

VIRAASAT

[vee-rah-suht]
(N.) Inheritance,
Heritage, Heirloom

विरासत



In India, every beginning is lit, a lamp, a diya, a flame that calls in memory and blessing. To light it is to invite both ancestors and possibility into the room.



TANVI GARG*Photographer*

Was there a moment while shooting for Viraasat where you felt the theme of inheritance come alive, in a gesture, an object, or a detail?

Inheritance in India lives in the everyday: my Nani's poetry books, my mother's bangles, even a roadside bhutta. It isn't always loud; it's carried in the quiet rituals and love across generations.

VARNAN VERMA*Photographer*

What role do you think visual storytelling plays in carrying forward cultural memory?

Visual storytelling keeps cultural memory alive by making us feel the past, not just recall it. A picture, a film, or even a mural can pull you into its world; suddenly you remember the warmth of a place, the air, the emotions of that moment. It turns memory into something living, something we can step back into.

YAKSHI ARORA*Model*

When you think of inheritance beyond material assets, what's one thing you feel has been passed down to you that shapes who you are today?

What I've inherited is less a possession than a perspective: curiosity, resilience, a deep respect & love for craft, and the quiet rebellion of choosing to shape life on my own terms.

SOUNDARYA THANDAPANI*Photographer*

As someone who works with images, how do you see photography as a way of preserving or challenging what we inherit?

Photography preserves more than moments; it carries the essence of what we inherit. When we tell women's stories through the female gaze, we pass forward not just memory but legacy, ensuring history remembers us in our truth.

RADHIKA SHARMA*Graphic Designer*

Design itself is a kind of inheritance, of typefaces, motifs, histories. What visual inheritance did you draw on while shaping Viraasat?

I drew from the India I grew up in - textures of Indian textiles, organised chaos of family albums, grids of kirana parchis (supermarket receipts), and more. Viraasat stitches these inheritances into a visual language of memory, protest, and play.

VANDITA GARG*Set Stylist*

Every set carries its own atmosphere. For Viraasat, what did you want the space itself to 'inherit' or communicate?

For Viraasat, I wanted the space itself to inherit warmth and memory, to feel like a lived-in archive, where fabrics, objects, and textures quietly communicate the legacies women carry.

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MODEL *Yakshi Arora*
PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Soundarya Thandapani*



SET STYLIST *Vandita Garg*
PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Tanvi Garg*

WHEN I THINK OF INHERITANCE, the first thing that comes to my mind are my mother's saris. Scores of them, precisely folded and stacked and stored. A collection that started before I was born, before she was married, when she was, just as I am now, a young woman, with the world in front of her, and dreams that felt too big.

For centuries, women in India were told inheritance was not for them; not land, not property, not power. Even after the law changed, the silences remained. If women were denied the material, they inherited something else entirely: the weight of expectation, the persistence of ritual, the endurance of memory. This magazine was born from that contradiction. Viraasat is both archive and experiment: a space where law meets lived testimony, where recipes sit alongside reportage, where oral histories speak to policy and protest. It is an attempt to ask not only what we inherit, but also what we want to pass on.

You will find in these pages stories of resilience and quiet rebellion – mango pickles grated into jars that have outlasted empires, a grandmother's gur roti folded into memory, women who resisted being erased by the statistics of 'missing' daughters. You will also find critical essays that challenge the structures of patriarchy, caste, and capitalism that still shape our inheritances today.

Viraasat is not glossy escapism; it is rigor wrapped in poetry, politics woven into aesthetics. It insists that women's legacies – whether bitter, sweet, or burning, deserve to be remembered, interrogated, and celebrated.

This first issue is a beginning, but it is also a continuation of generations of women who kept stories alive when the law did not. My hope is that as you turn these pages, you recognise pieces of your own inheritance too – and imagine what you might choose to pass forward.

*This magazine is also yours, to carry, reshape,
and pass on, as you please.*

*With love, warmth, and gratitude to the women
who came before me,*


Kanu Garg
Editor, Viraasat.



(ANI)
The Kutch district, is a
famous for its deep
rooted social customs. It is
treated as a symbol of
married life. It is a must in
the marriages of Hindu
and Muslims. Discovery of
dye-cotton fabric dating
back to the Indus valley
civilisation shows that the
art of dyeing using mordant
was well known to the
dyers, 5000 years ago. Tie
and dye still continues to
have an important position
in Gujarat. Its done by
Muslim Khatri community.
The work is done by women.
It cost of Rs. 60 to Rs.
60000 or more. The cotton,
pure silk & other clothes are
used for making banchani.
Bhuj, Mandvi, Anjar and
Mundra are the major
center for this craft.



[illegible]

**The iconic ‘*six yards*’ of pure
freedom, elegance, and grace.**

To the untrained eye, it is a mere piece of fabric – an unnecessarily and confusingly long one. But to over 650 million women, in one corner of the world - it is an integral part of their culture and identity.

The arrival of the British Raj back when, fundamentally altered not just the political landscape of the subcontinent, but the very fabric of how women could express themselves. Armed with Victorian sensibilities, they viewed the sari with suspicion and disdain. The bare midriff, the flowing fabric, non-structured tailoring, and more often than not, the absence or near absence of a 'proper' blouse— all of this challenged European norm.

Missionaries handed out petticoats. Colonial wives organised sewing classes. But here's the thing about the sari — it's survived everything history has thrown at it. The Bengali drape emerged in the late 1800s, with more coverage, sure — but still unmistakably ours. But colonialism doesn't just change laws and borders, it crawls into your head and rearranges your thoughts. Soon, upper-class Indian women started believing the British story about their own clothes. The blouse grew longer, tighter, more Victorian. New draping styles emerged that prioritised 'respectability' over the wisdom of centuries. We're told the sari is tradition — but what it really is, is transformation.

Folded, pleated, pinned, or flung — it tells the world who we are, where we come from, and how tightly we're supposed to be held together. Some drapes are about freedom. Others are about control. This is an archive of how fabric becomes identity, and how identity is used — to adorn, to erase, to control.

The irony cuts deep: British women were fighting for the right to show their ankles while forcing Indian women to cover their waists. Liberation for some meant oppression for others. The sari became a site of negotiation — between tradition and modernity, between self and society, between the woman you are and the woman you're allowed to be.

In Kerala, the mundum neriyathum told stories of caste and class that could be read

from across a courtyard. In Maharashtra, the nauvari spoke of warrior queens and working hands. In Tamil Nadu, the way you folded your border could announce your marital status, your village, your lineage. The sari was never just cloth — it was a language, complex and nuanced, that women spoke fluently across the subcontinent. But languages evolve under pressure. They borrow, adapt, and survive.

The modern Indian woman navigates this inheritance daily. She wraps herself in six yards of contradiction — embracing tradition while questioning it, honoring her grandmother's memory while writing her own story. The sari becomes her armor and her vulnerability, her connection to the past and her statement about the future. In boardrooms and kitchen doorways, at weddings and funerals, at protests and celebrations, the sari transforms. Sometimes it's a power suit. Sometimes it's camouflage. Always, it's a choice — even when it feels like there's no choice at all.

This is what they don't tell you about cultural identity: it's not a museum piece, preserved in glass. It's a living thing, breathing and changing and adapting to survive. The sari carries the weight of colonialism and the lightness of liberation, the burden of expectation and the joy of self-expression. It holds space for all of these contradictions because that's what identity does, it holds space for the fullness of human experience.

The sari remembers everything: the hands that wove it, the woman who wore it, the stories it carried from one generation to the next. It remembers colonialism and resistance, tradition and transformation. Most importantly, it remembers that identity isn't fixed — it's fluid, like the fabric itself, able to be draped a thousand different ways.

In the end, that might be the sari's greatest rebellion: *its refusal to be just one thing.*



IMAGE BY *Jacob Varghese*, Studio India



Priyam

SUNDAY
17.07.2022
8PM ONWARDS



ALTER EGO

In Conversation
with *Priyam*

You wear many hats: public policy professional, journalist, Oxford student, and DJ. Do you feel Priyamm the DJ is another version of Priyamvada the policy thinker? How do they inform each other?

There's always been a dichotomy in my life: policy and reporting on one side, DJing on the other. DJing has almost become my alter ego, the side of me that's creative, instinctive, restless. In my personal life, it's never been an issue; everyone's always known me as a DJ. But in professional spaces, it was harder.

When I was at The Print, I started DJing while still a reporter. And newsrooms are particular spaces — if editors hear you're spending nights behind a console, they don't see it as a creative release, they see it as distraction. Journalism, at least in India, is still treated as your entire life. If you're not pulling 24/7 hours, you're seen as unserious. So even though there weren't written rules, there was this unspoken judgment. Later, when I moved into public policy, a philanthropic, research-driven organisation — the environment was entirely different. People were more open, more mission-driven. My manager even came to one of my gigs and loved it. There, my alter ego wasn't seen as a threat; it was seen as a strength. They understood that creativity in one space fuels perspective in another. The more feathers you wear in your cap, the better rounded your worldview.

So in that shift from newsroom to nonprofit, did you also find more space to be yourself?

Yes, absolutely, but it was less about me, and more about them. At *The Print*, I worked with brilliant journalists who genuinely wanted to do good. But their worldview was still: reporting must consume you, everything else is fluff. When I moved into public policy, people valued difference. They saw creativity as an asset, not a distraction. It gave me the confidence to talk about DJing more openly. People found out about my sets because they were at gigs, and instead of suspicion, I got support.

Founding India's first all-women collective like Coven Code, did you aim to shape sound to shape space, especially for women to feel visible in nightlife?

That's actually how I started DJing. There was a two day workshop at the *British Council*, organised by *Wild City* called Women and Electronic Music, where we could learn how to produce music and DJ. Most of us came with no experience, I only knew how to produce a little. While we were learning, we were also just engaging in conver-

**Creativity thrives
in discomfort.
Subcultures emerge
from protest, from
friction, from joy and
pain *interwoven*.**

sations about how it's not that hard to DJ, if you have a general sense of rhythm and a good taste in music. What we lacked was access: equipment, resources, and space. And of course, the entire scene was male-dominated. Behind the console or in front of it, as women, we never felt fully secure. So by the end of those two days, 19 of us said: screw it, let's start our own collective. India's first all-women DJ crew. One of us, Tina, managed Auro in Delhi and gave us the space to practice during the day. Eventually, she booked us to play.

At that time people were experimental. The thing is, the *power that a group of women hold in the nightlife is also vast* because everybody knows that unfortunately, you sell gigs by the number of women who happen to be there. *So we just use that in our favour to subvert that.* The first Coven Code gig was chaos, a stormy night, power flickering, the stage was packed anyway. We weren't polished DJs, we were scrappy, and the room was full of women who finally felt at home in nightlife. Another one of our collective mates, was a photographer as well, she shot the night. *Being photographed in the female gaze, having a female DJ on the console, having other women at the bar in positions of authority, it all created a really beautiful contrast to the usual nightlife setting everyone had known till that point.*

And I feel like India, every field possible, just needs more women who can lead. Coven Code happened as a collective, and it showed people that female DJs are not just token girls. We have music to share. We can read the room, do tricks on the console, and actually play well. The ripple effect should keep going – women, but also marginalised communities, deserve access to these spaces. They deserve to be discovered. That door needs to be kept open constantly.

You are pursuing an MBA from Oxford, how has that global perspective reshaped your understanding of Delhi's nightlife and its politics?

Surprisingly, it's made me appreciate Delhi more. Creativity thrives in discomfort. Subcultures emerge from protest, from friction, from joy and pain interwoven. This game of 'tug and give' reverberates deeply within your experience. In Delhi, nightlife is still dominated by the upper classes, and access is unequal, but because we face so much tension in daily life, there's an edge, a rawness.

We're scrappy. We'll go to absurd lengths to dig up tracks, pirated sites, obscure blogs, hidden archives. I once got introduced to Charanjit Singh through a British DJ I was dating, he had Singh's vinyl. Imagine: an Indian composer from the 80s, unknown to most, he is considered the pioneer of Acid House. Over the years, there have been many composers and producers who have tried to pay subtle nods to world music, for example, the song, *Jiya Lage Na from Talaash by Ravindra Upadhyay and Sona Mohapatra*, has a sick drum and bass background. We didn't realise it then, it was released in 2012. But now, with more exposure, almost an endless access to media, it's so inspiring to recognise the kind of work Indian artists have done and contributed towards. That's the kind of discovery that makes you rethink where innovation really comes from. The UK scene is more established, yes, but Delhi has a spirit of rebellion that I now see as its strength.

You have received (some very well deserved) recognition by Adidas, Elle India, and Resident Advisor. You've even played for Boiler Room. How do you think young Priyam, the one who hadn't dreamt this dream yet, would feel about it?

I think she would be a little blown away. I think it's also like, you know, it's kind of the feeling that, "*oh shit, you can have it all.*" I wanted to be a smart, well educated person, doing well to make my parents proud. But I also have this dream to just be a creative person who is able to



Track for a room of only brown women?

Anything by M.I.A. Always works.

Weirdest thing you've seen in a club bathroom?

Coke-induced diarrhoea. Yes, really.

Your most controversial DJ take?

DJing is collage-making. It's craft. The worst mistake DJs make is taking themselves too seriously. We're sponges for sound, we absorb everything, reshape it with care, send it back for joy.

If patriarchy had a beat?

A dull, plodding 4/4. I'd glitch it out, speed it up, let women dance it into the ground.

What does your silence sound like after a show?

Bliss. Like the runner's high. The songs loop in my head as earworms. I scroll through videos, realise I didn't mess up where I thought I did. That quiet after chaos is one of my favourite feelings.

What's your DJ name if you were playing in the 90s MTV era?

Sticky Loops. Because you're a DJ, so you're playing a lot of loops and then like, you know, they're so good, they just stick in your minds. They're kind of like sticky loops.



channel energy in a way that is acknowledged and recognised. As I've gotten older, I realised I want to be known for more than a degree, or a 9-5 spent fulfilling someone else's dream. I want my own legacy separate from the rat race that was bottle fed to us as being our one big purpose in life. I knew there had to be more than that, and there is!

How has the desi auntie gaze followed you, from family gatherings to gigs?

Thankfully, not so much back home. From my mom, yes, because I couldn't have been a DJ if I wasn't doing something 'respectable'. I mean, by their standards. I had to be doing something meaningful with my career to DJ on the side. That's why I've always had a 'main job'. DJing was always a hobby, and then it became a sidegig, because I started earning from it.

Have you ever played parents ever come out for one of your gigs?

My dad has, and I am so glad that he did, because he passed away almost three years ago. A few years ago I was playing this really nice gig at an art gallery opening. It was a part of the *India Art Fair*. It was a selector's gig and he saw me play and he was just really happy to see me. He was happy to see me do something creative. (Of course, there wasn't any alcohol. I selected a good one, a safe one. Where you can just show that, oh, you know what? This isn't as bad as you thought it was going to be.)

A few years later, he passed away. I was unmarried, and suddenly people started looking at me through that old, suffocating lens: 'She's fatherless, now we should get her married.' It was intrusive, patronising, and I resisted it hard. But grief is heavy. What got me through was DJing. I wasn't able to talk about my emotions, but when I played, I could breathe again. Just a month after he died, I got the chance to open for *Nikki Nair*, a dream gig. I couldn't say no. That night, for the first time since his death, I felt alive. After that, I started living gig to gig. Each one gave me a little hope. DJing became my way to survive.

What's the most feminist thing you've ever done through music?

Playing music by women who don't just entertain, but command the room, a lot of times when rap or other genres can be 'empowering' on paper, but really they are just extremely male gaze led. I try to play music that doesn't sexualise women: Princess Nokia, Rosalia, Audrey Nuna. Music that makes women feel sexy but in control. Not tokenising them, not through the male gaze, but giving them power. I want them to feel like they own the floor.

One time yeah for the Bira Fest there were three of us, Pia, Esther, and we had just founded Coven Code. We ended a set with *Pussy Riot's Don't Be Stupid, Don't Be Dumb*. Maybe people just heard a catchy beat, but for us, it was defiance.

And nightlife itself, has it gotten safer, or just better lit?

(Laughs) Honestly, it depends. The hardest part is your workplace is everyone else's party. If you don't have community, it can wreck your mental health. I've seen both generations – the older DJs who partied like mad, and the younger ones now, who are far more vigilant. Many of my peers treat it like serious work: managing artists, ensuring patrons feel safe, holding boundaries. That shift gives me hope.

memory is



01

Ever since I was a little girl, my mother has loved dressing me up, a trait I've learned and carried into adulthood. Back in the 1980s, when money was tight and she was still in college, my grandmother used to sew and knit clothes for her: skirts, kurtis, sweaters — all lovingly made by hand.

Among them was a long pink wool cardigan with delicate pearl buttons, a piece my mom adored. It was stylish even then, thick and elegant.

When I started college, she passed it to me, sharing its story like a secret. Despite being over 30 years old, it looked brand new.

Since then, I've worn it everywhere — through my college winters, to New Year's parties, and even today, it remains a staple. It's probably the most cherished thing in my wardrobe — a piece stitched with history and held together by love. First my *nani*, then my mom, and now my sister and I, all wrapped in the same pink wool, passing warmth between generations.

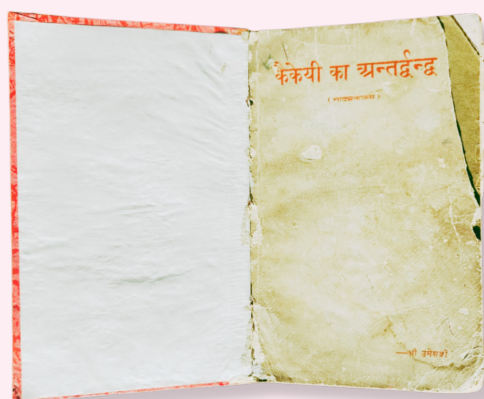


02

My father's coin collection sat in the top drawer of his old desk, under some rubber bands and an emergency torch that never worked. The box was just a scratched-up tin, easy to miss, unless you knew. But inside? Decades of stories, minted in copper, nickel, and silver. He'd hold one up, flip it between his fingers, and say, "This one's from before your time, but maybe not before your fate." I don't know what he meant but I liked how it sounded.

Now that he's gone, I keep the box in my own drawer. I don't add to it, it doesn't feel right — but I open it every now and then. I just listen to the clink of coins, and the lessons I'm still figuring out.

a Talisman



03

I borrowed this book from my mother over 20 years ago, a fraying paperback from the '70s that I had rebound before I dared open it. I'd watched her read it again and again when I was a child, back when life moved slower, and times were simpler.

And then I got married, had two kids of my own, but somehow, my mother's passion for reading and writing stayed with me. It has been over a decade since my mother passed, but it's one of the only things I have left of her. One day, I hope to annotate it, and pass it down to my daughters.

04

There were three of us — me, my twin, and our older sister. We started the album when we were still kids, collecting anything colourful, anything rare, anything with a tiger or a train on it. Our elder sister was the curator — serious, meticulous. My twin and I were chaos.

I'll never forget the day we traded a rare Tasmanian stamp, apparently worth a lot, for a shinier Indian one with a lotus on it. We thought we'd made a jackpot deal. My older sister was livid. "You two traded value for vanity," she said. We were proud anyway.

Some pages still smell like glue. When I flip through it, I see our fingerprints in every corner. It's just paper, I know. But it holds everything we ever were.



My Face is

a *Forgery*

INDIA IS A COUNTRY INHERENTLY rich in colour. Our streets, clothes, food, even our language at times can be quite colourful. And we make absolutely no apologies for it either.

But colour doesn't just live in fabric or festivals, it lives in skin. And the colour of your skin, in India, often decides how you're seen. Or not seen at all. For a nation so steeped in pigment, it has a long-standing obsession with fairness. Skin fairness, to be exact.

Tracing our history can pinpoint exactly how this mindset settled into everyday conversation. India has witnessed settlers, invaders, colonisers – you name it – and all of them brought their own beauty ideals with them. From the Dutch to French, Portuguese, Mughals, and of course, the British.

It seems odd, almost 80 years of independence, and for a country that rejected its colonisers, the beauty standard they left behind still rules the mirror.

The Indian beauty ideal was never indigenous, it was imported. Fairness became a metaphor for worth. The British, in particular, institutionalised colour as caste: lighter-skinned Indians were given proximity to power, while darker ones were labelled as 'black' and confined — quite literally — to 'Black Towns', while Europeans settled in the 'White Towns' of places like Fort St. George.

On colour, colonial conditioning, and the *cost of being seen*.

Of course, this division only found soil because of the pre-existing *caste system* that was rampant and thrived in Indian society. With their origins in Hinduism, caste-based hierarchies had already sorted labour, access, and appearance into a system of purity. When one thinks about it, the colour of one's skin pre-dates scientific explanations and falls flat in the face of the intersectionality of class and caste.

As explained by *Kathy Russell Cole* in *'The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium'*, people from lower castes were subjected to long hours in the sun, performing manual labour. Skin tone became an accidental archive of status, caste, and occupation. Having, as they liked to say, a 'cleaner' complexion was a sign of power, money, education, and ultimately, *status*.

And so, the beauty ideal was never just cosmetic. It was structural.

Ironically, in the West, where paleness was once prized, the opposite shift is underway.

their complexions mentioned in shorthand: f = fair, vf = very fair, vvf = very very fair; almost as if not mentioning it in so many words will somehow hide their blatant colourism.

The entertainment industry is at the helm of this epidemic, with endorsements from the biggest names in the industry to the storylines. The fair girl plays the main lead, the 'bronze' skin achieved via makeup to represent poor/underprivileged characters, and not to mention the ads by fairness cream companies.

Their branding started changing in 2014, when the Advertising Standards Council of India issued guidelines stating "ads should not reinforce negative social stereotyping on the basis of skin color" or "portray people with darker skin [as]...inferior, or unsuccessful in any aspect of life particularly in relation to being attractive to the opposite sex."

So they graduated from using 'fair' to using 'bright' and 'glowing'. If only changing termi-

**"The truth is skin tone in India has never been about pigment alone.
It is a marker of class, caste, history, access, and control, packaged
and sold as personal preference."**

Tanning culture is now aspirational – it symbolises a different kind of status and money – the kind that buy you 'trips to somewhere tropical'. 'Brownness' is marketable, exotic, something to be bought in bottles, booths, and bronzers. South Asian women, meanwhile, remain caught in a dichotomy of voices and gazes: fetishised abroad, discriminated against at home.

It is not just a certain sect of Indian society either, age, generation and socio-economic standing have no grounding in the existence of this bias. In 2015, Neha Mishra published a report, interviewing 20-25 year olds, where 71% of those surveyed, used the word 'fair' when describing their ideal beauty standard. It also revealed that this pressure of appearing fair was far higher for women, as compared to men.

Even today, matrimonial ads describe women as 'wheatish' — a strange, edible euphemism for 'not too dark'. The arranged marriage market includes descriptions of women,

nology would erase the past or rewrite the mindset, or even change the fact that they know, and we know, it's the same product with the same purpose – and a quick google search for 'Indian fairness creams' still pulls these to the top.

As times have progressed, so have skin lightening measures. From applying gram flour and turmeric, to buying fairness creams, bleaches, to now the golden age of Glutathione treatments. Administered through injections or an IV drip, it is the new craze, because no matter what shade you are, two shades lighter is always better. As of 2018, Indians spend nearly \$450 million annually on fairness products.

Our faces continue to be forgeries. A forgery of a beauty standard we have spent centuries replicating – a standard that was never ours. One that was forced down our throats by the same hands that robbed us of much more – a post colonial hangover that we accepted and now propagate as social common sense.







LAUN DRY POLI TICS

WELCOME TO THE POLITICS OF LAUNDRY: the secret economy of time, space, and patience that keeps dupattas crease-free and lehengas smelling like rosewater instead of mothballs.

Look, we all love our Indian wear. The colours, the embroidery, the way a well-fitted lehenga makes you feel like you could start your own Bollywood production company. But can we talk about the *admin* involved? Because nobody warns you that buying a beautiful sari also means signing up for a part-time job as a textile conservator.

THE GREAT DRY CLEANING CONSPIRACY

Every single label says 'dry clean only'. Every. Single. One. Our local dry cleaners know us by name now, which isn't the flex we were going for in life. Your Banarasi silk sari? Dry clean. Your hand-embroidered kurta? Dry clean. The dupatta you wore *once* but is now permanently infused with the scent of mutton biryani? Dry clean. Dry cleaning bills during the wedding season could power the Indian economy. It's that magical place where your favorite kurta goes to die a slow, chemical death while costing you thousands per visit. The dry cleaner looks at your embroidered *anarkali* like it personally offended his ancestors. "This will take three weeks," he announces, as if he's performing open-heart surgery rather than removing a small chutney stain.

SARI FOLDING: A CONTACT SPORT

Folding saris is a two-person job, minimum. You need someone at each end, preferably with engineering degrees and the patience of saints. "Hold it higher. No, not that high. Tighter. Watch the border! THE BORDER!" This performance happens every time. It's like *Poo* from *Kabhi Khushi, Kabhie Gham*, but involves more silk and significantly more judgment. Twenty minutes later, you've created what can generously be called a fabric burrito. Is it technically folded? Yes. Will it stay that way in your cupboard? Absolutely not. But you tried, and that's what matters.

THE LEHENGA AIRING DILEMMA

Every year, we stage a fashion show in our living room. Not for fun – for 'airing'. Apparently, lehengas need to breathe like they're training for a marathon. When mums say, "get some fresh air" to cough, treat your depression, cough, it applies to these beauties as well. So there it is, a skirt that costs more than your rent, spread across three chairs, rotating it every few hours like you're running a very expensive rotisserie service.



IMAGE COURTESY Unsplash



THE IRONING INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

And the ironing – oh, the ironing. Not the casual ‘run an iron over it’ kind. We’re talking steam, starch, precision folds. Each pleat must be pressed individually. The *dupatta* requires seventeen different angles. The *churidar* needs ‘just a light touch’ which somehow takes forty-five minutes to achieve. Dad suggests we just buy a steamer. The silence that follows could power a small town. “Steam?” Mum looks personally affronted. “These clothes have history. They need proper pressing.”

STORAGE WARS

Half our wardrobe space is dedicated to clothes we wear maybe twice a year. Everyday clothes are squeezed into whatever space is left, like refugees in their own closet. The lehengas live in individual garment bags like they’re in witness protection. The saris are rolled on specific hangers that cost more than the hangers for the rest of my wardrobe combined. The blouses have vanished into some parallel dimension where single socks also go to die. Meanwhile, we own fourteen kurtas that are ‘too nice for regular occasions’ but ‘not nice enough for weddings.’ They exist in outfit purgatory, taking up premium real estate while we wear the same two comfortable ones on repeat.

THE HIDDEN EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Here’s the thing nobody mentions: ethnic wear comes with its own emotional baggage. Not just the literal weight of heavily embroidered clothes, but the invisible weight of carrying cultural expectations in your wardrobe. You can’t just throw on a kurta and leave the house. There’s a whole mental checklist: Is this too fancy for a temple? Not fancy enough for the birth of my second cousin twice removed? Is there an overlap in the guest-list, because I’m rewearing this to another wedding? Did I remember to put the moth repellent sachets back



in the cupboard? Your jeans don't come with layers, but that sari your mum gave you? It carries the weight of "this was expensive" and "you need to take care of it properly" and "when will you pass this down to your daughter?" Meanwhile, you're just trying to figure out if you can get away with the same blouse for the third wedding this month.

THE IDENTITY CRISIS

And then there's the guilt. The special-occasion guilt that kicks in when you realize you've spent more on dry cleaning this year than some people spend on their entire wardrobe. The storage guilt when you see how much space these clothes take up compared to how often you actually wear them. But the worst guilt? When you catch yourself thinking, "Maybe I should just stick to Western wear for everything." Because that feels like giving up on something important, even if you can't quite articulate what. It's not really about the clothes, is it? It's about staying connected to something bigger while living a life that doesn't always have space for the ritual and ceremony these outfits demand.

THE STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

The maddest part? We keep buying more. We see a gorgeous chikankari suit online and think, "Yes, I definitely need another high-maintenance relationship in my life." We know it'll need special storage. We know it'll require professional cleaning. We know it'll take up precious closet space and cause us mild anxiety every time we wear it. But it's so pretty. And when you finally wear it, when you've survived the prep work and managed to keep it stain-free for an entire event, there's this moment where you catch yourself in a mirror and think, "Yeah, okay. Worth it." Until the next morning when you're googling 'how to remove haldi stains' at 7 AM and questioning all your life choices. But we do it anyway. Because sometimes the most beautiful things in life come with the most ridiculous instruction manuals. And because maybe, the point isn't efficiency. Maybe the point is that some things are supposed to be complicated and time-consuming. That's what makes them special. And honestly? That's very on-brand for being desi.

**Now chop chop, it's almost wedding season,
you need to go rotate a lehenga.**



In my house, summer doesn't begin with the heat, it begins with the scrape of metal against mango. The sound of my mother grating firm, green Ramkela mangoes is always the first sign that the season has turned. The air fills with that tart, electric smell of raw mango, and everyone knows: it's time to pull out the cottons and linens in our closets.

This pickle - *Heeng ka Achaar* - isn't just food. It's an inheritance. My mother learnt it from her mother, who learnt it from hers, and so on, going back five generations of women. My grandmother was the keeper of the recipe for years. She would grate mangoes while telling my mother stories, her bangles clinking against the grater as if adding their own rhythm to the work. As she grew older and her hands tired, my mother quietly took over. One day, it will be my turn, and my sister's. It is, in every sense, a family heirloom, one that could never be priced.

What makes it special is its rebellion against the ordinary. Most Indian homes make mango pickle with cubes, cooked until softened in oil. But ours? Always raw. Always grated. Every shred of mango clings to the masala, better coated, more intense. The jar sits in the sun for a week, alive and fermenting, carried indoors at night like a child being tucked into bed. By the time it's ready, the flavour is fiery, sharp, and unlike any other achaar you'll find. It can be an acquired taste, but for our family, it commands our dinner plates. It is forever the main character, rather than a supporting side dish.

Over the years, this pickle has travelled with us more than any suitcase has. Packed in glass jars wrapped in old cloth, it's seen more roads and train journeys than most people I know. No *poori* or *matbri* was complete without it, and stuffed parathas felt incomplete without a bright-red dollop on the side. My mother still laughs as she recalls how her and her siblings used to fight for the pickle juice at the bottom of the jar - the spiced, fiery liquid gold that no spoonful of dal could ever match.

The mangoes themselves demand devotion. Mushy ones are useless, soft ones even worse. Only the firmest Ramkela mangoes survive the grater's teeth, their shreds standing strong through a week of salt, heeng, and sun. Choosing them at the market is a small ritual in itself, one that sparks debates and knowing smiles across generations.

Every summer, when the first jar appears on our dining table, it feels like more than food. It feels like a memory, bottled and preserved. A quiet conversation between all the women in my family, past and present, carried forward one spoonful at a time.

Even now, oceans away, the ritual continues. When I moved to London, I carried a big jar of it from home in my luggage, my most precious cargo. No matter what I'm eating, the achaar sits proudly on my plate: folded into omelettes, tucked inside sandwiches, next to *butter paneer*, or even alongside vegetable *jalfrezi*. In every bite, it reminds me of who I come from, and where I will always belong.

हींग का अचार

Asafoetida Pickle

From my mother's hands to our table

Origin: A need for spice centuries ago

Prep Time: As long as the mangoes take to be grated + 15 minutes

Cooking Time: A week under the glorious Sun

Serves: Generations

1kg Raw Mangoes (ideally, Ramkela)

125g Salt

250g Red Chilli Powder (freshly ground – keeps better this way)

15g Heeng (Asafoetida), also freshly ground

Wash, peel, and finely grate the mangoes. Then, in a bowl, mix the salt, chilli powder, and asafoetida. Add this masala to the grated mangoes and mix thoroughly until well combined. Then, transfer the mixture into a clean glass jar and place the jar in the sun for one week, bringing it indoors at night. Stir every other day to ensure even fermentation.

Note:

This achaar has outlasted most human touch and memory. On our table, it is always the first thing to arrive - before *dal*, before *sabzi*, before *roti*. On mine, in London, it still holds that place of honour. Sharp, fiery, comforting, and priceless. A recipe, yes. But more than that, a legacy.



IMAGE BY *Tanvi Garg* and *Vandita Garg*

Motherland is a Moodboard

IMAGE COURTESY *Diya's Grocery Haul*

In between being Afghan, Indian, and being born and raised in the UK, what does 'Motherland' mean to you?

Motherland, to me, I think is the feeling of going back home, that is, to India. The reason being I have never been to Afghanistan ever since, (I would call them terrorists) – the Taliban took over. It was all very conservative, still is, women cover themselves head to toe when leaving the house. They actually killed my great grandfather. After that, my great grandma was really terrified, and did not imagine a life for herself or her family in Afghanistan anymore. She fled to the UK, and gave birth to my grandmother. Since then, **I am the third generation on my mother's side to be born here, and the third to have never seen one half of her identity up close.** I don't think it affected my values at all, I was brought up very traditionally from both sides, being born and raised in the UK did not sever me from my roots. And so, yes, I identify as half Afghan, half Indian – with my Afghan heritage being kept alive through the family and generations here in the UK, and my Indian heritage being groomed from my motherland – India.

Tell me the story behind changing your name from Dilsheen to Diya.

At the time that my mum was pregnant with me, we used to live in Yorkshire, because my dad used to work out of there. I was born in January, it was snowing heavily, and the street to the hospital was completely blocked off, so my dad couldn't make it in time for my birth. Luckily, a fair bit of my mum's family used to live in Yorkshire too at the time, so she wasn't alone. When it came down to filling out my birth certificate, my mum was unconscious due to complications, they had to perform a C-section, and a relative of my mum's looked up traditional Sikh names, to honour my dad's culture and heritage, and pretty much picked the first one she saw – *Dilsheen*. When my mum woke up, and my dad came about, they didn't connect with the name, it's not what they had pictured for me, at all. As I grew up, I adopted many nicknames, *Sheena*, *Sheila*, and then they eventually changed it to *Diya* when I was 8 or 9, so I could adapt to it. It's a name that has deep Afghan heritage, but is also a very popular name in North India – a culmination of both my identities.

If India were a moodboard, what's the first image you'd pin?

I would say that the image that the typical Western movies, and vloggers get wrong, I'd put it right. I think people forget that cities in India, especially where I'm from – Delhi, are like any metro city in the world. Do we have cows on the road, and are we polluted, yes? But it's not all slums, it's not all trash, and poverty. That is the side that gets the views, because that's what the Western audience wants to believe or see. I would pin up the (quite posh) cafes, the speak-easies, the clubs, the (hygienic) street food stalls, night markets and day markets, Lutyens Delhi, the emporium lane at CP – it's a trip around India's art and culture, on a single street. I would pin up Blinkit and Instamart – everything (and I mean everything from an iphone to groceries) delivered to your house in under 8 minutes? The UK could NEVER, But yes, that's what I would pin – the fun, the real, the India of 2025.

Whose version of 'womanhood' did you grow up seeing, and how did that clash or align with yours?

I grew up seeing two completely different versions. My mum's side: Afghan women who were raised to be composed, responsible, always graceful. The kind who lay fruit out on platters like centrepieces, who hosted like it was theatre. And then there was my dad's side: loud, witty Punjabi women who wore sunglasses indoors and spoke their minds. I think I ended up as a bit of both. I carry myself with quiet poise in rooms that require it, and completely unhinged laughter in rooms that don't.

What part of your identity is easiest to explain at a dinner party? What part never makes the cut?

Afghan. I think it's because when it comes to my family – my mum's side is completely present in the UK, whereas my dad's side lives in India, it's just him who moved to London. Sure, I learnt about both cultures growing up, but I was fully immersed and experiencing only one, at an intimate level. Like of course I celebrate Sikh festivals but the festivals on my mum's side have always been a bigger affair – simply because of the proximity of the community. I think I just adopted more of that end of mannerisms, and culture generally. And my father was quite happy for it to happen, in fact, I believe I followed his lead here. He was so immersed in it himself, that most people don't believe he's Indian. My mum's side says he's an honorary Afghan now haha.

What's the most Afghan thing your Indian dad does?

Oh weird coincidence actually, your question reminds me, I work at Levi's, the first shop my dad ever worked at was a Levi's at the Pacific mall in Delhi when he was 22. Call it a weird coincidence or a circle of life moment, I only got to know after I got the job! But yes, coming back to your question, my dad has adopted the language – *Dari*, fluently. Like I mentioned before, people have a hard time believing he's Indian, till he goes off in Punjabi. He switches between the two tongues, and of course, Hindi, and English, so fluidly, and it's a trait he passed down to me, I'm fluent in all 4 languages as well.

How is your dad's side different from your mom's? The space that lies between the two cultures, what does it look like?

I would say, my dad's side is far more chill. I think with India having evolved, and especially for families that have had a global influence in terms of living abroad, the mindset is extremely progressive. My mum's side is definitely more conservative. I think it has a lot to do with the fact that when my great grandmother moved here, she was already very set in her ways, and that's what she passed down to my grandmother. They're very much of the thought process of 'oh what will people say?', you know. When I got my belly button pierced, my maternal grandmother was horrified, she was like "What the hell is that, it's not part of our culture at all", whereas my paternal grandmother sitting back home in India, loved it, she thought it was super cool. My dad's sister's kids, my cousins, they've all got tattoos. My mum's side definitely is not as laid back about these things. But at the end of the day, I see it as checks and balances, one side lets me let loose, and the other makes sure I have my head on straight. It's all love and care, just in different fonts and manifestations.

If your cultural identity was a thali, what would be on it?

There's this Afghan dish called *Aushak*, it's basically dumplings, covered in sauces. It's got this *achaar* (pickle) on the side, and we add pomegranates to it. When you take a bite of a little bit of all the components, the pomegranate seeds burst and the spice hits at the same time – it's an explosion in your mouth. Fruit is a huge part of Afghan cuisine. Before and after any event or party, and even through a regular day, dishing up huge platters of fruit is the norm. So definitely a lot of those. And I'd add *Pani Puri* to it, and even *Dahi Puri*, where you add yoghurt and different sauces and fillings to the puri, and you eat it in the same way as *Pani Puri*, all in one go.

Delhi and London are two very well known cities of the world, what do they both look/feel like to you?

London is second nature. It's muscle memory, knowing when to hop on the right bus without checking the app, which corner shop stays open the latest, and how to cross a street without making eye contact. It's a city that never really surprises me, and maybe that's why I love it. It fits like a lived-in jacket. Delhi, on the other hand, is full-body sensation. It changes the way I walk, the way I hold myself, the words I choose. It demands a different version of me, louder, faster, softer, all at once. It's overwhelming, but also deeply familiar, like a relative you don't see often but immediately fall into rhythm with.

Describe the taste of something Indian you had for the first time as an adult — what was that bite carrying?

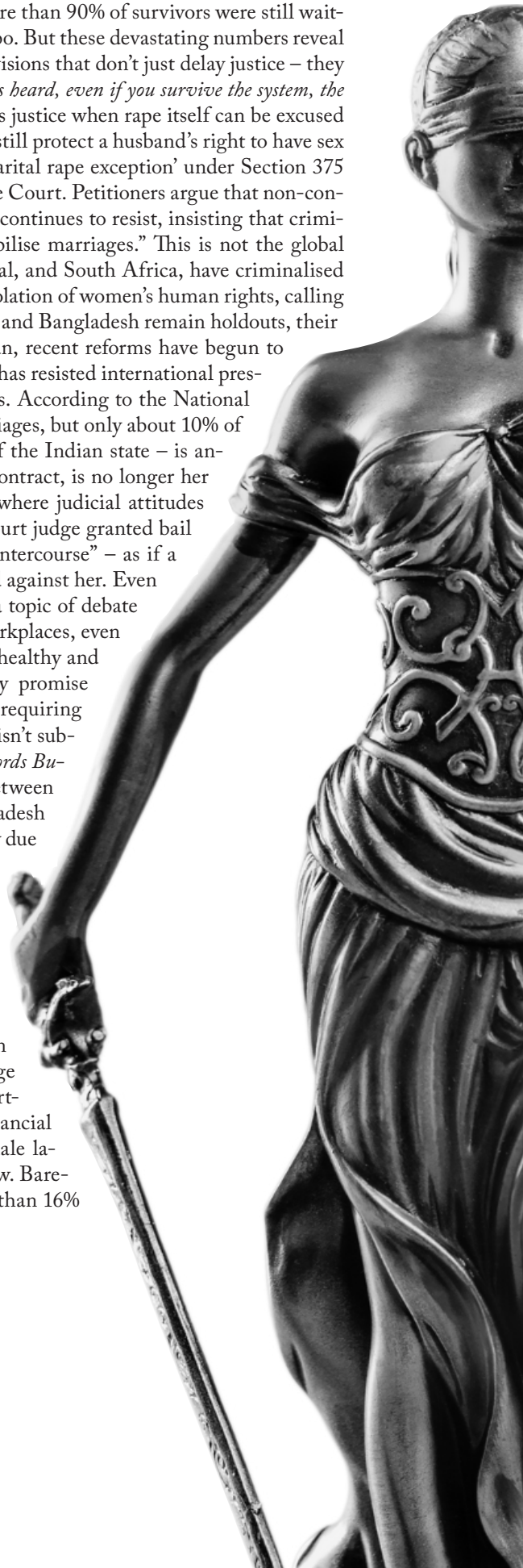
The first time I had real, street-side *Rajma Chawal* in Delhi, not the anglicised, oil-less version we get in the UK, I genuinely stopped speaking for a full minute. It was so deeply comforting, but also so unfamiliar in its intensity. It was like my mouth knew something my mind hadn't caught up to yet.

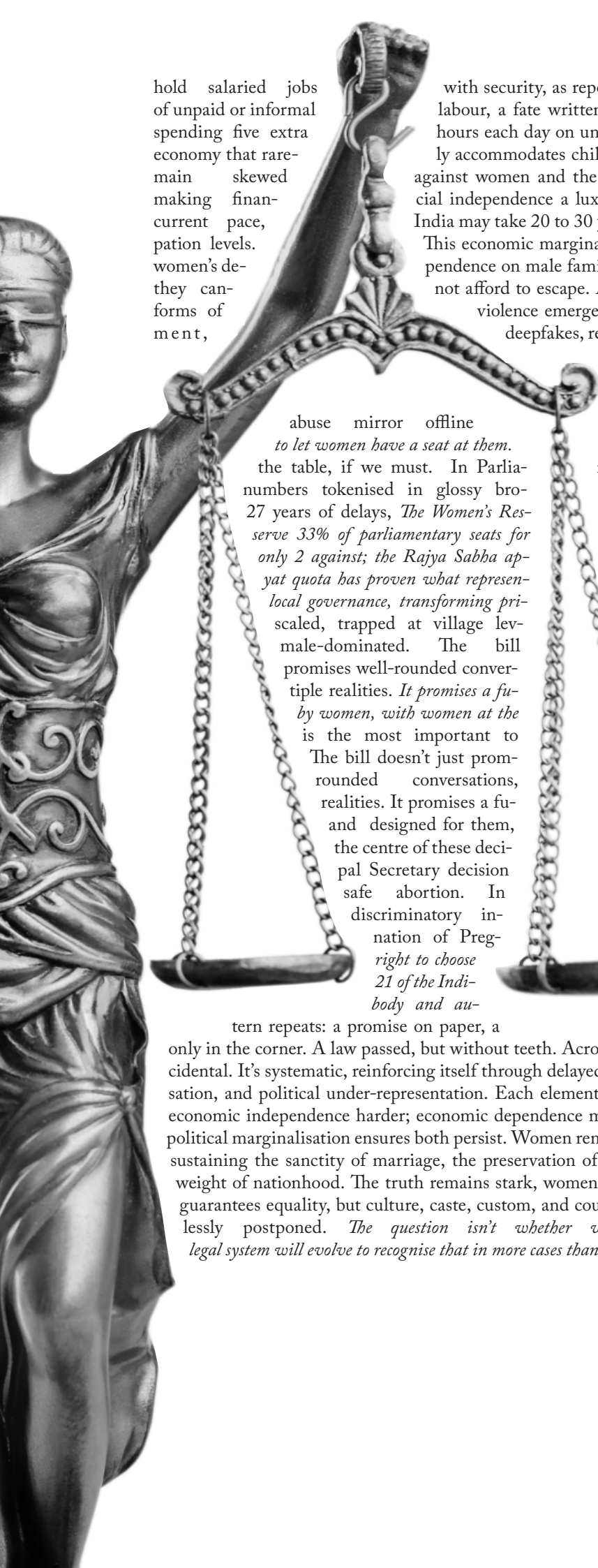




WHEN PRIYA* FINALLY FOUND THE COURAGE TO REPORT HER RAPE IN 2019, she was told her case would be heard 'soon.' Four years later, she's still waiting – one face among thousands trapped in India's labyrinthine legal system that promises justice but delivers abandonment. 'Justice delayed is justice denied' – a line we've seen on placards, in headlines, on social media, so often it risks becoming cliché. But in India, it's more than a protest slogan, it's a brutal statistic. In 2022, there were 198,285 reported rape cases pending trial in India, and only 18,517 had reached verdicts by year's end, according to a report by the non-profit *Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative*. In other words, more than 90% of survivors were still waiting for resolution, their lives on hold, their pain suspended in legal limbo. But these devastating numbers reveal only the surface of a deeper rot. Deep within India's legal code lie provisions that don't just delay justice – they deny women's very existence as autonomous beings. *Even if your case is heard, even if you survive the system, the system wasn't built with you in mind, especially if you're a woman.* What is justice when rape itself can be excused by the law? The *Indian Penal Code and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)* still protect a husband's right to have sex with his wife, where marriage vows override consent entirely. The 'marital rape exception' under Section 375 has been challenged repeatedly and now sits before the Indian Supreme Court. Petitioners argue that non-consensual sex is rape, regardless of the relationship. Yet the government continues to resist, insisting that criminalising marital rape would be "excessively harsh" and might "destabilise marriages." This is not the global norm. Over 100 countries, including the United States, the UK, Nepal, and South Africa, have criminalised marital rape. The UN has repeatedly urged states to recognise it as a violation of women's human rights, calling marital rape a form of gender-based violence. But in South Asia, India and Bangladesh remain holdouts, their laws still tethered to the idea of a wife's 'implied consent'. In Pakistan, recent reforms have begun to shift definitions of rape, but implementation lags. India, in particular, has resisted international pressure, treating marriage as an exception zone where consent evaporates. According to the National Institutes of Health, most sexual violence in India occurs within marriages, but only about 10% of victims report spousal sexual abuse. In 2025, consent – in the eyes of the Indian state – is annulled the moment a woman marries. Her body, subsumed into the contract, is no longer her own. This legal erasure extends beyond bedrooms into courtrooms, where judicial attitudes often mirror societal prejudices. In 2017, a Madhya Pradesh High Court judge granted bail to a rape accused, noting that the victim was "habituated to sexual intercourse" – as if a woman's sexual history could somehow diminish the crime committed against her. Even when women aren't legally owned by husbands, their bodies remain a topic of debate across institutions. From Sabarimala Temple to schools, temples to workplaces, even military academies, courts and customs debate how menstruation – a healthy and natural bodily function – justifies exclusion. The Constitution may promise equality, but the female body is never the norm, always the anomaly requiring special rules, restrictions, and relegation. But sometimes, this erasure isn't subtle – it's loud, violent, and fatal. According to the *National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)*, over 35,000 brides died from dowry-related violence between 2017-2022, an average of nearly 20 deaths every day. In Madhya Pradesh alone, official state figures reveal that at least one woman dies every day due to dowry harassment, with 719 deaths reported in the last 18 months. For Dalit women, this violence is compounded by caste-based brutality. They face not just gender-based violence but caste-based sexual assault – yet legal remedies remain inadequate, conviction rates abysmally low, and social stigma devastating. Even high-profile cases like that of Nikki Bhati in Greater Noida underline the gaps between existing laws, and nothingness, when enforcement fails. The constitution bans dowry, but we all know it thrives, reshaped as 'custom'. And when the violence escalates into death, the headlines are brief, the outrage fleeting, the cycle – unbroken. These legal limitations don't end in courtrooms – they bleed into the economy, creating a vicious cycle where financial dependence reinforces legal vulnerability. India celebrates rising female labour force participation, but peel back the numbers and the cracks show. Barely one in three Indian women is in the workforce, and of those, fewer than 16%

EQUAL





hold salaried jobs of unpaid or informal spending five extra economy that rare-main skewed making finan-current pace, pation levels. women's de-they can-forms of ment,

abuse mirror offline to let women have a seat at them. the table, if we must. In Parlia-numbers tokenised in glossy bro-27 years of delays, *The Women's Res-serve 33% of parliamentary seats for only 2 against; the Rajya Sabha ap-yat quota has proven what represen-local governance, transforming pri-scaled, trapped at village lev-male-dominated. The bill promises well-rounded conver-tiple realities. It promises a fu-by women, with women at the is the most important to The bill doesn't just prom-rounded conversations, realities. It promises a fu-and designed for them, the centre of these deci-pal Secretary decision safe abortion. In discriminatory in-nation of Preg-right to choose 21 of the Indi-body and au-*

tern repeats: a promise on paper, a only in the corner. A law passed, but without teeth. Across labour, law, and legislature, this erasure isn't ac-cidental. It's systematic, reinforcing itself through delayed justice, discriminatory laws, economic marginali-sation, and political under-representation. Each element strengthens the others: legal vulnerability makes economic independence harder; economic dependence makes challenging legal discrimination impossible; political marginalisation ensures both persist. Women remain both indispensable and invisible – their silence sustaining the sanctity of marriage, the preservation of family honour, the comfort of tradition, and the weight of nationhood. The truth remains stark, women in India live in a country where the Constitution guarantees equality, but culture, caste, custom, and court backlog conspire to ensure that equality is end-lessly postponed. *The question isn't whether women deserve justice – it's whether India's legal system will evolve to recognise that in more cases than not, justice is still delayed, it is still denied.*

with security, as reported by *Reuters*. The rest are trapped in the churn labour, a fate written not only by policy but by patriarchy. A woman hours each day on unpaid domestic work has little left to offer a formal ly accommodates childcare, safety, or flexible hours. Property rights re-against women and the gender pay gap in formal sectors reaches 19% –cial independence a luxury few can afford. Economists warn that at the India may take 20 to 30 years, or even longer, to match G20 female partici-This economic marginalisation isn't accidental – it's systemic, reinforcing pendence on male family members and making them vulnerable to abuse not afford to escape. As women increasingly occupy digital spaces, new violence emerge that the law struggles to address. Online harass-deepfakes, revenge porn, and cyber-stalking target women with impunity. The IT Act offers some protections, but implementation remains woeful, and social atti-tudes that blame victims for “provoking” online prejudices. *As a rule, most tables were not designed*

And yet, we fight, we hope. We drag our chair to ment, women remain just 14% of lawmakers, their chures about the ‘world’s largest democracy.’ After ervation Bill finally passed in 2023, promising to re-women. The Lok Sabha voted 454 in favour with proved it unanimously. At the grassroots, the pancha-tation can do – over 700,000 women now serve in orities and policies. Yet this lesson remains un-els while national power structures remain doesn't just promise more representation – it sations, multiple perspectives, voicing of mul-ture where decisions about women are designed centre. Representation, at the end of the day, bring about even a semblance of change. ise more representation – it promises well multiple perspectives, voicing of multiple ture where decisions are taken for women by women, and while keeping them at sions. The Supreme Court's *X v Princi*-affirmed unmarried women's right to 2022, The court rejected a narrow, terpretation of the Medical Termi-nancy Act, asserting that *a woman's is a fundamental right under Article an Constitution and extends to her tonomous decision-making*. The pat-

delay in practice. A seat at the table, but

EXCEPT



Group Chat Governance

Arjun, Dad, Himesh Tauji, Kartik Cha...



Kartik Chacha

➡ Forwarded many times

"In a precedent-setting judgment, India's Supreme Court has significantly increased permanent alimony for a divorced but unmarried wife from ₹20,000 to ₹50,000 per month, along with a 5% hike every two years. The court also upheld the transfer of her ex-husband's house to her name.



This marks a 2.5x increase over the Calcutta High Court's 2016 award of ₹20,000 monthly, revised every three years."



Dad

Great. The sanctity of marriage and everything our vows mean, has been reduced to absolutely nothing.



Tanvi Didi

But how do alimony rights and the 'sanctity of a marriage' coincide, or overlap in any way?



Dad

I don't understand how every relationship is reduced to money these days. Your generation views everything as a transaction.



Kartik Chacha

This is just the newest fad. Another example of western influence on our culture. Our generation didn't even think of divorcing, let alone women seeking alimony. Now just wait and see how the cases of *honey trapping* shoot up.

This is such a distorted view to have. You're arguing that the law will allow women to exploit men. Granted, there might be instances when this does happen. But you cannot generalise these situations, they are few and far in between. The law protects women.



Himesh Tauji

How is this protection? It's stealing. Once divorced, the woman has no right to anything from the man. She decided to walk away. If you're going separate ways, there should be no strings attached!





Group Chat Governance

Arjun, Dad, Himesh Tauji, Kartik Cha...



Mom

And how are you assuming that it was her choice? What if he divorced her? In fact what if she had no choice at all? What if he was abusive? Demanded dowry? Cheated? It's not like these are uncommon occurrences.

Tanvi Didi

Moreover, the law gives women the freedom and security to make a choice in the first place. You remember what happened with Richa? My friend? Her husband and in-laws didn't allow her to work after marriage. That wasn't her choice, it was forced upon her. And when she decided that her husband's cheating had gone a step too far, for the 6th time btw (!!!) She decided to leave. She had no financial security, no savings, because of the rules imposed upon her. It is only because of alimony laws that she was able to leave. That money not only gave her some time to stand on her feet again, it gave her the independence to choose herself.



Himesh Tauji

Oh please. All this feminist talk is messing with people's minds. Poor chap, his hard earned money will be spent on shopping sprees and luxuries, while he struggles to pay rent.

Taarini Maasi

Kartik Chacha

This is just the newest fad. Another example of western influence on our culture. Our generation didn't even think of divorcing, let alone women seeking alimony. Now just wait and see how the cases of *honey trapping* shoot up.

Our generation didn't divorce because women never could leave. The guilt and shame divorce brought with it, the burden women were viewed as. So easy to say alimony is a 'fad', while dowry continues to be exchanged. Women still 'sold' essentially, and nobody bats an eye, just rebrands it as 'gifts'.



Mom

Completely agreed. Our neighbours, the Malhotras? We attended their son's wedding just last week. There was some sort of hold up with the baraat procession, they didn't enter the venue for hours. Asked around and found out that they refused to go ahead with the wedding till they got the Audi, which had been 'negotiated' earlier with the bride's family.





Group Chat Governance

Arjun, Dad, Himesh Tauji, Kartik Cha...



Arjun

Chiming in, but also, I completely disagree with this whole perspective of alimony being 'stealing' or 'free money'. What about the free labour women endure and provide, and have been providing since time immemorial?



So true!!!! The feminist movement has equipped and empowered women to work, be financially independent, own assets, be her own person. But now, men (and women) alike, find it so easy to forget about the hidden domestic labour that women take up within the house as well, It's like having 2 full time jobs!

Dad

That's ridiculous! How does that make any sense, women have always been in charge of running the house. It's the way things are.



Okay, let me ask you, when you get back home from work, what do you do?

Himesh Tauji

A chilled beer and feet up



Dad

Hahahahah you know it!



And mom? She gets home, cooks, does the laundry, cleans, god knows what else. There's no 'beer and feet up' for her till she sleeps at 11pm, only to wake up and do it all over again at 5 the next morning

Kartik Chacha

Sounds like you need to help her out more



Mom

Sounds like the men of the house need to recognise that things don't just get 'magically done'. Your socks are in your drawer because we took them out of your shoes, washed them, dried them, folded them, and then put them away. After getting home at the same time as you from our '9-5s'!





Group Chat Governance

Arjun, Dad, Himesh Tauji, Kartik Cha...



Arjun

Himesh Tauji

Oh please. All this feminist talk is messing with people's minds. Poor chap, his hard earned money will be spent on shopping sprees and luxuries, while he struggles to pay rent.

Oh and respectfully, 50,000 a month is not going to buy you any luxuries. In today's economy? That's barely enough for monthly expenses, trust me. I live alone, and get paid more than that, I know how it can be.



Tanvi Didi

All this ruling does, and the precedent that it sets is, protecting women from detrimental, harmful, and potentially dangerous environments. And even in the most civil cases, it only becomes a tool to preserve lifestyle stability rather than a handout to barely cover subsistence. It fundamentally repositions spousal support as a continuity of living, not compensation for divorce.

Quick addition, the Supreme Court also (quite recently in July 2025) ruled that divorced Muslim women can seek alimony from their ex-husbands under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Code. While of course, in India, Muslims are governed by the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, this judgement observes that Muslim women can seek relief under the secular law as well. Do you see how much this will change? The actual lives these laws will save?



Dad

Okay okay, this debate will never end. Courts will do what they want anyway. Let's just agree to disagree. Did you all see India's batting lineup for tomorrow's match? THIS is what we should be worrying about.

The thing about family group chats is that they're not trivial at all. They're the parliament of our living rooms, the newsroom of our anxieties, the courtroom of our judgements. Power plays out here in the same way it does 'out there.' In fact it's more dangerous in a way, this mentality, this behaviour, lives with us, in our living rooms and back yards.

Except here, the Constitution is a forward, the opposition is always 'too emotional', and patriarchy never logs out





In Sarita's home, winter didn't begin with the fog or the crackle of coal fires. It began with the smell of melting jaggery. Her Nani would sit cross-legged on the kitchen floor in Meerut, breaking the dark, sticky blocks of gur into pieces, her hands gleaming with its sweetness. The air filled with a caramel warmth that seeped into every corner of the house. For Sarita, that smell was winter's first announcement, more reliable than any calendar.

The gur roti was never just food. It was her Nani's way of making sure that even in the leanest months, sweetness was never absent from the table. Wheat flour, ghee, fennel seeds, and gur, that was all it took. Rolled into soft discs and cooked on the tawa until golden, each roti arrived at the table glistening, as if it carried its own little sun. "It will fill your stomach, but more importantly, it will keep your heart warm," Nani always said, sliding one onto Sarita's plate with a dollop of white butter.

There was nothing lavish about it, yet it tasted like celebration. In a household where sugar was rationed,

jaggery became treasure. Sarita remembers her cousins sneaking into the kitchen, pinching hot pieces straight from the stack, their laughter echoing louder than the whirr of the ceiling fan. Her Nani pretended not to see, but the smile in her eyes always gave her away.

Another memory clings to her most vividly: exam mornings. While other children carried lucky pens or amulets, Sarita carried the comfort of gur roti in her stomach. Her Nani insisted it gave strength to the mind and steadiness to the hand. Sarita still swears it wasn't just the preparation, but the faith folded into each bite that carried her through those anxious hours.

Now, at 56, she carries that memory forward. Every time the air turns cold in Delhi, she makes gur roti – for her children, yes, but also for herself, to summon the warmth of her grandmother's courtyard. The recipe is unchanged, but its meaning has grown richer: a reminder that women's inheritances are often woven through food, quiet, sustaining, resilient.

A recipe, yes. But also a legacy folded into dough, rolled thin, and sweetened with memory.

नानी की गुड़ रोटी

Grandma's Jaggery Crepe

The kind of sweetness that lingers long after the last bite

Origin: Winters in Meerut

Prep Time: As long as it takes to break the jaggery + 20 minutes

Cooking Time: One turn of the tawa

Serves: Hungry hands, anxious students, whole families

1 Cup Wheat Flour

2 TBSP Grated Jaggery (Gur)

A pinch of Cardamom

Ghee, for cooking

Melt the jaggery in warm water until it turns golden and smooth. Use this sweetened water to knead your flour into a soft dough – no sugar, just memory. Roll into rotis, cook on a hot tawa, and brush with ghee till golden spots appear.

Note:

Soft, fragrant, and just a little sticky – this roti isn't just food. It's nani's hands, and a childhood wrapped in warmth.

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW HAS ALWAYS HAD A FLAIR FOR CRAFT, embroidery, handwork, design, but more than her creations, it's her stories that stitch everything together. She loves talking about where each piece came from: the inspiration, for what season, the materials and techniques used, and we love listening to her.

Professionally, I specialise in crafts and textiles, and she trusts me to preserve her creations and the tales they carry. Among her many handmade treasures, one piece stands out: a tablecloth embroidered with impossibly fine black thread. Only, it wasn't thread. "It's hair," she said one day, smiling as she handed it to me. "Nani's hair." The tablecloth is achromatic – white satin cloth, black embroidery. Classic and sharp. The kind of textile that holds weight just by being looked at. But once I knew what it was made of, it became something else entirely.

She told me the story. It was 1958. She had just finished her bachelor's degree and was waiting to begin her masters. One afternoon, she saw a friend embroidering delicately, with a 'hair like' thread. She was struck with inspiration. Her mother had long, shiny black hair, just like she did, and an idea sparked in her mind. She purchased a length of satin (fabric #892, which she still remembers), a premium piece at ₹2.50 per yard at a time when satin cost only ₹1.50. She began collecting strands of her mother's hair as she combed it, sorting out the longest, thickest, and finest ones. However, her shedded hair wasn't always suitable, so, interestingly, she asked her mother every day for a fresh strand of hair. And each day, *Nani* smiled, plucked one strand out and gave it to her.

With spare hours between studies and household work, she set to work embroidering. There were challenges. Since the hair was very fine, the stitches had to be tiny. No knots could be tied, so the ends had to be locked in with precision, over and over again in the same spot. Her father, who ran a photo studio, gave her ultra-fine needles usually reserved for retouching negatives.

It took nearly a year, but she was determined to do something different. She edged the tablecloth with complementary lace and used a recurring motif she'd worked on for other handmade pieces.

**"It's hair,"
she said one day,
smiling as she
handed it to me.
"Nani's hair."**

Cloth and *Hairlooms*

My mother-in-law,
the maker, the muse,
the memory-keeper.



IMAGE BY *Anjali Patni*



**The artistic front
and the intricate back of
the embroidered motifs**



IMAGES BY *Anjali Patni*

**My grandmother,
the original donor of threads,
unknowingly weaving herself
into cloth.**



Most family members didn't notice the embroidery until one newly married cousin, curious and interested, asked her to create something for her. She was happy to do so, but thought it would be boring to use the same color scheme again. After thinking for a while, she suddenly remembered that her grandmother had golden-white hair.

So, for her next piece, she decided to make handkerchiefs using her grandmother's blonde hair on black crepe fabric, which she then gifted to her brother and sister. She found the idea of hair embroidery so interesting that she also began to think more deeply about the colour palette.

Whenever she tells the story of the hair-embroidered table cloth, her face lights up. Unfortunately, the table cloth that she carried with her trousseau wasn't noticed, not championed by her in-laws after her marriage. However,

over time, friends began cover and admire it with great surprise. To her heart contains her and she can't get through it. In a textile I was teaching, a student asked if hair could

for her next piece, she decided to make handkerchiefs using her grandmother's blonde hair on black crepe fabric

relatives and to notice the mired it with. It is very close because it mother's hair, feel her love. Years later, design class ing, a student if human be used as

a textile fibre. I told them about the Dutch designer Zsafia Kollar, who creates garments using human hair – and then I pulled out my mother-in-law's tablecloth.

The room went silent. The students stared. Some stitches had worn away over time, scorched slightly by an old iron, but the work remained intact. So did the awe. This cloth is not just a story of technique. It's a relic of love, care, and innovation. Every thread, literally and figuratively, carries emotion, patience, and a quiet defiance to create something truly unique.

What's more, it became a conversation starter in my classrooms, creating a tangible link between generations, and an example of how materials and memories intertwine. Though time and use have faded parts of the cloth, its essence remains untouched with a story worth retelling, especially in today's world of fast fashion and fleeting trends.

Our Viraasat, I believe, is not just what we receive but also what we choose to preserve, celebrate, and pass forward with pride.

CONGRATULATIONS IT'S NOT A GIRL

IN THE WEST, WOMEN OUT-
NUMBER MEN BY AT LEAST 3%.
IN INDIA, THERE ARE NEARLY
8% MORE MEN THAN WOMEN.

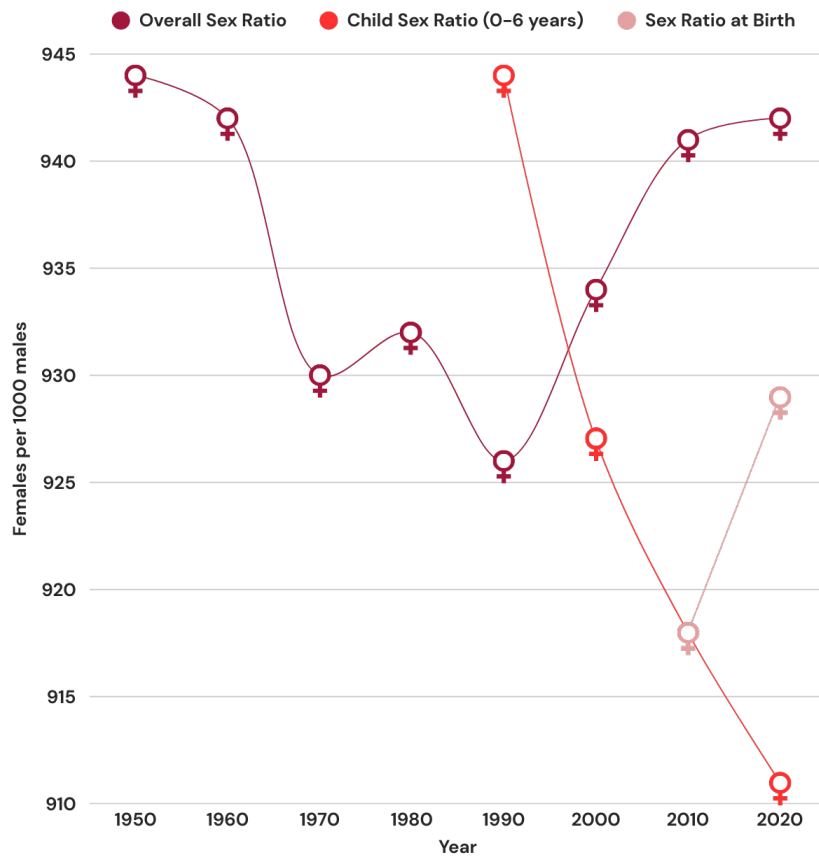
INDIA RANKED 6TH IN THE
WORLD FOR SKEWED SEX RA-
TIO AT BIRTH IN 2022; BEHIND
AZERBAIJAN, CHINA, ARMENIA,
VIETNAM, AND ALBANIA.

In 1990, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen called India “a country of missing women,” when the gender ratio had hit rock bottom at 927 women for every 1,000 men. He estimated 37 million had vanished due to sex-selective practices and neglect.

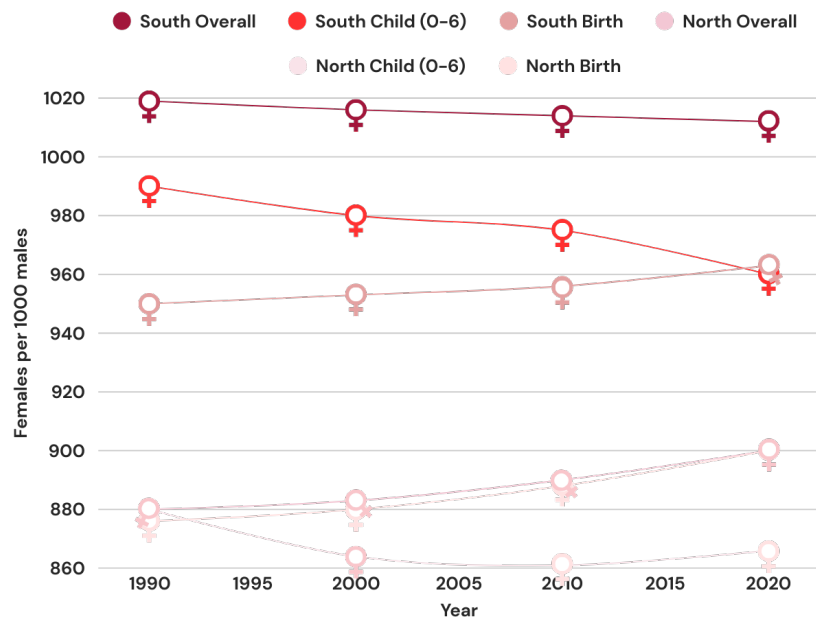
Recent numbers confirm the crisis. The UNFPA reported a national sex ratio of 943 women per 1,000 men in 2021. For children under six, the 2011 census counted only 914 girls per 1,000 boys, with northern states falling below 850. At present, Haryana remains the worst performer at 861, with Delhi close at 866. A 2018 Lancet study estimates nearly 239,000 girls under five die every year from neglect or prejudice. Over the last two decades, more than 9 million girls have ‘disappeared’ through female foeticide.

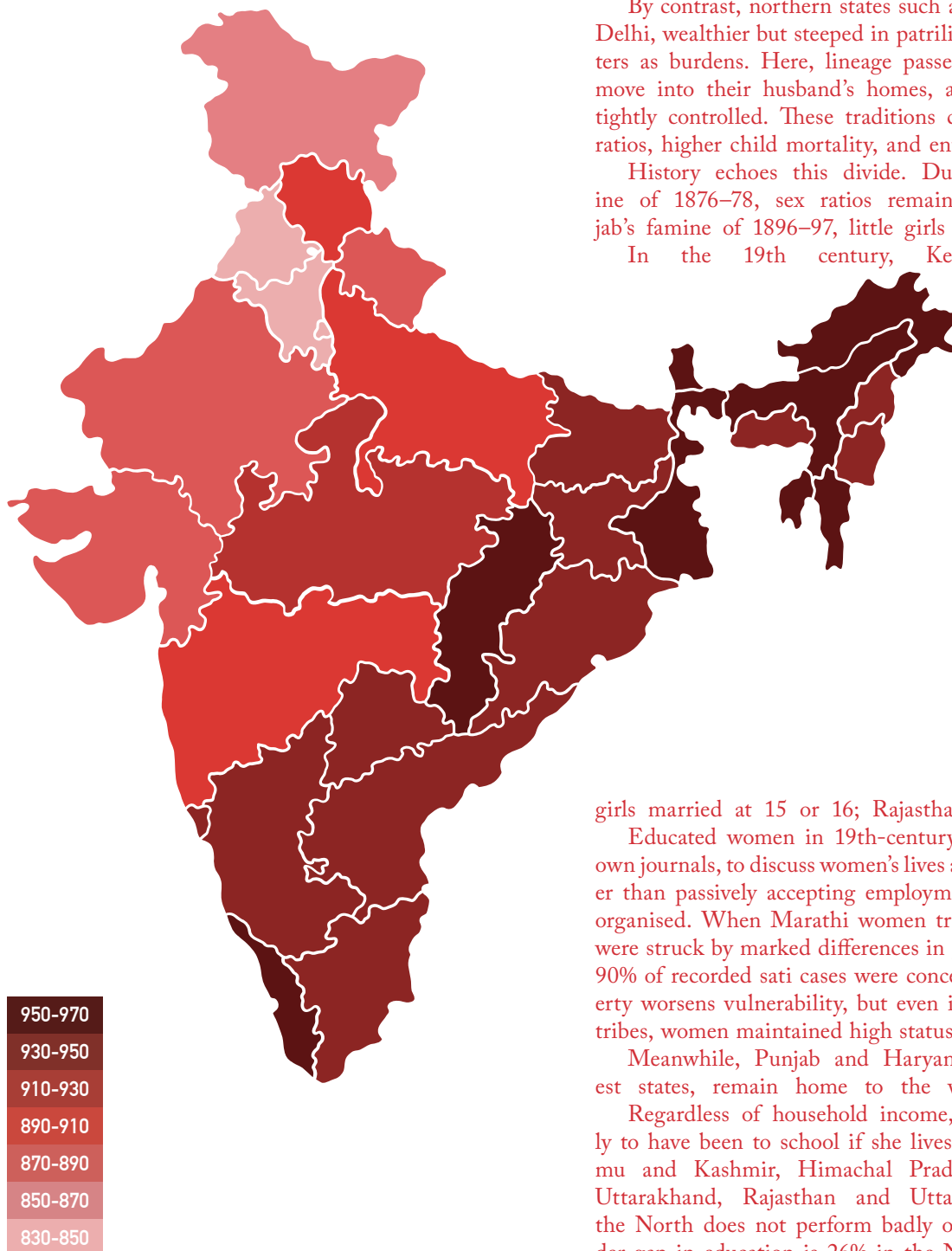
Despite laws, enforcement is weak. Since the 1990s, more than 16 million illegal ultrasounds have been performed, enabling sex-selective abortions. In states like Haryana, women are also sold Sex Selection Drugs (SSDs) for as little as \$3; studies link them to 20% of stillbirths, with up to 60% of mothers of first-born daughters using them in hopes of a son.

India-Wide Sex Ratios (1951-2021)



North vs South India Sex Ratios (1991-2021)





The imbalance is not evenly spread across India. Southern and North-Eastern women are far more likely to survive infancy, stay in school, marry later, and retain greater control over assets and mobility. In matrilineal communities, such as parts of Kerala, female children are valued more equally.

By contrast, northern states such as Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi, wealthier but steeped in patrilineal kinship, see daughters as burdens. Here, lineage passes through men, women move into their husband's homes, and female autonomy is tightly controlled. These traditions correlate with lower sex ratios, higher child mortality, and entrenched son preference.

History echoes this divide. During the Madras famine of 1876–78, sex ratios remained even, but in Punjab's famine of 1896–97, little girls died disproportionately.

In the 19th century, Kerala and Karnataka

girls married at 15 or 16; Rajasthan lagged by a century.

Educated women in 19th-century Maharashtra ran their own journals, to discuss women's lives and social reforms. Rather than passively accepting employment discrimination, they organised. When Marathi women travelled to Calcutta they were struck by marked differences in gender relations, notably 90% of recorded sati cases were concentrated in Bengal. Poverty worsens vulnerability, but even in poorer North-Eastern tribes, women maintained high status, mobility, and visibility.

Meanwhile, Punjab and Haryana, among India's richest states, remain home to the worst child sex ratios.

Regardless of household income, a woman is less likely to have been to school if she lives in the North (i.e. Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh). Nowadays the North does not perform badly on literacy. But the gender gap in education is 26% in the North, 9% in the South.

At the heart lies cultural logic: sons are believed to carry on family lineage, care for parents in old age, and bring dowries *into* the household. Daughters, by contrast, take wealth *away* and leave for their husband's homes.

Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women

Named one of the 10 best films of 2003 by Time magazine. It tells a chilling tale of female infanticide committed by a father, in a truly grotesque, yet factually accurate, manner.

Kokh Me Katl

A report by two Indian TV journalists on 100 doctors, in both private and government hospitals, who were prepared to perform illegal terminations of girl foetuses. In the grainy TV pictures, doctors from four states and 36 cities talked about the process with chilling nonchalance. The average cost of the procedure was a few thousand rupees (around £30).

Government campaigns like **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** (2015) have tried to stem the tide. In its first 17 months, authorities carried out 35 raids against SSD peddlers, resulting in only two convictions. Over 300 complaints about illegal ultrasounds yielded similarly weak results.

Son Rise

A 2019 Indian documentary directed and produced by Vibha Bakshi. Filmed in Haryana, it highlights bride trafficking/buying – a reality created for many as an indirect consequence of rampant gender-selective abortions resulting in the nearly complete absence of girls in the state's villages. While shedding light on these prevalent issues, the film focuses on ordinary men from patriarchal rural India who have emerged as gender rights heroes. The film was unveiled in February 2019 at Royal Opera House (Mumbai) by the United Nations Under-Secretary and is now showcased as part of United Nations' global HeForShe movement.

“There are *monsters* among us

“My uncle and aunt aborted several female foetuses before having a second child who is a boy. They are both educated upper middle class folks who live in tier 1 cities. No one will ever know the truth about them. People who commit female foeticide are there everywhere in society, from all walks of life and socio-economic status. They live among us”.

- ANON, 23, MUMBAI

“A cousin had his wife abort multiple (6 at least) times, until it was a boy. The wife suffered terribly and even after 10 years has mental and physical scars.”

- ANON, 35, HYDERABAD

“One of my school friend’s mother had 3 abortions after her and her sister were born because the family desperately wanted an ‘heir’. She told us how the family performed a ‘pooja’ on their alleged ‘death anniversaries’ and even observed an annual period of mourning for them. I couldn’t stop thinking: what was the point? What did they want to prove?”

- ANON, 27, DELHI

“I am a woman, and have a younger sister, and my parents were indirectly told to have a son. Unconfirmed, but maybe they did try for a son. I do know that they later realised that raising so many kids is tough and there are women in my extended family who did end up becoming financially independent. Made them realise that maybe it doesn't matter if they don't have a son.”

- ANON, 32, LONDON

and they look like *us*”

IMAGE BY *Yogendra Singh*, Unsplash



CALL IT

RAGE

CALL IT

आवाज़

If there was ever a **voice**,
Before I ever learnt to use it,
Silent whispers:
“Oh what a **burden** to bear,

it was mine
I **was** a strain on my bloodline
the second, and a daughter once more
what a brunt to bore.”

If there was
Before I was turned
Before I was blessing
Before there was **less** of me,

ever a voice, it was mine
into a **goddess** with her own shrine
things I didn't understand **and** giants I didn't know
and yet, still, somehow more

If there was ever a
It **sounded** like
It sounded **like** curiosity,
Before I ever knew the words:

voice, **it** was mine
innocence and wonder, intertwined
wit, and a softness so sweet
“**Silence**. Timid. Discreet.”

If
And she
To understand
To

there was ever a voice, **it** was mine
asked questions, asked ‘why’, asked for a sign
colours, how they can bleed, and so will I
understand that I will have to kill my shame, or with it, die

If there was ever
Before
Before I learnt
Before touches

a voice, it was **mine**
it drowned, in gurgle of moans and whines
my **pleasure** was a sin
burned my skin

If there was ever a voice, it
And it didn't realise how
How **every** turn, every
How **time** and again, she will have to get back up,

was mine
much it had yet to **fight**
gaze, was plotting against it
wiping spit, and teeth gritted

There has always been a **voice**, and it will
She
Pressed **between** pages and

forever more be mine
resides in the hardened anchor of my spine
passed down the line

And I've started
A **tune** that returns at its

humming what they tried to erase
own strange pace

It **echoes** in rooms where I take up
It spills **when** I question
It's stitched into
And

space
without having to brace
silences I no longer keep
rocks me to **rest** when this world serves up grief

The sound
Refuses to follow suit,
It chants over and over:
So

of me, my **soul** in soundwaves
follow into an early grave
"persist, resist, fight." **another** day
when she speaks, even the **silence** behaves.

My

Sister's

Keeper

MODELS *Yakshi Arora* and *Kanu Garg*
PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Soundarya Thandapani*

Once, I wrapped my friend's phone in my scarf to muffle my voice, and **pretended to be her on a call with her dad** while she kissed her boyfriend goodbye. I said "yes papa" at least eight times and even threw in a "I'm just at Divya's house revising chemistry." We were in fact... in line for pani puri.

My **roommate FaceTimed my mom for 2 days** to show her my hostel bed, perfectly made, books stacked neatly. Meanwhile, I was six hours away on a weekend trip to Pondicherry, hungover, eating Maggi on the beach. She even used the quintessential "Aunty, she just went to brush her teeth, I'll tell her to call!"

We **told her parents we were working** on a school project together. We even made an actual PowerPoint with fake pie charts about 'urban waste segregation.' She was out at a Holi party, getting beer poured on her head by a boy named Tarun.

One time, **I lied to three different parents** on the same night to cover for all three of us girls. I told one aunty her daughter was with my cousin, told my cousin's mom she was with me, and told my mom I was with them. I've never felt more powerful. Or panicked.

Her dad called me when she didn't pick up, so **I pretended I was crying** about a fake fight with her. I said, "She's not with me anymore...she left angrily after I said something about her makeup." He sighed and said, "She gets too emotional." Meanwhile, she was out watching Rocky aur Raani ki Prem Kahani with her Hinge date.

We **baked an actual cake to justify a sleepover** plan. That night, she snuck out from my balcony in borrowed jeans to meet her girlfriend. When she came back, we sat eating chocolate cake at 3am and it honestly tasted pretty good for being made by two girls who had never baked in their lives.

I once got a call from a friend, who was on a date with her boyfriend, asking me to send her a picture of myself, in my room, and to **make it look like she took it**, so she could send it to her mom as proof. I had my sister take the picture – super casual, sitting in my pajamas on my bed, putting my hair up. It totally worked.

I got my period and didn't want to go for a family event, but my mom said I couldn't skip it unless I was really unwell. My sister **put on a full act**, said I was vomiting and fainted twice, and that she'd take care of me. She even rubbed Vicks under my eyes to make it look like I had been crying. Honestly, iconic.



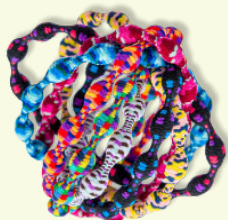
HALF-EATEN PERK

For when life feels like a Sabyasachi ad and a slap at the same time.



HAJMOLA

Childhood, cravings, and digestive support, it's a three in one.



RUBBER BAND CHAIN (5-7 INTERTWINED)

She only needs one, but they breed like conspiracy theories in her purse.

HALF-FULL BOTTLE OF ITAR

From a family trip to Lucknow or gifted. Overpowering. Unlabelled. Unforgettable.



TIDE PEN

For erasing dal spills, chai spills, or traces of someone else's opinion.



CLAW CLIP

One clipped onto the bag, one inside. Gotta put her hair up if she's going to catch an auto.



IPILL

Tucked under receipts and sanitary pads (ironic). Taken in silence, chased with chai.



AYURVEDIC PILL STRIPS FOR BLOATING / GLOWING / 'FEMALE BALANCE'

Endorsed by a YouTube auntie with 2M followers and a Tulsi plant.



VICKS INHALER

For headaches, heartbreaks, and hangovers. A desi girl's answer to everything.



MEDS (LOOSE IN AN ALTOIDS TIN)

For migraines. For period cramps. For overstaying guests. Same dosage, different pain.



AN OLD METRO CARD (with ₹3.50 balance)

She keeps it. Not for the money, but because it once got her home when her phone died. That makes it a relic.

THEY SAY THE EYE IS THE WINDOW TO A PERSON'S SOUL: "the eyes chico, they never lie." But for a woman? Her truth lies in the bottom of her bag, and not the one she breaks out for a dinner with the girls, but the — 'stained from uncapped lipsticks, overspilling from all the necessities and must-haves and secrets, worn and torn' bag. The one that has seen far too much, and survived every version of the woman that stands before you, while she wears it. Between bindis and earphones, an Indian woman's bag carries pure class and survival kits for weathering her everyday life.



PROTECTION
Taser. Pepper spray. That's it. Self explanatory.

BINDI PACKETS

Assorted sizes: one for the family function, one for the protest.



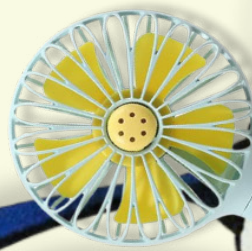
A PHONE CHARGER THAT ONLY WORKS AT A SPECIFIC ANGLE

Like most things in her life. Temperamental but essential.



PORTABLE FAN

Battery-operated breeze. For Delhi summers and overheating after one too many microaggressions.

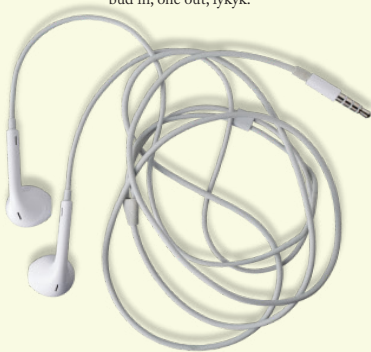


SAFETY PIN

She doesn't trust the world to hold things together, but this little piece of steel? Never fails.

EARPHONES

A makeshift boundary. One bud in, one out, iykyk.



NOTEBOOK

It's actually her journal, with sprinkles of to-do lists, and talking points with her therapist.



On fits, forms, and the space in *between*

The quiet scrutiny of the trial room, where you go to offer yourself up for judgement by your strongest critic - yourself. The yellow lights are soft and you bask in them when something fits just right; the same lights are harsh and abrasive when the outfit you thought you would shine in, makes you feel like disappearing in the pile of clothes on the floor.

Trying on clothes is not just about size or silhouette. It's a soft kind of shapeshifting, a quiet rehearsal for who you might become. "Mirror mirror on the wall, who's the most _____ of them all?"

One mirror reflects the curated casuals of the mall: bell jeans because the 80s/90s fashion is making a comeback, Zara tops because quiet luxury can be bought for cheap, a linen shirt that looks like that one pin saved on Pinterest and feels vaguely 'European'. The other?

It's the mirror in your parents' room, reflecting how your mother pins dupattas to avoid slipping, the gentle knot of the *dori* at the back of your blouse, the length of your kurti, and the fine mirror work that reflects prisms when you walk in the sunlight.

One foot in Adidas Sambas, the other still in Kolhapuris. One hand swiping through the Uniqlo app, the other ironing your mom's old Benarasi for a cousin's wedding. Every Indian woman lives in a split-screen reality: one that teaches her to master the art of shape-shifting.



DYEING HISTORY

IMAGE BY *Simone Dinoia*, Unsplash

The West's obsession with India is cyclical, often extractive, and *always filtered.*

We don't just own clothes. We own categories. There are outfits for temple visits, family lunches, society functions, for Instagram posts, airport looks, *pujas*, work outfits that do not centre around 'office siren core' because let's be real, half of those outfits would never fly in real life. We have been living a dual life since before Clark Kent made it cool.

One would think that the concept of identity, and everything it encompasses, must be hard for us to navigate – something we grapple with for days on end. But reconciling the many facets of our being, is a skill most of us are born with, an extension of our DNAs almost.

But what happens when the world peers into our mirrors? When our reflections – so secure and sacred to us, are 'borrowed' and stripped of all identity, to be sold back for parts to the world? The West's obsession with India is cyclical, often extractive, and always filtered.

The Prada Kolhapuri chappal is not an isolated incident. It's simply the latest in a long tradition of the West discovering what we've always known, sanding off its origin story, and selling it back to us at ten times the price.

Take the *Bleeding Madras* for example, the checked cotton fabric from Chennai which was dyed using natural dyes like turmeric and indigo, famously ran colour with every wash due to the instability of the dyes. The governor of 'Madras', Elihu Yale, donated bales of the Bleeding Madras, to his namesake university - Yale. It was embraced by Ivy League America, a symbol of prep schools and frat boys. They were sold by Brooks Brothers as 'guaranteed to bleed' shirts, without much mention of the hands that wove them.

Or *indigo*, the deep blue that turned denim into an icon, has been grown in India for over 5000 years. When the world reaches out to put on their favourite pair of jeans, they forget that stitched into every pair, is a deep violent and colonial history. Extracted from Indian fields for centuries under the brutal force of colonial rule, at the cost of farmers' livelihood, it led to the Indigo revolt 1859, and garnered international attention.

Paisley, now a 'bohemian' staple in fast fashion racks, is a Persian motif perfected in *Kashmir*, painstakingly handwoven into shawls long before it was printed onto polyester festival wear. *Henna*, worn on hands and feet for weddings and celebrations, is paraded on runways as an 'exotic temporary tattoo.' The *lungi* becomes a 'wrap skirt' in a glossy editorial. *Gingham*, sold back to us as a retro picnic print, echoes the checks that have long lived in *lungis* and kitchen towels across South Asia.

Kalamkari originated in Andhra Pradesh as a sacred storytelling form, artisans used tamarind pens and natural dyes to draw epic scenes on cloth – usually for temples and religious purposes. Due to global demand, *Kalamkari* gave rise to *Chintz*, derived from the Hindi word *Chhint* -





**We are caught
between pride and
protest, unsure if
seeing ourselves on a
bigger stage is progress
or just another
*performance.***

which means to spray and speckle. *Chintz* became a luxury commodity in 17th century Europe, especially France and England, where it was used everywhere - from upholstery, clothes to even wallpapers. The craft became so popular that local industries felt threatened, and banned its import from India. Due to high demand, they tried and failed to replicate it. Eventually under colonial rule, Indian artisans were used as cheap labour, and while *Chintz* survived the ordeal as a craft, its heritage and roots were lost and forgotten. The pattern repeats itself, literally and figuratively. Now we have Scandinavian scarfs, and long tunics, which for us, have always been *dupattas* and *kurtas*.

Something that is rooted in ritual, utility, and meaning is lifted from its context, renamed, and resold. What we call heritage, others call a trend. But unlike the trial room mirror, where the reflection is yours to keep, here the reflection is distorted. The image of India shown back to us is filtered for palatability - the spices without the labour, the colour without the politics, the textile without the weaver.

And the strangest part? Sometimes, we participate in it. A certain section of us feels a flicker of validation when a global brand 'discovers' something ours, while others see nothing but erasure. We are caught between pride and protest, unsure if seeing ourselves on a bigger stage is progress or just another performance. Because when the world borrows from our wardrobe, it rarely returns the garment intact, and almost never with the tag that says *Made in India*.

Somewhere between couture, runways and the blossoming of homegrown brands, Indian fashion has become a site of tension. For diasporic Indians, there's satisfaction in seeing the world love what you were once teased for. For others, it's a bitter pill: *why is it cool when they do it, but too much when I do it?* We crave representation but want it on our terms. We want to be seen, but not simplified. We want our culture to be celebrated, not sold. Still, something beautiful is happening.

Gen Z Indian women are reclaiming what was taken, and remixing it with what they've chosen. Jhumkas with cargos. Juttis with tube tops. Bindis with winged eyeliner. They're not dressing for approval. They're dressing for expression.

They don't need to choose between tradition and trend. They're creating a third thing entirely - a reflection that is theirs alone. Not borrowed, not diluted, not waiting for outside applause. The mirror no longer belongs to the West - or even to the past - its stitched from what they've been given and what they've taken back. And maybe that's how it's always been. Our mothers passed down wardrobes; our grandmothers passed down ways of wearing them. Now, we pass down something else entirely: the confidence to stand before any mirror, anywhere in the world, and recognise yourself.



MODEL *Kanu Garg*
PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Soundarya Thandapani*



THE QUIETEST ROOM

It's fairly easy to romanticise an Indian kitchen. You walk in and there's almost a symphony of sounds – the pressure cooker whistle going off, the rolling pin moving against the rolling board, churning out perfectly round *rotis*, the sound of the *masal daani*, quick, calculated, measurements of spices going in, curry leaves sizzling, rice being washed for the 4th time, vegetables chopped, tomatoes grinding. It has never just been about food. It's choreography. It's control, a performance perfected through generations of 'adjustments.' A modern Indian kitchen still sounds the same, but there is something in the air, something beyond the smell of warm fresh food, something that has simmered for so long it has started rotting.

IMAGES BY *Tanvi Garg, Varnan Verma,*
and *Prakriti Sharma*



This is the kitchen.

The loudest room in the house.
It hums of silent domestic labour.
The unpaid work that the men in the house have
conveniently ignored,
because the women are 'empowered' to have jobs.
It's etched onto the walls in the form of splatters -
one for each time she cooked, and each time she washed.



This is the kitchen.

The safest place in the house.
And the easiest one to hide in.
You can disappear without a trace.
You can cry here, and say it was the onions.





This is the kitchen.



The warmest room in the house.
And the most demanding.
It knows your mother's hands better than you do.
It's where she sings. Where she snaps. Where she disappears.
This is where love gets cooked, and so do expectations.

This is the kitchen.

The most nostalgic place in the house.
With echoes of
“This is how my grandmother used to make it”
Food and memory often intertwine in ways beyond
understanding here.



This is the kitchen.

Where nothing is ever measured,
and yet, everything is weighed.
Salt to taste. Guilt by default.
The curry is judged. So is her character.



This is the kitchen.



Where mothers become magicians.
She feeds five on a budget for two, hiding
vegetables in recipes to hide their presence.
What they don't know, won't hurt them, but will
make them healthier.



The quietest room in the house.
Where she grinds her spices, her rage,
her restlessness.
Where recipes become routines,
and routines become shackles.
Where every meal tastes like sacrifice.

This is the *kitchen*.



The Things
We *Do*

with
Our Hands

IMAGE BY *Dieter Schmitz*, Getty Images

TRACING THE LINES DOWN ONE'S HANDS – an astrologer can read a palm and tell one more about themselves, than their friends and family ever could. What shapes us, what karma we've carried from a past life, why our planets won't let us have something we desperately want.

The things we hold on to, and more importantly the things we let go of, all our habits - the ones we picked up and the ones forced upon us – the shapes of them, forever indented into our hands.

In an apartment on the corner of a dimly lit street in Delhi, there lives a 28 year old woman. Much to her parents' dismay (and the source of their constant worries), she is (still) unmarried. Living at home with them, her younger sister, and her dog. Working her dream job in Marketing, she just got promoted, putting her double Master's and years of experience to use.

At 10 in the night, *she flexes and relaxes her hands*, now cramping from the hours spent typing away - edits, comments, suggestions, emails, the works. Her pain – a testament to her hard work and sheer defiance towards the aunts she meets at weddings who ask her when she's getting married. Every morning her and her mother paint a juxtaposing picture – *both their hands folded in prayer*, hers for success, her mother's for her (hopefully soon) wedded life.

In the evenings, when she returns from work, she watches her mother, in the kitchen, in the sweltering June heat, grinding cardamom and cinnamon in a pestle and mortar, for her father's evening tea. *Her hands moved in a quick pounding*. At times she wonders if her mother lays all her resentments of the life she could've had, bare, the spices bearing the brunt of it all. The tea always falls short, there's always something missing, almost like *her hands have lost the magic* that won her father over, many years ago.

The weekend sneaks up, and her mother tries to teach her how to cook, how to roll out rotis, rounder than the moon. Hers end up looking like the Australian map. "Your hands don't

know the rhythm yet," her mother says. "One day, it'll come from you. You won't need to force it." She puts the rolling pin down. Once is enough.

She walks into her room, and finds her sister, who's managed to creep into her mother's closet to pull a silk saree – one that she almost never wears. Her *tiny hands, working in quick expert movements, pleating the saree* as she has seen her mother do for so many years. She quietly watches for a minute, as she bears witness to six yards of pure elegance draped, its layers holding a silent weight. A weight of all that they've inherited.

She pulls her sister into an embrace, taking the saree from her, and telling her to sit on the floor.

She pulls out some hair oil, and begins massaging her tiny head of strong voluminous curly hair, *her fingers moving gently, sure to not hurt her*. And whispers to her: "After this, *I will paint your nails red*, and we will make some posters. There is a protest at Jantar Mantar, and we will go there, to fight for our rights. Our right to exist safely in a country we call home. We will hold the signs high, and keep our voice firm.

Something you must do for the rest of your life – *keep your voice firm, and hands unshakable*. When they tell you you were meant to be soft, I want you to show them the *calluses on your palm, and make them see how the same hands that can carry the intricate designs of henna, drape a saree, and carry the ones who came before her – can also fight dirty for herself, and the ones who will come after her. That is our burden, our responsibility, our inheritance. Our वरिसत.*"

MODEL *Vandita Garg*
PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Tanvi Garg*

