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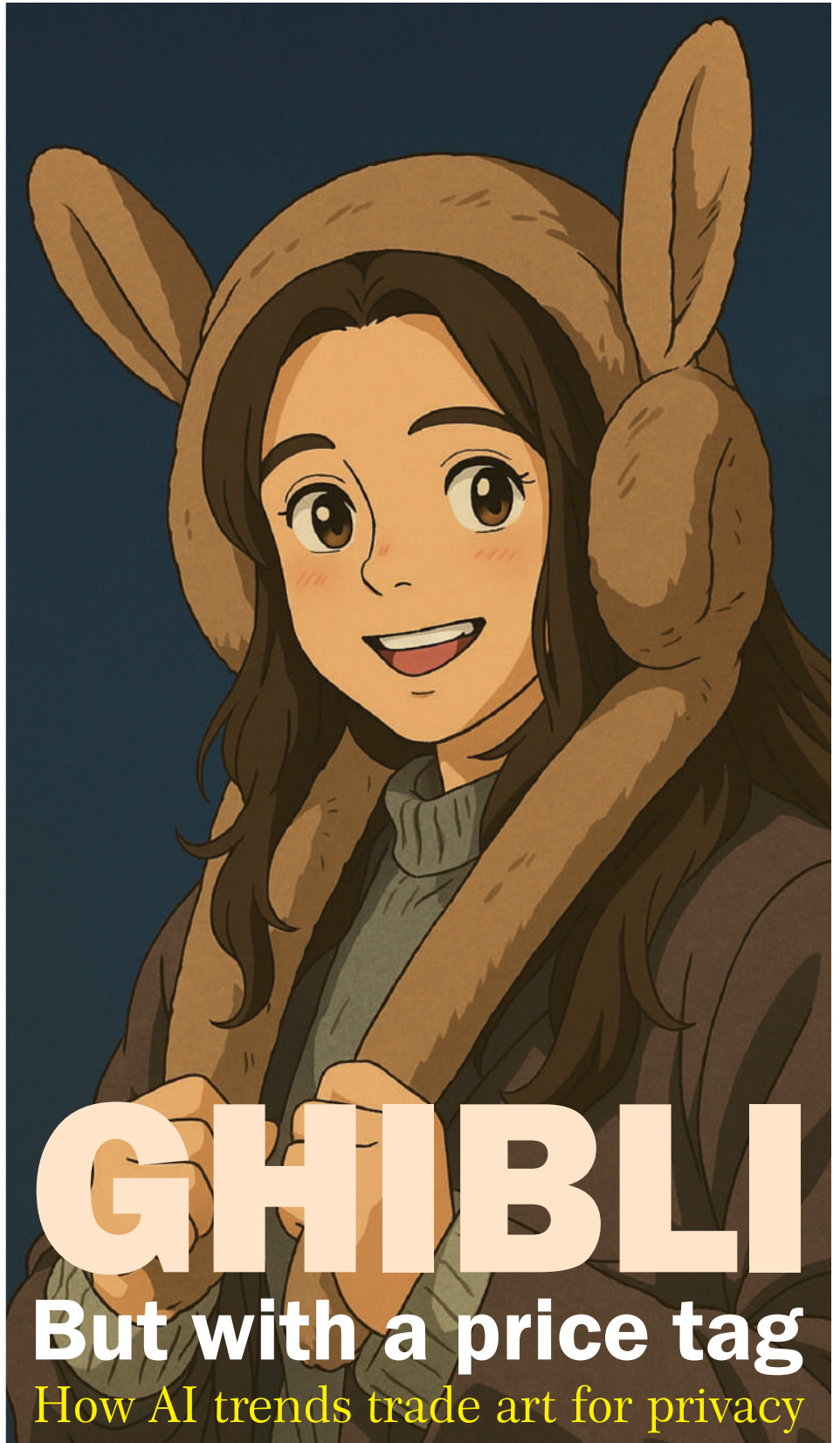
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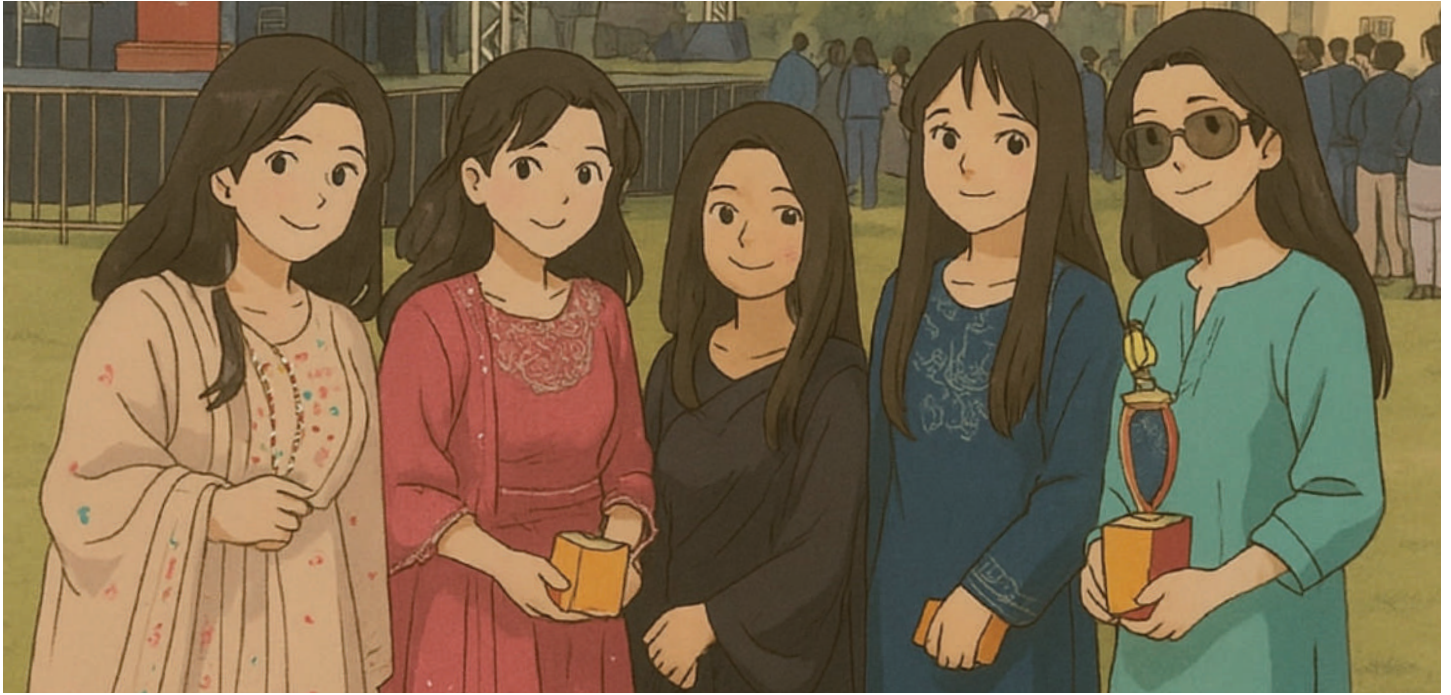


GHIBLI

But with a price tag

How AI trends trade art for privacy

How AI trends trade art for privacy...



BHAVNA SONI

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

That viral trend you love, it's snooping in on your personal info! But guess who gave it the green signal? You did! Take the Ghibli AI Trend for instance. Who would have thought that a whimsical art style rooted in traditional Japanese aesthetics would one day span the internet, making people go bonkers? Ghibli art refers to the distinct visual style seen in the films produced by Studio Ghibli, a legendary Japanese animation studio co-founded in 1985 by Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata. The studio, known worldwide for its beautiful hand-drawn animations, imaginative worlds, and emotionally rich storytelling, blends fantasy with reality, often using soft lighting, lush nature scenes, and deeply expressive characters.

However, it began innocently. A handful of digital artists, inspired by the gentle hues, dreamy lighting and emotional storytelling of Hayao Miyazaki's films, began recreating mundane photos in the Studio Ghibli style. Then the Instagram reels took over. Suddenly, everyone's camera roll was being turned into Ghibli magic. Apps and online tools popped up overnight, some AI-based, others powered by freelance artists. Influencers flaunted their Ghibli morphs with captions like

AI tools can exploit these data points to extrapolate age, gender, ethnicity, and even emotional expression. Geotagged photos or background details can hint at a user's location, habits, or identity.

"This is how I'd look in a Ghibli movie" while hashtags like #GhibliAI, #AnimeMe, and #GhibliCore exploded into trending charts. For a fleeting moment, the internet united under a banner of nostalgia and artistry. Studio Ghibli's hand-drawn masterpieces, shaped by emotion and years of craft, were now mimicked in seconds, reducing deep artistic labour to a mere trend. In the Ghibli trend, the algorithm becomes the artist, while the actual artists become invisible.

But the danger went beyond aesthetics. Enthralled by the viral trend, people overlooked the fact that they were giving third-party platforms access to their data. People were uploading personal photos often containing location data, faces, and backgrounds onto third-party tools with little concern for where their data was going. A small survey conducted among the 18–45-year-olds revealed a fairly bal-

anced familiarity with the Ghibli art style before the trend, with 51.2% of respondents saying they were aware and 48.8% saying they were not. Nearly half (50.6%) engaged with the trend by creating their own Ghibli-style image, showing how trends can attract broad participation regardless of prior knowledge. Notably, a significant portion of users (61%) were unaware of the potential risks associated with uploading personal images to AI platforms, pointing to a general lack of awareness around data privacy. Yet, even among those aware of the risks, many proceeded with uploads, suggesting a willingness to trade privacy for participation or creative output. Interestingly, although a large majority (91.7%) believed sharing personal data with third parties is dangerous, most still engaged with the trend, indicating a gap between awareness and action.

While most users participated for fun, the implications were larger. AI tools can exploit these data points to extrapolate age, gender, ethnicity, and even emotional expression. Geotagged photos or background details can hint at a user's location, habits, or identity. It's the perfect storm for misuse. As social media trends continue to blur the lines between creativity and vulnerability, users must pause not just to admire the charm of these filters, but to ask: how much privacy are we trading for a moment of Ghibli? ■

When laughter offends!

ASHKA JAIN

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

In a society quick to criminalise comedians over jokes, yet slow to act on grave national issues, what India truly needs is equal urgency in addressing real crimes.

In a country of over 1.4 billion people grappling with serious issues like unemployment, rising inflation, communal tensions, gender-based violence, and a creaking public healthcare and education system, one might assume that a comedian telling a joke would hardly warrant national outrage. However, in India, stand-up comedians such as Samay Raina, Apoorva Mukhija, Munawar Faruqui, Agrima Joshua, and several others have repeatedly found themselves in the eye of political and social storms—not for criminal acts or inciting violence, but for cracking jokes. This ongoing tension between comedy and societal norms has become a flashpoint in India's political discourse, raising questions about freedom of speech, misuse of power and selective outrage.

One of the biggest and most disturbing examples has to be Munawar Faruqui, who was arrested in 2021 in Indore over an allegation that he intended to crack jokes that might hurt the sentiments of a particular community. He was jailed for over a month with no evidence whatsoever. His case became the symbol of the state's overreach and the weaponisation of people's sentiments to oppress a field. Despite courts later granting him bail he had to face cancelled shows, death threats and online harassment. Ironically, his popularity soared! In similar cases, popular YouTubers such as Ranveer Allahbadia, Ashish Chanchalani, Apoorva Mukhija aka The Rebel Kid, and the very famous stand-up comedian Samay Raina, found themselves in similar situations.

One of the most bizarre controversies lately involved the sarcastic YouTube show, India's Got Latent. The show, however, quickly gained popularity for its raw, unfiltered content and subversive



- Over 80,000 cases are pending in the Supreme Court of India with over 4000 cases being over a decade old.
- 31,677 cases of rape in 2021, an average of 86 daily. Nearly 49 cases of crime against women were lodged every single hour according to NCRB Data.
- Among 177 countries, India stands at 128 in Women's safety.

humour. As some have pointed out, in this country, serious offenses like rape, murder, and underage driving often go unchecked—but telling a joke can spark outrage. That's what makes you a criminal. Passing a joke that is "offensive" to some is apparently a bigger crime in India than giving death threats openly on social media to someone or threatening to rape them or throwing acid at them. Imagine receiving thousands of threats—including rape, acid attacks, and death—yet being painted as the one at fault, while those issuing the threats face no consequences. Disturbing, isn't it? Sadly, this was the reality for Samay, Apoorva

(aka Rebel Kid), and Ranveer, for nearly a month.

Critical issues—such as the Prakriti Lamsal case at KIIT or the ongoing unrest and imposition of President's Rule in Manipur—are overlooked, while jokes are treated as criminal offences. What India truly needs is not increased censorship, but greater cultural maturity: the ability to distinguish between hate speech and humour, the willingness to listen, and the strength to laugh at ourselves. Because when comedians are treated as criminals and jokes become grounds for outrage, it's not just comedy that's under threat—it's the foundation of a free society. ■

Fashioned for the feed, not for me



Picture: MARIA SIDDIQUI

In the race to stay on trend, many young hearts are trading comfort and self-love for curated perfection. When did being seen become more important than being ourselves?

MARIA SIDDIQUI

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

Last winter, Tanya stood in front of the mirror, wearing the oversized sweater that she had loved for years. But that day, she hesitated. It wasn't 'trending' anymore. She swapped it with a turtleneck top she had seen all over her Pinterest.

She didn't feel like herself but at least she looked like everyone else and was Instagram-worthy. Dressing for the lens rather than for ourselves is a growing reality for our youth.

Social media has democratised fashion by giving everyone access to inspiration and global aesthetics. With this access comes an unspoken pressure to stay relevant. We scroll through endless

reels and Pinterest boards to search for what's 'in' and what's not. Outfits are no longer just clothes, they're content. Before choosing what to wear, we now subconsciously answer questions like 'Is it Instagrammable?' and 'Will it get me more views?' before wearing them. This has led to a shift in fashion from being a form of personal expression to a social performance.

The anxiety and the need to 'fit in' fuel the never-ending want to buy clothes, which shortly vanish into the back of our closets!

"I sometimes tend to buy clothes not because I need them but because of the fear of repeating outfits that I have already posted online", says a fashion influencer with more than 100k followers. People watch these influencers closely, learning to imitate their every move and

1. Instagram is utilised by 24.95% of the global population with the 18-34 age group being the largest demographic, making up 31.7% of the platform's total user base.

2. Instagram is a hub for high fashion brands like Gucci, Dior and Chanel, which use the platform to reach their global audience.

3. Approximately 76% of consumers discover fashion brands on social media, with 97% of these discoveries occurring on Meta platforms like Instagram. Notably, 52% of these discoveries are credited to Instagram Reels.

4. During Bharat Tex 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted that waste from fast fashion could reach 148 million tonnes by 2030.

5. India is among the world's largest producers of textiles and apparel, contributing 2.3 per cent to the country's GDP.

style. Fast fashion thrives on this disposability, and it is not just the clothes that are outdated it is our personalities too!

Not only are teenagers starting to look similar, but they are also starting to appear mature or older than their age. Kids Growing Old Younger (KGOY), is a term that has come to be used more recently, describing how the younger generation wants to look more mature and adopt the media typically consumed by older generations.

"I think it is okay to follow an influencer if the youth understands that what we are watching is a reel and not their real life. The problem starts when we forget the difference," said Riya, an influencer.

Following trends doesn't just make us look similar, it also makes it hard to tell what's real and what's not. When we start copying outfits made for paid promotions, we forget that our daily lives aren't the same. Maybe it's time we ask ourselves: Are we dressing to express who we are, or just to be noticed? ■

Once the heart of Hazratganj, now just a pause



Saharaganj's fall tells a bigger story of how shopping, spaces, and sentiments are shifting

1. Over 70% of Indian urban youth prefer online shopping for apparel and electronics (Statista, 2024).

2. Over 15 major brands have exited Saharaganj in the last 3 years due to high rent and poor sales.

3. Lulu Mall attracted over 1 lakh visitors on opening day and averages 40,000-60,000 daily footfalls.

4. Phoenix Palassio hosts over 300+ brands, including Zara, Sephora, and H&M, which aren't available in Saharaganj.

Picture: RAMZI HASAN

RAMZI HASAN

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

Saharaganj, the first-ever mall in Lucknow, inaugurated by the then Chief Minister in 2005, was never just a shopping complex. It was a landmark, a magical realm, especially for Gen Z kids who grew up cherishing every memory made within its walls. During those days, the word 'mall' in Lucknow was synonymous with Saharaganj. But over time, and the charm seems to have faded. What exactly turned the tide against this iconic destination? People still fondly recall the glory days of Saharaganj, the packed weekends, and the festive rush during Eid and Diwali. The hustle and energy were unmatched. So where did it all go wrong?

When asked, Meghna Srivastava, a resident of Bihar, working at the Van Heusen store in Saharaganj, candidly shared in an interview with Expressions: "Almost all the stores inside the mall have been closed. People come to browse the mall,

but if there are no stores left, no one will come just for the sake of a few shops." Her words underline the growing emptiness that now echoes in a place once full of life. The emergence of modern mega malls like Lulu and Phoenix Palassio has given tough competition.

Yet, despite its declining footfall, Saharaganj retains untapped potential to rival the biggest malls. Its strategic location in Hazratganj, the heart of the city, gives it a competitive edge. In its prime, the gaming zone was the first stop for families; children's laughter filled the air while parents strolled through the stores. Today, silence has taken its place. The gaming zone is shut, the spark is missing, and sales have plummeted. Ankur, a Lucknow resident who has been working at the Being Human store in Saharaganj for the past 1.5 years, explained in an interview with Expressions that newer malls are smartly zoned, with luxury brands on the ground floor, mass-market brands on the first, and ethnic wear on the second. Saharaganj lacks this segmentation.

Asked about the impact of Lulu and

Palassio, Ankur remained firm, "No mall can affect Saharaganj because of its location. The real blow came during Covid. Business suffered immensely and rents were not reduced. While we received only 50% salaries, the rent stayed constant." He revealed that current rent stands at ₹6.85 lakh per month, with electricity adding around ₹30,000, totaling expenses to around ₹8 lakh monthly.

Santosh Kumar, a security guard at Saharaganj, shared with Expressions, "We are paid well; we are like gunmen, money is not an issue." He works 12-hour shifts from 10 AM to 10 PM. When asked why brands are leaving, he replied, "The rent is high, the world is moving online, and large malls like Lulu have opened."

Despite all odds, Saharaganj is not a lost cause. It still has the power to stand tall against the giants. What it needs is introspection and strategic revival, maybe through rent concessions to attract brands, improved store distribution, better marketing, and, above all, faith in its own legacy. Once brands return, customers will too. ■

WETLAND BIRDS



Indian cormorant



Rouen duck



Bronze winged Jacana



black-winged stilt



Purple heron



ESCAPE THE CITY CHAOS

Discover lucknow's new eco-tourism gem

Whether you're a birdwatcher, peace seeker, or photography enthusiast, CG City Wetland is Lucknow's latest eco-tourism destination that invites you to reconnect with nature. Developed by the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA), this 37-acre

haven near Ekana Stadium is being thoughtfully transformed into a vibrant natural retreat.

The wetland offers a serene blend of scenic beauty and well-designed amenities. Highlights include birdwatching towers to spot a variety of migratory species, a walking

trail ideal for peaceful morning strolls, a musical park where nature and melody meet, and a dedicated food court for a relaxing culinary pause. Tucked just behind Ekana Stadium, CG City Wetland is quickly becoming a favourite escape for nature lovers, walkers, and shutterbugs alike. ■



MORNING TIME



Pictures: ABHISHEK SINGH

Becoming everything, all at once

The invisible battle of a generation

RICHA GOEL

Master of Journalism & Mass Communication

There's a silent storm that rages behind every "I'm fine" text or filtered Instagram story. While young adulthood is often hyped as the most exciting phase of life, it is frequently pressed between layers of expectations, to earn respect, figure out careers, and somehow "settle down" by twenty-five. In many Indian households, identity isn't always something that is discovered but rather something assigned. You're the "science topper", the "future IAS", or the "responsible elder sibling." While these tags may sound reassuring, they often drown out a quiet, desperate question, "Who am I?"

Many young adults in India today find themselves caught between tradition and modernity, struggling to balance cultural expectations while longing to live life on their own terms. "It's hard to find yourself when you're also trying not to disappoint everyone. To be honest, people might mock me if I talk about trying to find myself," said Shreya, a 23 year old student from Lucknow. The pressure to "do something respectable" starts ear-



We're not lazy. We're burned out from trying to stay sane in a challenging economy, fake-perfect social media world, and the pressure to be everything, all at once.

Mansi

ly, whether it's engineering, an MBA, or cracking government exams. Cities offer exposure, yes, but they also come with high societal standards. An anonymous

Reddit user stated, "Career pressure today isn't just about stability but also about status. If you're not building a brand or climbing fast by a certain age, it feels like failure. But no one talks about how most people pivot 3-4 times before finding what truly fits."

Social media doesn't help. From someone's vacation photos to startup milestones or promotions or even engagements, platforms like Instagram feel like constant reminders of everything you haven't achieved. "Social media is like slow poison. You know what comes after, yet you keep scrolling and comparing yourself," said a 26 year old preparing for government exams. Fear of missing out (FOMO) creeps in quietly, especially when you're lying in bed, feeling drained and unproductive.

Mansi, 25, shared, "We're not lazy. We're burned out from trying to stay sane in a challenging economy, fake-perfect social media world, and the pressure to be everything, all at once." Yet, despite it all, India's young adults are choosing to talk, seek help, and break the silence. If you're in your twenties, confused, broke, or just simply not feeling up to anything, you're not alone. You're growing, even if it doesn't look like it yet. ■

YOUNG ADULthood IN INDIA



IDENTITY CRISIS "WHO AM I?"

- Labels often overpower self-exploration.
- Youth feel pressure to become what others expect.
- Cultural values vs. personal dreams clash daily.
- Fear of being judged blocks open conversations.
- Many struggle silently in the name of "duty."



CAREER STRESS "BE SOMETHING BY 25"

- Constant pressure to be "settled" early.
- Careers seen as status, not just livelihood.
- Job market competition triggers burnout.
- Unrealistic timelines = self-doubt.
- Fear of failure leads to anxiety.



FINANCIAL BURDEN "DREAM, BUT FUND IT YOURSELF"

- Rising expenses with limited income.
- Supporting families adds extra stress.
- Few safe spaces to talk money related issues.
- High cost of living in cities adds pressure.
- EMIs, loans, savings — it's a juggling act.



SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT "SCROLL, COMPARE, REPEAT"

- FOMO fuels insecurity.
- Filtered lives distort real achievements.
- Likes & follows tied to self-worth.
- Social validation overshadows real joy.
- Creates quiet pressure to "keep up."



MENTAL HEALTH "WE'RE NOT LAZY, JUST OVERWHELMED"

- Burnout strains friendships & love.
- Parents struggle to understand mental health.
- Romantic ties suffer from emotional exhaustion.
- Few have time or energy to connect deeply.
- Internal chaos often reflects in relationships.

Infographic: RICHA GOEL

Mud, memory, and the timeless chill



Picture: SHRUTI KAPOOR

The simple earthen pot—just a vessel for water, a hard-hit nostalgia or the cry of potters?

SHRUTI KAPOOR

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

“Today, purchasing a matka isn’t merely nostalgic—it’s a stand against waste, a support for artisans, and a call to embrace a slower, more mindful way of life.”

In the old mohallas of Lucknow, where narrow lanes carry centuries of history, the matka was once a mandate in every home. More than just a clay pot, it was essential for summer survival. Placed on a wooden stand, often covered with a damp cloth, accompanied by a tulsi plant and a steel glass on top, it provided cool water—without the need for electricity or modern appliances.

The brilliance of the matka lies in its simplicity. Made from local clay, it cools water through evaporative cooling. As water seeps through its porous surface and evaporates, it carries heat away. What’s left is water at just the right temperature—not cold enough to hurt your throat, not warm enough to disappoint.

For many residents of Lucknow, the matka was deeply ingrained in their daily life. It stood ready after evening games of cricket in the colony lanes, served at local tea stalls to cool down a cup before sipping, and remained a constant presence

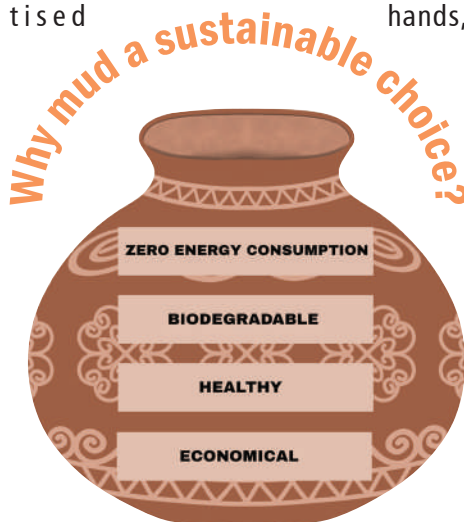
in grandmothers’ kitchens, tucked away from the harsh sun. “I remember the matka near the tulsi plant in our courtyard,” says 64-year-old Surendra of Chowk. “My mother would clean it every morning. She said the water from it had ‘mitti ki mehak’—the scent of earth.”

Behind every matka is a potter, and behind every potter in Lucknow is a story struggling to be heard. In the Kumhar Tola of Rajaji Puram, 57 year old Bhola Ram Prajapati sits cross-legged near his wheel. His family has been making matkas for over five generations. “This is Purvanchal mitti,” he says, holding up a lump of raw clay. “It comes from the banks of the Gomti. This mitti knows how to cool.” He shapes the clay with practised hands,

but orders are fewer now. “Earlier, we used to sell 100 pots before Holi. Now, we wait for someone to even ask.” In Yahiya Ganj, Rehmat Ali, once famous in his lane for his large decorative matkas, now makes flower pots for weddings and café decor.

“Paani rakhne wala matka toh ab bas photo ke liye bacha hai,” he says. “People want things that shine,” he added. Some young potters are trying to reinvent it. In Indira Nagar, Zeeshan Khan, a 25 year old ceramics graduate, is experimenting with minimalist matkas for urban homes. “We’re working on adding bamboo stands, cork lids, and a sleeker finish. The goal is to bring mitti back to modern life.” Even restaurants in Hazrat Ganj and Alambagh have started serving drinking water in small clay cups. “It’s trending now,” one café owner says, “but it’s also smart—no waste, no refrigeration bill.”

There may still be hope for the matka. It doesn’t beep or flash for attention. It doesn’t demand anything. It simply sits—cool, consistent, and reliable. In a city celebrated for its tehzeeb, perhaps it’s time to return the courtesy to this humble clay pot. This summer, consider skipping the plastic bottle. Choose a matka instead. Pour, pause, and sip—because, in Lucknow, coolness isn’t about noise; it’s about quiet elegance. ■



A stage left empty

The fading stories of the behrupiyas



Picture: ABHISHEK SINGH

Around 95% of individuals in Behrupiya-linked communities are illiterate.

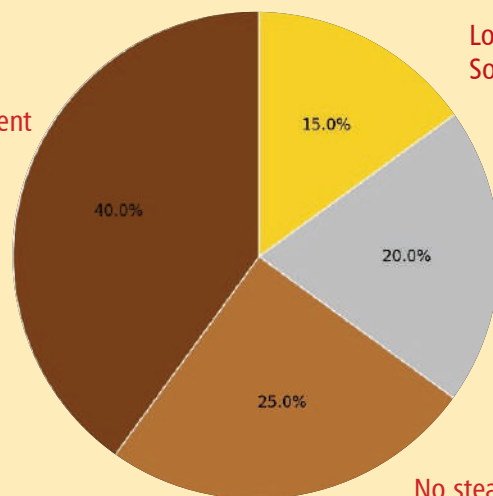
Over 90% of active Behrupiyas are men. Patriarchal norms and safety concerns prevent women from participating freely in this public performance art.

A Behrupiya typically earns Rs. 100-300 per performance. Monthly income seldom exceeds Rs. 4,000-6,000, leaving most artists economically vulnerable.

Source: IAFOR Journal of Cultural Studies

Fading faces: Why the Behrupiya tradition is disappearing

Lack of Government Support.



Loss of Respect in Society.

Disinterest from younger Generation.

No steady income.

SUPRIYA SRIVASTAVA

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

Behrupiyas (impressionists) once painted Indian streets with their captivating transformations, from kings to commoners, moving audiences from laughter to tears. These street performers, known for dressing up differently, brought characters to life through acting and mimicry. Today, this ancient art form struggles to survive against the tide of modernity and economic hardship. Yet, across the country, including

here in Lucknow, the spirit of the behrupiya endures in the hearts of a few dedicated artists. Their lives move on roads, they travel wherever work calls, setting up their temporary hamlets and performing in villages and towns, staging plays and slipping into countless roles to entertain and tell stories. They are not homeless, yet they have no permanent address!

Behrupiya Raju, 52, from Kakori, is a master of transformation and storytelling, keeping the behrupiya tradition alive. In an interview with Expressions, he shared: "I never planned to be a behrupiya. My

cousin introduced me to it, and I started it just for fun. Slowly, it became my profession. Now I live in Kakori, with my wife and four children. I work hard to support my family, but I don't want my sons to follow this path, as there's no future in it. After me, no one in my family will carry on this tradition." Dressed as a Jinn, the supernatural figure from Arab folklore, capable of shape-shifting into humans or animals, Raju enthusiastically approaches visitors, greeting them with his signature line, "Kya hukum hai mere Akka?"

It was once common for behrupiyas to make a dramatic entrance at a wedding

or some festivity, dressed as a policeman, priest, or some popular figure. They created playful commotion and surprise. Abdul Qadir, 61, a performer near Charbagh Railway Station in Lucknow, shared his challenges: "Earlier, we were invited to weddings, temples, and even school functions. Now, people don't have time for folk artists. They're too busy scrolling on their phones. Our culture is being forgotten, and with it, our talent is no longer admired. We can't even earn enough to survive through this art anymore." Communities like the sapera (snake charmers), nutt (acrobats), Madari (performers with monkeys) and behrupiya once entertained people with their crafts. However,

societal changes reduced their role as entertainment evolved.

"Behrupiyas are not just entertainers. They are living storytellers who reflect society's realities in the most creative ways," says Kamlesh Yadav, a cultural historian at Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Lucknow. "This tradition is one of the oldest forms of mimicry and folk theatre in India. But with digital media taking over and people's preferences shifting, behrupiyas are vanishing. It's not just a loss of livelihood. It's a loss of our cultural memory," he added. With the rise of technology and fast-paced digital entertainment, children from the Gen Z era often fail to understand the cultural

importance of behrupiyas and their character-driven performances.

Meena Sharma, a resident of Hazratganj, recalls: "I remember being terrified and thrilled seeing a behrupiya as a child. All my cousins and friends in the neighbourhood waited for summer vacations to experience these performances by various behrupiyas. Now my kids don't even know what the word means."

The fading footsteps of the behrupiya should not be lost in the noise of modernity. This tradition deserves not just remembrance, but revival so that future generations can witness the magic of live, heartfelt storytelling rooted in our soil. ■

Breaking the Shackles

A tale of courage and resilience

SHAMBHAVI SHARMA

BA English (Hons)

In the heart of a bustling town, nestled between towering apartments, lived a young girl named Meera. Her eyes gleamed with curiosity, but the world around her often dimmed that sparkle. At twelve, she worked in a small textile factory, weaving threads with her delicate fingers for hours. School was a distant dream, sacrificed to support her family.

Every morning, Meera passed by a nearby school, watching children her age, with books in their hands, giggle and chatter. Her heart ached, yearning for the joy of learning. Yet, the burden of responsibility weighed heavier.

At home, her mother, Anjali, bore a different pain. Married at a young age, she endured the daily wrath of her husband. Bruises told stories that her

lips never could. Domestic violence had become her shadow; one she could never outrun.

On her way back from work, Meera often faced another harsh reality.

Groups of boys loitered on the



streets; their whistles and remarks like sharp daggers. She learned to walk fast, eyes fixed on the ground, hoping to escape their taunts. Eve-teas-

ing had become a routine she silently endured. One evening, a local community centre organised a seminar on gender equality and legal rights. Curiosity led Anjali and Meera to attend. For the first time, they heard voices that echoed their silent struggles. The speaker spoke of laws against child labour, domestic violence, and harassment. It was a revelation.

Empowered with newfound knowledge, Anjali found the courage to seek help. With the support of the community, she reported the abuse and filed for protection. Meera's employer was also held accountable, and she was enrolled in a free education program.

Days turned into months, and resilience became their strength. Anjali began working at a women's cooperative, stitching clothes with pride. Meera, now a student, embraced her books with the same dedication she once gave to the factory machines.

Their journey was not easy, but it was theirs to own. In breaking free from the chains of injustice, they became symbols of hope for countless others. The town witnessed a ripple of change, proving that even in the darkest corners, courage could ignite light. ■

FADING RED



Picture: ABHISHEK SINGH

The backbone of Indian Railways disappearing

UMRAH ANSARI

BA English (Hons)

VASVI CHATURVEDI

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

The image of a red-uniformed coolie balancing heavy luggage on his head is slowly disappearing from our railway stations, thanks to the introduction of escalators and lifts inside the stations. Also, most passengers prefer to carry trollies instead of heavy attachés and boxes; hence no need for coolies.

Ram Kishore, a coolie at Charbagh Railway Station who has been working for over 25 years, said, "Earlier, every train used to be crowded, and passengers never carried their luggage and we coolies got fair money in return for our labour. Now, they just refuse."

Another porter, Salim Khan, who comes to Lucknow from a nearby village every day to earn wages, said that he barely earns enough to buy two meals. "Earlier, we used to earn ₹500–600

daily, but now earning even ₹100 is tough," he said. Ram Kishore said, "Even our children don't want to come into this work and hence we are trying that they study and do something else."

There was a time when large families travelled with loads of luggage and even a whole lot of coolies weren't sufficient for the families.

Most travellers now pack light and prefer to carry their luggage. Coolies seem to have compromised with the fact that they will rarely be approached by a traveller for help with their luggage. The trend of travelling to stay with relatives for a long time has declined and there are fewer members in a family, and people leave their cities on rare special occasions, for which they wouldn't require much luggage.

Coolies, once considered an essential part of railway journeys, are now fighting for survival in a world that's quickly changing. Coolies say that they have meagre income and no job security. Many

of their fellow coolies have left the field and turned to other forms of labour to support their families. Very few have stayed back, clinging to the hope of another traveller approaching them.

Most coolies don't have any alternate work, as they are not trained in other skills and feel left behind. With declining earnings, a lack of social security, and the increasing impact of modernisation, Indian coolies are in a vulnerable position. Once an essential part of the railway ecosystem, they now struggle to survive, facing an uncertain future as their profession fades into the shadows.

Many coolies believed that if the government supported them with skill training, small financial help, and better work opportunities, their lives could change for the better. Their hard work deserves recognition, not neglect. After serving thousands of passengers for generations, they now hope not just for survival, but for dignity and respect in a world that is moving ahead without them. ■