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# Wheels of Change

Honking their rides in a male dominated society



In the bustling streets of Lucknow, a few remarkable women are challenging societal norms. Despite facing skepticism and resistance, their determination and resilience shine through, writes **BHAVNA SONI**.

Picture: **BHAVNA SONI**

# Wheels of Change...

**BHAVNA SONI**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

For years, public transportation has been largely dominated by men, with women rarely seen behind the wheel. However, times are changing as more women step into professions once considered unconventional. "Some passengers refused to sit in my auto, thinking I wouldn't drive well. But when I see a relieving smile on the faces of females after looking at me, my confidence doubles up." These are the words of a 36-year-old female e-rickshaw driver, Ms Pratibha, who has been fearlessly driving her vehicle for about a year. Across the roads of Laulai, Chinhat, Polytechnic and Nishatganj, Ms Pratibha is breaking the stereotype by entering into a profession, which is largely believed to be a male-dominated one.

Her journey into this field began in the end months of 2023. After surviving the harsh economic crisis at the time of COVID-19, she was determined to support her family and husband by earning, but not as a house-help or maid. She proudly stated, "It was my husband who

encouraged and taught me how to drive. He was the one who showed full confidence in me and that made me believe in myself."

However, it wasn't easy for her in the first place since her in-laws were against letting the daughter-in-law pursue this profession, stating that "it wasn't safe for her and she could face harassment." However, "There is no profession where women don't fear getting harassed. So, should we hide inside our homes?", she defended and stood firm in her decision. She also expressed her hidden desire to learn how to drive a car and upgrade from e-rickshaw to Uber driving.

Ms Sunita is another name on this list where women have taken the first step in breaking gender-based stereotypes and transforming society's mindset. Ms Sunita drives in the areas of Nishatganj and further. "When I see people looking at me with surprise, I feel empowered and this motivates me to continue this work", she stated. Although her husband was not supportive initially, fearing eve-teasing rightly worried about her security. "My husband used to accompany me in the initial few days. But once I gained his trust, he allowed me to continue," she

shared. She also highlighted the importance of resilience. "People stare, comment, and sometimes even refuse to pay. But I keep going. I want my daughter to see that she can dream beyond what society dictates."

Aware of their families' conditions, these women don't have unrealistic dreams but rather display sheer pride in whatever profession they follow. Ms Sunita compares herself with numerous other women who are aeroplane or jet pilots, stating, "While they have a better workplace, security and other provisions, the only difference I see is that they fly in the sky, and we operate on land."

They shared a request to encourage women to enter this arena. Despite the societal hurdles, they are optimistic about the future. When asked about some advice to young girls, Ms Pratibha said, "Never let society dictate your limits. If you have a dream, chase it fearlessly. No job is too small or too big for a woman. We can do anything." Their stories serve as a beacon of hope for countless women who aspire to break barriers. They manoeuvre through the streets and not only earn a livelihood but also pave the way for a more inclusive and equal society. ■

## Female Drivers



▲ **33%**

Increase in women commercial drivers in last five years

▼ **15-20%**

Less earning than their male counterparts

▼ **Accidents**

Lower accident rates, are more law-abiding

Infographic: BHISHEK SINGH

International Transport Forum (2023)



# GOING GREEN: A marketing gimmick or a sincere effort towards sustainability?



Picture: MANU YADAV

**MANU YADAV**

Master of Advertising & Marketing Management

With environmental issues becoming increasingly evident through shifts in climate and transformations in nature, green marketing, aligning businesses and people with sustainable practices, has gained prominence. Businesses are producing environment-friendly products ranging from organic foods to electric vehicles, thereby adapting to a new wave of consumers who prioritize sustainability. Brands of all sizes are responding to this shift by adopting green marketing through eco-friendly packaging, ethical sourcing, and carbon-neutral operations. One such company is Emerald Paper Products Pvt. Ltd., a Lucknow-based manufacturer of eco-friendly corrugated boxes. The company boasts a top-tier manufacturing facility, including a high-speed automatic corrugation plant capable of producing over 80 tons or 250,000 boxes daily, situated on 3 acres.

But is this shift motivated by authentic concern, or just a marketing tactic? To gain insight, we engaged with consumers and businesses in Lucknow who are the focal point of this movement.

**“Consumers are now asking the right questions with sustainability becoming a key factor alongside price and quality.”**

**Meera Tandon**

A recent local survey revealed that many young professionals in Lucknow are ready to spend more on sustainable products. Vidhika, a 22-year-old content creator from Lucknow, considers sustainability as a way of life rather than only a trendy term. She told Expressions, “I made it a point to seek out brands that utilise biodegradable packaging or stand for ethical sourcing. In the past, I would mindlessly buy plastic-wrapped products without a second thought, but now I choose more consciously even if it means spending a bit extra.

Nishant Verma, a 30-year-old professor from Lucknow, expresses a similar perspective: “I’ve begun to avoid single-use plastic and choose to shop at local stores

that provide eco-friendly alternatives.” Contributing, even if in a small way, now brings him a sense of fulfilment.

Changes in consumer behaviour are evident in the current market trends, with more and more consumers demanding eco-friendly products, prompting businesses to deliver them. Major brands are also implementing changes. Well-known cafés in Lucknow are now adopting eco-friendly cutlery, while local shops are transitioning to paper and cloth bags in response to consumer preferences. Fashion boutiques such as ‘The Green Thread’ highlight the importance of organic materials and sustainable production methods in all their designs. Despite challenges, experts believe that green marketing is here to stay. Meera Tandon, an environmental activist from Lucknow, imagines a promising future for sustainability. “Consumers are now asking the right questions with sustainability becoming a key factor alongside price and quality.”

As India adopts sustainability, businesses face the challenge of going beyond just small actions and truly integrating environmental responsibility into their operations. Green marketing may have begun as a trend, but it is rapidly evolving into realistic consumer expectations. ■

Stop comparing, stop complaining, stop commenting

# IT'S MY LIFE! Gen Z to the world

"We grew up in a different time. I don't think we ever had any heartfelt conversations with our parents. Mental health was never a topic of discussion."

Jitesh Agarwal

**RICHA GOEL**

Master of Journalism & Mass Communication

In today's fast-paced world, keeping up can feel overwhelming, especially during the delicate stage of adolescence. The fear of being left behind constantly haunts teens. Although this challenge has traditionally been associated with adulthood, the rise of technology and social media now exposes adolescents to these pressures at a much earlier stage. Society's rapidly evolving standards play a major role in fuelling teenagers' self-doubt. To make matters worse, some challenges arise due to inherent health conditions like PCOS, Thyroid, Vitiligo, or traits such as skin colour, facial features or body shape. These are just a few examples of factors beyond their control, yet they often become sources of emotional distress. These struggles are largely a result of unrealistic norms imposed by society.

A 14-year-old student, Krati, from Lucknow Public School, shared, "Since I have a dark complexion, I've always been advised remedies for improving my skin tone—as if it's something that sets me apart in a bad way." Another 15-year-old, Navya, shared, "I have plenty of facial hair because of PCOS, and people never miss a chance to point it out—like I don't already know. The worst part? I



Pictures: RICHA GOEL

can't even explain why." Many people are unaware of conditions like PCOS and how it affects the body. Dismissing these struggles as mere observations prevents a deeper understanding of the underlying challenges.

School and home, the two institutions where children spend most of their time, might become sources of growing insecurities. "I have been ridiculed many times by my teachers for my average marks. She constantly tells me that I'm a loser and that I will fail in life. No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to achieve better grades, and I have started to lose sleep over it," shared 17-year-old Archit. Parents and teachers, who are supposed to be the guiding forces in a child's life, often fail to acknowledge that every child is different, and as a result, their struggles and challenges can vary.

A generational divide further deepens the disconnect. Reyansh, a 14-year-old, expressed how often he feels dismissed while talking about his feelings to his father, who perceives them as insignificant. Many other teenagers echoed similar experiences, frequently encountering dismissive responses like "It's all in your head" or "We've been through worse"

## Mental Health Update

Among Teenagers of India

**1 in 7 (13%)**

Proportion of 10- to 19-year-olds globally who have a mental disorder.

**10 Percent**

Children and adolescents globally who have a mental illness.

**7.3 Percent**

Prevalence of anxiety disorders in Indian teenagers.

**0.8 Percent**

Overall prevalence of mental illness among teenagers in India

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rather than receiving genuine understanding and support. A parent, Mr. Jitesh Agarwal, admitted, "We grew up in a different time. I don't think we ever had any heartfelt conversations with our parents. Mental health was never a topic of discussion. The primary focus back then was making a living and getting by."

Poor communication further deepens this gap. Many teenagers hesitate to share their insecurities due to fear of judgment or comparison. Parents on the other hand, not fully understanding this, often end up unintentionally comparing their children, fostering self-doubt. Tanishka, a high school student at Bal Vidya Mandir, confessed, "I'm one of the top students in my batch. Besides that, I'm a trained Kathak dancer, having won several competitions. Yet, I've never received any appreciation at home. But my cousin, who is the head girl, is often praised."

Teenagers need to hear that their feelings are valid, their struggles matter, and they are not facing them alone. Genuine reassurance and open dialogue can make a meaningful difference. ■



## From (no more) clocking hours to happy hours

# Gen Z's work mantra



Picture: MARIA SIDDIQUI

**MARIA SIDDIQUI**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

**H**ave you worked with someone who refuses to stay late, prioritises mental health and often questions the company's policies? If so, then you've encountered a Generation Z professional. Gen-Z, who are referred to as 'Digital Natives', is facing tough challenges in the job market. Despite being highly tech-savvy and expressive, they are labelled as 'difficult to work with' by their employers. A survey conducted by Resume Builder found that one in every eight managers has fired a Gen-Z within a week of their start date due to their laid-back attitude and sensitivity to criticism. This generation prefers to work fewer hours, wants a good number of holidays, and incentives and does not take criticism. To put things into perspective, they have gravitated towards the gig economy that prioritises freelancing, short-term contracts and more flexibility over the traditional 9-to-5 jobs.

Platforms like YouTube, Fiverr, and Upwork have revolutionised income gen-

**12.5% of managers have fired a Gen-Z within a week of their start date**

**Currently, around 60% of Indians under the age of thirty have moved towards freelancing**

**77% of individuals prioritise work-life balance when considering job opportunities**

**India has around 10 million gig workers, of which nearly 7 million are engaged in delivery on bikes**

**LinkedIn searches for "best work-life balance jobs" have doubled in India in the past two years**

Source: Deloitte and Forbes

eration. Today, a YouTuber can earn in a few months what a corporate professional makes in years. Ishika Srivastava, a freelancer based in Lucknow, said, "I used to think a 9-to-5 job is the only way to earn money but for me, freelancing

has changed my life entirely. Now I set my work hours, my rates and prioritise my personal life".

Instead of simply rejecting corporate jobs, Gen-Z is coming up with innovative actions in the workplace, redefining work. The generation expects rapid progression in their careers. They value leaders as mentors who believe in guiding them rather than presiding over them. Moreover, companies like Google and Zomato have introduced nap pods and relaxation rooms, allowing rest or meditation in between hard work. France's Right to Disconnect Policy inspired the generation to bring it over to India. A bill with a similar name, aimed to provide employees with the right to not respond after working hours, was introduced in India, in 2018.

'Work is your second home'. We often hear it at work. How come, we aren't allowed to decorate it?

Unlike previous generations that valued job security, Gen-Z chooses organisations that align with their values. After Shein faced backlash on unethical labour practices and environmental concerns, others were quick to realise and started introducing changes in their organisations. Rishi Singh, a former H&M employee, said, "Why should I work at a company that does not align with my values and just blindly runs after profits!" Studies suggest that companies that have adapted to offering flexible work hours and well-being initiatives have experienced higher employee engagement and innovation. This generation chooses not to believe in the traditional 'climbing the corporate ladder's approach but values skills over positions. They are not simply looking for a paycheck, but they prioritise flexibility.

In a speech addressing National Cadet Corps (NCC), PM Narendra Modi called the generation 'Amrit Generation' and that it is the government's resolve to fulfil the dreams of this generation by creating countless opportunities and removing obstacles from their paths. ■





*Extravaganza of  
Relive, Rejoice and Recharge*

# AMIPHORIA 2025

**“Bright costumes, waving flag, energetic dance and symphony of drum beats creating memories for all.”**

**BHAVNA SONI**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

The grand spectacle of Amiphoria 2025 commenced on March 5th with a lively carnival, beginning at the AB 1 foyer of Amity University Lucknow. This vibrant carnival was all about celebrating the rich diversity and unity of Indian culture and festivals. Each department was assigned a specific theme for the carnival, such as Chhath Puja, Navratri, Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, Eid, and Onam, creating an electrifying and vibrant atmosphere.

The grand procession of students, each dressed according to their respective theme, was a powerful display of India's rich

cultural heritage and unity. It also embodied the essence of Amiphoria 2025—Relive, Rejoice, and Recharge. Entire Amity Campus was filled with the energy of rhythmic beats of dhols and drums, creating a spectacular scene of joy, unity and excitement.

Leading the grand parade were esteemed dignitaries: Hon'ble Pro-Vice Chancellor, Prof. (Dr.) Anil Vashisht, Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor, Wg. Cdr. (Dr.) Anil Kumar (Retd.), Dean of Student Welfare, Prof (Dr.) Manju Agarwal, Dean of Academics, Prof (Dr.) Rajesh K. Tiwari, Dy. Director (Academic Affairs), Dr. Rajeev Verma, and Heads of Institutions & Departments.

Their presence not only added prestige but also a sense of honour to the celebration. ■



Pictures: ABHISHEK SINGH



# Malai Makhan

*Lucknow,  
kuchh  
meetha ho  
jaaye!*

**The 'winter speciality' is available from late October to the end of February because it requires cold weather to maintain its composition, state and texture**

**RAMZI HASAN**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

In the city of Nawabs, known for its rich cultural heritage and tradition, a variety of delightful eateries such as Tunday Kababi, Wahid Biryani and Malai Paan await. Among these culinary treasures, malai makhan holds a special place in the heart of every Lucknowite. This delicate and fluffy dessert that melts in your mouth offers a creamy richness that is simply irresistible.

This 'winter speciality' is available from late October to the end of February because it requires cold weather to maintain its composition, state and texture. Sarvan Mishra, a 25-year-old vendor, has been serving malai makhan on the streets of Chowk for a long time. He represents the third generation of his family in this profession, following the footsteps of his



Picture: RAMZI HASAN

grandfather and father, who also sold this delightful dessert. When asked about the recipe and preparations, Sarvan shared that it begins with boiling milk to create a rich cream, which is then carefully churned and infused with flavours like saffron, cardamom and pistachios.

Sarvan said, "I make malai makhan daily and use around 4 buckets of milk, which is around 80 litres needed daily to make the dessert." Priced at ₹80 per 100 grams, this delightful dessert is immensely popular and sells out instantly. By preserving his family's legacy and providing such a cherished treat, Sarvan not only delights the community but also contributes to the rich culinary culture of the area.

Like malai makhan, daulat ki chaat is another beloved winter delicacy, from Delhi though. While both treats share similarities, they represent distinct culinary experiences. Malai makhan is not

merely a dessert. It symbolises Lucknow's rich tradition. Families gather around street vendors, sharing stories - both joyous and sorrowful-while savouring this winter treat.

In Lucknow, malai makhan is typically available in Chowk and Aminabad. Chowk, the heart of old Lucknow, sees vendors setting up their stalls early in the morning to prepare this delicacy, ensuring customers don't have to wait long to enjoy it. Aminabad, another historic market, is also home to vendors selling this delectable dessert.

The magic of malai makhan lies not just in its ingredients, but in the experience it offers. As soon as you eat this, its soft and creamy texture melts in your mouth, leaving a lasting experience. Whether you are a local or a traveller, tasting malai makhan is a must, and each bite promises to create a memory that lingers long after the last bite. ■

## Astrology

# Ancient knowledge, modern commerce



Picture: SUPRIYA SRIVASTAVA

**SUPRIYA SRIVASTAVA**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

**A**strology, once confined to ancient texts and traditional consultations, has evolved into a thriving industry. The rise of social media, AI-generated horoscopes, and subscription-based astrological apps have shifted the focus from prophecy to profit.

Commercial astrologers often exploit fear as a marketing strategy, using ominous predictions about career setbacks and warnings like manglik dosh to pressure families into spending on expensive rituals.

Neha Sharma, a 26-year-old working professional, told Expressions, "When I went to an astrologer for career guidance, he told me that I had 'kala sarpa dosh' and that I needed to do a pooja worth ₹15,000 to prevent tragedies or

bad luck. I was terrified, but later, realised that many others were told the same thing. It was just a way to make money."

From YouTube tarot readers with millions of followers to famous astrologers charging high fees, astrology has become a commercialised sector catering to modern fears.

"It is not that every astrologer is trying to fool people out of their money, it is our stupidity to trust astrologers blindly as we should check their qualifications and experience before consulting, just like we do when we visit a doctor," Dr. Satyaketu, Assistant Professor of Jyotir Vigyan from Lucknow University, told Expressions. Because astrology is meant to empower rather than to frighten, a good astrologer will never frighten you but will instead look for solutions to your issues.

Nowadays, a simple tap on your phone can unlock astrology apps like Astrotalk, Astrosage, and Panditji, offering

**During COVID-19, Astrotalk's daily revenue surged from ₹10 lakh (March 2020) to ₹23 lakh (December 2020), reflecting increased demand for online astrology**

**Hilal Sarac, a Turkish Astrologer predicted a politician's death which happened in real life and was later arrested for spreading fear**

**A 2012 survey found that 51% of employees followed superstitions at work, with many practices rooted in astrological beliefs like Vaastu Shastra**

daily horoscopes, insights into your love life, and alerts about challenging times ahead. Malini Seth, a 34-year-old astrologer and app user, shared, "These applications are excellent as long as you use them carefully. Many astrologers on these platforms use Western astrology methods such as numerology, tarot card reading, and horoscopes, but these only provide general information, if someone is looking for specific solutions and answers, they should only consult Vedic astrologers (Jyotish) for accurate results."

While technology has made astrology more accessible, it has also resulted in deceptive practices. The generalised astrological predictions available widely on the internet are a means of creating false expectations in the minds of viewers. Instead of mindlessly accepting forecasts, people should approach astrology critically, using it as a tool for self-reflection rather than manipulation. ■



# No security for the security personnel!

“After working the entire day and night, we get only ₹7500 per month. It is very hard to run the house with this sum as both my children are studying in a private institution, but currently, due to financial problems, my wife and I decided to remove them from there.”

Manu Mishra



AAROHI SEEM

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

While the world sleeps, they remain awake, standing guard outside homes, offices, hospitals, malls, and universities. Watchmen or security guards are the silent sentinels of society, ensuring safety and order, yet their struggles often go unnoticed. Unseen and unheard, these men and women stand vigilant as the city is in deep slumber. Despite playing a vital role, their struggles remain overlooked.

Dealing with the everyday chaos of a government hospital, Manu Mishra's major responsibility is to ensure that patients and staff are safe. "Witnessing life and death from a close range on a daily basis has taught me the value of life." Talking about the challenges he faced as a single parent, Mishra Ji stated, "My only motivation for this exhausting job is my daughter, Sonali. Her goal is to become a doctor one day and my duty is to provide her with the best education." Despite working for 12 hours straight, Mishra Ji carries a calm and warm smile

on his face. Facing a different set of struggles, Meeru Yadav spends her entire day scanning through bags at a shopping mall. She works hard every day to support her family after her father suffered a paralysis attack two years ago. "It is hard to stand for hours without resting and often face harassment or disrespect from the customers but that's what you do to feed your family." She gets paid only ₹9000 a month despite working hard every day. The biggest challenge, according to her, is the lack of job security. "If someday, mall authorities decide to change the security agency, we are left without a job overnight."

Manoj Shukla, guarding a private university, is suffering from low and late salary payments. Talking about his hardships, Shukla Ji complained about the late payments to security guards. "After working the entire day and night, we get only ₹7500 per month. It is very hard to run the house with this sum as both my children are studying in a private institution, but currently, due to financial problems, my wife and I decided to remove them from there." His eyes got teary while talking about his hardships. Being



Pictures: AAROHI SEEM

a university guard, his responsibilities include intervening in hostel fights, managing drunk students and any medical emergencies. "Despite stationed at the gate, we have to handle all sorts of situations," he added.

People can sleep peacefully knowing that there are people out there keeping watch. Society should acknowledge the contribution of these silent guardians and give them the dignity and respect they deserve. ■



# Dirty streets, chaos on roads. Phew!

*Still, Lucknow hum par fidaa aur hum fida-e-Lucknow?*



**ASHKA JAIN**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

**L**ucknow, the city of Nawabs, is known for its rich culture, historical monuments, and delicious cuisine. From the grand Bara Imambara to the bustling streets of Aminabad, the city carries a charm like no other. However, with increasing urbanisation, maintaining its beauty and heritage has become more important than ever.

Civic sense refers to the duty of citizens to follow social norms, respect public places, and act in ways that benefit society. Without civic sense, issues like littering, traffic jams, and damage to public property increase, reducing the quality of life for everyone. In a growing city like Lucknow, these problems need urgent attention.

One of the biggest problems is improper waste disposal. Many people throw garbage on roads, in public places, and do not follow waste segregation. This leads to pollution, disease, and an unhygienic environment. Areas like Hazratganj, Aminabad, and Gomti Nagar suffer from excessive littering, damaging the city's beauty and health. Waterlogging

during monsoons also worsens because of clogged drains due to plastic waste. Traffic congestion is another serious issue in Lucknow. Many people ignore traffic rules, drive on the wrong side, and park their vehicles irresponsibly, causing jams in areas like Charbagh, Alambagh, and Chowk. Rash driving and encroachments by roadside vendors also contribute to traffic chaos. Accidents and road rage incidents are common, often leading to loss of life.

Many citizens also fail to respect public infrastructure. Historical monuments like Bara Imambara and Rumi Darwaza are often vandalized with graffiti and illegal posters. People even scratch their names on heritage buildings. Such acts not only ruin the city's heritage but also increase maintenance costs for the authorities.

Excessive honking, burning garbage, and loudspeakers in residential areas are major causes of pollution in Lucknow. The city has seen rising air pollution, particularly in industrial areas like Transport Nagar. This leads to respiratory diseases and stress-related problems among

In 2022 Swachh Sarvekshan Lucknow ranked 17<sup>th</sup>, however a year later in 2023 there was a significant drop in its performance as Lucknow's ranking declined to 44<sup>th</sup> place among 4,477 cities

residents. To solve these problems, citizens must actively contribute to keeping the city clean and disciplined. Waste management should be improved by using dustbins, following waste segregation, and participating in cleanliness drives. Authorities should impose strict fines on littering, install more CCTVs, and encourage responsible disposal of garbage. A cleaner city will improve health and quality of life.

Traffic discipline should also be enforced with strict laws, removal of illegal encroachments, and awareness campaigns on safe driving.

Public hygiene and sanitation should be prioritized by constructing more public toilets and ensuring proper maintenance. Citizens must take responsibility for keeping their surroundings clean and reporting violations.

"बूढ़-बूढ़ से घड़ा भरता है" – Every small effort counts. If each citizen takes responsibility, Lucknow can set an example for other cities and continue to shine as a symbol of culture and elegance. ■



## THE MAHA KUMBH

# *Immersed in spirituality, India takes a holy dip*



**SHRUTI KAPOOR**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

In the spiritual heart of India, where rivers converge and cultures flourish, hails the Maha Kumbh that unfolds every twelve years drawing millions of pilgrims from across the world to the sacred waters of the Ganges. The 45 days of the gathering are meant for purification, devotion, and the reaffirmation of one's faith. However, what was once an intimate, personal pilgrimage has now been reshaped into a spectacle tailored for viral content, political propaganda, and commercial interests. The true essence of devotion gets buried under hashtags and political speeches that focus on engagement instead of enlightenment.

A sharp disparity is seen between the online representation and the actual situation on the ground. Through the prism of social media, Maha Kumbh appears to be a well-planned, profoundly spiritual event. But those who are physically present notice the gaps in this magnificent narrative. The real and sincere seekers are confronted with basic problems that are neatly left out of the

social media discourse. Pilgrims must traverse filthy walkways and overflowing trash cans because of the egregious sanitation facilities. Sanjay Agarwal, one of the attendees, grimly remarks, "After this Maha Kumbh, the city will face a Mahamari because the sanitation conditions are very bad." His words resonate deeply as one walks through the congested lanes of Prayagraj, where the scent of devotion is often overpowered by the stench of mismanagement.

Another issue is the Kumbh's commercialisation. Due to the soaring cost of food, many tourists are now forced to pay outrageous sums for even the most basic meals. Although vendors' businesses flourish, they suffer from overcrowding. According to Rajesh Rai, proprietor of a nearby tea stand, "Business is on the boom, but the space where I was living in a tent with my family has been taken away because there are too many people." Rai acknowledges the economic benefits but laments the human cost.

Influencers and digital content creators flood the ghats, keen on capturing the 'perfect' shot of their holy dip rather than experiencing its sacred significance. Politicians use the event as a

stage to promote their agenda. Many pilgrims, instead of divinity, are focused on sharing their adventures online. Live-streamed rituals and selfie marathons have supplanted the silent times of introspection that were once essential components of the pilgrimage. The need to check alerts frequently interrupts a moment of prayer, and devotees often find themselves lost in an ocean of spectacle and chaos.

The spiritual significance of Maha Kumbh lies in its timeless tradition, where faith transcends material concerns. It is meant to be a place where one sheds worldly distractions to focus on inner enlightenment. However, the infiltration of social media has added layers of distortion, where the need for validation and digital presence often takes precedence over genuine devotion. In a world where perception is shaped by online trends, it is crucial to question whether Maha Kumbh is evolving or merely being repackaged for mass consumption. If Maha Kumbh is to retain its true essence, the focus must shift from superficial portrayals back to its roots—a space of purity, faith, and unfiltered devotion, untainted by digital noise. ■