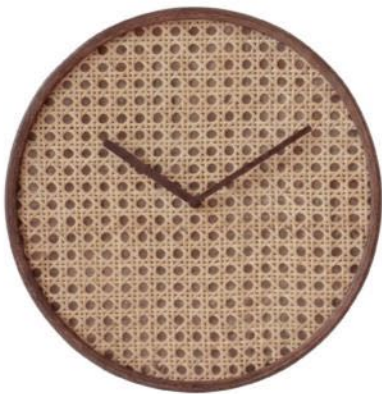


Royal 1960 Retro
Typewriter Showpiece,
Gibox, ₹9,999



Vinyl Record Player 3 Speed
Turntable With Bluetooth,
Silwisun, ₹5,280 approx.





CaneHalo Clock,
The Artment,
₹4,499



Avery Jenkins
Console Table,
Living Shapes,
₹22,856



Rondo Portable Bluetooth
Speaker, Crosley, ₹11,200



Vintage Electric Kettle,
Ariete, ₹4,990



The Rhythm
Dome Table
Lamp, Nestlume,
₹5,199



Popcorn Wall Light,
Hatsu, ₹13,500



Toaster, Smeg, ₹22,999



Rain Dining
Chair THOT x
Nico Sanctuary,
Nicobar,
₹55,500



Checkerboard Chest
of Drawer Cabinet,
Boingg!, ₹28,710



Images: SHUTTERSTOCK and RESPECTIVE BRANDS

Chocolate Dipped

We are officially de-influencing boring beige and bringing the moodiest shade in the palette straight to your space.

Compiled by Itisha Arya

Bronte Solid Wood End Table, Bohemiana from Pepperfry, ₹17,999



Candle Cafe Reed Diffuser, RAD LVNG, ₹1,199



Dual Essence Clock, Ikiru, ₹5,160



Elico Vase, Whispering Homes, ₹2,499



Large Stoneware Bowl, H&M Home, ₹1,799



Cone Pagen Table Lamp, FIG Living, ₹6,199



Bagh Block Print Cotton Frill Pillow Cover (set of 2), Itokri, ₹1,650



Luxe Lamb Arm Chair, Uber Decor, ₹33,809





Vintage Wall Mirror, Ikiru, ₹1,755



Peaceful Countryside Cat Mother, Swarovski, ₹9,750



Glimmering Garden Cloche, The Maeva Store, ₹1,499



Emerald Majesty Frame, Castle & Co. Décor, ₹2,667



Oracle Decorative Vase, Dekor Company, ₹4,999

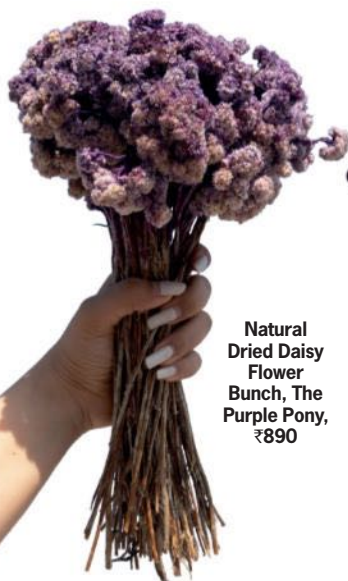
Coven Approved

Crystal clusters, candles, and secretive botanicals—the mystical spread for anyone whose vision board is a spell book.

Compiled by Itisha Arya



Palais 2-Light Wall Sconce, Whispering Homes, ₹8,399



Natural Dried Daisy Flower Bunch, The Purple Pony, ₹890



Modern Upholstered Tufted Cordelia Bench Button, Ouch Cart, ₹41,999



Calm & Focus Crystal Treasure Cauldron Soy Candle, The Lilith Store, ₹2,997



Notes From Japan: Eat, Shop, Explore

Travelling to the country of mindful living, *kawaii* and *konbinis*? If Japan is not on your boarding pass, it is on your bucket list. Here's a discovery guide.

By Snigdha Ahuja



Japan is many things—from ancient history and architectural marvels to *gachapons*—the vast universe of capsule toys that give you an entryway into the layered pop cultural mindscape of its people. For tourists and travellers, the journey is dotted with chasing KitKat flavours, a perfectly-timed photograph at Shibuya crossing, and navigating labyrinthian train stations.

This writer's recent visit may have ushered in matcha fatigue (and clocked exactly zero Mt Fuji sightings), but it has also inspired lessons in the art of thrifting in Tokyo, investing in “viral” beauty products that actually work, and skipping Instagram-popular *kushi dango* for gourmet *daifuku*. While global brands like Uniqlo and Muji deserve their spotlight in every guide to Japan, it's the local brands and experiences that will make the trip unforgettable. From the Kyoto-headquartered % Arabica for a wake-me-up cup, to Takeshita street for those who want to fuel their crepe-loaded, Daiso-bought, Harajuku-fashion-fuelled fantasies. Till then, *arigato gozaimasu*.



Explore: Little Trip to Heaven, a vintage clothing and jewellery store in Nakagyo Ward, Kyoto. Find everything from Tyrolean-inspired separates, romantic crochet, Y2K denims, and babydoll dresses to one-off American vintage fashion by the likes of Diana Fries and Gunne Sax.

The electric handheld fan will be your go-to accessory in Japan.



No gender, no border—that's how Japanese fashion brand Not Conventional defines itself. The silhouettes are anti-structure with oversized collars, pleated surfaces, and limited-edition pieces alongside graphic prints and experiments with denim. Visit their stores across Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Fukuoka.



With cool collabs and pop culture forward, Graniph is for the no-fuss buyer. Think Harry Potter prints, works of illustrator Bridge Ship House, and a recent Lamb Chop collection. Find them at stores across Japan.

Maximalism + Minimalism

If there is one accessory that lines the streets of Japanese cities and holiday towns, it is the ubiquitous compact hand fan that doesn't only keep humidity at bay but also ensures that it's not the sweat that glazes your dewy makeup look. And, when it comes to fashion, the young working woman in Japan is dominantly rooting for comfort—the Issey Miyake-galaxy of pleats, embedded in accordion pleated skirts like an inherited style code. However, the minimalism stands strong by the side of subcultural dressing styles that keep maximalism at its core—either through Rei Kawakubo-sized silhouettes and abstraction, or via charms that hang from backpacks and designer handbags in hordes. Along with an iced lemon tea and fresh onigiri to go, of course.



Care for a Parisian touch to your Uji matcha? Café Kitsuné and its speciality servings are worth the try in Tokyo.



Looking to wear Japan on your sleeve (bag?)—look no further than Pop Mart, including their Robo shops aka vending machines found across Japan for plush toys, collectibles, and more.

Founded by Fumie Kobayashi, Calico merges Indian textiles with Japanese design. With collections crafted in collaboration with master weavers and Indian artisans, it is a unique study in shared principles of handmade, handwoven, and minimalism. Visit their beautiful flagship in Nara city.



India Inspiration

You may leave Japan, but chances are, Japan may stick to your style subconscious. If you are hung up on the wabi-sabi of it all, explore Indian brands and designers that understand handcraftsmanship, minimal detailing, and colours that take a cue from an earthy palette.



Akaaro by Gaurav Jai Gupta's handspun and handwoven cotton summer dress.



Kantha stitch patterns X silk and cotton blends by Abraham & Thakore.



Upcycled separates with bandhani (tie-dyed) details courtesy Doodlage.



The Keana Nadeshiko Rice Pack by Ishizawa Labs is a soothing fix for dehydrated skin.

Get Behind J-Beauty

We have seen Reels that have added to the "viral" value of some of these products. And, the truth is—a lot of them actually work. From the drugstore fix for acne, the Lion Pair Acne Cream (there's also an anti-acne cleanser on offer), to The Fino Premium Touch hair mask (the trick is to leave it on for at least five minutes)—most of these are available to buy across department and convenience stores in Japan. The prices vary from store to store—so invest in some on-ground research.

The Lion Pair Acne Cream is worth the buy for breakouts and long-term acne reduction.



If you are into beauty supplements, Meiji's made-in-Japan Amino Collagen is worth the pick.

The legacy Japan-born brand's Ultimune series is a long-term commitment to healthy skin.



You can't ignore the reviews. Biore Japan's water-based sunscreen + essence delivers.



One thing India and Japan have in common? Humidity. Pick the Matomage wax stick to tame flyaways.



The affordable hair mask can declare early retirement for your conditioner.



Perfect for a date with your summer fling, a beach day with the girls, or just a little solo brain workout. Pick a side, and play with *Cosmo*.

Get caught at a beach sex party

OR

Catch your parents' friends in the act

Sunrise

OR

Sunset

Have an ice cream that screams every time you bite

OR

Have a drink that won't stop calling your name

Take a cycling trip with your lover

OR

Go for a booze cruise with your folks

Have a first kiss in the sunshine

OR

Have a first kiss under the stars

Melt in the scorching heat

OR

Freeze under the air conditioning

Be stuck on a boat party with your ex

OR

Run into your boss at an after-party

Have sand in every possible place, all day long

OR

Be in soaking wet clothes from morning to night

Have a badly sunburnt bum

OR

Have scorched soles that make every step a nightmare

Never ever find shade

OR

Always end up in a cold draft

Tackle a holiday break-up

OR

Third-wheel for the entire trip

Never need sunscreen again

OR

Never sweat again

Always have 25°C and pouring rain

OR

Always have 35°C with zero breeze

Swim in shark-infested waters

OR

Camp in a bear-filled forest

Never swim in summer again

OR

Never hit the slopes in winter again

Have the best summer ever, but can't tell anyone

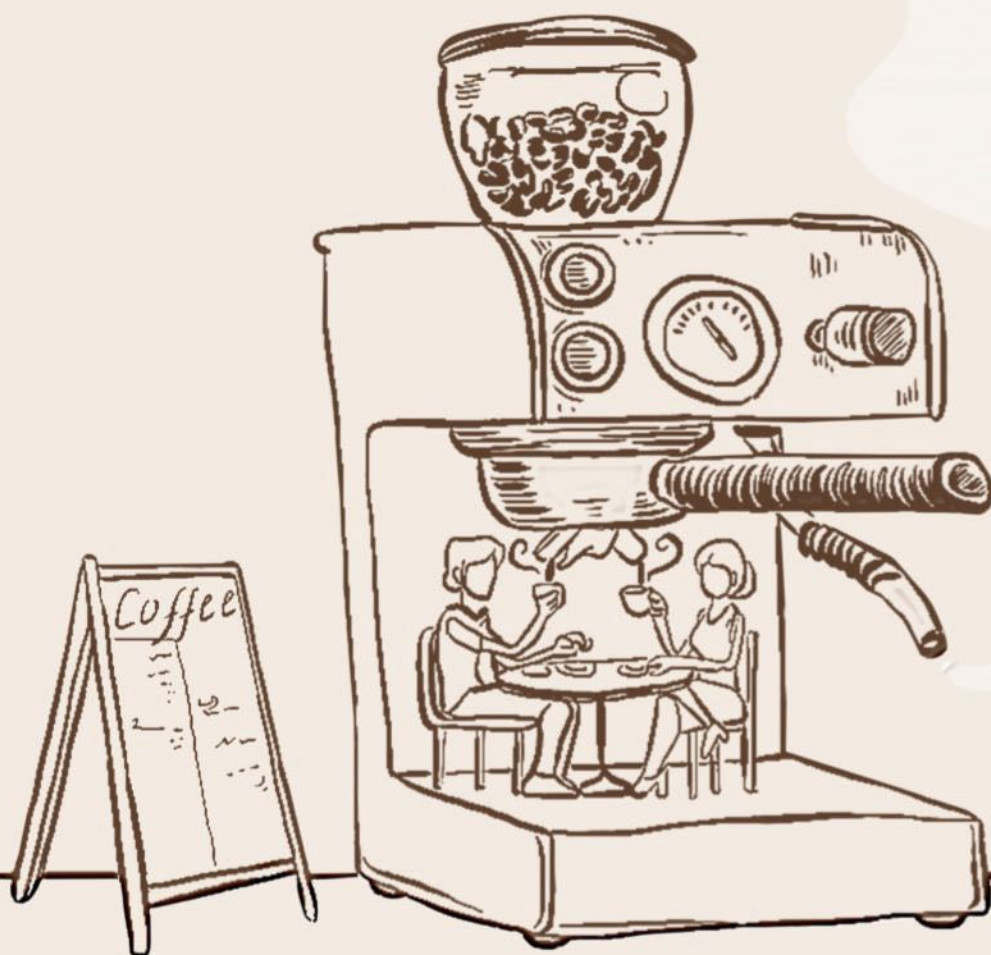
OR

Mediocre summer, but you can post about it and talk everyone's ear off

Let Us Order For You

15 cafes, 15 coffees. We track down India's most-ordered cuppas, from Kolkata's citrus laced classic to Kochi's coconut milk icon.

Words by Patsy Anthony
Illustrations by Parth Bhoria



Not too long ago, a good cup of coffee meant an imported bag of beans and a French press lugged from a trip abroad. Today, it means a professional barista in Kolkata adding a citrus touch to an artisanal cold brew, a Mumbai roastery streaking mocha with activated charcoal, and a long-standing art cafe in Kochi doubling up on its coconut iced coffee.

We asked 15 cafes across the country what they're best known for pouring—and why customers keep coming back for it.

Mokai

📍 Mumbai

☕ Valrhona Mousse Latte

The Valrhona Mousse Latte is Mokai's reigning customer favourite, prized for its rich, velvety texture, and deep chocolate flavour. Made with 55 per cent Valrhona chocolate sourced from France, it strikes a perfect balance between indulgence and comfort—every sip feels like a luxurious dessert reimagined as coffee.



True Black Speciality Coffee

📍 Hyderabad

☕ Valencia Orange Coffee

True Black's signature Valencia Orange Coffee crowns a specialty ristretto shot over sparkling Valencia orange juice, balancing citrus brightness against rich espresso depth. It's a refreshing rethink of classic cold coffee, popular enough to anchor the menu across all of True Black's Hyderabad outposts, from Jubilee Hills to Kompally.



Grey Soul Coffee Roasters

📍 Pune

☕ Hazelnut Praline Latte

Grey Soul's Hazelnut Praline Latte is a high-altitude, single-origin espresso layered with notes of almond, chocolate buttercream and ripe red berries, finished with silky milk and a scoop of housemade hazelnut praline. The little praline chunks are the real draw, amplifying the coffee's natural sweetness rather than masking it.





The Drop

📍 Delhi

☕ Marmalade Shakerato

The Drop's Marmalade Shakerato is what regulars order without looking at the menu: Bitter orange marmalade shaken hard over ice with a 45-second lungo shot. The result is smooth, balanced, and surprisingly addictive, brewed from a house blend of Moganad, Orchardale, and Bison Valley beans roasted upstairs in the cafe's own mezzanine lab.

Nerlu Cafe

📍 Bengaluru

☕ Saigon Special

At Nerlu, a multi-roaster cafe built to spotlight India's independent coffee scene, the Saigon Special is a cult cold coffee—espresso softened with rich coconut milk, playing on Vietnamese coffee traditions. It fits the brand's wider mission: Connecting drinkers directly to the small Indian roasters behind every cup on the menu.

Roastery Coffee House

📍 Hyderabad

☕ Cranberry Coffee Tonic

Truly made in India, the Cranberry Coffee Tonic balances fruity sweetness, fizz, and an espresso kick in one elegant pour. Served in a wine glass, it works year-round and holds a rare distinction: It's the first coffee in India to be trademarked, dreamt up by Roastery back in 2018.



Potboiler Coffee House

📍 **Kolkata**

☕ **Orange Palace**

Potboiler wears its bookish soul on its sleeve, and its coffee menu reads like a syllabus. The cafe's OG creation, the Orange Palace, is a citrus-laced cold coffee that's become shorthand for Kolkata's new coffee culture. Sipped in a colonial-style bungalow lined with Harry Potter cushions, it's equal parts drink and mood.



Araku Coffee

📍 **Bengaluru**

☕ **Vanilla Ice**

Vanilla Ice is made with a signature blend of washed, natural, and honey-processed Arabica coffees, creamy hand-frothed organic milk, and a house-made vanilla syrup, prepared with pure vanilla extract. Served over ice, it delivers a smooth, balanced cup of coffee.



Subko Specialty Coffee Roasters

📍 **Mumbai & Delhi**

☕ **Cold Brew Lemon Mint Tonic**

Subko set out to put Indian-origin beans on the global specialty map, and the Cold Brew Lemon Mint Tonic is its most talked-about proof of concept: Classic cold brew with a zesty citrus lift. Served across its cafes nationwide alongside its craft bakes, it's the drink that put Bandra's coffee cognoscenti on notice.





KC Roasters

📍 **Mumbai**

☕ **Activated Charcoal Mint Mocha**

KC Roasters' most-ordered cup is also its most unusual— mint mocha streaked with activated charcoal for a jet-black finish, sweet enough to abandon sugar. Regulars swear by it hot. Roasted in-house at their small Bandra roastery, it's proof good coffee doesn't need a big room.



Maverick & Farmer Coffee

📍 **Bengaluru**

☕ **Spresso Citron**

Maverick & Farmer's Spresso Citron proves Indian coffee can be as playful as it is precise: Frozen espresso meets bright orange and dark chocolate, shaken cold for a citrus-sharp, coffee-forward cooler. Made from beans grown on the brand's own 140-acre Coorg estate, it's one of Bengaluru's boldest cold coffee twists.



Libertario Coffee Roasters

📍 **Delhi**

☕ **Iced Brown Sugar Latte**

The Iced Brown Sugar Latte reimagines nostalgic Indian cold coffee through a specialty lens. Crafted with Libertario's signature Paz espresso—notes of caramel, sugarcane, and milk chocolate—and finished with silky house-made cold foam, it's rich, creamy, and indulgent without tipping into overly sweet.

Nandan Coffee

📍 **Bengaluru & Mumbai**

☕ **Brown Butter Cookie Mocha**

One of Nandan's bestsellers, the Brown Butter Cookie Mocha, is made with dark chocolate and brown butter—basically a cookie in a cup. Indulgent yet perfectly balanced in sweetness, it's a fun, exciting drink that doubles as caffeine fix and dessert, making it the ideal treat any time of day.



Kashi Art Cafe

📍 **Kochi**

☕ **Iced Coconut Coffee**

Fort Kochi's original art cafe, reportedly the only spot in town serving proper iced coffee for years, Kashi's Iced Coconut Coffee swaps in coconut milk for a tropical, faintly nutty richness. Sipped in the cafe's leafy Dutch-bungalow courtyard, it's as much an institution as the art on its walls.



Coffee? Since 1999

📍 **Chennai**

☕ **The OG Cold Coffee**

Before it was a cafe, Coffee? Since 1999 was a cold coffee recipe quietly supplying Chennai's Sathyam Cinemas—hence The OG, a twenty-one-year-old formula for milky, medium-strength cold coffee that built a cult following long before the cafe itself existed. Simple and endlessly nostalgic, it's the one thing regulars never skip.





Gen Z Would Like a Word, Please

Lazy? Commitment-phobic? Chronically online? We asked Gen Z to set the record straight on the stereotypes they wish people would stop believing.

As told to Radhika Singh

Image: IMDB



"Apparently, we 'complain too much about everything'.

However, we're actually unlearning stuff from previous generations, and trying to stand up against what we believe is wrong.

Just because other generations chose to struggle does not mean we have to as well!"

— Aditi, 22

"I've heard people say we're very rude and impolite, but I believe that we, as a generation, choose who to respect and who not to, as respect is earned and not given."

— Manvendra, 23

"Older generations call us unserious. Meanwhile, we're applying for jobs, fighting existential dread, and editing a reel at the same time."

— Lavanya, 21

"One misconception about us is probably that we're lame. Like...have you seen Gen Alpha? Please, '6-7' has got to be the LAMEST thing ever, and coming from someone who loves dad jokes, that's huge."

— Swarali, 20

"Everyone says we're addicted to our phones, but our phones are where we work, study, socialise, date, shop, and consume news. It's basically our entire infrastructure."

— Kabir, 25

"They say we're too focused on mental health. I'd rather be accused of caring too much than pretending everything's fine. We're putting an end to that generational trauma."

— Ishita, 24

"The misconception that we're scared of commitment? Not always true. I think we're actually scared of settling for the wrong person after watching so many relationships fall apart around us."

— Ananya, 22

"Apparently, wanting a healthy work-life balance means we don't have ambition. I want a successful career—I just don't want it to be my entire personality."

— Yash, 26

"People call us entitled for wanting flexibility at work. I call it wanting a life outside of answering emails."

— Dev, 25

All Filler, No Killer: Why We Are Done With Ambient TV

God forbid a woman seek well-written television.

By Ananya Rai

In a desperate attempt for television that respects my attention span, I turn on Bravo's reality show, *The Real Housewives of Rhode Island*. It is the franchise's latest edition, and it is Messy with a capital M. Housewife Rulla's husband is cheating on her and she refuses to believe it. Denial isn't just a river in Egypt, after all. Another housewife, Jo-Ellen, brings proof—how she got them is a question nobody is brave enough to ask. “Every morning he [Brian] goes to her [the mistress]

house, and brings her coffee. Every single morning,” Jo-Ellen tells Rulla. To which, she replies, “He’s at the gym every morning.” “Does Brian look like he goes to the gym?” Jo-Ellen retorts. My jaw drops.

You see, there would have been no dropping of the jaw if I was watching a scripted show. Nearly everything else out there right now seems like it has been made to watch ambiently—a term that caught on post-covid for shows that play in the background while you go about your life.

I’ve watched the entirety of *Emily in Paris* (the reigning champion of ambient TV) while on some sort of side quest every season, and I can still tell the protagonist Emily is more indecisive than a Libra. Don’t even get me started on *And Just Like That...*—it took seven rewatches of *Sex and the City* to recover.

It is common knowledge that TV is increasingly being written for people on their phones, for the simple reason that we, in fact, are on our phones. And



Images: IMDb

with this rise of second-screen viewers, streaming services have started accommodating them by reiterating plotlines over and over (and over, and over, and just to be safe, over again). Canada-based scholar Daphne Rena Idiz, in conversation with European film creatives who've worked on Netflix originals, once described how the platform internally flags certain series as "second-screen shows." The result is cliffhanger after cliffhanger to keep you hooked, with an ending you barely register because you were never fully there to begin with, and would've stopped a long time ago if you had been paying any attention.

Second screens aren't the only reason showrunners stopped giving a damn though. There is also the spoiler economy online, which makes binge watching the only safe option (and even then, you might get got). There's our deteriorating attention spans, thank you META. And not to mention, the sheer glut of content, so abundant and so easy to access that it feels overwhelming.

WHO'S REALLY TO BLAME

Being on the phone after browsing for hours (the bigger the screen, the more exhausting) feels like a little treat. And streaming platforms benefit from passive watching, considering it means we spend more time glued on their apps.

And, this isn't just a viewer's paranoid theory, it's coming from the people in the room. On *The Romesh Ranganathan Show*, British actor and activist Jameela Jamil talked about how there is a directive handed down by big studios to filmmakers to simplify the plot, because people are on their phones. "In TV shows, even with good actors, they're saying really obvious things about what's happening. They're laying out the entire plotline," she explains, adding: "The language has become really bait and on the nose, and that's because the writers are being told that they have to write in a way that someone can carry on with doomscrolling or shopping online while following it in the background." She

argues how this purposeful dumbing down of content is leading to a less nuanced, a less interesting, and a less thoughtful society.

It's one thing to suspect television is coddling you. It's another to hear, from someone who has been in the business, that coddling may now be the assignment.

Before you mistake this for some vapid cultural criticism, it is important to remember that this generation has also seen some of the sharpest television ever made: *Phuribus*, *Industry*, *Severance*, *Succession*, and the like. One thing they all have in common is a weekly drop, leaving less room for spoilers, more for really sitting with an episode and your thoughts on it. While I can't speak for everyone, I seem to have my attention span intact and not traded in for that of a doorknob's.

I would rather TV started taking risks again. There are only so many reruns I can watch before nostalgia wears thin, and there are only so many days I can spend wondering whether Brian really goes to the gym every morning. We all know he doesn't. ■



Supermodel Ujjwala Raut on the cover of *Cosmopolitan* in a Tommy Hilfiger maillot

(ICYMI: “It’s the hottest swimwear. Like, ever!”), with instructions on “how to check if you have sex FOMO”? It doesn’t get more 2016 than this.

37 at the time this cover was shot, Raut was only 17 when she started her journey as a model in 1996. The rest—as they say—is history.

Inspired by her elder sister’s love for fashion, who was the first in her family to wear jeans and eyeliner, Raut went to Paris in 1997 for couture week with a dream (and without any winter clothes). Since then, the 48-year-old model has walked for international designers including Roberto Cavalli, Valentino, Dolce & Gabbana, and many more.

Back when the fashion industry wasn’t as inclusive and it was rather unusual to see a brown face on billboards, Raut was everywhere, all at once. She walked for Yves Saint Laurent’s last show before he stepped down in 2002, and has been a Victoria’s Secret Angel in ’02 and ’03.

When Raut gave birth to her daughter Ksha, she was only 27. She would breastfeed in between runway shows until she put her professional career on hold to focus on her personal life. A single mother, she believes in quality work over quantity.

Raut was among the Indian models to make a case for the industry internationally, and she was as relevant in 1996 as she was in 2006, in 2016, and today. ■

Mother Is Mothering

From the *Cosmo* archives: Ujjwala Raut goes boho and brings out her “inner bikini babe”. When we say you *had* to be there...

By Ananya Rai



Photographed by Anushka Menon and styled by Amandeep Kaur, May 2016.

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