

46TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL ISSUE

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JANUARY 3, 2022 ₹75



INDIA TODAY



From left to right

Cricketer **Smriti Mandhana**

Entrepreneur **Karan Adani**

Actor **Taapsee Pannu**

Politician **Aaditya Thackeray**

Rocketmaker **Pawan Chandana**

THE NEXT 100

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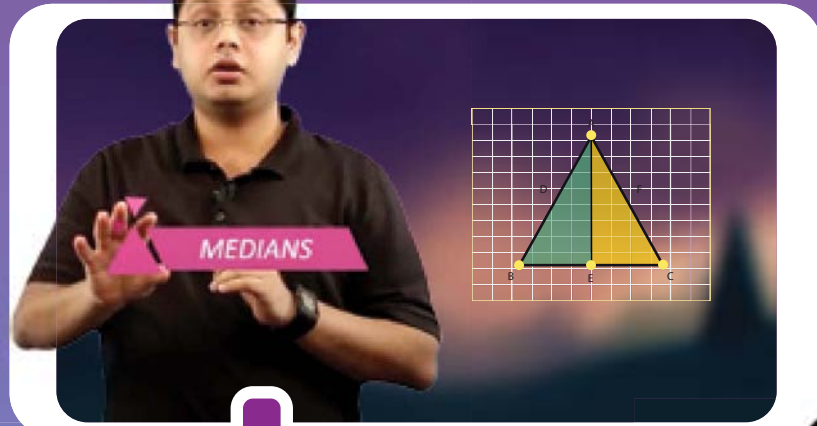
Tiger Shroff
Actor

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Through C draw CE parallel to BA

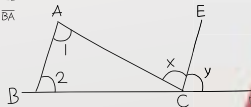
$$\angle 1 = \angle x$$

$$\angle 2 = \angle y$$

$$\angle 1 + \angle 2 = \angle x + \angle y$$

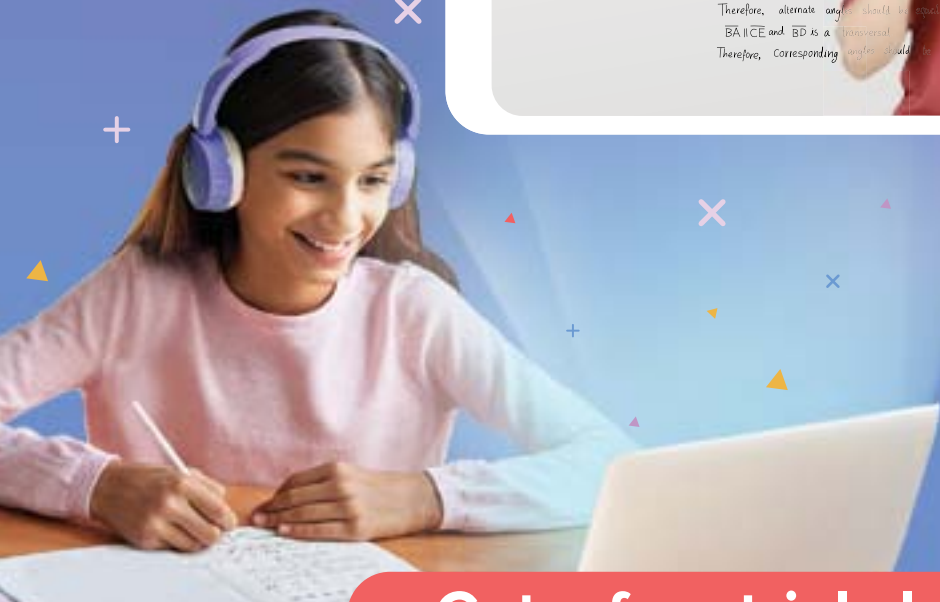
$$\text{Now, } \angle x + \angle y = \text{ext. } \angle ACD$$

$$\text{Hence, } \angle 1 + \angle 2 = \angle ACD$$



Reasons

BA || CE and AC is a transversal
Therefore, alternate angles should be equal.
BA || CE and BC is a transversal
Therefore, corresponding angles should be equal.



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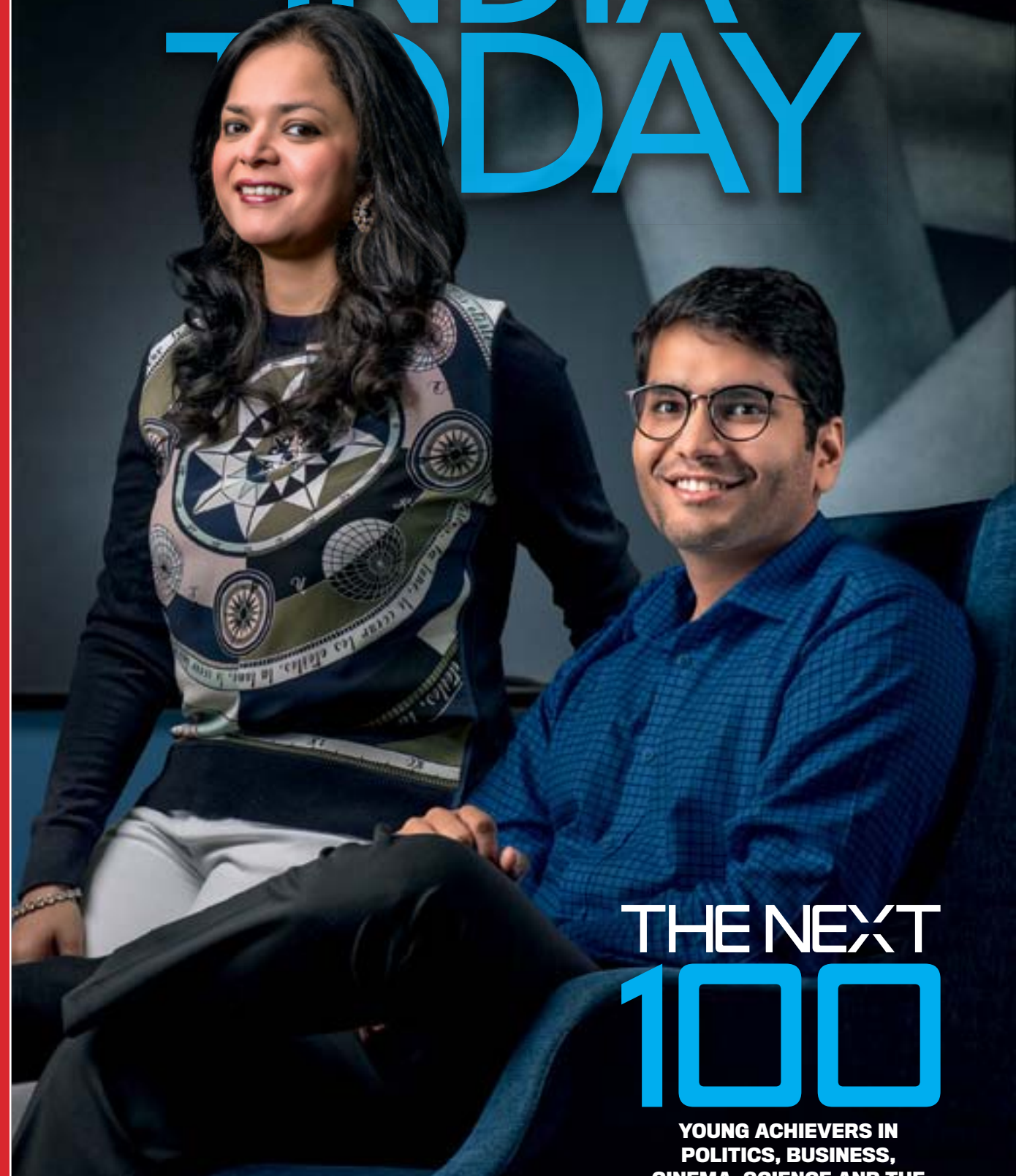
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Aarna Jain and Shashwat Goenka
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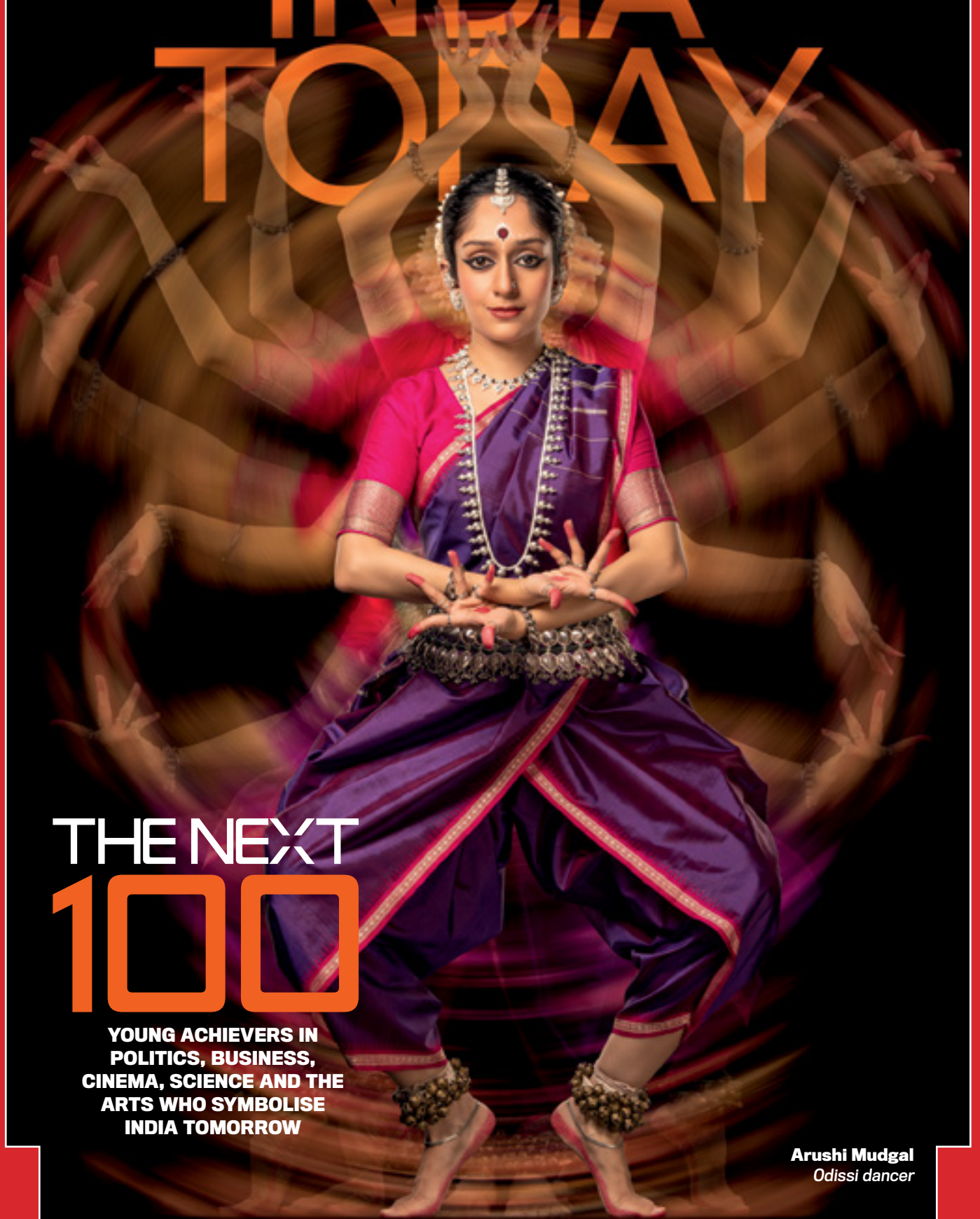


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INDIA TODAY



THE NEXT 100

YOUNG ACHIEVERS IN
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Odissi dancer

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46TH
ANNIVERSARY

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The first edition of INDIA TODAY hit the stands in the silver jubilee year of our Republic. Three years from now, when the Republic is 75, we will celebrate half a century of our existence. What an incredible journey it has been. We have covered the highs and lows of India's roller-coaster ride of the past few decades, from the Emergency to the pandemic, without missing a single edition. The anniversary issue of the magazine is often a time for us to reflect. Our previous issues have looked at the significant events of the past decade, the life-changing moments of top personalities and the changes in rural India.

We are also conscious that we live in the youngest country among major economies—half of India is under 29. The youth account for one-fifth of the world's population. Our youth bulge thus is one of our greatest assets, and what they do individually or collectively will decide where we are as a nation in the years ahead. So, for our 46th anniversary, we decided to look at India tomorrow—the men and women who were not even born when our magazine was launched and yet who are set to excel in their respective fields.

We have chosen a hundred young men and women who will be the future stars of this country. 'The Next 100', as we have called them, have already made their mark as leaders, scientists, writers, artists, sportspersons and entrepreneurs. Many have rewritten the rules of the game. It took Reliance and Infosys a generation to become two of India's most valuable companies. Byju Raveendran, 40, needed just a decade to turn Byju's into the world's biggest edtech company, with a market cap of \$21 billion (Rs 1.6 lakh crore) in August. In the assembly election held in Bihar in 2020, 32-year-old Tejashwi Yadav, pitted against two heavyweight ruling parties, came within a whisker of becoming one of India's youngest chief ministers—he is currently the opposition leader in the assembly. This year, Neeraj Chopra, 23, threw a javelin to Olympic gold, living up to the Games' faster, higher, stronger motto. He is one of our most significant sporting sensations of the year and among those to watch out for in the years ahead. Entertainer Bhuvan Bam enjoys the kind of adulation on YouTube that Amitabh Bachchan did at the box office in the year of our launch.

Then there are the young entrepreneurs who have spun their ideas into successful businesses, be it Ankit Mehta, 32, whose startup Idea Forge has become India's most prominent



drone firm. Or Avarna Jain, director of Saregama, who has turned a retro-looking music player into a household name and the largest repository of music in India. Or space entrepreneur Pawan Kumar Chandana, 32, who plans to launch a satellite from a privately-built rocket in 2022. Radhika Gupta, 38, the MD and CEO of Edelweiss AMC, is one of India's most influential businesswomen.

Others have seen opportunity in the crisis brought about by Covid. Ayushi Gudwani, 37, diversified her businesswear line for women into accessories during the pandemic. Tejasvi Surya, 31, the BJP's youngest Lok Sabha MP, set up a Covid task force to deliver medical aid and provisions to his constituents.

The trailblazers are followed by a generation of equally successful young Indians aged 16 to 18. At 242 million, India has the world's largest population of those aged between 10 and 24. This cohort is far bigger than China's 185 million young people. We asked them what India meant to them. Ridhiman Ganguly, a 17-year-old student from Kolkata, said he wanted an India where 'the marble floors of shrines are sacred, but so is the land, water and air'.

However, any such listing cannot be exhaustive. It can only indicate that India is teeming with young talent and boundless energy in almost every field, a generation that can stand up to the best in the world. They are the future of the country. The heartening part is that they radiate optimism, confidence and ambition. To them, there is nothing that is not possible. There is a lot wrong in our country, but these young men and women give me hope that our future will be bright.

On that note, I would like to wish you all a healthy, happy and prosperous 2022. We definitely need it.

(Aron Purie)

THE NEXT
100

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THE NEXT 1000

Young achievers in politics,
business, cinema, science
and the arts who symbolise
India Tomorrow

BY RAJ CHENGAPPA

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

46TH
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LEAD ESSAY

T

They are the woke generation. Much more politically and culturally aware than their predecessors but brief in their communication. They call it being 'social'—of the twitter and WhatsApp kind. Many of them have built in less than a decade the kind of fortunes that took their parents a lifetime or more to amass. Time is no more a factor that decides their success. Neither does geography or history. Einstein would have been forced to modify his famed equation if he were alive. For this generation has used its energy to build more mass out of virtually nothing and do it at a rate faster than the speed of light squared.

Sociologists call this generation—those between 20 and 40 years of age—the 'Millennials'. They succeeded the Lost Generation (distinct from the Baby Boomers who were born soon after World War 2), which dominated the country when INDIA TODAY magazine began publication on December 15, 1975. Generation X, as they are also known, came of age under the shadow of Emergency. Job opportunities lay largely in the public sector and the central government's oppressive hand could be found everywhere. There were queues and waiting lists for practically everything, whether you wanted a telephone connection or even to buy a car.

On the other hand, the Millennials or Generation Y, as they are also dubbed, grew up in an age of reform and relative prosperity. The oldest of them was 10 years

old when the Indian economy was freed from the shackles of the Licence Raj. India dumped the Hindu rate of growth of three per cent and expanded at hyper speed. The middle class burgeoned and blossomed, and private entrepreneurship came into its own.

Evolution, Harvard physician Harvey V. Fineberg once observed, was all about passing on the genome to the next generation, adapting and surviving through generation after generation. As he put it, “From an evolutionary point of view, you and I are like the booster rockets designed to send the genetic payload into the next level of orbit and then drop off into the sea.”

The next generation that we spawned did not just adapt and survive, but flourished. With '83, the biopic of India's cricket world cup win, now the flavour of the season, it would be apt to quote Kapil Dev, who captained the heroic team: “The next generation has always been and

will be better than the previous one. If it is not, then the world would not be moving forward.” Well, the world is not just moving forward, but at a speed faster than what the Haryana Hurricane would ever have bowled during his career.

If their parents taught them to work in factories, the Lost Generation decided their children will be allowed to explore their creativity in full. What speeded the RPMs of the Millennials' progress was the explosion of the Internet and the rapid advance of technology, particularly in how people communicate and interact. It gave rise to social media that enabled constant connectivity along with anytime, anywhere entertainment. It was the cannon that allowed the Millennials to blow up the hesitations of history and carve a pathway to phenomenal success. As Eric Yuan, CEO and founder of Zoom Video communications, puts it, “Millennials grew up realising they could get a job done without ever having to go to office.”

Yet it is not as though the Millennials have had it all easy. They were at an impressionable age when 9/11 shook the world. In India, they lived under the shadow of three wars—the Kargil conflict, and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars that followed. They felt the fear of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, the global economic meltdown and the ensuing recession. They lived through as tumultuous

and tough times as their preceding generations did. But they also had exemplars to show them how to break free. Their role models included N.R. Narayana Murthy of Infosys, Elon Musk of Space X and Jeff Bezos of Amazon, who demonstrated how to generate wealth rapidly, even without an inheritance, and retain it.

For India, the convergence of communication technologies was fortuitous. With a third of the country's population being between the ages of 20 and 44, the demographic dividend of being a young country has paid off richly. Right across the spectrum, be it politics, business, science, sports or the arts, the Millennials have made a difference with their high energy and can-do spirit.

It is particularly noticeable in industry, where young entrepreneurs have grown their companies into unicorns or companies with a valuation of billion-plus dollars, straddling not just India but wielding influence across the world. In 2021, even as Covid raged, as many as 42 start-ups turned unicorns, with a combined valuation of

\$82 billion. India has now emerged as the third-largest ecosystem for start-ups globally, with over 59,000 of these companies sprouting up in the past five years. Only the US and China are ahead.

Not surprisingly, when INDIA TODAY for its 46th anniversary special decided to identify ‘The Next 100’ between the ages of 20 and 40 who symbolise India Tomorrow, it was the young entrepreneurs who dominated the list. Not to be left behind, though, is a clutch of young politicians across parties, who are making their presence felt on the political

landscape. Joining them is a set of entertainers who now have a following that would be the envy of superstars of yesteryears. There are many other fields the Millennials are excelling in, from science and the arts to sports. In the following pages, we present a selection of individuals who we think deserve a place in The Next 100. It is only a representative list, but it is enough to showcase the immense talent in this generation. We also feature in this issue a cross-section of voices from Generation Z, the successor to the Millennials, on how they view the nation. India has come a long way after 75 years of Independence but has an even longer way to go. Both these generations exhibit the guts and the gumption to achieve the glory that India seeks before its 100th anniversary. ■

The Internet has been the cannon that has allowed the Millennials to blow up the hesitations of history and carve a pathway to phenomenal success

CLIMATE CONSCIOUS

AADITYA THACKERAY, 31

*Minister of Tourism & Environment,
Maharashtra*

The first member of the Thackeray clan to have contested and won elections, Balasaheb's grandson and Uddhav and Rashmi Thackeray's elder son has infused a constructive energy in the state's politics. The law and history graduate shares next-gen's concern about climate change and wants political parties to adopt it as a poll plank, something he reiterated while launching the curriculum for environment education—*Majhi Vasundhara*—on December 13. His commitment to the cause became apparent during the Devendra Fadnavis-led regime, when he was keenly involved in the initiative to ban single-use plastic in the state.

Later, when he took over as environment minister in the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government led by his father, the first thing he did was to add climate change to the name of his department. His effort to introduce electric vehicles on Mumbai's roads also stems from this concern. Nor was it a surprise when young Thackeray turned up at the global climate change conference in UK in September.

Climate change, however, is not the only thing close to his heart. And no, we are not talking about his love of words—Aaditya is a published poet and has also cut his own album, for which he wrote all its eight songs.

Thackeray Jr is also brimming with ideas for tourism in his state. For one, he has cut down the number of permissions required to set up a hotel from 70 to 10. His emphasis on promoting agro tourism, adventure tourism, caravans and branding tourist destinations have seen massive infrastructure development across the state. Next on his agenda are the 400 forts, beaches and wildlife in the state. "Maharashtra has everything except sand and snow to attract tourists across the world. We need to market them appropriately"—is his unstated mandate to officials of the tourism department. And what better way to marry his twin preoccupations—environment and tourism—than to train locals in tourist spots on how they can save the environment while promoting tourism.

Aaditya is equally interested in the planning and execution of infrastructure works in Mumbai. It is not unusual to find him inspecting the progress of the Sewri-Nhava Sheva Sea Link one day and huddling with Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority officials the next. He wants to make Mumbai traffic jam-free by December 2023. Umeed was not just the name of his first album. Hope is something Thackeray Jr is heavily invested in. ■

—Kiran D. Tare

VALUE AD Fond of writing, Aaditya often helps create content for his party's campaign hoardings. Loves reading and watching cricket, especially Test matches

"He is a very hardworking, progressive and empathetic leader, with an extremely bright future"

SUPRIYA SULE
NCP MP



Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

THE NEXT
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POLITICS

JAT ENGINE

DUSHYANT CHAUTALA, 33

*Deputy Chief Minister,
Haryana*



SANDEEP SAHDEV

His is the only political family—apart from the famed Gandhis—that has contributed four generations of elected leaders. Yet, Dushyant Chautala, the deputy chief minister of Haryana and president and co-founder of the Janata Jannayak Party (JJP), has time and again demonstrated that he can negotiate political battlefields without invoking family legacy. Even before he was eligible to contest election, Dushyant had in 2013 told India Today that “winning people’s hearts is not an easy job”. Understanding the pulse of the public comes naturally to someone who was only eight when he accompanied great-grandfather and former deputy prime minister Devi Lal on his campaign trail in Rohtak in 1996.

In 2014, Dushyant became the youngest member of the 16th Lok Sabha, winning at a time when his grandfather and former Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala, his father Ajay Singh Chautala and uncle Abhay Singh Chautala were in jail. Four years later, as his differences with his grandfather and uncle grew, Dushyant was expelled from the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). Undeterred, he went on to form a party of his own at age 31, which won 10 seats in its very first electoral outing—the 2019 Haryana assembly election—while the INLD won just one seat. With the BJP six seats short of a majority in the 90-member house, Dushyant joined them in exchange for the deputy chief minister’s post and several key portfolios for JJP. He has since been using his stint in power to consolidate his position as the next big leader of the Jats, who often determine electoral outcomes in Haryana. ■

— Kaushik Deka

“Instead of banking on his family legacy, Dushyant has worked hard to become a true representative of the people. From meeting common citizens daily to dealing with senior officials, he stays calm and gives personal attention to every public grievance or government file”

DR K.C. BANGAR,
Sr National Vice-president,
JJP, ex-Chairman, Haryana
Public Service
Commission

DEGREE AND PEDIGREE

After a BSc in business administration from CSU, Bakersfield, Dushyant did LLM (Prof.) from National Law University, Delhi, in 2018 followed next year by mass communication from Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar



PTI

A-Z POLITICIAN

TEJASHWI YADAV, 32

*Leader of Opposition;
Ex-Deputy CM, Bihar*

“The people of Bihar have expressed faith in Tejashwi’s leadership. He gives them something new and engages everyone with his progressive vision”

PROF. MANOJ JHA,
RJD MP, Rajya Sabha

A successful political debut was par for the course for someone whose parents—Rabri Devi and Lalu Prasad—ruled Bihar almost uninterrupted for 15 years as chief ministers.

Tejashwi Yadav won his first assembly poll in 2015 and started his political career as Deputy Chief Minister. But the honeymoon ended by July 2017 when Nitish Kumar dumped Rashtriya Janata Dal, and Tejashwi found himself warming the Opposition benches. Then, his father was sent to judicial custody, leaving the political greenhorn to lead Bihar’s single-largest party.

The Lok Sabha election in 2019 was a nightmare for Tejashwi, when RJD drew a blank. However, a year later, the young leader bounced back, with RJD becoming the single largest party in Bihar, though falling short of forming a government. His success was significant and attributed to him alone, as he led

his party without the overarching presence of his father.

Gone is the bit IPL cricketer, the reliance on being Lalu’s younger son. Tejashwi has made it clear that he is a leader in his own right. He is projecting RJD as an A-Z party, representing everyone, instead of a solely M-Y (Muslim Yadav) one. He is the chief minister’s staunchest critic, but was part of the 10-party delegation that met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in August seeking a caste census.

Even family members are not allowed to come in the way of his agenda, most notably his brother Tej Pratap. Be it his parents or siblings, he has dropped them from party posters to reach out to those who have shied away from RJD. Certainly a politician to watch out for. ■

— **Amitabh Srivastava**

FEAR OF FLYING He successfully overcame his aerophobia to lead RJD’s campaign for 2019 LS poll

THE NEXT
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POLITICS

CAPTAIN TRINAMOOL

**ABHISHEK
BANERJEE, 34**

*Lok Sabha MP and National
General Secretary, Trinamool
Congress, West Bengal*

**“Abhishek has
an architect’s
acumen in all
that he does. He
wants to focus
on renewed
investment in the
state”**

SUKHENDU SHEKHAR RAY

Rajya Sabha MP, TMC

He has none of the political flamboyance of his feisty aunt. Abhishek appears unflappable at all times, letting nothing get to him—not the *bua-bhatija* barbs, not allegations of dynastic rule, nor ED summoning him and wife Rujira to join in a coal smuggling probe.

Instead, he focuses on the task at hand, which, in 2021, was to take on the mighty BJP electoral machine, steered by the country’s prime minister, home minister and other saffron heavyweights. Standing by Mamata Banerjee like a rock, he encouraged her to go full throttle against the BJP juggernaut, following a script he engaged Prashant Kishor for. Braving criticism and partymen’s exodus, Abhishek implemented Kishor’s recommendation to deny tickets to under-performing, unpopular, corrupt and disloyal sitting MLAs. For the first time in TMC history, a third of the sitting MLAs were dropped. However, even as he allowed the poll strategist a free hand, he unleashed a social media campaign, manned by professionals, to counter the BJP narrative. Vindication came in the form of TMC’s giant-killing win.

Now he is the captain of Didi’s expedition to extend TMC’s footprint beyond Bengal. Gradually becoming his party’s public face, he is introducing reform in the party organisation to make it cadre-based and disciplined. He has implemented a one-man, one-post policy to check the concentration of power in a few hands and a fair and transparent distribution of tickets and portfolios, based on performance and not clout or political weight. He’s also grooming a crop of young leaders, giving them posts and responsibilities, to take the baton when the time comes. ■

—Romita Datta

GADGET FREAK Abhishek loves to splurge on the latest electronic gadget. Recently upgraded to an iPhone 13





TARANGA GOGOI, 37

BJP MLA, Naharkatia, Assam

Able Lieutenant

When Taranga Gogoi contested his first assembly poll this April from Naharkatia in Assam, not many fancied his victory. The young debutant was up against three high-profile candidates—Pranati Phukan, a former minister and four-time MLA; Lurinjyoti Gogoi, Assam Jatiya Parishad president and poster boy of the state-wide protest against Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and Naren Sonowal, sitting MLA from Asom Gana Parishad. Yet, he went on to win a multi-cornered contest by a margin of nearly 15,000 votes—the 2016 margin was just over 3,500.

Son of a PWD contractor and housewife mother, Taranga entered politics as a National Students' Union of India member in Delhi in 2003. He rose to become national secretary and in-charge of Kerala, Bihar and the Northeast. Thanks to his work in mobilising votes in campus elections in Delhi and Assam, he came to the then Assam Congress minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's

“Taranga is one of Assam’s most promising and energetic young politicians who has made his mark through merit, fresh ideas and hard work”

SARBANANDA SONOWAL *Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and AYUSH*

notice. Gogoi has been a Sarma loyalist since, joining BJP with him in 2015, and rising to become state secretary. He retains Sarma's as well as his predecessor Sarbananda Sonowal's confidence, despite their differences. Taranga's success is the result of a conscious effort to project himself as a grounded, soft-speaking politician who believes in deliverance more than the decibel level of his promises. ■

— Kaushik Deka

SHUTTLE SERVICE Taranga, who wanted to be a badminton player, now plays with Chief Minister Sarma whenever both are in Guwahati



CHANDANA BAURI, 30

BJP MLA, Saltora, West Bengal

Rich in Intention

She caught the BJP's eye when, as general secretary of the Mahila Morcha in her village Kelai in Bankura district, she went door to door to enlist villagers for a membership drive. She even helped two candidates from neighbouring villages win the 2018 panchayat poll despite inter-party violence.

She was a natural choice, therefore, when BJP was seeking candidates for the 2021 assembly poll in West Bengal, especially as Mamata Banerjee fielded 50 women. Chandana, wife of a daily wager and mother of three children, lived up to the expectation, as she won her maiden election from Saltora constituency, defeating Santosh Mondal of Trinamool Congress to become one of the 77 BJP candidates who managed to win in the face of an overwhelming

TMC sweep.

“What amazes me is her zeal to uplift the poor when she herself can't make ends meet”

MIHIR GOSWAMI
BJP MLA from Cooch Behar (South)

Being a BJP MLA, though, has scarcely brought about any change in Chandana's modest lifestyle. She continues to live in a humble dwelling she got under the PM Awas Yojana, with unplastered walls and without window panes. She does not spend the MLA salary she earns on herself. She would rather extend a helping hand to families too poor to marry off their daughters or unable to bear medical expenses. Nobody understands better than her what it means to be poor. ■

— Romita Datta

LOO LESS ABODE She does not have a toilet in her home. There's one in her backyard which she has to share with the CRPF men in charge of her security.

DOCTOR DOGOOD

SHRIKANT SHINDE, 34

Lok Sabha MP, Shiv Sena, Mumbai

When Shrikant Shinde, an orthopaedic surgeon by training, decided to join politics in 2014, he knew in which direction he wanted to take his party, the Shiv Sena—from being street fighters to health warriors.

Under the banner of his Dr Shrikant Shinde Foundation, Shinde has helped lakhs of poor and needy patients get medical help under several Maharashtra government schemes. Extended now to 14 of the state's 36 districts, such is the demand for his work in the field of health that a tea stall vendor in rural Satara offered his premises as an office



MANDAR DEODHAR



SANTOSH KUMAR/GETTY IMAGES

SHREYASI SINGH, 30

BJP MLA, Jamui, Bihar

THE NEXT 100 POLITICS

“He is a dynamic person whose work extends beyond politics and his father's legacy”

AMOL KOLHE
NCP MP

for the foundation's health wing.

Shinde is also planning to make premarital genetic testing free and compulsory, and pulmonary response training mandatory in schools. Equally concerned about the environment, Shinde has launched an initiative to plant several hundred saplings in his constituency to create a mini forest.

His private member's bill on the ban of single-use plastic led to a debate on the subject, and later a ban.

As a two-time MP from Kalyan, Shinde has also lavished attention on his constituency, pushing for rail and infrastructure projects in the area. His initiative to set up a shooting range in Ambernath, only the second public range in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, resulted in 11 shooters qualifying for selection in the national team this year. He feels he can serve people better as a politician than as a medical practitioner. His constituents would concur. ■

— Kiran D. Tare

MR GREEN FINGERS

Shrikant has planted around 10,000 saplings of sandalwood, strawberry, cherry and blueberry in his farm in Satara this year

A SHOT AT POLITICS

She was just 19 when her father, the Gidhaur royal and socialist leader Digvijay Singh, died in June 2010. However, he left her with a love of politics and shooting—Digvijay was a Union minister of state in the Chandra Shekhar (1990-91) and A.B. Vajpayee (1999-2004) governments, and

“Having proved her mettle in sport, she'll do the same in politics”

SUSHIL MODI
Former Deputy CM, Bihar

president of the National Rifle Association of India. Mother Putul Singh too is a former MP from Banka. Shreyasi won medals at two successive Commonwealth Games—a silver in 2014, and a gold four years later. She is also an Arjuna awardee.

She seriously started thinking about a career in politics only after she interacted with common people during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. That was when she realised that

people wanted a young and committed person like her to be their public representative in Jamui. After formally joining BJP in 2020, she contested the Bihar assembly election and trounced the sitting MLA—Vijay Prakash of Rashtriya Janata Dal—in her maiden election by 41,000 votes. ■

— Ashok Priyadarshi

GOLDEN GIRL She's the first person from Bihar to win a Commonwealth gold

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POLITICS

SAFFRON STAR

TEJASVI SURYA, 31

Lok Sabha MP, BJP, Bengaluru



There cannot be a more complete package for BJP than Tejasvi Surya. An RSS swayamsevak, ABVP member and Yuva Morcha leader, law graduate, digitally literate and committed to party ideology. Eyeing this very potential, BJP chose the then 28-year-old over Tejaswini, wife of Ananth Kumar, a six-time BJP MP and the party's most prominent face in Delhi, after his death in November 2018 to represent Bangalore South in the 2019 general election. Surya won, trouncing veteran Congress leader B.K. Hariprasad by 331,000 votes to become the youngest BJP MP in the 17th Lok Sabha.

Like other gen-next politicians, Tejasvi, too, is internet and social media savvy, with million-plus followers on Twitter. He is also approachable; don't be surprised if you see him at a coffee shop chatting with his electorate. He remains faithful to the saffron agenda, whether it's asking for an NRC in Karnataka, or calling for BJP to be unapologetically a party of Hindus, or accusing those who oppose Narendra Modi of strengthening 'anti-India forces'. As a lawyer, he has represented those whom BJP thought the Congress government in Karnataka had targeted. Education is another cause close to his heart; he runs an NGO called Arise India, which works in the field of school education. During the pandemic, he set up a special Covid task force for his constituency for medical aid and doorstep delivery of essential goods. You know who BJP's preferred candidate for the 2024 general election will be.

— Amarnath K. Menon

ARTISTICALLY INCLINED He was nine when he sold his paintings to contribute to the Kargil fund. He is also a trained Carnatic musician and an avid biker

“Tejasvi Surya was destined to become a national leader since his school days. He is a force that cannot be stopped, as he is always raring to go”

A. H. ANAND, Spokesperson, Karnataka BJP

THE NEXT
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POLITICS

Congress's New Hope

KANHAIYA KUMAR, 34

Congress leader in Bihar



Kanhaiya Kumar's first electoral foray may have resulted in ignominious defeat against the BJP's Giriraj Singh, but it has done little to blunt the sharp edge of his oratory. It was this very skill that saw him fall foul of the BJP government at the Centre, which slapped sedition charges against him for allegedly shouting anti-national slogans on the occasion of Afzal Guru's third death anniversary in February 2016. A former president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union, his joining the Communist Party of India was a logical progression. But the defeat at Begusarai in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and overtures from Congress saw him switch sides to the grand old party on September 28.

However, those who rushed to dismiss him as an opponent came not from the BJP but from RJD (Rashtriya Janata Dal), as its spokesperson said he did not know who Kanhaiya was. RJD may still be sitting pretty as the single-largest party in the Bihar assembly, but it will brook no challenge to its crown prince—Laloo's younger son and leader of Bihar opposition, Tejashwi Yadav.

Congress leaders, meanwhile, are pinning all their expectations on the charismatic new recruit, hoping he will revive their fortunes in Bihar, a state the party largely ruled till 1990. ■

— Amitabh Srivastava

WELL SPOKEN Kanhaiya won his first debate talking about Mother Teresa while studying at the Sunrise Public School in Begusarai. His prize? An English dictionary

“Educated, oratorical and now a pragmatic politician...Kanhaiya has all the ingredients to rise above others”

N. K. CHOUDHARY, Ex-HoD,
Economics, Patna University

THE PATIDAR VOICE

HARDIK PATEL, 28

*Working President, Pradesh Congress
Committee, Gujarat*

Carrying a whole agitation on his young shoulders had long made Hardik Patel a Patidar leader to reckon with. The slew of cases against him only proved that he had begun to matter. Enough for the Congress to recruit him in their project to develop next-gen leaders in states. It's a different matter that Hardik started feeling isolated in the state unit, complaining that "Congress did not utilise his potential". After sulking for almost a year, Hardik seems to have hit a plan. Putting his mass communication skills to use, he has launched two outreach programmes—the Janchetana Mahasammelan in November, aimed at "exposing" the state government's "anti-poor policies". Hardik plans to organise around 300 rallies across Gujarat in 2022, the year when the state goes for an assembly election.

In October, Hardik launched 'Nyay Yatra', to ensure justice for families of Covid-19 victims. Close to two lakh people, he claims, died because of the government's poor handling of the pandemic. He plans to meet each family that has lost at least one member to the virus. He

has contacted 31,000 families so far in 16,000 villages.

Representing the 12.5 million-strong Patidar community, which makes up 18 per cent of the state's 60 million people, Patel laid claim to the post of state Congress president. But with Congress entrusting Jagdish Thakor, an OBC, with that responsibility and appointing Sukhram Rathwa, a tribal, as leader of opposition, Hardik is expected to concentrate on his core support base, the Patidars, of whom he claims to be the lone, strong voice. He is also likely to contest the assembly election from Ahmedabad. Till then, he wants to negate the advantage BJP has gained after installing Bhupendra Patel, a Patidar, as chief minister. He has begun by dismissing Chief Minister Patel as Delhi's puppet and projecting himself as the sole Patidar warrior. ■

—Kiran D. Tare

A WARRIOR IMAGE An ardent devotee of Lord Rama, Hardik likes to pose for photographs carrying a sword, a rifle or a pistol



“Hardik is a fighter and has caught people’s imagination. He knows the tricks of the trade. He is expanding his base beyond Patidar community of Gujarat. He will go far”

JIGNESH MEVANI, Gujarat MLA



THE NEXT
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POLITICS

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

KINJARAPU RAM MOHAN NAIDU, 34

National General Secretary & Lok Sabha leader, TDP, Srikakulam

Accidental Politician

Politics, he says, was never an option for him. With a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from Purdue and an MBA from Long Island (2011) universities in the US, he was working as a business development manager for an investment company in 2009. But the tragic death of his father, four-time MP and Telugu Desam Party parliamentary leader K. Yerran Naidu, in a road accident in November 2012 changed the course of his life. TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu put the young Ram Mohan in charge of his father's Srikakulam Lok Sabha constituency in 2013 on the eve of the 2014 parliamentary polls. He delivered, and how. Riding the sympathy wave for his father, the newbie politician defeated YSRC candidate Reddy Shanti by 127,572 votes. And there was no looking back.

"Personally, losing a father at that age felt like the end of the world," he says. "At the same time I was overwhelmed by the legacy my father had built in his 30-year political

"India needs young, committed people. Ram Mohan manages a healthy balance between his constituency and his work in Parliament. Being fluent in Hindi, Telugu and English helps"

ASHOK GAJAPATHI RAJU
Former Union Civil Aviation Minister

journey." He was exposed to Parliament and its working while Naidu Sr was Union rural development and employment minister between 1996 and 1998 and he was studying at Delhi Public School, RK Puram. But being in politics himself was a different proposition.

Inspired by his father's example, Ram Mohan spent his 31st birthday in December 2018 sitting on a hunger strike near the Mahatma Gandhi statue in Parliament, seeking Special Category Status for Andhra Pradesh.

He was back Parliament in 2019 despite the YSRC wave, though with a smaller margin of 6,653 votes. He takes the responsibility seriously, seldom missing a Lok Sabha session and eloquently presenting his state's concerns or his party's viewpoint on issues of national concern. No one was surprised when he became the youngest MP to win the Sansad Ratna Award in 2020.

A firm votary of providing youth the opportunity to participate in politics and giving them exposure to governance, he launched a Politics for Impact scheme in May 2018 inviting youth to intern for two months in his constituency. Eighteen students were picked out of the 201 students who applied from 130 colleges in 16 states for the internship.

"Srikakulam as a constituency has a lot of scope for development," says Ram Mohan. He has worked hard for the sanction of the six-laning of the National Highway through the district, a project worth Rs 2,000 crore. Other plans include completing all irrigation projects to provide irrigation water for two crops, creating healthy sources of employment to stem migration, and better health infrastructure. In May 2021, he launched an exclusive Covid-19 helpline for his constituency with information on doctors, hospitals and bed availability. ■

- Amarnath K. Menon

DADDY DUTY In January 2021, Ram Mohan took nine days of paternity leave from the budget session of the Lok Sabha

46TH
ANNIVERSARY

THE NEXT
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INHERITORS

SOLID ANCHOR

KARAN ADANI, 34

CEO, Adani Ports & SEZ
Ahmedabad

As a young man about to enter the family business in 2009, Karan Adani was given two options—power or ports. He opted for the latter and joined Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone (APSEZ), where he gained expertise in core operations. In 2016, he took over the reins of APSEZ, and decided to shift its focus from coal to containers, making investments in Kattupalli, Kamarajar and Vizhinjam ports, keeping expansion in containers in mind. With the rising global awareness about climate change and environmental pollution, the company is also focusing on handling gas, LNG and LPG. Inland logistics has been another focus area. His idea is to form an integrated logistics company that will provide end-to-end logistics solutions to customers using Adani's ports. In 2020-21, APSEZ acquired the Krishnapatnam, Dighi and Ganga-varam ports as well as the Sarguja Rail Corridor, and entered into a partnership to develop a container terminal at the Colombo port.

An economics graduate from Purdue University, Adani, son of industrialist Gautam Adani and his wife Priti, views the business with a stakeholder-centric approach. He has successfully steered APSEZ's growth strategy, resulting in its rapid expansion from a single port operator in

“Technology, for me, is an enabler to revamp operations and a ‘driver’ to augment the company’s identity”

2016 to handling a string of 14 ports and terminals now. APSEZ achieved a cargo volume of 247 million metric tonnes in FY 2020-21 and has a market share of 25 per cent. APSEZ has also set itself a target of becoming carbon neutral by 2025, the first Indian company in the ports sector to do so. ■

— M.G. Arun

STRAP IT UP Karan likes to run marathons whenever time permits. He is a movie buff—*Top Gun* remains a favourite



ELEMENT OF SUCCESS

VINATI SARAF
MUTREJA, 37

*Managing Director and CEO,
Vinati Organics Ltd, Mumbai*

Vinati Saraf Mutreja, the elder daughter of Vinod Banwarilal Saraf, executive chairman of Vinati Organics, and Kavita Saraf, had an interest in chemicals ever since she was a schoolgirl. She had begun accompanying her father on client visits whenever back home from the US during college breaks.

Vinati Organics, which she would eventually go on to join in 2006, was named after her. At the time of her joining, the company had revenues of Rs 20 crore. This fiscal, Vinati is hoping for a revenue of over Rs 1,600 crore and a market capitalisation of Rs 19,000 crore.

The company is the world's largest manufacturer of ATBS (2-Acrylamido-2-methylpropane sulphonic acid) and IBB (Isobutyl Benzene)—chemicals used in a variety of products, like detergents, acrylic fibre and adhesives, and in the pharmaceutical industry. It is also the world's largest producer of ibuprofen. ■

— Shweta Punj

THE CLIMB Listed under Forbes' 'Asia's 200 Best Under a Billion' companies in 2019, Vinati Organics' journey to becoming a Rs 1,000 crore-plus company has been made possible by Vinati herself

“The brief was clear—ATBS has to work, else the company would shut down. A consultant was appointed and pain points were identified. Today, ATBS brings in over half the company's revenues”

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INHERITORS





RISHABH MARIWALA, 37

*Co-founder, Soap Opera N More &
Director, Sharrp Ventures, Mumbai*

Sharrp Sighted

Rishabh Mariwala spearheads Sharrp Ventures, which manages the Mariwala family office. After graduating from Hofstra University in US in 2007, he joined Kaya Skin Clinic, an arm of the family business Marico. The son of Marico founder Harsh Mariwala and Archana Mariwala, Rishabh works across several roles, from projects, service quality management and on-line marketing. After three years in the Marico Group, Rishabh took the entrepreneurial leap, establishing Soap Opera N More, a marketer of niche bath and body personal care products. In 2016, he introduced a luxury range of skincare products under the brand PureSense.

In 2014, Rishabh began overseeing the family's investment portfolio under the umbrella of Sharrp Ventures, which works in public markets, private equity and start-ups. As much as 20 per cent of the Mariwala

“I have the opportunity to invest and operate in disruptive businesses that have the ability to change the narrative of a sector. The technology shifts and changes in consumer habits are exciting to see”

family office's funds are allocated to investing in start-ups, venture capital and private equity. The firm has invested as much as \$3.5 million (nearly Rs 27 crore) in start-ups. Some of its investments include beauty and skincare firm Nykaa, baby-care portal Mamaearth, as well as early-stage VC funds Blume Ventures and A91 Partners. He also recently become a director at Kaya. ■

—M.G. Arun

HEALTHY HABITS Rishabh has been a vegan for the past seven years and is an avid yoga practitioner. He also enjoys scuba diving.

SIBLING SUCCESS

SHASHWAT GOENKA, 31

Vice-chairman, Firstsource Solutions
(part of the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group)
Kolkata

HEADY MIX Shashwat enjoys badminton and photography, and is passionate about cooking and travel. He also has a newfound interest in reading books

As director of Saregama, which has the largest repertoire of music under its label in India, Avarna Jain helped steer a 100-year-old legacy company into the digital world. Saregama launched Carvaan in 2017, a portable, retro-looking music player with over 5,000 pre-loaded songs. In a year's time, Carvaan sales crossed a million units. Saregama followed this up with Carvaan kids and Carvaan karaoke, and forayed into the OTT film segment and stepped up new content acquisition. Ever eager to

BANDEEP SINGH



“My family has a huge legacy, one that lends itself in great ways. The least I can do is give my best and create new benchmarks”

YASIR IQBAL

expand her horizons, Jain also heads the magazine *Hello!* for which the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group has entered into a licence agreement with Hola SL.

Brother Shashwat Goenka (their parents are industrialist Sanjiv Goenka and his wife Preeti) was instrumental in acquiring information technology company Firstsource Solutions in 2012 when its market capitalisation was less than Rs 600 crore. As of December 21, its m-cap stands at around Rs 10,900 crore. Shashwat consistently worked towards making the company debt-free and at the same time has acquired

AVARNA JAIN, 36

Director, Saregama
New Delhi

SLICED 'N DICED
Avarna, a doting mother to two, loves cooking and would have loved to be a chef, donning the apron and chef's cap, had it not been for what she's doing

companies in the robotics space to add to Firstsource's heft. In 2012, Shashwat took the plunge into the retail space. In 2019, Spencer's acquired Nature's Basket, with Shashwat scripting a turnaround there too. He is also the founder of FMCG brands Too Yumm and Naturali. Too Yumm has, within a short span, garnered a niche for itself in the healthy snacks category, and has become one of India's fastest-growing brands in the process. Naturali, on the other hand, is a nature-inspired hair and skincare brand. ■

—Romita Datta



“I am driven by the need to do better each and every time”

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**TECH
CZARINA**

**ROSHNI NADAR
MALHOTRA, 39**

*Chairperson, HCL
Technologies, & CEO, HCL
Corporation, Noida*

“The rural-urban divide is a difference in access. Even the underprivileged who live in urban India have a certain amount of exposure that enables access...what we are trying to create is a level playing field”

Roshni Nadar Malhotra has the daunting task of building HCL beyond what founder Shiv Nadar, built. Among India's top 20 largest publicly traded companies and one of the top five IT services firm, HCL Technologies had a market capitalisation of Rs 3.14 lakh crore (as of December 20, 2021). Daughter of Shiv and Kiran Nadar, Roshni is the first woman to lead a listed IT company in India. This year, HCL is set to report a double-digit growth in revenues with the pandemic having hastened the adoption of digital ways of doing business. She is also a philanthropic star and has been working actively towards

providing quality education to underprivileged children via the Shiv Nadar Foundation and the VidyaGyan leadership academy. Roshni became the CEO of HCL corporation at 28 and has since led the diversification of the business into healthcare and skills training. Given her background in education, analysts have said the company is likely to strengthen in talent and skill development. ■
- Shweta Punj

NEWSFLASH
Roshni Nadar Malhotra has a communications degree and interned with CNBC and CNN. Her first job was at Sky News, London

**THE ART OF
BUSINESS**

MANASI TATA, 32

*Executive Director and CFO,
Kirloskar Systems; Managing
Trustee and CEO, Caring with
Colour; Mumbai*

When Manasi Tata graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design in the US, many would not have expected her to opt for a corporate career. But Manasi chose to take up a three-year training at Toyota Kirloskar Motor, encompassing technical processes, manufacturing, Japanese work culture, industry-leading quality management systems and business functions. That learning has stood Manasi in good stead as director of Kirloskar Technologies, which delivers medical equipment to 175 major hospitals and medical colleges in India, Toyota Kirloskar Motor and Toyota Tsusho Insurance Broker India.

In 2012, Manasi harmonised art with business with her interior designs for the Sakra World Hospital in Bengaluru to create a vibrant and musical ambience meant to aid healing. In 2018, she was appointed the first United Nations in India Young Business Champion to expand the dialogue on sustainable development goals and work with the world body on issues such as climate change, plastic pollution and women's empowerment. Daughter of industrialist Vikram Kirloskar and Geetanjali Kirloskar, Manasi is married to Neville Tata, son of industrialist Noel Tata. Given her experience as a volunteer-teacher in government schools, Manasi set up Caring with Colour, a non-profit that aims to improve teaching and learning through activity and arts integrated learning methodologies. It is partnering with over 3,200 schools in Karnataka. ■

-M.G. Arun

CANVAS OF CREATIVITY A painter, Manasi's first solo exhibition of 23 paintings was held in Bengaluru when she was 13, and was graced by M.F. Husain. Manasi also enjoys deep-sea and night diving, mountaineering and adventure sports like river rafting

“Through my NGO Caring with Colour, I hope to provide quality education to children who will one day become the backbone of India's growing economy”



SUDHIR RAMCHANDRAN



IN PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

ANANYA BIRLA, 27

Founder & Chairperson, Svatantra Microfin; Co-founder, Mpower Minds; Singer & Songwriter Mumbai

Ananya Birla wears many hats. She is a singer, songwriter, entrepreneur and a mental health advocate. At 17, Ananya started Svatantra Microfin, which now has presence across 78,000 villages in 20 states, employs over 6,000 individuals and has impacted 18 million lives. It is the only microfinance institution to extend 100 per cent cashless disbursements since inception. Svatantra MHFC, the micro-housing arm, is among the few housing institutions to focus on the economically weaker sections. Svatantra Microfin's gross loan portfolio has grown at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 135 per cent from 2015 to 2022 and Svatantra MHFC's at a CAGR of 133 per cent (2017-2022). Ananya's Mpower Minds is an initiative to alleviate the stigma associated with mental health while the Ikai Asai venture empowers local artisans.

Daughter of industrialist Kumar Mangalam Birla and Neerja Birla, Ananya is an alumna of Oxford University and founder of the Ananya Birla Foundation. In May 2020, the foundation made its first

grant to Save the Children India, targeting 100,000 individuals. It is currently working on research and intervention designs in mental health in rural India. Ananya is also an ambassador of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

As a singer, Ananya boasts of over 400 million streams globally. She is the only English language Indian artist to record platinum sales, a feat repeated five times over. The MTV Europe Music Awards nominee began her musical journey at the age of nine with the santoor. She fuses her drumming, piano and guitar skills into her live performances. ■

— M.G. Arun

THE MUSIC OF HER LIFE

Ananya will be releasing an English album and a Hindi-Punjabi one in 2022. Apart from playing the drums and santoor, she writes poems. Books are her other passion—she is currently reading *The People Code* by Taylor Hartman and *Tools of Titans* by Tim Ferriss

“Business or music, leaving a lasting impact on people’s lives drives all my pursuits”

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TWIN FACES OF THE FUTURE

ISHA AMBANI, 30
AKASH AMBANI, 30

Directors, Reliance Jio Infocomm & Reliance Retail Ventures, Mumbai

THE NEXT
100
INHERITORS

“If you have to innovate on a wide scale, it has to come from the grassroots level. That is the DNA of Reliance. Now, it has come to Jio”

AKASH AMBANI

It was in 2014 that the Gen Next at Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), India's largest private sector company, took on management roles in group businesses. Both Isha Ambani and Akash Ambani joined Reliance Jio Infocomm and Reliance Retail Ventures as directors at the age of 24, the same age as their father Mukesh Ambani, who joined RIL in 1981. Isha, who graduated from Yale University with majors in psychology and South Asian studies in 2013, had a brief stint with McKinsey in the US. Akash graduated from Brown University with a major in economics and had been working on RIL's 4G telecom venture before becoming director.

Akash and Isha had been the key negotiators in mega deals struck by Jio Platforms with the likes of Google, Facebook and Intel to remould RIL into a



ROHIT CHAWLA

futuristic enterprise. They have been involved in all key acquisitions by Jio Platforms, including Den Networks, Hathway Cable and Datacom. Akash is part of the Reliance Jio Infocomm executive committee, the firm's governing council, and also involved in the development of products and digital services applications. He is also into employee engagement initiatives to evolve a young and vibrant culture in the company. Akash is also handling sports businesses and running IPL team Mumbai Indians. Isha handles the consumer-oriented aspect of the business—consumer experience, branding and marketing. She assists mother Nita Ambani at Reliance Foundation and is working to build the next level of outreach in healthcare and education. ■

— M.G. Arun

LIVING THEIR PASSION Akash is an avid cricketer and football player. He represented the DAIS (Dhirubhai Ambani International School) football team for over five years. The passionate wildlife photographer often holidays with family at wildlife sanctuaries. Isha's hobbies include tennis and playing the piano.



HEMANT MISHRA

THE NEXT
100
INHERITORS

Weaving Magic

LAVANYA NALLI, 37

Vice-chairman, Nalli Chennai

Lavanya Nalli is the first woman in her family to join the 90-year-old legacy sari business. An engineer by training, she started her career at Nalli in 2005 and worked there for four years before moving to the US to do her MBA at Harvard Business School. She worked as a consultant with McKinsey in Chicago and as vice-president at Myntra before returning to Nalli on the condition that she will be given complete autonomy to build the brand's e-commerce venture.

Since then, the e-commerce vertical, launched in 2015, has grown manifold (300 per cent in the Covid year, FY2021). A big believer in keeping the luxury of handcrafted weaves within the reach of every woman, she talks

about Nalli keeping very low margins but banking on volumes to drive business growth. On her part in the business, she says, "The greatest acknowledgement is success itself. After five years, I will be funding my own business." Besides building the e-commerce side of Nalli, she is also bringing in digital prints on satin, reviving old designs, and bringing in fabrics such as organza and tussars. On working with father Ramnath Nalli, she says a clear demarcation of roles helps. And while her father is a "brutally" tough coach, Lavanya feels it has helped her push herself further. ■

—*Shweta Punj*

STORY TELLER When in her 20s, she wrote three books for children as Lavanya R.N.

"I joined Nalli almost accidentally. I had a month left after my IT engineering internship, so I joined the company"

STEELY RESOLVE

PARTH JINDAL, 31

MD, JSW Cement & JSW Paints; Founder, JSW Sports Mumbai



"The road is very long [in sports]. There is scope for a lot of improvement in the systems put in place by the government"

Parth Jindal joined the Rs 98,800 crore JSW Group in 2012 after a two-year stint abroad, starting with a hedge fund in New York before working in Japan for JFE Steel. Here, he learnt the intricacies of auto-grade steel manufacturing and sales. Upon joining the JSW Group, he was appointed an economic analyst and was to lead all strategic projects. He helped devise a new retail strategy for JSW Steel and took up the challenge of turning around some of the group's loss-making entities—JSW Cement and JSW Steel USA. Jindal now heads JSW Paints, launched in May 2019, and JSW Cement, a Rs 4,560 crore company with a production capacity of 14 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) capacity, the target being 25 mtpa by 2022.

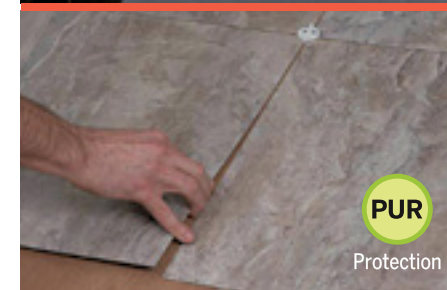
The son of industrialist Sajjan Jindal and Sangita Jindal is also the founder of JSW Sports, which owns and manages the Indian Super League 2018-19 champions Bengaluru FC and Pro-Kabaddi League team Haryana

Steelers. He is chairman and co-owner of IPL team Delhi Capitals. Jindal also founded the Inspire Institute of Sport, which is managing top Olympic athletes of India, such as Neeraj Chopra, Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik and Vikas Krishan Yadav. JSW Sports was honoured with the Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puruskar in 2018 for encouragement to sports through corporate social responsibility. Jindal is vice-president of the Western India Football Association. He earned his MBA from Harvard Business School in 2016 and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Political Science from Brown University in 2012. ■

—*M.G. Arun*

GAME CHANGER Jindal wept for joy when Neeraj Chopra won the gold medal in javelin at the Tokyo Olympics. Chopra's training has been funded by JSW Sports since 2015. Jindal never misses an India cricket match and is also a football buff.

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Before taking over the mantle at tyre maker CEAT when he was just 30, Anant Goenka cut his teeth at KEC International, an RPG Group firm that makes transmission towers, where he oversaw operations in supply chain management, manufacturing, planning and quality control. Under his leadership, CEAT saw its net sales grow from Rs 4,649 crore in 2011-12 to Rs 7,573 crore in 2020-21. Goenka's focus has been on high-margin products, bringing about rapid innovation and marketing aggressively. He changed the product mix at the company, prioritising sales of high-margin two-wheeler and SUV tyres over the low-margin crossply tyres used in commercial vehicles.



MANDAR DEODHAR

Finding His Groove

ANANT GOENKA, 40

Managing Director, CEAT, Mumbai

“What drives me is the challenge of making a larger impact on our customers and on society than anyone else, with limited resources”

With an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management and a BS (Economics) from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, Goenka led CEAT to win the Deming Prize in 2017, one of the world's most prestigious awards in quality management. Before joining CEAT, he had worked with Hindustan Unilever, Accenture and Morgan Stanley. The son of industrialist Harsh Goenka and Mala Goenka he is also a member of the management board at RPG Enterprises. ■

—M.G. Arun

WORK HARD, PLAY HARD

A fitness freak, Goenka enjoys running and likes to play squash on weekends. He also enjoys Japanese food.



THE NEXT
100
INHERITORS

When former investment banker Falguni Nayar decided to venture into the beauty business, her sounding board for all ideas was her daughter, Adwaita, who was still in college at the time that Nykaa was taking shape. Adwaita, the daughter of Falguni and Sanjay Nayar, came home for a break for three months while still a student and worked with her mother to set up the basics of the business, including the wire frame of the company's website, which remains the same as it was when the business began

“What people want to achieve in two years, we want to achieve in the next six months”

MANDAR DEODHAR

about 10 years ago. As CEO of Nykaa Fashion, Adwaita's job is a challenging one—to build the brand's presence in the highly competitive and seasonal fashion space. She says that when her team tells her how many brands were brought on board, her first question is to ask how many were rejected—her motto is to curate fiercely and offer style with value. Today, Nykaa carries over 4,000 brands and has 20 warehouses and 80 stores across 40 cities. The company recently went public, and its listing was one of the most successful, oversubscribed 81.78 times on the last day of subscription. ■

—Shweta Punj

NO FREEBIES Nayar detests the discounting model in retail, maintaining that it depletes value in every leg of the supply chain

FASHION FORWARD

ADWAITA NAYAR, 31

CEO, Nykaa Fashion, Mumbai



YASIR IQBAL

VASUDHA DINODIA MUNJAL, 40

Founder and CEO, Choko la, New Delhi

The Chocolate Factory

Born and raised in an entrepreneurial family, Vasudha Dinodia Munjal, the eldest daughter of Dr Pawan Munjal, chairman and CEO of Hero MotoCorp, and Aniesha Munjal, showed a passion and acumen for entrepreneurship early in life, a quality she clearly inherited from her father. She started Choko la in 2005 with the vision to introduce superior quality and beautifully crafted premium chocolates in India and has since used her financial and entrepreneurial acuity to make Choko la a global made-in-India luxury chocolate brand.

What started as a small one café venture in Delhi's Vasant Vihar is now a global premium chocolates brand. Post Covid, the business also established a strong online presence in India, the US and Europe via both direct sales channels as well with partners such as Amazon.

Choko la is working on further increasing its global presence by opening outlets in London, Berlin, Paris, Dubai and the Philippines over the next three years.

“I have always enjoyed cooking, serving and feeding people. Choko la has allowed me to convert my passion into business... Quality is in my DNA. If I won't give it to my kids, I won't give it to my customers”

With its recent debut in the US with Amazon Global, the brand will be expanding its foothold across the North American and European continents by 2025. In the coming years, Munjal also plans to expand Choko la to Western Europe, West Asia, North America, and Australasia, with boutiques in these locations. ■

– Shwweta Punj

GIVING BACK Vasudha Dinodia Munjal has trained at some of the world's top culinary schools, including Le Cordon Bleu Cookery School, London, and also attended finishing school in Switzerland

RITESH MALIK, 32

Founder, Innov8 and Project Guerrilla, Delhi

FUNDING FATHER

Life would have been very different for Ritesh Malik had he opted to follow in his parents' footsteps and remained a medical professional. (His father, Ravi, is one of the most sought-after paediatricians in New Delhi, while his mother is a reputed gynaecologist.) A graduate of Tamil Nadu's Dr M.G.R. Medical University, Ritesh decided his focus would instead be on supporting innovators.

As an angel investor, he has funded firms in healthcare, technology, education and energy, also building an enabling ecosystem via his co-working space, Innov8. Beyond just equity investments, Ritesh has also been putting his management expertise to work to support these businesses. Eight years after setting up his first firm, he has funded more than 80 startups via Project Guerrilla. It all began with his augmented reality start-up, Adstuck, which created a product called Alive App that was later acquired by Bennett & Coleman. Today, Ritesh remains the CEO of Innov8, though he, along with other investors in the firm, such as Paytm's Vijay Shekhar Sharma and Sequoia Capital's Rajan Anandan, sold their stakes when OYO bought the firm for Rs 220 crore. ■

—Anilesh S. Mahajan

MEDICINE'S LOSS, START-UPS' GAIN

While pursuing his medical degree, Ritesh also attended the London School of Economics for a short-term course as well as completed a semester at Harvard University. He was working as an in-house surgeon at Delhi's Sir Ganga Ram Hospital when he co-founded his first start-up, Adstuck.



“I started angel investing very early in life. When I began, I had no intention of making money from my investments in start-ups. Being backed by founders who have been there and done that is amazing”



RACHIT GOSWAMI



SAMYUKTA LAKSHMI/GETTY IMAGES

RITESH AGARWAL, 28

Founder & Group CEO, Oyo Rooms, Gurugram

Room to Grow

In 2020, London-based research group Hurun featured Ritesh Agarwal as the second youngest billionaire in their Global Rich List 2020. The founder of Oyo Rooms, though, had become a rage in India long ago. A college dropout from Rayagada in Odisha, Agarwal has built an empire of over a million rooms in 43,000 hotels and 150,000 vacation homes globally. OYO was valued at \$10 billion (Rs 75,800 crore) in 2019 after Agarwal bought back shares worth \$2 billion (Rs 15,125 crore) from venture capital firms Sequoia Capital and Lightspeed Venture Partners. His start-up success has had its share of ups and downs. Oravel Stays, the budget accommodation platform he had launched in 2012 while in college in New Delhi, had sunk without a trace. Agarwal, at one point, was left with

“Ritesh has not only created value for himself but built an ecosystem. His start-up is competing with the best in the world and taking the India story to the next level”

ADITYA MALIK
Senior Partner, Lumis Partners

just Rs 30 and the option of returning home. But his entrepreneurial zeal pushed him to not give up. The same spirit helped OYO survive the demand slump during the pandemic. The company invested heavily in technology, restructured operations and went lean. In October 2021, Oyo filed a red herring prospectus with SEBI, seeking clearance to raise Rs 8,384 crore by listing the stocks. The stock market bells are expected to ring in early 2022. ■

—Anilesh S. Mahajan

HOME TRUTHS Agarwal's parents did not believe OYO Rooms was a phenomenal success until they heard Prime Minister Narendra Modi talk about it in one of his radio broadcasts



IN THE BIG LEAGUE

NITHIN KAMATH, 38
NIKHIL KAMATH, 34

Founder and CEO & Co-founder and CIO, Zerodha, Bengaluru

In 2010, Nithin Kamath founded Zerodha, a brokerage with a transparent and discounted business model. Today, with an estimated five million active clients, Zerodha, now driven by both the Kamath brothers, Nithin and Nikhil, is the largest brokerage in the country. According to the IIFL Wealth Hurun India '40 and Under Self-Made Rich List' 2020, they are the wealthiest entrepreneurs in India under the age of 40, with Rs 24,000

crore. They recently got permission from SEBI to set up an asset management company. In September, Nithin announced that Zerodha would be adding an 'alert feature' to its platform to inform nominees when an account became dormant, after reports in recent months that about Rs 80,000 crore of Indians' wealth remains unclaimed in various banking and demat accounts. ■

—Shweta Punj

BUSINESS PRIORITIES Nikhil Kamath dropped out of school at the age of 16 (after class 10) to join his brother's business

“Hobbies help you grow intellectually. When you try to learn something new, your life skills get incrementally better”

NITHIN KAMATH

“We intend to make our products available in smaller towns and cities and grow the positive social and environmental impact created by Ecoware. Pollution is a global problem that requires a concerted solution”



Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

THE NEXT
100
ENTREPRENEURS

PLANET SAVER

RHEA MAZUMDAR SINGHAL, 39

Founder and CEO, Ecoware Delhi

On a mission to make sustainable packaging a way of life, Singhal has introduced the likes of national food giant Haldiram's to using cutlery made of biodegradable materials. Distressed at the amount of plastic waste generated by disposable cutlery—with the attendant environmental consequences—Singhal worked to find an appropriate replacement material. She settled on sugarcane bagasse (the residue left from the extraction of sugarcane juice), and today, her firm claims its cutlery degrades into soil in just 30 days. Founded in 2010, Ecoware currently has a turnover of about Rs 30 crore, which Singhal aims to raise to Rs 100 crore. She has a growing list of major clients, including Indian Railways, Cinnabon, FabCafe, Subway and Chaayos. The firm also caters to hotels (including the Taj, Leela, Lalit, Novotel and the Oberoi), as well as the office canteens of J.P. Morgan, Goldman Sachs and Bain Capital. She was awarded the Nari Shakti Puraskar by President Ram Nath Kovind in 2019. ■

— Shweta Punj

THE EARLY BIRD... Singhal wakes up at 5.45 am every day for a vigorous workout; she says this grounds her and keeps her motivated



NIRAJ SINGH, 36

Founder, Spinny, Gurugram

The Patron Saint of Used Cars

In the first week of December, when Niraj Singh's Spinny raised \$283 million (Rs 2,150 crore) from an investor consortium led by Abu Dhabi-based ADQ, Tiger Global and Avenir Growth, it became India's newest unicorn, valued at about \$1.8 billion (Rs 13,680 crore). A used-car retailing platform, Spinny competes with firms like CarDekho, OLX and Quikr. Industry estimates suggest Indians will be trading 6.7-7.2 million used cars by end of 2022, and transactions are rapidly moving online. An inveterate car lover, it's what drew Singh to setting up Spinny. An IIT-Delhi alumnus, he is a serial entrepreneur and also an investor in new businesses. He floated Spinny in 2015, along with friends Mohit Gupta and Ramanshu Mahaur. Ramanshu, a fellow IIT-D grad, is a tech geek, while Mohit joined them from Flipkart and heads operations. The firm has 15 car hubs in eight cities—Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata and Ahmedabad. ■

“Extremely consumer-oriented, I've always been keen on innovating businesses to meet changing consumer needs”

—Anilesh S. Mahajan

SELF DRIVE For Niraj, driving his car—both on city routes and longer highways—is a big stress-buster. In fact, he loves to go for a spin before taking a big decision

THE ED MASTERS

BYJU RAVEENDRAN, 40
DIVYA GOKULNATH, 35

Co-founders, Byju's
Bengaluru

“I hadn't envisioned a specific career path, but I knew I would give 100 per cent to whatever I did”

DIVYA GOKULNATH

THE NEXT
100
ENTREPRENEURS

Understated, ambitious and an astute educator—Byju Raveendran calls himself an accidental entrepreneur. A journey that began with helping friends ace the CAT (Common Admission Test) and holding classes for whoever was interested led him to co-founding Byju's with his former student and then wife, Divya Gokulnath. Today, Byju's is the world's most valuable edtech startup, at \$21 billion (Rs 1.6 lakh crore) as of August this year. Before co-founding the firm, Gokulnath was a teacher. Her love for teaching and her ability to keep her people together has ensured that Byju's core team has remained intact since it was founded. During the pandemic, the firm launched a slew of online classes for students across age groups. It also made several acquisitions—about eight this year—extending its footprint to the US. In terms of numbers, the Byju's app has been downloaded over 100 million times, and classes are available in 1,700 cities worldwide. According to the firm, it added 13.5 million students in March and April 2020. ■

—Shwweta Punj

COUPLE OF GOALS Gokulnath's love for biology comes from her father, but her appreciation for maths comes from her husband. Raveendran worked at a shipping company before returning to India to start Byju's





“My dream is to put India on the private aviation map and build the fastest possible connectivity from point A to B”

SHEKHAR GHOSH

The Jet Setter

KANIKA TEKRIWAL, 33

*Founder and CEO, JetSetGo
Delhi*

The founder of JetSetGo—an aggregator service for aircraft, often described as the Ola/Uber of the skies—Kanika Tekriwal founded the company when she was just 24. She has surmounted major challenges in her journey—a year into developing her business model, Tekriwal was diagnosed with cancer. Nonetheless, she fought her way through, beginning her business with an investment of just Rs 5,600 and without owning a single aircraft. Her business began with an app on which customers could book chartered

flights. In the early years, as she sought meetings with potential clients, she was often dismissed and sometimes ignored at meetings, with questions about her business being directed to her male colleagues. With a turnover of Rs 150 crore, her company today has about 200 employees, with offices in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad. In 2020-21, Tekriwal's company handled 100,000 fliers—many of them India's rich and powerful, who lease jets from her company to travel for business meetings or election rallies—and operated 6,000 flights. ■

—Shweta Punj

A BITTER EXPERIENCE Tekriwal was once asked to serve coffee at a meeting she had set up with a potential client

THE NEXT
100
ENTREPRENEURS

QUEEN OF WORKWEAR

AYUSHI GUDWANI, 37

*Founder and CEO, FableStreet
Gurugram*



When Gudwani began working as a management consultant at McKinsey, the first thing she noticed was the paucity of professional-wear options for women. Most brands in this field were international, with the clothing not specifically designed for Indian women. Spying an opportunity, she set up FableStreet, a domestic clothing brand catering specifically to India's professional women, in 2016. Gudwani says that though she has a personal interest in such products, she was clear that her firm would not be a passion play but rather would be established on a sound business model. She says her company's revenue has grown eightfold in the past two years, all the more impressive given that this took place during the pandemic. "Short of sewing, I can do and know everything about the garment business," she says. She has so far successfully conducted two rounds of funding, raising about \$500,000 (Rs 3.8 crore) in seed funding and close to \$3 million (Rs 22 crore) from Fireside Ventures. She says her goal is to have a store in every Indian metro once the pandemic has receded. ■

—Shweta Punj

FUN AND GAMES Gudwani plays badminton on the weekends, and her favourite exercise is weighted squats

“Entrepreneurship is a hard journey, and always will be. It comes with the need to do everything from scratch”

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



“What drives me is the opportunity to build financial products that help ordinary Indians create wealth and experience financial freedom”

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

Prize Asset

RADHIKA GUPTA, 38

MD & CEO, Edelweiss AMC, Mumbai

From being a self-doubting girl in college to one of India's most powerful businesswomen, Radhika Gupta's journey has been an eventful one. Her birth was a difficult moment—born with complications, she was kept in an incubator for several days, where a grave oversight by a duty nurse left her with a broken neck. The daughter of an Indian diplomat, she grew up on four continents. Graduating from the Wharton School, she faced rejections from several top companies before being hired by McKin-

sey & Co in 2005. In 2009, while the world was still nursing the wounds of the global financial crisis, Gupta decided to return to India as an entrepreneur, giving up a comfortable job in the US. After a nearly five-year stint as co-founder of Forefront Capital Management, an alternative investment firm, she joined Mumbai-based financial services firm Edelweiss, rising to become the CEO of its mutual funds business in 2017. Under her, the firm's assets under management grew from Rs 6,000 crore in 2017 to Rs 77,000 crore in December 2021. She led the

acquisition of the JP Morgan Mutual Fund by the Edelweiss Group and the integration thereafter in 2016–2017, despite having no previous experience in mergers and acquisitions. Her collaborative approach, decision-making skills and relentless adherence to project timelines has resulted in the acquisition being one of the best and fastest integration of people, clients and processes in the asset management industry. ■

—M.G. Arun

AFTER HOURS An avid bridge player, she likes to compose poetry in her free time and is a fan of Shah Rukh Khan. She is the founder president of the Penn Alumni Club of Mumbai, the largest foreign university alumni club in India.



UDIT KULSHRESTHA/GETTY IMAGES

SHEKHAR GHOSH

ON THE MOVE
Deepak Garg,
Gazal Kalra

DEEPAK GARG, 39
GAZAL KALRA, 35

Co-founders, Rivigo, Gurugram

GRAND TRUCK ROAD

Lots can happen over coffee. For close friends Deepak Garg and Gazal Kalra, a meeting over their favourite brew set the stage for Rivigo, a technology-enabled logistics platform founded in 2014. Garg had been toying with the idea of a relay truck model wherein no driver would be on the road for more than a couple of hours. He and Kalra took a road trip to understand the challenges faced by truck drivers, such as poor pay and notoriously long working hours, and positioned Rivigo as a 'humane' logistics brand. The start-up immediately attracted e-commerce, cold chain, pharma and FMCG clients. Warburg Pincus and SAIF Partners came on board as investors. While the improved highway network helped Rivigo scale up operations and post an income of Rs 1,080 crore in 2019–20, Garg and Kalra need to overcome sectoral problems, such as fragmented ownership and demand-supply mismatch, to turn their venture profitable in the future. ■

“Rivigo is a beneficiary of the infra and policy initiatives of the past seven years, be it GST, highway development, Digital India or fast tag”

DEEPAK GARG

—Anilsh S. Mahajan

DRIVING FORCE Working on a logistics report while at McKinsey, Garg found truck sales at odds with India's growth trajectory. The quest to solve this riddle led to Rivigo's birth.



THREE'S COMPANY
(From left) Roman Saini, Gaurav Munjal and Hemesh Singh

NAVEEN KADAM

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ENTREPRENEURS



DYNAMIC DUO
Nandan Reddy (L) and Sriharsha Majety

“If I don’t understand something, I read half a dozen books to learn about it”

SRIHARSHA MAJETY

THE HUNGER GAME

SRIHARSHA MAJETY, 35
NANDAN REDDY, 34

CEO and co-founder & Co-founder, Swiggy, Bengaluru

Sriharsha Majety and Nandan Reddy (with Rahul Jaimini, who left the firm in 2020) launched food aggregator Swiggy in 2014. The company prioritised excellence in logistics operations and on building a strong management team. Majety kept a strong control of the financials, and focused on the viability of the food delivery model rather than blind growth. Swiggy currently connects consumers to over 185,000 restaurants across over 500 cities. It has a fleet of over 250,000 delivery partners and also offers instant grocery delivery service through Instamart, pick-up and drop service through Swiggy Genie and daily grocery delivery service through Supr Daily. Swiggy became a unicorn (valued at over \$1 billion, or Rs 7,600 crore) in 2018, and is currently valued at around \$5.5 billion (Rs 41,800 crore), according to Venture Intelligence. ■

—M.G. Arun

FROM THE GROUND UP In the early days of operations, the founders physically undertook deliveries themselves

MAKING A MARK

GAURAV MUNJAL, 31
ROMAN SAINI, 30
HEMESH SINGH, 29

Co-founders, Unacademy, Bengaluru

“My aspiration is to be the biggest [start-up] in the world, and build one of the largest consumer internet firms India has seen”

GAURAV MUNJAL

While in school, an engineering coaching centre had rejected Gaurav Munjal, saying he could not be put in the batch taught by the best teachers. Munjal realised how good education was a privilege in India. In 2010, while in college, he started Unacademy as an educational channel on YouTube. Its popularity led to Unacademy's formal launch in 2015. Munjal's first venture, however, was Flat.to, a real estate platform co-founded with Hemesh Singh in 2013. It was acquired by commonfloor.com. Unacademy aims to build the world's largest learning repository on the 'freemium business model'. Learners can access courses for free but pay a subscription for live classes and personalised learning. In a short span, Unacademy has gained over 50,000 registered educators and over 49 million learners. The group entered the unicorn club in 2020 and, according to Venture Intelligence, is currently valued at \$3.4 billion (Rs 25,770 crore). ■

—M.G. Arun

LIKE MINDS Munjal is passionate about technology and building world-class products. Singh enjoys writing code and travelling. Saini, a doctor who cleared the IAS, was an assistant collector in MP

GATEWAY TO WEALTH

HARSHIL MATHUR, 30
SHASHANK KUMAR, 31

Co-founders, Razorpay, Bengaluru

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“You can’t build a payments company out of a garage. We needed bank partnerships, but several of them rejected us. These were things we didn’t understand about the business”

HARSHIL MATHUR

Like many start-ups, fintech unicorn Razorpay, founded in 2014, had a shaky beginning. A bank had asked founders Shashank Kumar and Harshil Mathur, both IIT Roorkee graduates, to make a security deposit of Rs 25 lakh to service their business loan. It eventually fell on Kumar’s grandfather to bail them out. Kumar and Mathur look back at those initial struggles with a smile. Razorpay, a payments gateway for small and medium businesses, has grown phenomenally to become India’s second most-valuable fintech start-up, after Paytm. With the recent Series-F fundraising of around \$375 million (about Rs 2,840 crore), it has raised its valuation to \$7.5 billion (Rs 56,800 crore) from \$3 billion (Rs 22,700 crore) in April 2021. The company recently launched Razorpay Rize, a programme focused on early-stage and bootstrapped start-ups. Mathur hopes to add 100,000-odd start-ups to the Rize network over the next two years. ■

—Shwweta Punj

BANK BUMPS Nearly a hundred banks had rejected Razorpay as a payments solution provider, prompting Kumar and Mathur to—at one point—even consider giving up their venture and moving into the e-commerce space

SHARP SENSE
Mathur (left), Kumar



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ENTREPRENEURS

SWEET SUCCESS

VINEETA SINGH, 38

Co-founder and CEO, Sugar Cosmetics, Mumbai



“Moving forward, we will strengthen our core pillars—distribution, product, content and community. We aim to make Sugar one of India’s top three cosmetics brands”

Singh famously gave up a crore-rupee job offer from an investment bank while she was still in her twenties because she wanted to build a firm of her own. Sugar Cosmetics, a digital-first brand, is her third start-up—the first two failed, but that did not dampen her enthusiasm. Pouring her learning and consumer insights into Sugar, which she co-founded in 2015, the IIT and IIM graduate has scaled up the firm to around 35,000+ retail touchpoints in over 130 cities across India. In 2020-21, the firm achieved Rs 130 crore in revenue, and raised \$21 million (Rs 160 crore) in venture funding, bringing its valuation to Rs 750 crore. Her mantra is to make cosmetics for Indian skin tones and the Indian environment. Singh, who runs the company with her husband, is optimistic of future growth—the Indian beauty market as a whole is estimated to be worth about Rs 10,000 crore. ■

—Shwweta Punj

RUNNING A BUSINESS Singh is an ultra-marathoner and has completed the 89-km Comrades Marathon in South Africa three years in a row

MANDAR DEODHAR

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ENTREPRENEURS



TEAM WORK

Harsh Jain (left),
Bhavit Sheth

Living the Dream

HARSH JAIN, 36, CEO & Co-founder, Dream11

BHAVIT SHETH, 36, COO & Co-founder, Dream11, Mumbai

An idea that had its seeds in a casual conversation between friends fresh out of college has today taken shape as one of India's largest fantasy gaming companies. Dream11, a pioneer in the fantasy gaming segment in India, was founded in 2008 by Harsh Jain and Bhavit Sheth. It started off as a personal project since the co-founders were big fans of English football fantasy leagues. Their big idea was to start something similar to the Indian Premier League (IPL) in gaming. While doing his MBA from Bentley University, Sheth, also an engineering graduate, would look at the way fantasy leagues are played in the US—in baseball, football and basketball. Co-founder Jain has done his engineering from the University

of Pennsylvania and an MBA from Columbia Business School.

Competition has grown and there are at least 60 other gaming platforms operating in the same genre in India, according to news reports. But Dream11 stayed ahead. Users across Dream Sports platforms now number 140 million. The company commands a valuation of \$8 billion (about Rs 60,400 crore). It has diversified to include sports technology products and services. It recently committed \$50 million (Rs 380 crore) to in-house sports content and commerce platform FanCode. The firm has also introduced payment solutions through DreamPay, and launched a sports accelerator, DreamX. In 2020, Dream11 won the title sponsorship rights for the 2020 IPL for Rs 222 crore. ■

—M.G. Arun

“While starting a company, it is important to define its culture and then align everyone to that culture. Systems and processes may have to be reinvented but the culture will always be the same”

BHAVIT SHETH

FUNDS FUNDA Before getting their first funding from Kalaari Capital, Sheth and Jain had approached some 150 venture capitalists and private equity investors, but were refused by all of them

CHILL PILL DELIVERY

DHAVAL SHAH, 32
SIDDHARTH SHAH, 32
HARDIK DEDHIA, 32
HARSH PAREKH, 32
DHARMIL SHETH, 32

Co-founders, PharmEasy
 Mumbai

“We aim to bring efficiency in the end-to-end delivery chain. If food and fashion can be supplied at the doorstep, why not healthcare?”

DHAVAL SHAH



THE SMILES SAY IT ALL: (Clockwise from left) Dhaval Shah, Harsh Parekh, Siddharth Shah, Hardik Dedhia and Dharmil Sheth

In 2015, after a not-so-successful venture in dialhealth.com, Siddharth Shah, Hardik Dedhia and Harsh Parekh teamed up with childhood friends Dhaval Shah and Dharmil Sheth to float PharmEasy, a pharmaceuticals delivery firm. It shot into prominence during the pandemic when online delivery became the norm. In May 2021, the founders struck a deal to buy Mumbai-based entrepreneur Arokiaswamy Velumani's 66 per cent stake in Thyrocare for Rs 4,546 crore. It was one of the largest deals in healthcare and one that saw an unlisted entity pick up a listed one. Around the same time, PharmEasy had acquired Medlife to become the first Indian e-pharmacy start-up to enter the unicorn club. With Thyrocare in the kitty, the company added lab and clinical testing to its bouquet of services. PharmEasy claims to cater to 5 million people in over 1,200 cities across the country, offering both medicines and diagnostic services. ■

—Anilesh S. Mahajan

UNIQUE MIX The PharmEasy founders have varied backgrounds. Dharmil is an engineer, Dhaval a doctor and the other three are management specialists. Siddharth is also a three-time national go-karting champion.



SIMPLIFYING TAXATION

(From left) Ankit Solanki, Archit Gupta and Srivatsan Chari

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 ENTREPRENEURS

The Tax Help Cometh

ARCHIT GUPTA, 36
ANKIT SOLANKI, 37
SRIVATSAN CHARI, 34

Co-founders, Clear (formerly ClearTax), Bengaluru

“India is on a massive digitisation journey and we are fortunate to be in the perfect storm of electronic invoicing, GST, UPI, cheap mobile internet and rapid adoption of technology due to Covid-19”

ARCHIT GUPTA

Archit Gupta returned to India in the summer of 2010 from San Francisco after the start-up he was working for, Data Domain Inc., was acquired by EMC Corporation. A conversation with his chartered accountant father at home regarding complexities in India's online tax-filing portal set Gupta thinking about his next move. He flew back to the US and researched on setting up a self-serving tax filing platform. ClearTax was launched just a fortnight before closure of the tax-filing window for FY2011 and quickly attracted 1,000-odd clients. In September 2011, at a hackathon he was hosting, Gupta met and teamed up with Ankit Solanki and Srivatsan Chari, both tech experts. The defining turn came in 2014 when ClearTax was accepted in the Silicon Valley-based Y Combinator start-up accelerator programme. In June 2021, ClearTax was rechristened Clear. It claims to have over six million Indians registered on its platform, including 50,000 tax experts; a million small businesses and 3,000 large enterprises. In October, it raised \$75 million (Rs 560 crore) in Series C funding and is expected to use the money for expansion into the B2B credit and payments space and making Clear a complete financial services provider. ■

—Anilesh S. Mahajan

KYOTO CALLING Gupta wishes to travel to Kyoto to get a feel of its culture, food and nature. Ideally in the cherry blossom season, he says.



YASIR IQBAL

“Sachin demonstrates the courage to lead by example. His work has the characteristics of being disruptive and provocative—as real design should be”

PROF. MANOJ MATHUR
School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

THE GREEN BUILDER

SACHIN RASTOGI, 38

Founding Director, Zero Energy Design Lab, New Delhi

In a world ruled by excesses, Sachin Rastogi’s architecture and interior design studio ZED (Zero Energy Design) Lab, specialising in net-zero buildings, stands out. His philosophy is simple—“to enhance human experience while minimising resource consumption”. Rastogi’s building designs factor in climate, site, context and environmental impact. He even draws inspiration from Indian vernacular architecture to design for the future, and wins accolades. For instance, the hostel block at St Andrews Institute of Technology and Management in Gurugram serves as a model for environmental sustainability, energy conservation and minimal

carbon footprint, and has received various international awards, including the RTF Green Building Award and Eldrok Best Green Building Award.

Another of his interesting works is the House Under Shadows in Karnal, which reinterprets the architectural language of Indian *havelis* and *chhatris*, with the courtyard enabling social cohesion and transition spaces for movement and natural ventilation. Rastogi is an alumnus of the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, and the Architectural Association School of Architecture, London. He has over 10 years of international experience across Europe, West Asia and New Zealand. ■

—Ridhi Kale

GAME FOR IT Rastogi is a diehard cricket fan and plays matches whenever he gets a chance. He also loves football and has won several state-level awards in sports

EYE TO THE FUTURE

PEYUSH BANSAL, 37
AMIT CHAUDHARY, 34
RAMNEEK KHURANA, 35

Co-founders, Lenskart
New Delhi

“To build futuristic firms, it’s important to not get swayed by market or investor benchmarks, but set one’s own”

PEYUSH BANSAL



FRAME BY FRAME
Bansal (right) with Chaudhary

VIVAN MEHRA

The limited success of his ventures, searchmycampus.com and Valyoo Technologies, prompted Peyush Bansal to return to India from the US in 2010 and start an eyewear start-up. Lenskart, set up with the help of friends Amit Chaudhary, Sumeet Kapahi and Ramneek Khurana, adopted the hybrid model—online and brick and mortar stores. Bansal was confident the Indian market would provide him scale. Starting with contact lenses, Lenskart today has 600-odd retail stores and claims to cater to over 100,000 customers a month with over 4,000 types of eyewear and other eyecare products. Lenskart’s valuation touched \$1.5 billion (Rs 11,355 crore) in 2019 after a \$275 million (Rs 2,080 crore) investment from Softbank. Bansal, Chaudhary and Kapahi have worked hard to streamline operations. Their facility in Delhi can produce 300,000 glasses a month; 20 per cent of the frames are produced in China’s Zhengzhou. Kapahi handles supplies while Chaudhary is an expert in organisational development. Bansal, of course, is the brain behind Lenskart. ■

—Anilesh S. Mahajan

TRAINING GROUND Bansal picked up the nuts and bolts of the eyewear business through his Valyoo Technologies venture in the US

HEALTHY OPTION

SAMARTH SINDHI, 29

*Founder, Raksha Health
(formerly Digi-Prex), Hyderabad*



“Instead of trying to acquire customers online, we work with physicians and pharmacies to serve [their] customers”

For Sindhi, a graduate in mechanical engineering from Brown University in the US, founding a company based on a relationship of trust with customers was of paramount importance. His idea was an online medicine delivery platform, especially for chronic diseases. His firm, Raksha Health (founded as Digi-Prex in 2019), provides discounted medicines that are delivered to customers' doorsteps. The company uses AI to provide customised lifestyle management solutions for patients with chronic diseases, arranging for monthly delivery of medicines to those who have uploaded their prescriptions through WhatsApp. Over the past two years, the firm has networked with several hospitals and laboratories to help patients book tests and operations, as well as to help them locate the most cost-effective options. Raksha achieves this through an app that keeps track of recurring medicine orders that one might require. It also has a dedicated patient coordinator team, covers 15 specialties and has a network of over 100 hospitals and over 500 specialists. ■

—M.G. Arun

EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

During the lockdown, Sindhi's company saw a 100 per cent surge in daily medicine orders

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INNOVATORS

SWARM SAPIEN

TANMAY BUNKAR, 30

Founder, Botlab Dynamics Delhi

When Tanmay Bunkar, a young IIT Delhi student, read of how the Indian army was looking to import American-made Javelin anti-tank missiles in 2010, he began looking for solutions. He quickly gave up because the sugar rockets—homemade rockets using potassium nitrate—were proving expensive to build. Less than a decade later, he had found the answer—dozens of low-cost drones carrying explosives and flying in a ‘swarm’ could attack tanks far beyond the range of anti-tank missiles. By 2014, he had demonstrated a two-drone hunter-killer team. In 2016, he began Botlab Dynamics, a start-up at IIT Delhi, with a loan of Rs 50 lakh from the Department of Science and Technology.

He didn’t win the 2019 IAF competition to field drones but used the experience to branch out into swarm drones where packs of armed drones fly together like herds of killer bees, in perfect symmetry and saturate enemy air defences or attack soft-skinned vehicles, aircraft and troops in the open. Bunkar is now one of a handful of Indian start-ups offering completely homegrown products. The break-

“Finance is
the biggest
constraint in
technology, not
physics”

through came last year when Bunkar, the son of a decorated policeman from Morena in Madhya Pradesh, perfected his own algorithm-based flight controller—which tells the machine how to fly. His firm takes on civilian contracts for mass drone displays where pre-programmed drones make patterns in the sky. This isn’t his desired end-state for his technology, but Bunkar sees it essential for revenues. ■

—Sandeep Unnithan

ROLE MODEL His father, a decorated Senior Inspector of Police in Madhya Pradesh, passed away due to pandemic-related stress in 2020

BANDEEP SINGH



SPACE ARTIST

PRIYANKA DAS RAJKAKATI, 30

*Aerospace engineer and artist
Assam*

Priyanka Das Rajkakati wanted to be an artist, but was equally fascinated by the stars. So, this aerospace engineer combined passions to start on a professional journey few Indians have attempted. Her artwork has been selected to be part of an international Moon Gallery project that aims to send art to the moon via a lunar lander mission by 2022. Co-founder and GNC Engineer (Navigation) in Franco-German space tech firm The Exploration Company, which is working to develop, produce and operate a modular and reusable orbital space vehicle, she has now been chosen for a one-year fellowship programme by Karman Project, instituted by a Berlin-based non-profit

foundation. This fellowship brings together 15 individuals below 45 with outstanding accomplishments in space. Priyanka plans to run outreach campaigns in her home state Assam to create awareness about how space technologies can be used to better everyday life. She also seeks to explore and showcase the harmonious existence of arts and science in every sphere of human life—from a remote village in Assam to the most high-tech first-world cities. ■

—Kaushik Deka

EARTHLY STRUGGLE She had to relearn to walk after meeting with a serious accident at the age of 25



RAVI PRAKASH, 31

Dairy technology researcher Bengaluru

White Revolutionary

A steel milk pail with a power charger that can chill milk in 30 minutes has the potential to revolutionise India's dairy industry. The nano fluid-based technology pail can store seven litres of milk and chill it from 37°C to 7°C in 30 minutes. The innovator, dairy technologist Ravi Prakash, who is pursuing a doctorate at the, Indian Council of Agricultural Research-National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI), Bengaluru, expects to make the pail, costing about Rs 9,000 in the early prototype iterations, affordable. With financial grants from NDRI, he

“Frugal yet high-tech innovations can change farmers’ lives, especially in India’s unorganised dairy farming sector”

invested over Rs 10 lakh to design a system that cools raw milk from ambient temperature to below the critical limit. “After milking, time is of the essence in preserving quality as the farmer ferries it to the collection centre on its way to the chilling centre, twice a day,” says Prakash. His experience as the son of a farmer from Harsari in the West Champaran district of Bihar, and his education (a BTech degree from NDRI, Karnal), prompted him to prepare the prototype of the pail. The device fetched him the BRICS Young Innovator Prize in 2019 that included a cash award of \$25,000. He expects his invention to be available to farmers at less than Rs 5,000 by mid-2023. ■

—Amarnath K. Menon

MULTI-BILLION OPPORTUNITY The government’s National Action Plan for Dairy Development projects needs 880,000 rapid milk chillers worth over Rs 2,100 crore by 2022

“Priyanka stood out not only because she was good at Physics but because of her talent for art and language”

BIKRAM PHOOKUN
*Professor of Physics,
St Stephen’s College, Delhi*



MISSION MOON Priyanka Das Rajkakati, inset, and during a lunar simulation experience in Hawaii





“The future is in small satellites for observation and communication through small rockets—India has just a two per cent share in this \$370 billion business”

PAWAN KUMAR CHANDANA, 31

Co-founder and CEO, Skyroot Aerospace Hyderabad

SOARING AMBITION

Choosing one's passion over their ambition can leave most conflicted. Not IITian Pawan Kumar Chandana. He craved the independence of an entrepreneur along with a desire to build rockets. What helped him blend both was a mechanical engineering degree from IIT Kharagpur. Chandana opted for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) over going abroad for further studies or enrolling in the high-paying finance or information technology fields. “Without any thought, I attended the interview and luckily got selected. I was fortunate to get in despite a comparatively low academic performance—the three others chosen were among the batch toppers,” he recalls. A bonus was the placement at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram. In six years at ISRO, he learnt enough about rocketry to realise he could develop it privately like Space X and Rocket Lab are doing abroad. Quitting ISRO in

June 2018, Chandana launched Skyroot along with Naga Bharath Dhaka, 32, also an IIT graduate. Together they began building one of the most cost-effective space launch vehicles in the world. “Step by step, we achieved one milestone after another,” says Kumar. Skyroot has raised more than Rs 90 crore as capital and inked a deal to use ISRO test and launch facilities. The start-up has developed cryogenic technology with new propellants, such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) and liquid oxygen (LoX) for the first time in the country. For its stirring success, Skyroot relies on a 100-member team built over the last three and a half years. ■

—Amarnath K. Menon

PRIVATE BOOST Skyroot will launch a satellite using its 20-metre-tall launch vehicle, Vikram-1, before the end of 2022



“I want to cut a billion tonnes of carbon dioxide from the air each year”

Use and Refuse

VIDYUT MOHAN, 30

Co-founder & CEO, Takachar Delhi

Delhi-based entrepreneur Vidyut Mohan's start-up Takachar (literally, money from carbon) aims to provide affordable machines for farmers to convert their agri-waste into cash. One of the five winners of the Earthshot Prize, 2021, he has pilot projects in Haryana and Africa operate on a simple principle. Existing machines that process farm waste are large, centrally located and need huge logistics to transport crop waste. Mohan's start-up plans to hook up these compact machines on to tractors, making them portable and affordable, and give farmers a new revenue stream. The idea germinated from his master's thesis at the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

There was, he discovered, little interest in using crop and forest residues as a source of renewable energy as compared to wind and solar power. Not tackled at their source, this crop waste could turn into a health hazard like what happened on November 5 this year when the share of stubble burning in Delhi's polluted air peaked at an alarming 48 per cent of PM 2.5 particulate matter. He's working with a Bengaluru-based firm to mass produce the prototypes, which can convert rice straw, rice husk and even coconut shells into fuel and fertiliser. ■

—Sandeep Unnithan

A DIFFERENT BEAT Mohan is an accomplished tabla player



RACHIT GOSWAMI

Drone Dynamo

ANKIT MEHTA, 32

*Co-founder and CEO,
IdeaForge Mumbai*

When Pakistani terrorists struck Mumbai in November 2008, Ankit Mehta, then a student at IIT Bombay, saw Indian security forces struggle to locate the gunmen in the maze of hotels. It convinced him the technology he was developing for remotely operated vehicles was the solution. That was the take-off point for one of India's pioneering drone start-ups. Mehta's aerial vehicle made its debut in the 2009 Bollywood film *Three Idiots* and now, over a decade later, IdeaForge is India's largest drone-maker and his firm has over 20 patents.

An IdeaForge drone takes off once in six minutes across the country running a range of tasks from classified military

surveillance missions to mapping agricultural land and surveying infrastructure projects. The drones have a range of between two and 15 kilometres and can fly a maximum of 6,000 metres. His customers have done over 200,000 missions using his platforms. Business boomed during the twin crisis last year—the pandemic—and China's aggressive border deployment in eastern Ladakh. His drones were used for law enforcement and lockdown management. And in January 2021, the Indian Army placed an order worth over Rs 140 crore for IdeaForge's 'Switch' drones that can operate at high altitudes. "Give me a mission and I'll give you the product," Mehta says. ■

—Sandeep Unnithan

LOW TECH MUST-HAVE
Dangles at least three carabiners around his waist to make sure he doesn't lose things

“We build the technology that impacts national security and food security”

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ENTERTAINERS

REIGNING DIVA

DEEPIKA PADUKONE, 35

Actor

In the late '80s, Sridevi reigned supreme; the noughties were all about Madhuri. 2010s have seen both the emergence—and the dominance—of Deepika Padukone. Given her upcoming line-up of films that feature co-stars like Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Hrithik Roshan and Prabhas, Deepika is determined she won't let the ongoing decade slip by.

An array of films showcase how much she has evolved as an actor. She can be a graceful diva lighting up the screen (the three collaborations with Sanjay Leela Bhansali), the charming mainstream heroine (*Chennai Express*, *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani*), the assured actor (*Cocktail*, *Piku*, *Tamasha*) and, more recently, a smart producer (*Chhapaak*, '83). That her films fare well at the box office is

an added incentive, making her one of the highest-paid and sought-after actresses in the industry. In a highly competitive world where actresses are made to settle for less, be it screen time or meaningful parts in big-budget spectacles, Deepika has ensured she works on her own terms.

The ability to wield such influence comes from learning from one's mistakes. "I fell into that trap of what a heroine is expected to do and what she should look like," she told *India Today Woman* a few years back. "It has been a journey of self-discovery." History has time and again shown that careers of the biggest leading ladies come with a shelf life. Wiser and creatively hungrier, Deepika intends to be an exception. ■

—Suhani Singh

ANGEL INVESTOR Padukone has invested in companies such as Epigamia, Furlenco, Purple and space start-up Bellatrix Aerospace



“I don’t do things that are expected of me or do them just because everybody else is doing it. I get very irritable if I don’t challenge myself”



RIDDHI SEN, 23

Actor/director

RIDDHI SEN

BURNING BRIGHT

Riddhi became one of the youngest actors to win the National Film Best Actor Award for his portrayal of a eunuch in Kaushik Ganguly's *Nagarkirtan* when he was just 19. Still only 23, he has already worked with a number of notable directors including Aparna Sen, Sujoy Ghosh and Pradeep Sarkar, playing such varied roles as a helper at a tea stall in *Kahaani*, a debauched son in *Parched* and an adorable one who helps his mother find her creative identity in *Helicopter Eela*, and the war-ravaged orphan in *Children of the War*. Many of his films, such as *Parched* or B.R. Mishra's *Chauranga*, were made with international collaboration, and went on to win awards at the Locarno Film Festival. Apart from this, he also directed his first short film in 2020. *Coldfire* won the best short film award at the Miami International Science Fiction film festival. ■

—Romita Datta

“A quote I live by is by filmmaker [Alejandro Gonzalez] Inarritu, ‘I don’t have a career, I have a life’”

THE GASTRONOME Mother Reshmi caters to his fondness for international cuisine by cooking Continental, Mexican and Chinese dishes at home

The Bigger Cause

PA. RANJITH, 36, Film director

Pa. Ranjith's influence on the cinematic and cultural landscape of Tamil Nadu in the past decade has been unlike that of any other film icon. Beginning with his debut film *Attakathi* in 2012 to his latest *Sarpatta Parambarai*, Ranjith has created brilliant films that have also been statements of Dalit assertion in Tamil cinema. His imprint is not just confined to films but is apparent in different spheres of culture through the many organisations he has helped set up, including the Neelam Cultural Centre, Neelam Productions and Neelam Publications. His Neelam cultural centres now have branches

and educational projects for Dalits across Tamil Nadu. He has also backed several new-wave filmmakers like Mari Selvaraj, Shyam Sunder, Manoj Leonel Jahson and Athiyan Athirai through The Casteless Collective. His next film, *Natchathiram Nagargirathu*, is a romantic drama, and he's also finalising a project with actor Vikram. ■

—Aditya Shrikrishna

SET APART Housing sets of Ranjith's films like *Madras* can be traced back to the realist aesthetics of films like *Chennai 600028* in which he worked as an assistant



YASIR IQBAL

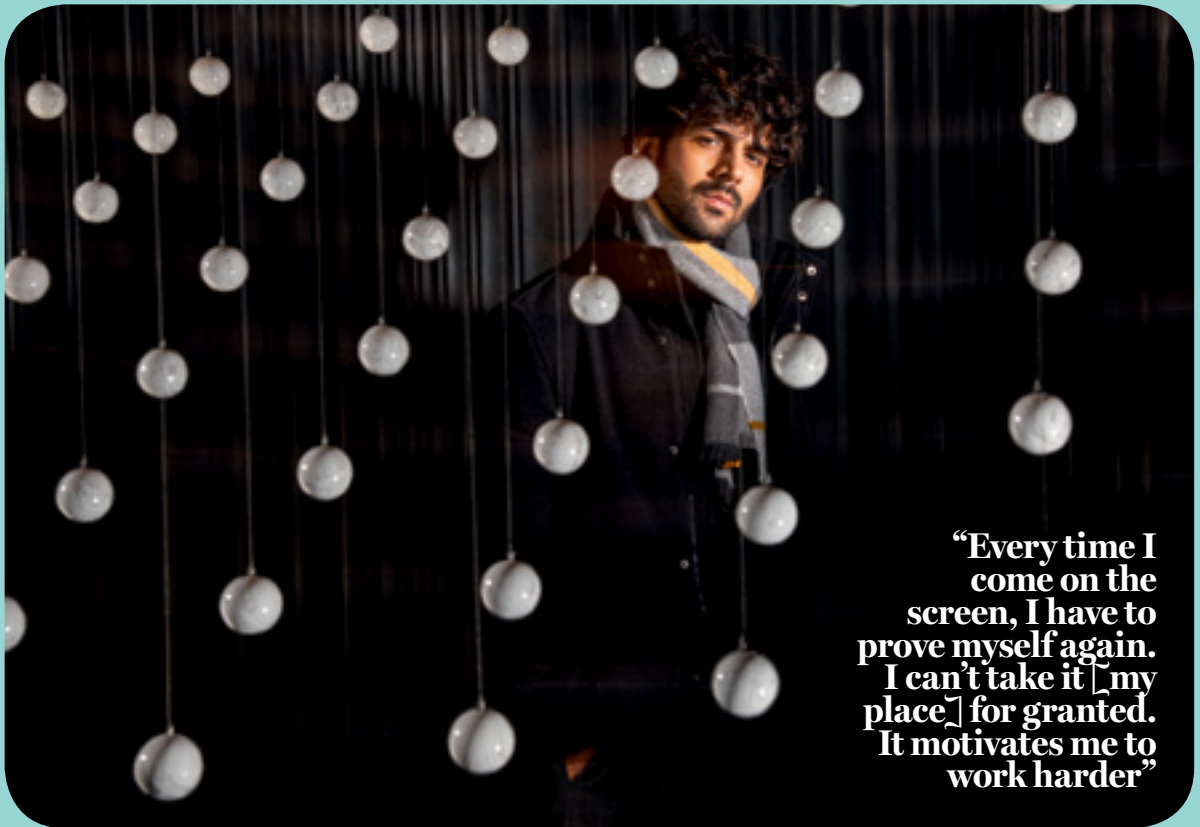
“I had to reflect on what my stories can say. I wanted to show that my culture itself is based on discrimination, violence”

PA. RANJITH to *The Wire*

TAKING HIS CHANCES

KARTIK AARYAN, 30

Actor



“Every time I come on the screen, I have to prove myself again. I can’t take it [my place] for granted. It motivates me to work harder”

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

Since his debut at 20 with the sleeper hit *Pyaar Ka Punchnama* (2011), Kartik Aaryan has gradually edged his way into becoming one of the leading young men of Hindi cinema. It's all the more impressive given that the Gwalior-born actor didn't have any connections in the Hindi film industry when he first landed in Mumbai as an 18-year-old. "There's no second chance for me. It's always been the only chance, film or character to prove myself," he says. He capitalised on the few chances to effectively portray the angst of young Indian men in a string of friends-centred comedies—the two *Pyaar Ka Punchnama* films and *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety*—and later expanded

his fan base among the youth with *Luka Chuppi* and *Pati, Patni aur Woh* which touch on live-in relationships and adultery respectively. There's been a conscious effort to try different genres and seek interesting directors to collaborate with. "Lots of people say, '*Chalti gaadi ke engine ko mat chhedo* (Don't mess with the engine of a car that's running well)", he says. "But I have never thought of losses, I have always seen the silver lining." ■

—**Suhani Singh**

FRAME AND FORTUNE Kartik's first paycheck—Rs 1,500 for a commercial that he did—lies unspent as his parents have framed it



BHUVAN BAM, 27

YouTuber/ actor/ singer

WHAM BAM

In 2015, when Bhuvan Bam began exploring a career as an entertainer on YouTube, friends and relatives laughed him off. But with 24.2 million subscribers for his YouTube channel BB ki Vines, a hit web series (*Dhindora*), a merchandise brand (Youthiapa), a short film (*Plus Minus*) and multiple interviews with stars under his belt, Bam is having the last laugh.

He is a clear example of the ability of video streaming to empower creators. Bam's success comes courtesy his ability to develop a range of characters, many of whom are drawn from real life. Having grown up on the comedy of Govinda and Kader Khan, Bam focuses on the mundane, the little things that make his humour relatable. The sum of his talents, though, is best visible in *Dhindora*, an eight-episode series he has created, co-written and in which he plays 10 characters. ■

“I want to be known as an entertainer. The social media star and influencer tag does not have as much appeal”

—Suhani Singh

LONELY TUNES Before becoming a YouTuber, Bam used to sing six days a week, four hours a day at a restaurant in south Delhi

THE GAME CHANGER

DHANUSH, 38

Actor/ singer/ director

Dhanush has been at the top of his game for more than 10 years now. He found almost instant success with his second film, *Kaadhal Kondein*, directed by his brother, director Selvaraghavan. Except for a brief lull in the late 2000s when he was still in search of his niche, he's not had a period when he wasn't in the conversation with a truly original film. He may not have the market of his peers Ajith and Vijay, but his success is measured by his roles and collaborations

MONEY SHARMA/GETTY IMAGES



THE NEXT
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ENTERTAINERS

“I never wanted to get into the film industry or become an actor. I used to lock myself in my room when stars came home. So all this just happened”

DHANUSH
to Film Companion,
March 2021

that have come mainly with Selvaraghavan in his initial days, and now with strikingly original filmmakers like Vetrimaaran and Mari Selvaraj. He won his first National Award in 2010 for the Vetrimaaran film *Aadukaalam* and hasn't looked back since. He is also the rare multi-hyphenated star actor in the mould of Kamal Haasan, a producer with a film that was India's entry for Best International Feature in 2016—*Visaaranai*—and also on many occasions as a lyricist (*Ilamai Thirumbudhe*)/ singer (*Why this Kolaveri Di*)/ director (*Pa. Paandi*) who is just about to break loose. ■

—Aditya Shrikrishna

FLASHBACKS Dhanush's directorial debut, *Pa. Paandi*, starred Rajkiran in the lead. Rajkiran also acted in Dhanush's father Kasthuri Raja's debut film *En Rasavin Manasile* in 1991. The poster of that film can be seen in Vetrimaaran's *Vada Chennai*, a film set in the 1980-'90s



SONU MEHTA/GETTY IMAGES

KEERTHY SURESH, 29

Actor

SOUTHERN SIREN

Daughter of Malayalam film producer G. Suresh Kumar and Tamil actress Menaka, cinema ran in Keerthy's blood. She appeared as a child actor in some of her father's productions, but then went on to study fashion design at the Pearl Academy in Chennai. Soon, however, she realised cinema was her true calling, and began acting in Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu cinema.

While her initial years as an actor were eclipsed by the heroes of the films (*Rajini Murugan*, *Remo*, *Sarkar*, *Bairavaa*), it was with the 2018 film *Mahanati* (The Great Actress) that she came into her own. A biopic of one of the greatest actors of Indian cinema—Savitri—casting Keerthy in the iconic role invited a lot of scepticism. Soon, however, Keerthy turned all her critics into believers, going on to win a national award for her performance. *Mahanati* paved the way for more titular and well-defined roles in *Penguin*, *Miss India* and *Annaatthe*. The Great Actress had, indeed, arrived. ■

“I want to keep redefining myself. I can't have just one iconic character and think that's just about it”

—Aditya Shrikrishna

GREATEST COMMON FACTOR Keerthy's mum Menaka was paired opposite Rajinikanth in *Netrikann* (1981). Keerthy now plays Rajini's sister in *Annaatthe* (2021).

Chameleon King

RANVEER SINGH, 36

Actor

“I am not the kind of person to half-ass anything,” says Ranveer Singh. It shows in the impressive body of work he has accumulated in just a decade-long career. Be it the ruthless antagonist upstaging the good king in *Padmaavat*, an aspiring rapper in *Gully Boy*, the deceitful lover in *Lootera* or even his spirited debut in *Band Baaja Baaraat*, Singh has the ability to sink himself into any role and play it with utmost conviction. The more they demand of him, the more he thrives.

“I approach every day at work like it’s my first day or my last day, with full commitment,” he says. “Logically, if you spend enough years in show business, some complacency starts creeping in. With me, it’s the opposite. The more work I do, the more I enjoy it because I understand that the scope within the craft is limitless. Almost every day, I experience a moment I could never have imagined.”

This child-like enthusiasm combined with a methodical approach to his work has won him a legion of fans who know that walking in to see a Ranveer Singh film means inhabiting for two hours a universe he’s created for them.

Only a few actors in Hindi cinema have the distinction of being box office stars and dynamic performers. Singh belongs to that rare breed and, given his unwavering passion and astute choices when it comes to collaborators, he’s here to stay. ■

—Suhani Singh

GETTING INTO THE MOOD To get into a part, Singh devises a theme-based playlist. His love for music has seen him start a record label, InclinK, which provides a platform for local hip-hop talent.

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

“I have gotten detached from the result of the film and more attached to the creative process. I subscribe to the notion that the process is the prize”



Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

Brawn to Be Wild

TIGER SHROFF, 31

Actor

“I have seen Tiger put the highest level of focus, dedication, discipline and passion towards his craft and always striving to better it. I see growth in him not over time but every single day”

SAJID NADIADWALA
Producer

There are a handful of bankable leading men in Hindi cinema, but few have carved a niche as a bona fide action star as Tiger Shroff has. Shroff is in a league of his own when it comes to pulling off awe-inspiring stunt sequences. There's not just great athleticism on display but also a balletic beauty to his movements. With his training in martial arts, Shroff has single-handedly elevated the benchmark for action in Indian cinema which for long relied on brawny heroes to screech in rage and punch at will to brandish machismo.

Through his oeuvre which has mostly seen him play the role of a one-man army (*War* being an exception), Shroff has garnered a fan following that's distributed evenly between single screens and multiplex-going audiences. It's why he's currently one of the few actors to have two franchises in *Heropanti* and *Baaghi*. 2022 will be a pivotal year for Shroff who is positioning himself as an heir to the throne of the ageing Khans as his films (*Heropanti 2* and *Ganapath*) arrive on the

sought-after release dates of Eid and Christmas. What Shroff lacks in thespian credentials to his peers, he makes it up with his physical prowess and terpsichorean skills. And at the box office that combination pays rich dividends. ■

—Suhani Singh

LYRICAL BENT Tiger also has a musical side to him. He has released three singles—'Unbelievable' and 'Casanova' in English and 'Vande Mataram'.

MISS MARVEL

TAAPSEE PANNU, 34

Actor

The best of actors resist being pigeonholed, but Taapsee Pannu seems to thrive in the image she's been boxed in, as someone who prefers woman-centred, empowering narratives. "The only stereotype I don't mind is that the film has a *tedha* [crooked] heroine or has some takeaway," says Pannu. "I don't want to repeat the *mudde* [issues]."

It all started with *Pink* in which she shone as a sexual assault survivor fighting the system. Since then, Taapsee has made a career out of playing messy, strong women (*Badla*, *Manmarziyaan*, *Haseen Dill-ruba*) persevering against all odds (*Saand ki Aankh*, *Game Over*, *Thappad*, *Rashmi Rocket*). Still, it's not what she consciously set out to do. "I didn't have an option," she says. "I was never seen as a conventional heroine. It was the only route left."

Taapsee was also one of the first actors to embrace streaming platforms with enthusiasm, with three releases in 2021. She has also made it a point to shuttle between Hindi cinema and the South, where she first got a break. Her work calendar is packed, but she is still awaiting that one super role. "I want to be Captain Marvel," she says. ■

—Suhani Singh

GREEN THUMB Taapsee loves gardening and has around 200 plants at her duplex in Mumbai where she also grows vegetables

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH



Hair: Amit Thakur, Styled By: Devki Bhatt, Make Up: Niti Goenka

"Priyanka quickly digs deep into the character and creates a wonderful rhythmic balance with co-actors"

SATYAVRAT RAUT
Theatre director



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

STAGE CRAFT

PRIYANKA SHARMA, 35

Theatreperson

Born and brought up in an old Delhi business family, theatre actor and director Priyanka Sharma has created a special space for herself on the Indian stage. Though she's not a National School of Drama graduate, her adaptability to roles was key 4-5 years back when theatre director Satyavrat Raut was desperately looking for an actress for his critically acclaimed play *Tumhara Vincent* as his lead had left for Mumbai. Priyanka rescued the situation by preparing for the role in just 15 days. One of her directorial efforts,

Dhruv Swamini, attracted an audience on the sheer strength of her performance.

The theatre activist, now a veteran of over 600 shows, has worked for social organisations like Smile, CRY and AISA and also runs her own theatre group, Silly Souls, in Delhi's Civil Lines. As she says, "We have to create such cultural spaces where people can entertain themselves in a creative way, it's the only way society will progress." Her next project is a new play, 'The Last Man', based on Orwell's novel *1984*. ■

—Sheekesh Mishra

"Half the industry is driven by conventions of what is good and bad. I have made a career out of [playing] grey [characters]"

HALLOWED HALLS Priyanka tried out for NSD in 2007, but didn't get through. She did get to do a four-day workshop there, though, which she enjoyed.



EARNING HIS STRIPES

ADARSH GOURAV, 27

Actor

CHAITANYA TAMHANE, 34

Filmmaker

Holding Court

Few directorial debuts have been as thought-provoking as the National Award-winning feature *Court* (2014). That a 27-year-old was the creator of this wry and devastating critique of the Indian judiciary impressed many. "I had a few simple rules in mind: the film's form and tone should be consistent, its craft should have a certain standard and hold up in any part of the world, and that I should grant intelligence and intuition to the viewer," says director Chaitanya Tamhane.

Tamhane deployed the same tactics to profound effect in his second film, *The Disciple* (2020), a Marathi-

language drama that follows a classical vocalist high on aspiration but low on talent. Tamhane's films defy the mainstream mould and he doesn't foresee them "ever being truly popular".

But even with the acclaim and the string of awards, Tamhane is unsure of how long he wants to keep making films. "It requires a lot of stamina, a lot of hustling and a lot of people management,"

"I aspire to be authentic in my work. I want to be truly myself, and then transcend that into my work"

says the director whose two films were independently produced by actor-producer Vivek Gomber. "It's Sisyphean in that you have to fight the same battles over and over again...even now it's still always about what to make next and how to get it made." ■

—Suhani Singh

SOAPY START Tamhane started out as an assistant writer on the Balaji Telefilms show, *Kya Hoga Nimmo Kaa*

Adarsh Gourav isn't tall and brawny like the conventional Hindi film hero. What he is, is an adept performer with intense eyes and a fascinating screen presence like the late Irrfan. These attributes were on notice earlier this year when he stole the show in the Netflix film, *The White Tiger*. "I was almost not going for the audition," says Gourav. "It was such a big part...I thought they would take someone more recognisable." The actor would go on to win critical acclaim including an Independent Spirit Award nomination for best actor. He hasn't looked back since.



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ENTERTAINERS

"I want to be like clay, mould me into anything and I will stick"

From the hero's friend to other supporting characters, he has now "been testing for a lot more central parts", says Gourav. In the pipeline is a film co-produced by Zoya and Farhan Akhtar, *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*, and an international series for Apple TV, which also features Meryl Streep. Gourav admits that he's still making sense of the newfound attention. "Sometimes I get a little scared with the

confidence people show in me," he says. Gourav credits his small-town upbringing (he was born in Jamshedpur) and his nomadic life in the metropolis (he has moved 12 houses in 14 years) for lending him perspective. A stint at Drama School Mumbai was instrumental in shaping him as an artist. He first made an impression in the independent drama *Rukh* (2017) followed by Sridevi-starrer *Mom* and web series *Hostel Daze*.

With talent agencies in the US and UK now representing him, Gourav has opened himself to work beyond India. "I want to be like clay, mould me into anything and I will stick," he says. ■

—Suhani Singh

RAGA TO RIFFS A trained Hindustani classical vocalist, Gourav taught himself to play the guitar during the lockdown



NIMISHA SAJAYAN, 24

Actor

REAL-TIME EMOTIONS

Nimisha Sajayan was 19 when she made her debut in the Dileesh Pothan-directed Malayalam film, *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (Evidence and the Eyewitness), but it was such an affecting performance that everyone took notice. The next year, in 2018, she won the Kerala State Film

"Nimisha has the ability to transform herself before the camera"

MADHUPAL
Director, *Oru Kuprasiddha Payyan*

Award for Best Actress for her roles in *Oru Kuprasiddha Payyan* and *Chola*. The rave reviews have continued in hit movies like *Eeda*, *The Great Indian Kitchen*, *Malik* and *Nayattu* where she held her own against seasoned actors like Fahadh Faasil and others.

Nimisha's parents are from Kerala, but she was born and raised in Mumbai, so it's even more creditable that she has been able to get into the skin of some of her characters. Her

first movie came after director Pothan gave a casting call on Facebook. She got the part even though she was a year short of 20 (the director was looking for someone older) and was not fluent in Malayalam. Her latest will be a movie in English, *Footprints on Water*. ■

—Jeemon Jacob

KICK START Nimisha is a Taekwondo black belt who has represented Maharashtra in competitions



A BORN STAR

ALIA BHATT, 28

Actor

In the decade she has spent facing the camera, Alia Bhatt has time and again shown why she is touted as one of the best young actresses in show business. Whether shouldering an entire film as in *Highway* (2014), only her second film, and *Raazi* (2018) or shining in an ensemble as in *Kapoor & Sons*, *Udta Punjab* (both 2016) and *Gully Boy* (2019), Alia is up to task. Behind the apparent effortlessness is a discerning mind, consciously pushing her out of her comfort zone. That audiences reward her effort by watching her films in theatres has only increased her stature as one of the few actresses with box office clout. So commanding is her screen presence that even in a mediocre outing you can't help but notice her.

Her upcoming line-up betrays the young Bhatt's

“Alia is what I call a raw star. She knows what will work and what won't. She doesn't think much, just comes to the set, acts, and is brilliant”

MOHIT SURI
Filmmaker/ Cousin

ambition—to collaborate with popular filmmakers on big-budget spectacles (*RRR*, *Brahmastra*, *Rocky aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani*) as well as satiating the artist in her (*Gangubai Kathiawadi* and her maiden film as producer, *Darlings*). By signing on with the William Morris Agency, a premier talent management agency in Hollywood, Alia is clearly eyeing a successful career not just at home but abroad too. ■

— **Suhani Singh**

INSPIRED NOMENCLATURE Alia named her production house after one of her favourite films, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, featuring Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet.



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

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ENTERTAINERS

Diljit Dosanjh's talent for melding rustic Punjabi songs with his western singing style had already given him and Punjabi music a much wider audience. But then Bollywood came calling, making him the first reigning star of the Punjabi film industry to get work as a leading actor in Mumbai as well.

Dosanjh will be seen next in *Kaneda* with Anushka Sharma and Arjun Kapoor, along with Karan Johar's *Crazy Hum* with Sonakshi Sinha. His past films

“Diljit can surprise you by coming up with a different take on a scene. I love it when my co-stars are so talented”

MANOJ BAJPAYEE Actor

in Hindi include *Good Newz*, *Suraj Pe Mangal Bhari*, *Arjun Patiala*, *Phillauri* and *Udta Punjab*. In the Punjabi industry, his latest movie, *Rakh Hausla*, made Rs 54 crore in the global market before it was released on Amazon Prime. Meanwhile, Brand Dosanjh continues to roll on—his album of Punjabi ballads, *The Moonchild Era*, continues to be a rage months after release. Born in Phillaur, Diljit started out performing kirtans at the local gurdwara. He soon forayed into popular music, finding success with hits like *Nachh Diyan Alran Kuwariyan*. Diljit started acting in 2011, and was on his way with *Jatt and Juliet* a runaway hit the next year. ■

—Anilesh S. Mahajan

CLOTHES HORSE Dosanjh's fondness for big brands is well-known. His wardrobe is filled with exclusive items from international brands.

PUNJABI TADKA

DILJIT DOSANJH, 38

Actor/ Singer



METHOD AND MADNESS

SHANE NIGAM, 25

Actor

Shane Nigam started off as a child artist in 2007, doing the rounds of reality TV shows and serials. By 2013, he was appearing in small roles in Malayalam films but his first big break came three years later when he was cast as the lead in the Shanavas K. Bavakutty-directed feature, *Kismath*. The film didn't exactly set the box office on fire but his performance was well received and led to roles in commercial and critical hits like *Parava* and *c/o Saira Banu*. Then came 2019 and the Madhu C. Narayan-directed *Kumbalangi Nights*, where his performance as the moody brother Bobby in a dysfunctional family won the appreciation of both fans and filmmakers. This was followed by hits like *Ishq*, and a role in film auteur Shaji N. Karun's *Oolu*.

“Shane has the ability to mould himself into any character he is playing. He could become a great actor if he keeps improving”

SHAJI N. KARUN
Director

Now he has half a dozen films lined up for release.

Nigam is also a trained dancer with a passion for western dance, choreographed sessions of which he often posts on social media. He also courted controversy in 2020 after producers of three movies lodged complaints against him for not cooperating in post-production work. Malayalam superstar Mohanlal had to intervene to save him from a ban. ■

—Jeemon Jacob

MUM'S THE WORLD Shane is very close to his mother, and quite often uses her social media accounts to post his pictures and videos



The Extra-Ordinary

AYUSHMANN KHURRANA, 37

Actor

“If you can do value education through your cinema, I think it's great. You give back something to society. I like to do such films that make people uncomfortable”

AYUSHMANN KHURRANA
Aaj Tak Agenda, 2021

Whenever Hindi filmmakers have looked to deliver a social message to their audience through their films, there's one actor they know they can count on—Ayushmann Khurrana. Few would have predicted a former *MTV Roadies* winner to take on this responsibility. A rom-com with gay men (*Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*); normalising a relationship with a trans woman (*Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*); a protagonist with a high sperm count (*Vicky Donor*); or one with diminishing hair (*Bala*)—Khurrana's trump card is his ability to make heroes out of ordinary men.

Khurrana, though, is not content being pigeonholed. His last few films—*Andhadhun*, *Article 15*, *Gulabo Sitabo*—are proof. He has been vocal about his desire to do an action film. By championing progressive ideas and dabbling in different genres, Khurrana has emerged as an actor whose legacy is stamped in the originality and diversity of his work. ■

—Suhani Singh

FIELD WORK Khurrana, who has played cricket at district level, has said that he would like to play Virat Kohli on screen

THE PLOT MAKER

SYAM PUSHKARAN, 37

Scriptwriter

Writer Syam Pushkaran is possibly one of the best creative contributors in Malayalam movies today. The list of films he has contributed to include *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, *Mayanadhi*, *Kumbalangi Nights*, *Rani Padmini* and *foji*. Fahadh Faasil might be a star actor today and every film of his an event even outside Kerala but Syam Pushkaran and his screenplays have had a big hand in the making of that phenomenon. Be it the films of Dileesh Pothan, Aashiq Abu or Madhu

C. Narayanan, Syam's scripts are studied and analysed by fans and critics with special care. Syam won the National Award for Best Original Screenplay for *Maheshinte Prathikaram*. His next project where he is co-producer and writer is *Thankam*, directed by Saheedh Arafath. ■

—Aditya Shrikrishna

PHONE LIFE Syam loves to shoot videos on his phone during shoots, a lot of which make it to the YouTube channel 'Bhavana Studios', incidentally the name of the studio of Mahesh, one of his most iconic creations



“In Malayalam cinema, we can experiment a lot... People like the masala movies but they also like the contemplative films we make”

SYAM PUSHKARAN
to The Indian Express

LIVING ON THE EDGE

KARTHICK NAREN, 28

Filmmaker



Karthick Naren announced himself with *Dhuruvangal Pathinaaru*, a Tamil crime procedural that put writing, characters and film-making over stars and set pieces. Not often does a debut filmmaker come into the limelight with a tried and tested genre and yet create an impact that's as new as it is refreshing. At a time when most young aspiring filmmakers were still writing or

making short films, Naren had already made a solid first feature that was both a critical and commercial success. Naren quickly made a sophomore feature, *Naragasooran*, that unfortunately got stuck in release limbo. He then made *Mafia: Chapter 1* that put style on the frontburner with a promise of a sequel for the fans. He's now working on a film with Dhanush—*Maaran*—and quickly trying to establish himself as one of those filmmakers who can leave his stamp even in a film headlined by a star. ■

—Aditya Shrikrishna

“I'll complete five years in the film industry soon. It's been a roller-coaster ride and I can't wait to see what's in store for me in the next two years”

TENDER SHOTS Karthick Naren was just 22 when his first feature film came out

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ENTERTAINERS

CHARM OFFENSIVE

SANYA
MALHOTRA, 29

Actor

There's an inherent, infectious charm to Sanya Malhotra which makes it near impossible to ignore her on screen. While *Dangal*, her debut, gave audiences a peek into her abilities, her talent was fully tapped in *Lunchbox* director Ritesh Batra's *Photograph*, a poignant drama in which Malhotra was fabulous as a shy, hesitant Gujarati girl who befriends a man older than her (Nawazuddin Siddiqui) and finds herself in the process.

She has only been in the industry for six years, but Sanya has hardly put a foot wrong. Her filmography thus far (including a supporting part in *Badhaai Ho*) shows a secure, assured actor eager to both entertain and experiment, and one that so far has cleverly steered clear of formulaic spectacles. She may not be seen as an audience-puller on the big screen yet but on the streaming platforms she has built and expanded her fan base with three direct-to-digital releases—*Ludo*, *Pagglait* and *Meenakshi Sundareswar* (all on Netflix). From a widow struggling to grieve to a bride negotiating a long-

“Sanya is very meticulous. You can tell when actors have read the script 300 times. She’s always trying to make it better”

RITESH BATRA
Filmmaker

distance relationship, the films showcase her range as an actress.

The adulation that has come from fans has seen her quietly emerge as a contender, one with a winning personality and the acting chops to boot. With four films in the pipeline, including one said to feature Shah Rukh Khan, Sanya's star is on the rise. ■

—Suhani Singh

HAPPY FEET Sanya, who's from Delhi, first came to Mumbai to audition for reality show *Dance India Dance*. She didn't get far but then stayed on in the city to pursue acting.

THOMAS NIERMUELLER/WIREIMAGE



46TH
ANNIVERSARY

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MUSIC

HITTING THE RIGHT NOTES

JUBIN NAUTIYAL, 32

Singer, Dehradun

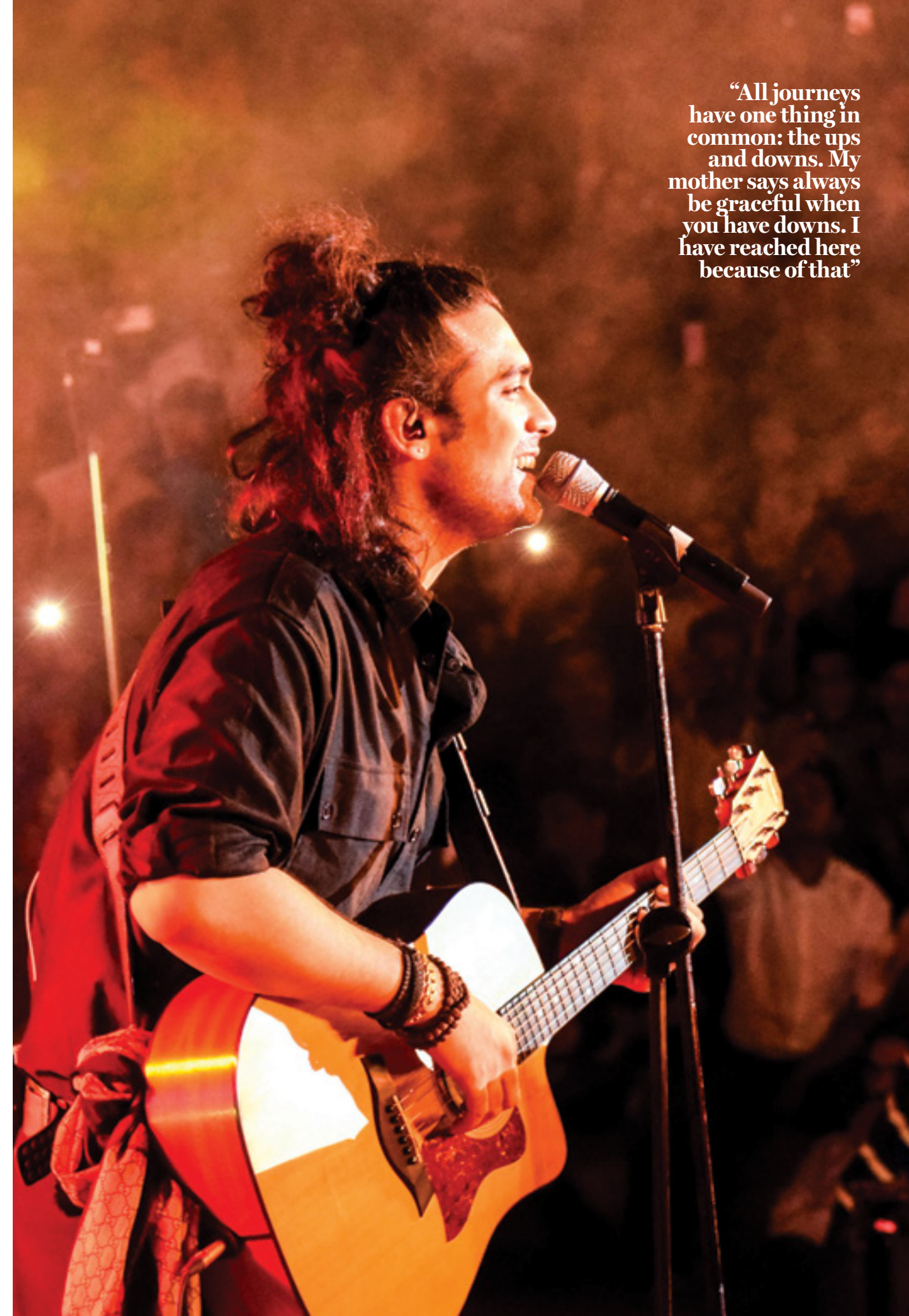
Jubin Nautiyal was in his late teens when A.R. Rahman told him that his voice was “original” and needed a few years to blossom. He cut short his stay in Mumbai and headed back home to Dehradun. A few years later, Sonu Nigam would reject him at the audition of *X-Factor*. He travelled to Varanasi and Chennai to hone his voice. He returned to Mumbai in 2012. It took him another two years of singing around 250 demos before he scored his first song with ‘Ek Mulaqat’. “Where I knew my limitations, I learned,

where there was politics, I smiled and left,” he says. Since then, he has been hitting the right notes—‘Kaabil Hoon’, ‘The Humma Song’, ‘Tum Hi Aana’. It culminated in him dominating the 2021 charts with two hit tracks: ‘Lut Gaye’ and ‘Raataan Lambiyan’. “The voice has found a face which is a difficult thing to achieve [in music],” he says. After a breakthrough year, he is eager to show a newer version of himself, one that sees him as a composer of independent music and who performs across the world. ■

— Suhani Singh

TRAVEL TALES An avid hiker, Nautiyal has trekked many sites in the Garhwal region of his home state Uttarakhand

“All journeys have one thing in common: the ups and downs. My mother says always be graceful when you have downs. I have reached here because of that”





YASIR IQBAL

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MUSIC

SOULFUL SOIRÉE

MEHTAB ALI NIAZI, 23

Sitarist, Delhi

**“Mehtab is
a brilliant
musician.
His music is
a blessing for
listeners”**

**—Pandit Gaurav
Mazumdar,
Sitar maestro**

When Mehtab Ali Niazi performed at the Guru Purnima of Ustad Allah Rakha Khan Sahab in 2018, the tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain said *Wah* and told him you are carving a different path. Mehtab felt he had arrived because there were stalwarts such as Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma, Pandit Nayan Ghosh, Shivamani, Suresh Wadkar and others in the audience. Mehtab has music in his genes because his grandfather and father Mohsin Ali Khan too are musicians of the Bhendi Bazaar gharana. A child prodigy, he learnt the santoor first and started playing on stage at the age of 12. “I had no other option. I was carrying the legacy of six generations. But I don’t consider it a burden,” he says. His control of the instrument is perfect; his confidence in handling intricate note patterns uncanny and his note-changing ability amazingly swift. He makes the sitar sing. “I play the

gayaki of Ustad Vilayat Khan sahib,” he says. He practises for five hours daily and is learning vocal music from Pandit Sajjan Mishra. Apart from playing classical music, he has also collaborated with Jazz musicians and ghazal singers. And he wants to be not only the most famous musician of the country but of the world as well. ■

— S. Sahaya Ranjit

NOTABLE NOTES When he played his first concert for Pandit Birju Maharaj’s birthday, Maharaj Ji wanted to take a photograph with him

LET THE MUSIC BEGIN

DHRUV BEDI, 31

Sitarist, Delhi

When Dhruv Bedi was born, his grandfather didn't sing him lullabies but whispered taans (note patterns) in his ears. That's how he started learning music from his grandfather, Tara Chand Bedi, and father and sitar maestro, Jagdeep Singh Bedi. Later, he trained under Pandit Budhaditya Mukherjee, a sitar maestro of the Imdadkhani gharana. His was a single-minded pursuit—when his teachers

GLOBAL CONNECT He has collaborated with musicians from Korea and Russia and dabbled in both jazz and Carnatic music

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

THE NEXT
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MUSIC

would ask him what he wanted to do professionally, his answer would always be, "I want to be a musician." He wants the world to listen to his music, and feels that being a musician is a divine gift. He hopes he can impart that divinity into his music. "Though I experiment, my core remains that of Hindustani classical music. The raaagdari is what I firmly believe in," he says. His style is unique, lyrical and rich in melody. ■

— S. Sahaya Ranjit

“Dhruv is promising. He has the right tayyari and taleem”

—Pandit Madhup Mudgal
Hindustani classical vocalist



“I don't differentiate between film music and independent music”

SANTHOSH NARAYANAN, 38

Film composer and musician, Tamil Nadu

DREAM CATCHER

Santhosh Narayanan, who made his debut in 2012 with the Pa. Ranjith-directed *Attakathi*, can easily be termed as a musician of the past decade. *Attakathi*, a trendsetter of sorts, was a debutant movie for Pa. Ranjith too; while he presented it with a new aesthetic and ideology that centred around marginalised people, Santhosh impressed everyone with his romantic melody and peppy *Ghana* (ethnic music of north Chennai) songs. He continued impressing in his subsequent films, and new directors with creative

ideas clung to him. If Ranjith took him to the alleys of north Chennai, Karthik Subburaj made him travel the streets of Madurai and Mari Selvaraj made him feel the heat of Tirunelveli. Santhosh got into the skin of each genre. His song, 'Nerupuda', in the movie *Kabali*, starring Rajinikanth is the only song that has reflected the superstar's mass appeal in recent years. Any young director who enters Tamil cinema with the dream of changing it can bank on Santhosh to render his or her vision into music for the soul. ■

— Naveen Rajan

CAREFUL AND CAUTIOUS He is always anxious about the response to his works, but is particularly worried about the opinions of his mother Mahalakshmi and wife Meenakshi, both of whom are well-versed in music

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MUSIC

MASTER STROKES

“Bhagyesh Marathe has developed his own independent musical thought process”

– Pandit Satish Vyas
Santoor maestro

On Instagram, Bhagyesh Marathe frequently keeps uploading reels of his singing classical raga-based compositions. Even in those short 20-second reels, he artistically manages to capture the nuance of the raga. Such is his creative acumen. Groomed under his father, Sanjay Marathe, celebrated vocalists Pandit Kedar Bodas and Pandit Suhas Vyas, he has the influence of four *gharanas* in his music—Gwalior, Jaipur, Agra and Bhendi Bazaar. Bhagyesh has the ability to internalise his music, and says, “You never get tired singing the same raga. Every time I sing, I feel I am getting to know the beauty and different shades of the raga. I try to be truthful to



BHAGYESH MARATHE, 29

Vocalist, Mumbai

the composition.” He delves into the intricacies of the raga effortlessly while building a musical symphony for his listeners. Expressing each and every musical phrase lucidly, he has never needed to rely on pyrotechnics to please his audience. He says he wants to evolve constantly as a musician or else his music will not flow. ■

– S. Sahaya Ranjit

BY THE WAY He learnt the tabla for many years. It was while doing his graduation in information technology that he decided to be a vocalist

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DANCE

Best Foot Forward

ARUSHI MUDGAL, 35

Odissi dancer, Delhi

Arushi Mudgal dances because she loves it too much—with or without music. “I see rhythm around me all the time, be it the ticking of the clock or water dripping from the tap or the sound of a train running on the tracks. The natural movements fascinate me,” she says. It’s quite natural for Mudgal, who took her Odissi training under her aunt Guru Madhavi Mudgal, as she wakes up to an *alaap* or the sounds of *ghungroo* at the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Delhi where she stays. She has not only performed and choreographed dance in Odissi, but also collaborated with French percussionists and was even invited by celebrated choreographer Pina Bausch to Germany to perform at the Internationales Tanz Festival. She brings in old-world charm and the vibrancy of the new age. Her dance is eloquent, graceful and brings an intensity that’s captivating. “I seek that abandon in my dance. What I like is the struggle in the journey of creating dance more than the final product,” says Mudgal, who has co-authored *The Bud and the Blossom*, on the aesthetics of Odissi, with musicologist and academic Sushil Saxena. During the pandemic, she took to Instagram to showcase her movements in dance, which made her realise how engagement with art is so important to life. Awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Yuva Puraskar for her excellence, she has a huge legacy to carry on her shoulders—that of the Kelucharan Mohapatra *gharana*, but is confident of doing so. “Till death do we dance,” she says, seeing the fragility of life in the time of the pandemic. ■

— S. Sahaya Ranjit

ET CETERA She has written a story for Gautham Menon’s *Paava Kadhaigal*, a Netflix anthology on honour killings



“I want to be that moment in dance where the dancer and dance are submerged and the audience experiences the bliss”

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DANCE

BORN TO DANCE

BHAVANA REDDY, 30

Kuchipudi exponent, Delhi

Bhavana Reddy took to dance as fish takes to water; her parents Raja and Kaushalya Reddy are celebrated Kuchipudi exponents. "When she was in my womb, she used to kick/ turn a lot, and that I suppose was dancing for her," says mum Kaushalya. Bhavana started dancing at the age of six as Lord Krishna in her father and mother's productions and continues to dance, choreograph and teach dance at her recently started school in Los Angeles, US. "A lot of my dance training has happened informally by watching my parents and sister dance, practice and teach students," she says. Bhavana chose dance but was fascinated by western music and would participate in all competitions while studying at the Lady Shriram College in Delhi. "It was an inner calling and much to the displeasure of my mother, I pursued my passion. I graduated from the Musicians Institute in Los Angeles with an Associate of Arts Degree in Vocal Performance. I also continued to learn Carnatic music," she says. What is striking about her dance is she is uninhibited in her *abhinaya* sending her audience in raptures. Her rhythmic virtuosity and exuberant stage presence make her recitals scintillating and set her apart from other dancers. She travels between Los Angeles and India and feels India can change: "India has gratitude, respect and value for its roots and culture. The same sets us apart in the eyes of the world. The knowledge we have is what the West is digging up and searching for," she says. She has collaborated with jazz singers and, recently, with Russian composer Igor Stravinsky for the ballet and orchestral concert work *The Rite of Spring*. ■

— S. Sahaya Ranjit

CLASS ACT She has performed at the Grammy after-party in 2013 and sung a song in the grunge rock style for Hollywood film *Joy Ride 3*

HARDIK CHHABRA



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Twinkle Toes

**PARSHWANATH
UPADHYE, 39**

*Bharatanatyam dancer,
Bengaluru*

THE NEXT
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DANCE

“Parshwanath is perfection and poise. Centred. Classy. A joy to watch”

—Ashish Mohan Khokar
Dance historian

When Parshwanath was six, people in his village in Belgaum, Karnataka, would make fun of his dancing the Bharatanatyam. Boys don't dance, they would mock. But that didn't stop the young dancer's search for a guru even as he pursued a master's in Kannada literature and sat for the civil services examination, for which he was even called for an interview. “Something in me said dance was my calling,” he recalls. Being a male dancer was no longer a taboo, besides. “It has been a challenge as a male dancer, but I feel the body becomes irrelevant if you are able to embody the character through your *abhinaya* and convey that *rasa* to the audience.” With an eclectic presence on stage, his communication technique is that of joy. In 2012, he started the Upadhye School of Dance in Bengaluru and the dance company Punyah Dance Company in 2013. “I want to go back to my roots, my village to propagate dance,” he says. He is also building a dance *gurukul* in Belgaum where he expects to teach and inspire the young to take up dance. ■

— S. Sahaya Ranjit

ALL ROUNDER

Parshwanath is a black belt in karate and a swimming champion. He has also trained in Kalaripayattu.



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AUTHORS

EPIC IMAGINATION

SAMHITA ARNI, 37

Author, Bengaluru

Samhita Arni was four when her father, an officer in the Indian Foreign Service, was handed a Pakistan posting. In Karachi's embassy library, she found several versions of the *Mahabharata*. Having read the text over and over again, she decided to illustrate and rewrite Vyasa's epic. Arni was 12 when her *The Mahabharata: A Child's View* was released. There was something endearing about the quirky way in which she drew astras, but what

seemed precocious was her anti-war stance. Arni's talent only grew with time; in 2012, she found herself on the *New York Times* bestseller list with *Sita's Ramayana*. Though the illustrations were by Moyna Chitrakar's, a Patua scroll artist, Arni imagined Sita's voice and narration of the *Ramayana*. She followed up on the success of these titles with *The Missing Queen* in 2013, and *The Prince*, a period novel that hit stands in 2019. ■

—Shreevatsa Nevatia

FELINE PHILOSOPHER Arni was 31 when she rescued her first cat. She named him after a character from *Chhota Bheem*—Chutki.



“In trying to meet the challenges looming in our future, we will have to come closer, find greater meaning and allyship than before”

YASIR IQBAL

“Fiction can make people think about issues, can spark imaginations, can take people out of their own frame of reference”

SANJEEV VERMA/GETTY IMAGES



**KANISHK
THAROOR, 37**

Author, New York

Written in the Stars

For Kanishk, New York City has been home since he moved there at the age of six with his brother Ishan and parents. His father, Shashi Tharoor, was, of course, an influence, but it was in books that his mother, Tilotama Mukherji, read out—the *Old Testament*, *Shahnameh*, *The Persian Book of Kings*—that Kanishk found wonder. The older a text, the more historical its antecedence, the more was Kanishk drawn to it. His abiding love for folklore, for fable-like narratives that only the past makes possible, was made apparent by his first collection of short stories *Swimmer Among the Stars* (2016). “Fiction can make people think about issues, can spark imaginations, and can open doors,” says Kanishk. He is presently working on a novel set in the 15th century. ■

—Shreevatsa Nevatia

REMAINS OF THE DAY When he is not writing, Kanishk presents a radio show, *Museum of Lost Objects*, on BBC 4. The series traces the histories of antiquities and landmarks destroyed in Iraq, Syria, India and Pakistan.



RAVI KUMAR/GETTY IMAGES

PAST PERFECT

MANU PILLAI, 31

Author, London

Having graduated from Pune's Fergusson College, Manu Pillai's resume almost started to build itself. After a stint with Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, Pillai spent some time working at the House of Lords and then with the BBC World Service. More than these high-profile jobs themselves, what excited Pillai was the access they brought him. Working with Tharoor, he had the National Archives and the Kerala State Archives at hand. In the UK, he tuned to the British archives. Poring over those records paid off. Released when he was just 25, Pillai's first book, *The Ivory Throne: Chronicles of the House of*

"I do hope 20 years down the line, I will have at least written enough books to fill one shelf"

Travancore, was an instant hit. It even won him a Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar in 2016. Pillai has since authored three more books. He doesn't just make women and the marginalised speak in his accounts of history, but his latest book *False Allies: India's Mahara-jahs in the Age of Ravi Varma* also forces us to revise our inherited notions of power. ■

—Shreevatsa Nevatia

PEOPLE PERSON When Pillai was in his teens, he used to inflict on his family his "atrocious" poetry and fiction. Slowly, as he heard more stories about his ancestors, he found he wanted to tell the history of people, not one of dates.

Honestly Speaking

AVNI DOSHI, 39

Author, Dubai

"I'm not an insider. Yet I've been able to find my own little place where I can write what I believe in"



SHARON HARIDAS

Shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2020, *Burnt Sugar* (published in India as *Girl in White Cotton*) is, in many ways, Avni Doshi's labour of love. She started writing the novel in 2013 and the draft she finally submitted to her publisher was her eighth. Reading Doshi can be an unsettling and harrowing experience. Rather than pandering to her readers, she portrays human intention and action with an unflinching honesty. For her, the mother-daughter relationship,

for instance, is hardly ever straightforward. It's with good reason that her novel's first line—"I would be lying if I said my mother's misery has never given me pleasure"—is quoted so often. While Doshi's book defied the toughest of odds—the pandemic—to succeed, it did also show that characters in a novel do not need that silver lining of redemption to be relatable. Doshi, it seemed, had infused into her fiction her own sense of delectable doubt. ■

—Shreevatsa Nevatia

THE SAME BRUSH Before Doshi took to literature, she worked as an art writer and curator. Over time, she found the distinctions between the two disciplines blur significantly. In much the same way that art permeates her fiction—her *Burnt Sugar* protagonist is an artist—books fashioned her art career, too.

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SPORTS

ARM AND THE MAN

NEERAJ CHOPRA, 24

*Athlete (Javelin throw),
Khandra, Haryana*

Until August 7, 2021, Neeraj Chopra was just another young, talented sportsperson who carried the weight of expectations of winning an Olympic medal. A day later, he became that rare figure who didn't just meet but over-delivered on them by winning a gold medal at the Tokyo Games. India's first medal in athletics and only its second individual gold came from a throw which wasn't even his career best.

Chopra's era has begun on a high note but he hasn't reached the summit yet. Having already accomplished a milestone, the sky is the limit for the Haryana

athlete. He can now focus on adding to his laurels—win the world title in his discipline and enter the small, elite league of throwers who have crossed the 90-metre mark.

Regardless of it, Chopra's herculean feat has inspired the youth and given them the self-belief that India too can compete with the best in the world and win at the biggest international sports competition. The results of that historic evening in Tokyo will hopefully be felt in a few years just as Abhinav Bindra's Beijing gold led to a renaissance in shooting. Chopra has shown he is more than adept at being the sporting icon India needs. ■

— *Suhani Singh*

HOLD IT LIKE NEERAJ One of his quirks is to teach the correct way to hold a javelin. When he comes across someone handling a javelin not knowing which side faces the ground, he tells them the right way.

“You should love the work you do. It automatically becomes easier to do it. I liked other sports too but chose javelin because it made me happy”



Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**
Outfit: Louis Vuitton

TARGET LOCKED

AISHWARY PRATAP SINGH TOMAR, 20

Shooter, Ratanpur, Madhya Pradesh

“Aishwary clearly has the mindset of a champion. He has shown the ability to withstand pressure, which is essential in a sport like shooting. He has a long career ahead of him, hopefully interspersed with medal wins for India”

YASHODHARA RAJE SCINDIA
Minister for Sports and Youth Welfare, Madhya Pradesh

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Aishwary caught the shooting bug early in life, at his family's farm in Ratanpur village in Madhya Pradesh. His cousin Navdeep introduced him to competitive shooting in 2015. Aishwary began competing in the 10-metre air rifle category, but moved to the 50-metre 0.22 three position (standing, kneeling, prone) event in 2018. Within a couple of years, he had earned a berth for himself in the Indian contingent to the Olympics. He was

ranked #21 in Tokyo, but did not let the setback weaken his drive—in October this year, he won a gold at the ISSF Junior World Championships in Lima, setting a world record in the process. “The Olympics is the biggest sporting event in the world, and in Tokyo, I was competing for the first time. There were things that did not go my way, but I have the 2024 Olympics in my sights,” he says. Before then, Aishwary has another chance to prove himself at the 2022 Asian Games. ■

— **Rahul Noronha**

BIKER BOY A bike enthusiast, Aishwary bought himself an Enfield Continental GT after the Olympics. His dream bike is a Kawasaki Ninja H2R



SANJEEV VERMA/GETTY IMAGES



Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

P.V. SINDHU, 26

Badminton player, Hyderabad

Queen of the Court

With two Olympic and Asian Games medals, a World Championship title and countless other tournament wins under her belt, P.V. Sindhu is not only India's greatest badminton player but also its greatest female athlete. She remains driven even after gaining success and its tricky byproduct—fame. After bagging a bronze at the 2020 Tokyo Games and becoming only the second Indian sportsperson to win back-to-back Olympic medals, Sindhu could have rested on her accomplishment and taken 2021 off. Instead, she was back

on court soon, reaching the semis of three tournaments and finals of the World Tour Finals.

A disciplined work ethic, the need to work on her weaknesses and the hunger to learn new tactics are essential to Sindhu's consistency and longevity. Her ability to stay in shape and be relatively injury-free in a physically gruelling sport are also underrated. For the betterment of Indian sport, she needs a rival. But there's no denying that the Hyderabadian is the queen and, thankfully for fans, she's in no mood to relinquish her throne yet. ■

— *Suhani Singh*

“Many people tell me that at this age, you are supposed to go out with friends, travel. But to achieve something, it's fine to sacrifice. It's not a burden, I don't regret it”

FURRY REMINDER In 2020, Sindhu welcomed home a Labrador named Rio, named after her silver medal run at the 2016 Olympics

DOUBLE TROUBLE

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SPORTS

CHIRAG SHETTY, 24

Mumbai

SATWIKSAIRAJ RANKIREDDY, 21

Shuttlers,
Amalapuram, AP

India's badminton challenge finally got a formidable partnership going in 2016 when then coach Tan Kim Her asked Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy to team up. He knew their similar height and attacking styles would pay off. It didn't take them long to set aside linguistic barriers—Chirag is from Mumbai while Satwiksairaj is from Andhra Pradesh—and demonstrate that theirs is a pairing that can win titles and medals.

The year 2018 saw them win

a gold (mixed team) and a silver (men's doubles) at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Not only are the two the first Indian men's doubles team to be ranked in the top 10 but also the first to win a Super 500 title (2019 Thailand Open) and be recognised with the Arjuna Award (2020). With age on their side and the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and Paris Olympics not too far away, the shuttlers will be India's best bet for a medal alongside PV. Sindhu. ■

—Suhani Singh

ON THE BUTTON Satwik is a big fan of PUBG while Chirag is steeped in Netflix. Both also love Japanese food



“You must have a good understanding on and off the court. Players who bond off court gel well on court”

CHIRAG SHETTY

ALEXANDER NEMENOV/GETTY IMAGES



COURTESY HOCKEY INDIA

LALREMSAIMI, 21

Hockey player, Kolasib, Mizoram

Dynamic Dribbler

No girl from Mizoram had made the cut for India's senior hockey team until Lalremsaimi, then only 17, stormed onto the turf and wowed with her speed and skills. An integral part of India's silver medal-winning team at the 2018 Buenos Aires Youth Olympics, scoring nine goals, she also stood out as a dynamic forward at the Asian Games and Asian Champions Trophy where she won the tournament's U-21 rising star award.

Siami, as she is fondly known

by her teammates, says her heart was set on hockey the moment she first held a stick. “I was always fascinated by how one can manoeuvre the ball with it,” she says. Recently appointed a hockey coach by Mizoram's Department of Sports and Youth Services, she is keen to popularise the sport. “There are definitely more girls taking up hockey in Mizoram now. We even have a girl who has made it to the national junior team,” she says with barely disguised pride. ■

—Suhani Singh

HEROINE WORSHIP The first player from Mizoram in India's women's hockey team, Lalremsaimi's idol is Rani Rampal, the current captain

“Siami was very young when she broke into the senior squad. She is extremely talented, skillful and courageous”

RANI,
Captain, Indian Women's Hockey Team

AIMING TO EXCEL

Ganemat Sekhon, currently India #1 (#25 globally), is the only Indian to win medals at international skeet shooting competitions. She says her love for the sport was instant: “When I was 15, my father took me to a shooting range in Patiala. Within a month, I was in Delhi, had a coach and was training for the nationals.” Her journey

to the top wasn't easy—in 2016, her outing at a World Cup in Germany was a debacle. After that, she decided to compete internationally only after ranking #1 in India. She achieved that by 2017 and in a World Cup in Finland, won a bronze. In 2018, she won another bronze at an ISSF World Cup in Australia and one more in Delhi in March 2021. In October, she won a silver at the 2021 Peru World Championships. ■

—Rahul Noronha

WIDE-RANGING INTERESTS

Sekhon likes to paint and draw in her free time. Her dream is to build a shooting range in her hometown, Chandigarh.

GANEMAT SEKHON, 21

Shooter, Chandigarh



SANDEEP SAHDEV

“Ganemat is very determined to succeed. Her rise in the sport has been nothing short of spectacular”

MANSHER SINGH
Chief Coach, Shotgun, India



“We would want to win every game in the World Cup but we are starting against Pakistan, so that’s going to be special”

SHAFALI VERMA, 17

Cricketer, Rohtak, Haryana

THE BIG HITTER

Shafali Verma announced her arrival in just her second T20 international against South Africa in 2019. Just 15 years old then, she missed out on a half century by four runs but it came off 33 deliveries. Since then, it hasn’t taken long for people to start comparing her with former India opener Virender Sehwag.

Shafali walked into an Indian women’s cricket dressing room which boasts of many established names, but soon became one of

the most talked about batters in the team. Her style of play looks more suited for shorter formats and many had doubts if she could replicate the same success in Tests. But in June this year, she buried those apprehensions with a brilliant 96 in overcast conditions in Bristol, UK. The ICC Women’s World Cup is scheduled for March next year and Shafali, who is still not 18, is already being seen as the X-factor if India are to win their maiden World Cup. ■

—Rahul Rawat

YOUNG 'UN Shafali is the youngest cricketer to represent India internationally in all three formats of the game.

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SPORTS

“Lovlina is an epitome of women’s empowerment. Her global recognition at the highest level shows there is no knockout for a woman determined to pack a punch”

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA
Chief Minister, Assam



LOVLINA BORGHAIN, 24, *Boxer, Golaghat, Assam*

Fearless Fighter

She symbolises a fearless India. Young boxers like her will ensure many more Olympic medals in the future,” Ajay Singh, president of the Boxing Federation of India, says about Lovlina Borgohain, whose bronze at the Tokyo Games in the women’s 69 kg welterweight event made her only the third Indian boxer to win an Olympic medal. But it wasn’t really unexpected considering Borgohain

had won bronze medals at the AIBA Women’s World Boxing Championships in 2018 and 2019 and at the World Championships in Russia in 2019. What makes Borgohain’s Tokyo feat all the more incredible is that she had tested positive for Covid-19 just months ago, and her mother was battling a life-threatening ailment. It delayed her trip to Italy, where India’s Olympic-bound boxers trained before travelling to Tokyo. Fearless is perhaps the most apt word for Borgohain—in the quarterfinals, she was up against former world champion Nien-Chin Chen, to whom she

had lost four times. But then, overcoming fear and obstacles has been a part of her journey through abject poverty and adverse conditions. The bronze in Tokyo is just the beginning. Borgohain has set her sights on a gold in the next Olympics. ■

—Kaushik Deka

HOPE & DESPAIR After watching a series on Lord Buddha in 2019, she delved into Buddhist philosophy, learning to control her emotions, be it victory or defeat. Yet she found her mother’s ailment difficult to take.

Mission Gold

The nation cheered as Ravi Kumar Dahiya stood on the podium to accept the silver medal in the men’s freestyle 57kg clash at the Tokyo Games, but the smile was missing from the grappler’s face. Dahiya was very disappointed by his close loss in the finals to Russia’s Zaur Ugeyev and later apologised to his fans.

Son of a small farmer from Haryana, Dahiya’s journey in wrestling has been an uphill climb. In 2003, he moved to Delhi’s Chhatrasal Stadium—the Mecca of wrestlers in India—and spent years practising. His father, Rakesh Dahiya, would travel 40 km every day from his village in Sonapat to get him milk, fruits and vegetables.

RACE AGAINST TIME Dahiya practises for more than 18 hours a day, putting his time on the mat before all work and promotional activity

An Olympic silver is no mean feat, and Dahiya, to his credit, had made history by becoming only the second Indian wrestler—after Sushil Kumar—to bag an individual silver medal at the Games. Kumar’s silver had come at the 2012 Olympics in London. Not the one to rest on his laurels, Dahiya returned from Tokyo and immediately got down to preparing for the 2024 Paris Games. Coach Ramphal Mann says Dahiya’s only dream is to win an Olympic gold for the country and that he is working hard to realise it. ■

—Anilesh S. Mahajan

“Ravi is very focused and training hard for Paris. He doesn’t allow himself any distraction from the aim of winning an Olympic gold”

RAMPHAL MANN
Coach



LEAH MILLIS/REUTERS

“Shaili is a natural talent and has keen observation and the right attitude to be a world-level athlete. She is a quick learner with an indomitable fighting spirit”

ANJU BOBBY GEORGE
Asian Games gold medallist

SHAILI SINGH, 17

Athlete (Long jump), Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh

A LEAP OF FAITH

In August, when Shaili Singh won the silver for long jump at the Under 20 World Athletics Championships in Nairobi, she cried. They weren't tears of joy, but regret. Despite a career best 6.59 metres, the teenager missed the gold by a centimetre. “There were a lot of expectations that I'd get a gold and the national anthem would play in the stadium,” says Singh, the junior national record holder. This hunger to win is one reason why many see her as the next new star of Indian athletics. The expectations don't bog her down. “I thrive on it, in fact, I am more energised,” says Singh. “I feel I have to do more.”

Singh was 13 when her talent caught the eyes of India's most accomplished long jumper Anju Bobby George and her husband-coach Robert George. They invited the girl from a village near Jhansi to move to Bengaluru for coaching and training.

The year 2022 will be crucial as Singh looks to qualify for the Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games. To qualify for the latter, she will need to clear the 6.82 mark. Her coach Robert George believes she can even clear the 7-metre mark, and be an Olympics contender. “If he has faith and I give my 100 per cent, I can do it,” she says. ■

—Suhani Singh

DIET ANOTHER DAY Shaili loves her food. “Kuchh bhi khila dijiye, main sab kha loongi (Give me anything, I will eat it all),” says the long-legged athlete.

SUDHIR DAMERLA



STEADY AT THE CREASE

SMRITI MANDHANA, 25

Cricketer, Sangli, Maharashtra

“Every time I step on to the field, it's like, ‘Smriti you have to score runs.’ I love responsibility”

Smriti Mandhana was always a precocious talent, just nine when she made it to the Maharashtra Under-15 team, 11 when she was drafted into the state Under-19 team. She donned the blue Indian jersey for the first time in the summer of 2013. She was just 16 then. Since then, her rise has been phenomenal, so much so she's already one of India's most successful batters.

With runs and experience under her belt and an affable personality, it's just a matter of time before Smriti is handed the Indian captaincy. She's also on the radar of every franchise/ team when it comes to foreign leagues like the Women's Big Bash League and The Hundred. Success brings with it a lot of expectations and Smriti acknowledges both sides of the fame bit. “As an opener, we have to lay

the platform for the innings. As a team, we want to win the World Cup. If people appreciate you, one should also be ready for criticism. If people are criticising, it means they are watching you,” reckons Smriti.

With four ODI tons, she is already closing in on the record for most centuries by an Indian woman in ODIs. Only Mithali Raj, who has been at the crease since 1999, is ahead of her. Her ability to adapt to conditions, be it foreign or Indian, makes her a force to reckon with. Interestingly, all five of her centuries for India came on foreign soil. ■

—Rahul Rawat

TWICE AS NICE Mandhana is the first Indian woman to score a double century in a domestic one-dayer, 224 n.o. in a West Zone U-19 game.



MANDAR DEODHAR, Makeup: Sharvari Gandhe



CHRIS GRAYTHEN/POOL/AFP

SAIKHOM MIRABAI CHANU, 27

Weightlifter, Nongpok Kakching, Manipur

Iron Willed

When Saikhom Mirabai Chanu ended up on the podium at the Tokyo Olympics, she not only opened India's medal account but also became the first Indian weightlifter to win a silver at the games. With that glorious entry to the record book, the diminutive girl from Manipur proved that she doesn't give up. Five years ago, at the Rio Olympics, she had failed to register a single legal lift in the clean and jerk. While her win at Tokyo exorcised the ghost of Rio, her sights are set still further—aiming for a gold at the 2024 Paris Olympics. It's not an impossible goal for someone whose commitment to her sport remains non-negotiable and is ready to make many sacrifices. After the Rio debacle, she gave up using her mobile phone, and even now, rarely uses it. However, there are certain relationships in life that this Khel Ranta winner doesn't like to ignore or forget. When she returned from Tokyo, Chanu went looking for, and found, the truck drivers who in her early days as a bud-

“What strikes me most about Mirabai is her mental strength. To retain one's self-belief even when faced with the most adverse situation is extremely difficult. That's why she is an inspiration to millions”

N. BIREN SINGH
Chief Minister, Manipur

ding athlete gave her free rides from her home in Nongpok Kakching village to the training centre at the Khuman Lampak sports complex in Imphal, majorly easing the financial cost of her training. ■

—Kaushik Deka

OFF THE CLOCK Mirabai loves doing paper craft and cooking in her free time, and enjoys dancing to the songs of Neha Kakkar. Her guilty pleasure on cheat days is pizza

THE HIT MACHINE

RISHABH PANT, 24

Cricketer, Roorkee



“Pant has produced three innings that changed the course of a Test... most players don’t contribute that many in a career”

IAN CHAPPELL
Ex-Australia captain

Rishabh Pant first came into the Indian side as an understudy to M.S. Dhoni. Pant got his opportunities, succeeded, failed and rose again. At just 24, he has already guided India to some famous victories. On the cricket field, he is a dangerous bat, a far improved wicketkeeper, and off the field he has become a sponsors’ delight. That the opposition fears him was evident when earlier this year in Chennai, England delayed their second innings declaration in the first Test. One reason captain Joe Root cited was Pant: “If he bats for one session, it can make things quite interesting. I didn’t want the pressure of having to contain as well as take wickets.” This came just weeks after the left-hander had guided India to a famous victory at the Gabba in Brisbane to win the Test series 2-1 in Australia. He also leads the high-profile IPL team Delhi Capitals, who retained him for Rs 16 crore for the next three years. ■

—Rahul Rawat

TON UP Pant is the only Indian wicketkeeper-batsman to score a Test century in England and Australia

MICHAEL BRADLEY/GETTY IMAGES

TOP SHOT

THE NEXT
100
SPORTS

PAYAS JAIN, 17

Table tennis player, New Delhi

“He’s got a very good technique and plays a daredevil game. If he can maintain his aggression, he will be one of the best India has ever produced”

SHARATH KAMAL ACHANTA
Nine-time national TT champion

Payas Jain was destined to play table tennis even if he didn't take a liking to the sport early on. "It was my parents' plan all along," says Jain, whose father Jitendra and mother Shweta, both former players, run the Table Tennis Foundation Academy in New Delhi. It is here that Payas has blossomed into one of India's most promising paddlers. Among his feats is a world no. 1 rank in the under-17 boys' singles category and a bronze in the under-19 category at the 2021 World Youth Championships in Portugal.

Jain symbolises the new-age Indian athlete who knows what it takes to be on top of the game. He does SPARQ (Speed, Power, Agility, Reaction and Quickness) training and uses high-tech strobe glasses to enhance neuromuscular efficiency and devise methods to beat the dominant Chinese. "The game is evolving; it has become very fast. There are many new techniques now," says Jain. "You have to strategise [even] in between the game."

Jain is known for his on-court speed, playing close to the table, strong backhand and ability to generate spin. His recent inclusion in the Sports Authority of India's Target Olympic Podium Scheme development group for the 2024 Olympics only shows how he is seen as a bright star of the game. ■

—Suhani Singh

FIGHTING FIT In 2020, Jain lost 18 kilos playing and training during the pandemic. He attributes his stellar showing in 2021, which includes three international titles, to his fitness.



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



SWINGING HIGH

KIDAMBI SRIKANTH, 28

*Badminton player,
Hyderabad*

On December 19, Kidambi Srikanth won silver at the Badminton World Federation (BWF) World Championships, held in Huelva, Spain, scripting history as the first Indian man to have won a World Championship silver. It helped him move up four places in the latest BWF rankings to No. 10. Srikanth, who has clinched titles in four Super Series in Indonesia, Australia, Denmark and France, is the only Indian, and fourth overall, to win all in a calendar year. Despite the setbacks served by the pandemic and injuries, Srikanth is busy setting bigger goals for himself. He has a packed schedule ahead—India Open in January, the all-England, the World Championship and the Asian Games. “No time to rest,” he says. Srikanth will be focusing on bettering his form and fitness at the Pullela Gopichand Badminton Academy in Hyderabad where he has been training. ■

—Amarnath K. Menon

BETTER THAN THE BEST Kidambi Srikanth has outperformed even the greats. Prakash Padukone (1983), B. Sai Praneeth (2019) and Lakshya Sen (2021) all lost in their respective BWF semi-finals to settle for bronze medals.

“He is not swayed by the success that has followed months of toiling and heartbreak, the biggest one being the Olympic Games”

PULLELA GOPICHAND

Chief National Coach, Indian Badminton Team

REVOLUTION AND RETREAT

The youth have driven some of the biggest calls for change India has seen, but these big mass movements have had their limitations too

By DIPANKAR GUPTA

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

There have been many movements in India where the youth have played a significant role. The uprising against Hindi in the south, the long Assam agitations, the Gujarat-based Navnirman stir, the anti-Mandal protests, the list goes on. Needless to say, if there is an uprising anywhere, the young will be in the mix like turmeric in Indian cuisine. Even so, the anti-corruption movement of 2011 helmed by Anna Hazare was different. For the first time, this mobilisation was truly altruistic and “other” oriented. It

was not to get a leg up in the job market, not to let outsiders (however defined) rise above the locals, not to overthrow a government, but to squash what was seen as end-to-end corruption for the larger social good.

One can go sociological and argue that if the youth felt so strongly about corruption, there must be a much deeper reason for it. The cause was perhaps so deep that it stirred the unconscious without the activists being fully aware of its existence. Even a cursory look at those who thronged around Anna Hazare at the Ramlila grounds in August 2011 would show that they were not labourers or indigent farmers, but young aspirants to the country’s middle class. It was not absolute poverty that was driving them as much as disillusionment with their life prospects as they moved on to a more mature age. It was relative deprivation rather than an animal theory of revolution that was spurring them on.

For these thwarted youngsters, the prospect of joblessness was perhaps less upsetting than being stuck in a job beneath their station and qualifications. So

many of them had diplomas and degrees, but these looked best framed on the wall and rarely impressed any employer. Their parents had spent good money to send them to an engineering college, a vocational or management institute, but with little reward. It is widely acknowledged that more than 60 per cent of those with formal vocational skills work in areas they are not trained for.

It is then not for want of trying that these young people face a bleak prospect as they enter full-fledged adulthood. Today, as many as 96 per cent of school-age children are enrolled; currently their numbers have shot up in private schools from a mere 2 per cent in 1980 to 34 per cent. Over the past years, we have established nearly 800 universities with 24 million students as well as 6,000 engineering colleges with over 2 million students. These figures show a sharp rise, way higher than a gradual climb. Ambitions have simply skyrocketed.

In contrast, the parents of this new youthful generation were from

The accent was not on jobs for locals or special handouts...but to bleach politics of politicians who are the source of all undemocratic evil

a different world. They were less discontented, less educated and more rural with limited ambitions beyond making ends meet and dying respectably. All that has changed; the rural world cannot retain their young, nor do their parents want them to relive the lives they had led. Unsurprisingly, over 60 per cent of rural net domestic product is now non-agricultural, which is why workshops are abuzz in every village and slum. Hence the willingness of parents to finance education with the hope and prayer that the fates that visited them will not haunt their children.

Why then should good, hard-earned money spent on education and skill development lead to wasted ambitions? If, after all, the hardship their parents had endured, they should still be locked into low-paying, uncertain jobs, then it must be age-blind corruption that is at the bottom of it all. The way out then is to change the rules of the game, beginning with a citizen’s charter and watchdog Lokpals that would nail the corrupt and free the passage to a robust democracy. This is probably all the sociology needed to back-ground the anti-corruption movement that buoyed Anna Hazare.

The accent was, therefore, not on jobs for locals or special handouts, nor political vendetta but to bleach politics of politicians who are the source of all undemocratic evil. An impossible, oxymoronic idea that only the very young can entertain. Consequently, it was Anna’s outsider status that drew him to the cheering crowd of youthful enthusiasts who looked up to him despite his age. That a septuagenarian became the leader





ANNIVERSARY

YOUTH MOVEMENTS

of this anti-corruption movement only goes to show that the youth are not necessarily attracted to young leaders as much as they are to young ideas.

Anna's status as a political outsider added most to his credibility. The young saw the establishment packed with corrupt deal makers and breakers and they wanted no part of it. The anti-corruption movement did not allow any politician on the stage with Anna, yet other notables, from Aamir Khan to Sri Sri Ravishankar, were greeted warmly. Though Anna and the front, India Against Corruption, kept politicians out, every political party, barring the Congress, wanted to be included as sympathiser. From the Left, the CPI (M), and from the Right, the BJP, did everything besides sending Hallmark cards, to draw Anna's attention.

For the record, it must be mentioned that the Imam of Jama Masjid stayed unimpressed. His opposition was swiftly neutered by other organisations like the Ulema Council, Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and the All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board. All of them criticised Imam Bukhari and found nothing wrong with the cries of Bharat Mata routinely belted out by Anna's followers. It was this combination of parties and organisations behind Anna that induced many "politically correct" people to re-think. The flag-waving and the fervent cries of Bharat Mata that hung like a noisy aerosol over the Ramlila grounds did not arouse in them feelings of disdain as they did in the past. Instead, they signalled a positive bonding with no angularities attached.

Anna was bewildered by the support he received, and that too in the national capital. He came with a reputation of honesty, but so many honest people

have slipped into oblivion. Yet, boisterous, happy crowds cling-wrapped him everywhere. A worried government eventually agreed to Anna's conditions in the hope that he would give up his fast, which was threatening his health. The demands Anna set forth were non-partisan and aimed only at corruption: a citizens' charter, Lok Ayukta in every state and to include upper deck bureaucrats in the ambit of Lokpal inquiries.

Anna won that battle and at that very instant also lost the war: another

When Anna became political, the youth were no longer interested in him...his special quality was gone and they had many other choices

paradox. When he gave up his fast at Ramlila grounds, he also let it be known that he would weigh in for the Opposition in the coming general election. At exactly that point, as if a giant switch was turned off, Anna's charisma dimmed and blacked out. From a moral crusader, he had become a political animal in an instant. This was confirmed when, soon after, in December he sat with political leaders in Jantar Mantar in happy camaraderie. Collectively, they dreamt prospects at the hustings in an atmosphere of smiling lips and stern calculating eyes.

Anna still did not know that his

charisma had fused and set out to recreate the Ramlila magic in Mumbai. It was a disaster. Only a handful turned up and row upon row of chairs stared emptily into media cameras. When Anna became political, the youth were no longer interested in him. Anna's special quality was gone, for at the political plane the youth had many other choices. Anna's movement was now officially dead and his supporters fractionated along political lines. Lokpals, the citizen's charter were words whose meanings were gradually getting difficult to recall. The real world was back!

Just as crayoned skies end the day, youth bring colour to a movement before fading into the night. Such mobilisations are invariably fleeting moments for a number of reasons. First, people stay young for a very brief window and, except for a few laggards, they invariably succeed in clambering over it. Second, the next generation of young hate inheriting a cause; they would rather start one of their own. This is true around the world: the beatniks gave way to the mods, rockers, hippies, yippies, punks, and so on. Ironically, if there is any inheritance at all, it travels in the reverse direction. Those with wizened looks and calculating minds take over and convert a young passion into a bureaucratic programme. What was once a movement soon becomes a party and, true to form, the iron law of oligarchy and the rule of experts take over. The youth that still remain, on this side of that narrow window, are now a bother, if not an embarrassment. Every generation must make that same futile mistake. ■

—Dipankar Gupta taught at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for three decades

YOUNG INDIA MOVEMENTS

BE IT A FIGHT AGAINST INJUSTICE, DEPRIVATION OR CORRUPTION, THE YOUTH HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT, BATTLING THE POWERS THAT BE

▼ People gather at the Kolkata Maidan to protest against the B.C. Roy government, Aug. 1959



ANANDBAZAR PATRIKA

HUNGER PANGS

FOOD MOVEMENT, 1959

West Bengal

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ANNIVERSARY

YOUTH UPRISINGS

It began as a protest against the B.C. Roy-led Congress government's indifference to the food crisis in Bengal, when rice began selling for Rs 28-30 per maund, and the subsequent hoarding and black marketing triggered a near-famine in the countryside. In no time, however, the movement, which began under the aegis of the CPI or Communist Party of India's Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee (PIFRC), escalated into a mass uprising. Students from city schools and colleges flocked to the cause, as did peasants and the working class, braving batons and bullets. Descending soon into a vicious spiral of violence and counter-violence, a four-day bloody carnival (August 31-September 4, 1959) of arson and anarchy by protesters was met with the most brutal state repression. Kolkata witnessed reckless firing and lathi-charges, with official figures claiming 80 deaths and 3,000 injured. Hundreds went missing. Police would cordon off areas of retreat, turn off the street lights and beat up the protesters. The anarchist role of the leftist young brigade also came in for criticism. With things spinning out of control, the CPI called off the protest on September 26. The Opposition moved a no-confidence motion against the government, but it was defeated due to lack of numbers. The movement subsided but did not die, rearing its head again in 1966. ■ —Romita Datta

Students from city schools and colleges flocked to the cause, braving the batons and the bullets of the state

IN REMEMBRANCE August 31 is now Martyrs' Day; a plaque has been set up in their memory at the Subodh Mullick Square in Kolkata

Forked Tongues

**ANTI-HINDI
AGITATION, 1965**

Madras State

The anti-Hindi
sentiment gained
traction as the day
of the switchover
(January 26, 1965)
to Hindi came near

46TH

ANNIVERSARY

YOUTH UPRISINGS

The Union government's efforts to impose Hindi as the sole official language after 1965 met with resistance in the erstwhile Madras state, which soon snowballed into a violent agitation. The anti-Hindi agitation gained traction with students out on the streets as the day of the switchover (January 26, 1965) to Hindi neared. On January 25, riots broke out in Madurai sparked off by a minor altercation between agitating students and workers of the ruling Congress. It soon spread across the state and continued for two months. The fledgling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) rallied the youth, harped on the self-respect of Tamils, and kept the situation on the boil. The 70-odd deaths in police firing gathered more support for the DMK. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's assurance that English would continue as the official language as long as the non-Hindi-speaking states wanted led to the end of the agitation. But political convulsions continued and enabled the DMK to come to power in the 1967 assembly poll, trouncing the Congress, which never recovered after the loss. ■

—Amarnath K. Menon

THE DRAVIDIAN RISE The anti-Hindi agitation laid the seeds for the dominance of Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu politics, reimagining the Union-state paradigm on relative rights and governance

STATE OF UNREST

TELANGANA AGITATION,
1969-70

Hyderabad



ANNIVERSARY

YOUTH UPRISINGS

The movement for bifurcation was the result of severe misgivings in Telangana that their interests were being curtailed

The 1956 reorganisation of states in the south failed to usher in equitable development of all regions. The Telangana agitation was one of the outcomes. The movement for bifurcation of the state of Andhra Pradesh was the result of severe misgivings among the people of the Telangana region that their interests were being curtailed. It all came to a boil in 1969. While factional politics inspired the agitation in its initial days, the ferment among the youth, especially students, stemmed from a sense of frustration at the lack of job opportunities. In the Telangana region, it engendered a strong, sub-regional agitation. Incensed students boycotted classes and took to the streets. They were joined by government staff and politicians deserting the Congress to join the protests. More than 300 students died in police firing and clashes while all the students eventually lost an academic year, an unprecedented sacrifice then.

Unable to check the protests, Indira Gandhi,

on a fleeting visit to Hyderabad, assured the agitation's leaders that Telangana's surpluses would be used for its development and appealed to students to call off their agitation. An economic package to spur the development of the region was announced. Meanwhile, the agitation spawned the Telangana Praja Samithi (TPS) which won 10 of the 14 seats in the region in the 1971 parliamentary polls. But just a year later, it won just one seat in the assembly poll. With that the demand for statehood too went on the backburner. ■

—Amarnath K. Menon

A 44-YEAR WAR The Telangana Rashtra Samithi, led by K. Chandrashekar Rao, revived the campaign in 2000 involving students and the youth (several even committed suicide for the cause). Telangana finally got statehood in 2014.



▲ Students' protest in Ahmedabad, 1974



A NEW AWAKENING

NAV NIRMAN ANDOLAN, 1973-74

Gujarat

The Nav Nirman movement gave a platform to the people who were fed up with the food insecurity, unemployment and corruption

What began as a protest by the students of the Ahmedabad University against high mess bills and poor quality of food soon became a mass movement against the corrupt government of Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel. The Ahmedabad University students called for a strike on January 7, 1974. But fed up of food insecurity, unemployment and corruption, the isolated protest on one campus became a rallying cry for students across Gujarat.

The call for a bandh on January 10, 1974 in Ahmedabad and Vadodara (then Baroda) led to two days of riots. It was followed by a call for another statewide bandh on January 25, 1974. Sensing the people's anger, the then prime minister Indira Gandhi asked Patel to step down on February 9. By March 1974,

95 of 167 MLAs had resigned. On March 12, 1974, the then Congress leader Morarji Desai went on an indefinite hunger strike. Four days later, the assembly was dissolved, marking the end of the movement.

The Nav Nirman movement was perhaps the first in India that led to the ouster of an elected government. Though it didn't last the course, it became a precursor for Jayaprakash Narayan's 'Sampoorna Kranti' (Total Revolution), which led to the imposition of the Emergency in 1975. ■

—Kiran D. Tare

A TASK ACCOMPLISHED
The Nav Nirman movement petered out with Chimanbhai Patel's ouster not before influencing JP's Sampoorna Kranti. Some 16 years on, Patel returned as CM in March 1990, supported by BJP

STUDENTS' MOVEMENT, 1974

Bihar

A STORM CALLED JP

In 1974, socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) launched a movement called Students for Democratic Governance in Bihar, which soon caught the popular imagination at a time when India was getting increasingly restive because of soaring prices, growing unemployment and an indifferent Congress government at the Centre. Launched initially as a students' movement in Bihar, the idea soon spread like wildfire across India. When JP finally addressed a public meeting in Patna on June 5, 1974

and gave the call for '*Sampoorna Kranti*' (Total Revolution), almost 500,000 people attended the rally.

JP attracted people from every section of society, all with the common aim of changing the government, and then society. Though India Gandhi continued with her government and finally clamped Emergency on the country on June 25, 1975, the subsequent expansion of the Total Revolution movement across the country transformed JP into the most powerful anti-government force since Independence. ■

—Amitabh Srivastava

▶ JP at the Gandhi Maidan rally in Patna, 1974



DEMOCRACY'S REVENGE When elections were held in 1977, the Congress party was routed. India, for the first time, had a non-Congress government

Chorus Against Coercion

STUDENTS' MOVEMENT DURING THE EMERGENCY, 1975

Pan-India



▶ A young Arun Jaitley (right), then the Delhi University Student's Union president, leading an anti-Emergency strike

The Emergency, imposed by then prime minister Indira Gandhi on June 25, 1975, saw bans on political rallies, media censorship, incarceration of Opposition leaders and controversial measures, such as coercive sterilisation—all leading to severe curbs on individual and institutional freedoms. At first, Emergency created a false sense of order. The government, for instance, claimed trains were running on time and—with strikes banned—industrial output was picking up. Indira Gandhi announced a 20-point programme to tackle various challenges, such as

inflation, making farm production sustainable and streamlining the public distribution system. She brought in legislation to cap rural land ownership.

At the same time, there was rampant misuse of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). Outright victimisation, mistaken identities and flimsy suspicions were cause enough for people to end up in detention. The controls and gags became instant anathema for youth across the political spectrum. An undercurrent began to swell as their leaders, except those sympathetic to the Congress, were rounded up and jailed. A spirited movement

pushed for the dislodging of the Indira government. She revoked the Emergency in March 1977 and called for general elections, only to be swept out of power by the Janata Party. ■

—Amarnath K. Menon

A LESSON FOR LIFE The Emergency underscored the need to uphold civil liberties and strengthen democratic institutions, and proved that coercive tactics, such as sterilisation, were bound to boomerang on parties and their government

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ANNIVERSARY

YOUTH UPRISINGS

A PURE AGENDA

ASSAM AGITATION, 1979-85

Assam

The six-year-long Assam agitation started with the primary demand for identification and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in Assam. The agitation, led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), had begun as a non-violent movement. It turned violent in the later phases. Since the 1960s, there had been a demand in Assam for identification of illegal settlers, who were finding a place in the electoral rolls. The immediate trigger for the agitation was the discovery of over 45,000 illegal immigrants in the electoral rolls of the Mangaldoi Lok Sabha constituency in 1979. Over the next six years, Assam witnessed widespread civil disobedience, including railway blockades and attacks on oil pipelines, political instability and ethnic violence. While operations by security forces claimed the lives of over 850 student leaders, over 2,000 people were killed in the infamous Nellie and Khoirabari massacres in 1983. ■

—Kaushik Deka

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



▲ A 'rail roko' protest by AASU members in 1980

For six years, Assam witnessed widespread civil disobedience, including railway blockades and attacks on oil pipelines, political instability and ethnic violence

ALL IN ACCORD
The agitation ended on August 15, 1985 with the signing of the Assam Accord—a memorandum of settlement—between the Union government and the student leaders, who formed a political party, the Asom Gana Parishad, and won the next state assembly election with a massive mandate

▼ Students at an anti-Mandal agitation in Delhi

SHARAD SAXENA



ANTI-MANDAL AGITATION, 1990

Pan-India

The Quota Factor

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ANNIVERSARY

This was a nationwide protest against the implementation of the B.P. Mandal Commission's recommendation of 27 per cent quota in government jobs and public universities for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The commission was set up in January 1979 by the Morarji Desai government and presented its report to the President in December 1980. Given the existing 22.5 per cent reservation for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, the OBC quota meant nearly 50 per cent government jobs and public university seats would be out of bounds for the general category. The V.P. Singh government decided to implement the recommendation in August

1990, sparking student protests, which began from Delhi University and spread quickly. It turned violent at several places with roads blocked, vehicles targeted, schools and colleges shut and government and public services disrupted. DU student Rajiv Goswami, who attempted self-immolation, became an abiding symbol of the protests. ■

—Kaushik Deka

SHEDDING ALL RESERVATIONS The anti-Mandal agitation ended with Prime Minister V.P. Singh stepping down on November 7, 1990 after the BJP withdrew support to his government

Affirmative Objection

ANTI-RESERVATION PROTESTS, 2006

Delhi, Mumbai



GETTY IMAGES

◀ Medical students at an anti-reservation protest, 2006

In April 2006, the UPA government, through the 93rd Constitutional Amendment, decided to implement 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in higher education institutes, including central universities, IITs, IIMs and AIIMS, inviting protests from forward class students. Medical students in Delhi took

the lead and drew support from their counterparts in other cities, such as Mumbai, and IIT Roorkee students. The protesters organised themselves under the banner of 'Youth for Equality' and demanded a rollback of the quota, a white paper on the reservation policy and alternative ways of affirmative action. ■

—Rahul Noronha

WIN SOME, LOSE SOME: While the agitation paled in comparison to the anti-Mandal protests of the noughties, a key development was the Supreme Court's April 2008 verdict, which upheld the 27 per cent quota but ruled that the OBC 'creamy layer' was not entitled to the benefit.

The protests were led by medical students. In some cities, doctors joined in solidarity and college faculty went on leave

COLOURS OF CONSENT

PRIDE MARCH, 2008

Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Mumbai



It took 10 years of for the Pride movement to achieve its goal—the Supreme Court striking down Section 377 in 2018

enough support to become a yearly event in major Indian cities. After 10 years of continued efforts and protests, the movement achieved its goal—on September 6, 2018, the Supreme Court said using Section 377 to victimise homosexuals was unconstitutional, and decriminalised homosexuality. ■

— Sonali Acharjee

THE GAY WAY: Laws should be tools of social unity and should protect non-violent self-expression

AP/ MUSTAFA QURAISHI



◀ People at the first Rainbow Pride Walk in Delhi, Jun. 29, 2008

The IAC protest was sparked off in 2011 by a number of senior leaders in the then UPA government being embroiled in corruption cases

THE ANGRY TIDE

INDIA AGAINST CORRUPTION, 2011

Pan-India

▼ A supporter carries a giant Anna poster at Jantar Mantar where the social activist was on hunger strike, Aug. 24, 2011



EPA/ANINDITO MUKHERJEE

The India Against Corruption (IAC) movement was a series of protests across India in 2011 against political corruption. It was sparked off by a number of leading politicians in the-then UPA government being embroiled in corruption cases. The movement was launched when the government proved reluctant to submit to the growing demand for a national anti-corruption watchdog—the Lok Pal—with the authority to investigate political corruption. Student participation strengthened it immensely, turning it into a mass movement.

The movement gained momentum from April 5, 2011, when activist Anna Hazare began a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi.

Hazare's fasts, the support from traditional media and the astute use of social media by IAC leaders drew India's urban middle classes on to the streets. It resulted in the Centre involving some of the activists in the formulation of an anti-corruption bill. Some protest leaders launched the Aam Aadmi Party, which is now in power in Delhi. ■

—Kaushik Deka

POWER OF PROTEST The IAC movement not only caused a massive awakening about corruption in India but also showed that popular protests can shake the corridors of power



► Women cling to a flagpost at a Nirbhaya protest near Rashtrapati Bhavan, Dec. 22, 2012

AP

THE LAST STRAW

NIRBHAYA OUTRAGE, 2012

New Delhi

The brutal gangrape of the 23-year-old in New Delhi brought national attention to the growing incidence of sexual crimes against women

On the morning of December 17, 2012, as India woke up to the news of the gruesome gangrape of a 23-year-old woman on a moving bus in New Delhi, the nation initially went numb. But soon, young people across the country decided it was time to break the silence that has long surrounded violence against women in India. Thousands of students poured onto the streets of Delhi, demanding justice and safety for women. When the victim, dubbed 'Nirbhaya' (fearless) by the media, succumbed to her injuries in a hospital in Singapore on December 29, the outrage—by now known as Nirbhaya movement—intensified, and Delhi came to a standstill. All six rapists were arrested within 24 hours and a fast-track court was set up for their trial. Within a week, the government created

a high-level committee, led by a former Chief Justice of India, Justice J.S. Verma. The committee's recommendations—to widen the definition of rape, to create new categories of offences to address violence like acid attacks and sexual harassment and to increase the penalties for those convicted of rape—were introduced into the Indian Penal Code. The law also included provisions to penalise the police in cases where they failed to register FIRs, to make it easier for rape victims to report cases. ■

— Kaushik Deka

STRINGENT OUTCOME
The Nirbhaya protests led to the enactment of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, 2013, which made punishment for rape more stringent and included provisions to protect victims' safety and rights

UNQUALIFIED FAILURE

FTII AGITATION, 2015

Pune

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Though Chauhan took charge in January 2016, he had a short tenure—just 14 months—which was not extended after it expired

Three days after the Centre announced that BJP member Gajendra Chauhan would be the new chairman of the Pune-based Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), students began a protest on June 9, 2015 that would continue for 139 days—among the longest in the history of an institution that has seen many student agitations. Protesters cited Chauhan's lack of credentials, with some members of the film fraternity too supporting their strike. Many students faced disciplinary action—among them, Payal Kapadia, who went on to make a documentary inspired by the protest titled *A Night of Knowing Nothing* and had her scholarship

grant cut. (Her film would go on to win a prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2021.) On August 3, some 80 students hit the streets of New Delhi, seeking a dialogue with the information and broadcasting ministry on the issue.

The strike was called off on October 28. Though Chauhan took charge on January 7, 2016, he had a short tenure—one year and two months. The central government has also made a change to the admission process now, requiring students to sign an affidavit that makes it more difficult to protest. ■

— Suhani Singh

A MATTER OF DEGREE Political appointments to educational institutions should consider a candidate's actual qualifications, not just whether they have worked in a particular sector

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



▲ FTII students protest against Chauhan's appointment in Delhi, Aug. 3, 2013

LET THERE BE NOISE

JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY UNREST, 2014

Kolkata

One of the most prominent students' movements in recent years began at Jadavpur University in Kolkata in early September 2014, following a case of sexual assault that was handled in a lackadaisical manner by university authorities. A major flashpoint was a sit-in demonstration at Jadavpur in mid-September. After a heated altercation between students and university authorities, including the then vice-chancellor, the administration called the police. On September 17, police personnel entered the campus and lathi-charged students, even arresting many on false charges.

The police brutality resulted in a surge of public sympathy, with tens of thousands taking to the streets. On September 20, representatives of a huge protest

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The flashpoint came on September 17, when university authorities allowed police to enter the campus and baton-charge students

march in Kolkata met West Bengal Governor Keshari Nath Tripathi. The slogan of the protest—'Hok Kolorob', meaning "let there be noise"—went viral on social media, gaining support from across the country and even abroad. In January 2015, after months of sustained protest, the Trinamool Congress government announced the resignation of Jadavpur University's vice chancellor. ■

— Romita Datta

SECURITY CODE Institutional failure to protect students should result in leadership changes, not repression



▲ JU students burn V-C Abhijit Chakraborty's effigy demanding his resignation, Dec. 24, 2014

GETTY IMAGES

SUPPRESSED FURY

CAMPAIGN FOR DALIT RIGHTS, 2016

Hyderabad

◀ Congress workers brave water cannons in Delhi as they protest then HRD minister Smriti Irani's statement on Vemula's suicide

Rohith Vemula's death by suicide in 2016 sparked a nationwide protest against the discrimination and violence meted out to the Dalit community. A student at the University of Hyderabad, Vemula had hanged himself, leaving behind a chilling note in which he called his birth a "fatal accident". Touching a raw nerve among the student community, demonstrations across campuses in the country reiterated the demand for equal rights and opportunities for Dalits and religious minorities as provided for in the Indian Constitution.

The protests alerted Indians to the fact that despite the enactment of a range of legislations meant to protect

Dalits, discrimination and segregation remain rampant. Neither the political regime, nor the ideology of the ruling political party, or the presence of major Dalit parties within states makes a difference.

As per NCRB data for the year 2020, more atrocities are committed against Scheduled Castes and Tribes in states in the Hindi heartland

As per the National Crime Records Bureau data for 2020, more atrocities are committed against the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the Hindi heartland states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It also revealed that the absence of social reform movements in these states has contributed to brutal caste wars. Part of the reason for this is the backlash by privileged groups against a new form of assertion of rights by Dalit youth. ■

— Amarnath K. Menon

A HISTORY OF OPPRESSION Discrimination, as perceived earlier, isn't a rural problem alone. Joblessness among Dalits runs through the urban landscape as well.

GETTY IMAGES



▼ JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh speaks to the press a day after the 2020 attack



PANKAJ NANGIA

The Beaten Path

In 2016, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) students gathered to protest the capital punishment meted out to 2001 Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru, leading to the arrest of students' union president Kanhaiya Kumar and two others. The arrests, it was alleged, were the BJP-led Centre's attempt to silence dissent. Protests were held in college campuses in many other states in solidarity. Investigations carried out by the Delhi government and JNU revealed the controversial slogans had been raised by outsiders. The arrested students were granted bail. However, after 21 students were charged with violating university rules and punitive action taken against them, the students went on a hunger strike. The Delhi

High Court suspended the punitive action on the condition that the students end the strike.

Protests erupted again when on January 5, 2020, masked assailants attacked JNU students and staff. Most victims claimed it was orchestrated by the ABVP. After the attack, students began protest marches in Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata and Hyderabad in solidarity with JNU victims. ■

— **Kaushik Deka**

JNU UPRISING, 2016, 2020

Delhi

FIRING UP THE CAMPUS
The JNU protests have given fresh impetus to campus politics in India. The country acquired a new set of emerging leaders, among them Kanhaiya Kumar, who is now a Congress leader in Bihar

Students vs. the Patriarchy

BHU PROTESTS, 2017

Varanasi



RAJESH KUMAR/GETTY IMAGES

◀ BHU students face off with the police, Sept. 24, 2017

SAME DIFFERENCE
More than four years after the incident, one can scarcely claim that the issue of women's safety across campuses has been resolved in any way

In September 2017, a female student of the Banaras Hindu University reported an incident of sexual harassment to the hostel authorities. Instead of taking action, the authorities berated the young girl for being out late. When students staged a *dharna* outside the vice-chancellor's residence, the police lathi-charged them, resulting in some students and journalists getting injured. This only hardened the students' stand, and the protests soon spread to Delhi.

The 2017 protests brought to the fore security issues at campuses across India and the patriarchal response to complaints on matters like sexual harassment. More than a year later, the BHU administration debarred 11 students who were part of the protests from seeking admission to the university in future. A probe panel headed by a retired high court judge gave a clean chit to the BHU administration and called the protests sponsored. ■

— **Rahul Noronha**

The authorities took no action on the sexual harassment complaint and instead chastised the victim for being out late

DIVISION BELLS

ANTI-CAA AGITATION,
2020

Assam, Delhi

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The massive protests against the CAA erupted first in Assam before spreading to other northeastern states

In December 2019, the Union government passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which enables Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Parsi, Buddhist, and Christian illegal immigrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who have entered India on or before December 31, 2014, to apply for Indian citizenship. Massive and partly violent protests erupted first in Assam, led by the All Assam Students' Union, and soon spread to other neighbouring northeastern states. In Assam, police firing claimed five young lives.

Protesters in the Northeast feared that providing citizenship to illegal immigrants from Bangladesh would alter the region's demographic balance, resulting in a loss of their political rights, culture and resources. Meanwhile, on December 15, major protests took place near the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi where mobs burnt and destroyed public property. The police forcibly entered the Jamia campus, used batons and tear gas, injuring over 100 students. In pro-

test against the CAA and in solidarity with Jamia students, civil society groups and students took to the streets in many parts of India. However, unlike the protesters in the northeast, their counterparts elsewhere believed the CAA to be discriminatory against Muslims. Following the Jamia violence, Muslim men and women began a peaceful sit-in protest in Delhi's Shaheen Bagh from December 15, 2019. The protests continued till March 2020, when the Covid pandemic struck. ■

– Kaushik Deka

TWO SIDES OF THE CAA COIN While protesters in Northeast feared the law would alter the region's demographic balance, those in Delhi and other states felt it was discriminatory against Muslims

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

▼ A candlelight march against the CAA from Jamia to Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi, January 3, 2021



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THE AUDACITY OF YOUTH

Today, India's youth are more informed than ever before. Their hopes for the future include self-reliance, a more positive media culture, less crime, more inclusivity and free speech

By SONALI ACHARJEE

Illustration by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY



who points out that while India is a country with many triumphs, its shortcomings can only be addressed through unity and respect for differences. Similarly, 17-year-old Riddhiman Ganguly, a student of Kolkata's St Claret School, has a strong vision for the future: "[An India] where the marble floors of the shrines are sacred, [but] so is all the land, water and air. I yearn for an India where the bovines are [seen as] divine and so are all other flora and fauna. I wish to see an India where the elite are respected, but so are the [destitute homeless]."

The varied nature of young dreams today is striking. "Children don't live isolated from what is going on in the country, or indeed the world anymore. Today, their knowledge base today is diverse and their goals can include just about anything," says Sunita George, principal of Bombay Scottish High School in Mumbai. Indeed, there are few topics left untouched by young people when it comes to expectations from India—self-reliance, quality education, a more positive media culture, less crime, sensitivity towards the marginalised, free speech, even a peaceful night's rest. The one thing that does unite their dreams for India is an overwhelming belief in the potential of the country. "My idea of India's future reflects the India of the past. One in which the country's genuine potential, its resources and people are recognised, valued and appreciated," says 21-year-old Kashish Mathur, a student of Amity Law School, Noida.

There also exists a belief that the India of tomorrow will be defined and improved by the youth of today. The growing participation of young people in addressing the country's problems can be seen in the sheer numbers that came out in support during the recent farmers' protests and the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019. Vibhor Jain, a 19-year-old studying at IIT Delhi says that while democratically elected politicians may have forgotten the plight of our country, "the youth hasn't and will not forget India". And 16-year-old Radhika Bharadwaj, a student of Seth Anandram Jaipuria School in Ghaziabad adds, "The capable youth of India are coming to the rescue." It isn't just economic value that India's young demographic wishes to create but also cultural, social, environmental and political worth. ■

With an average age of 29, India is currently home to a fifth of the world's youth population. The United Nations Population Fund predicts that this 'youth bulge'—often referred to as India's demographic dividend—will last till about 2025, with India continuing to have one of the youngest populations in the world till 2030.

In the coming decade, more young people than ever before will join the country's work force. Young people today are highly informed, aware of both domestic and international issues and increasingly technologically savvy. They are

also highly mobile: according to a recent study by the Institute for Governance, Policies and Politics in Delhi, around 86 per cent of those aged 18-25 access the internet and social media through mobile phones. This constant exposure to different views, trends and news has resulted in adolescents and young adults with high aspirations for themselves and India.

Whether it is pollution, the continuing lack of gender equality or the shortage of jobs, young people today are clear-sighted about the problems facing our country and aren't afraid to name them. Take 16-year-old Shyla Upadhyay, a student at Delhi's Vasant Valley School,

**The one thing
that unites young
Indians' dreams
for the country is
an overwhelming
belief in India's
potential**

THE INDIA OF MY DREAMS

YOUNG VOICES ACROSS THE COUNTRY SHARE THEIR IDEA OF INDIA AND THE FUTURE THEY ENVISION FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR COUNTRY

LOOKING INWARD

CHAHAK MALHOTRA, 18, DELHI

Fashion Media Communication, School of Contemporary Media, Pearl Academy, Delhi

Padhega India tabhi toh badhega America'. Actor Anupam Kher had put up this post on Instagram. It captured the reality of the Indian youth—many famous personalities, like Satya Nadella, Sundar Pichai and Shantanu Narayen, have an Indian background. The data collected by Leverage Edu in 2021 shows that 94 per cent of Indian students choose to study abroad if they get the chance. This urge of Indian students to move away from their home to another country must have some significant reason behind it. Most students are chasing two things—exposure and experience. Most universities and

schools in India still follow the process of rote learning of facts. There is a need for an education system that focuses on exposure rather than rote learning.

The youth, on the other hand, also have the responsibility to stay and help their own country grow rather than any other nation because 'Padhega India tabhi toh badhega India'. ■

“The Indian youth has a responsibility to stay in India and help their own country grow”



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Warriors of Tomorrow

RADHIKA BHARADWAJ, 16
GHAZIABAD

Class 11 student, Seth Anandram Jaipuria School, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad



I believe in what stand-up comedian Vir Das said—'I live in two Indias'. The first one where the population explosion has a ripple effect in terms of unemployment, access to basic housing, sanitation and food, and the other where the population has the power to be a productive resource with established business acumen.

But don't worry. The capable youth of India is coming to the rescue. I can envision content farmers, resilient students and transparent leaders in a gender-sensitised environment uniting to make an incredible India. Why am I so certain? Because we are being nurtured wonderfully by schools. Thanks, especially, to the New Education Policy.

So, rest assured, India is going to be in good hands. ■

FIELD OF DREAMS

PRACHI KASHYAP, 19
GUWAHATI

BTech Computer Science Engineering, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar



The India of my dreams is that of a common citizen of this country, who wants to wake up after a peaceful sleep, with no worries about their job security or family's safety, who wants to breathe clean air, walk down clean streets with fewer beggars. Who wants to sleep without worrying about the safety of their daughter returning late, without worrying about corruption. Who wants to be surrounded by countrymen who truly follow their dreams rather than blindly following society, grow companies at home that have a huge impact on employment and the world. Who is willing to get their hands dirty, cleaning boundaries made to divide people and erase the gap between decision-makers and the common people. My dream India isn't just my dream, but also the dream of the million Indians living in slums, buildings and bungalows. ■

“I dream of an India where one can sleep without worrying about their job or their daughter's safety”

SUBIR HALDER



FEARLESS NATION

RUPSA DASGUPTA, 19
KOLKATA

Physics Major, St Xavier's College, Mumbai

What is my dream India like? Well, it's not like I've been given a menu card of choices to pick from. Ah, a more tolerant India. What would you like with that? A side of inclusivity? Maybe a dash of free speech and fundamental rights? Well, here you go, we

offer everything in our Constitution. But whether they offer you a dash of this and a side of that, never forget to take everything with a pinch of salt. The India I've grown up in has constantly said the future is in our hands, yet our hands are tied behind our backs. When we're crossing milestones, it applauds us, but suddenly, mysteriously, we're “crossing limits”, and it becomes orange-faced, spluttering with rage. (Why, I thought

only a certain former US president had exclusive rights to that reaction.) The India I dream of is one without contradictions, where what is on paper is in practice. The India I dream of lets me fly without watching over my shoulder. Where people don't laugh at sexist, homophobic jokes and look the other way at the mention of accountability. Above all, it is a home, which lets me dream of a future without fear. ■

VIBHOR JAIN, 19, PUNJAB

BTech, Textile Technology, IIT Delhi

Remembering India

[The India we want]: A new India and, ironically, the oldest India, One with safety to walk, One with safety to talk, One where voices are heard, One where stereotypes are unheard; Maybe the 50-year-old suited journalists have forgotten India, And perhaps the democratically chosen politicians have forgotten India, But the youth hasn't and will not forget India.

From climate strikes, to giving voice to the voiceless, to marching on streets to know the truth, to going through the internet to garner support for the needy, to asking the right questions, to just knowing their rights and enforcing them, there is a change, and there will be one. Visible? Yes, Audible? Yes, Fast? Probably not, But comprehensive? Damn straight. ■



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For a Better World

SHASHWAT RAUT, 21,
MUMBAI

Arts graduate, St Xavier's College, Mumbai

India is a country of abundance—of cultures, languages and love. I grew up in an India that exudes brilliance, that excuses mistakes and that exercises pride in humility. But growing up I realised, 'your India' and 'my India' are different. There is a different India whose importance transcends that of my privileged India. There is an India full of pain, that doesn't let you be you, where your worth is realised every five years. It

is an India of hardship. And then there is an idea of a new India where bigotry rules over humanity, where majoritarianism is pampered and the marginalised are further isolated.

At the same time, there's an India of hope where communities are stronger than predatory leaders. There is an India built on ties that go beyond caste, creed or religion, a nation that has an unflinching spirit and tenacity. This is the India we'll proudly call truly incredible. ■

“There is an India full of pain, but there's also an India of hope, built on ties that go beyond caste or creed”

Growing Acceptance

PRISHITA KULKARNI, 20
MUMBAI

Architecture, School of Environment & Architecture, Mumbai

S*chitt's Creek* was a show that really opened my eyes to the way the LGBTQ community should be perceived. In India, we have made slow progress towards accepting the community. In the name of acceptance, the lives and struggles of those who identify as 'queer' are mocked as entertainment. As we shifted online during the pandemic, it became easy for people to open up about their struggles. Articles and videos, even things like putting one's preferred pronoun on public platforms, helped create safe spaces. There have been shows that have tried to eradicate the idea of homophobia. This is the kind of future I hope for—where we completely eradicate homophobia and queerphobia. While this is still a utopian dream, which would require years of learning and unlearning, we can start by being aware of and sensitive to the community and by providing platforms to queer people across all fields. ■



EESHA PETHE, 20
MUMBAI

Architecture, University of Mumbai

BUILDING OUR TOMORROW

We need a country where we address topics like sexuality or the issues of marginalised communities with sensitivity; where the issues of caste biases will be addressed with care because everyone will be friends who fight, argue but connect. We need to bargain and negotiate and not reduce anything to a binary. A nuanced country adapting to the contemporary times and borrowing from history will indeed shape India into a sustainable nation. ■

Empowered to Change

Young Indians have high aspirations. They are empowered to demand change as access to the Internet and technology improves. The Internet and smartphones have reduced the information gap between urban and rural Indians. Both public and private sectors must collaborate to adapt business strategies and product/ service offerings for consumers. In the coming decade, India will offer a plethora of commercial options. If investment in education, health-

“Internet and smartphones have reduced the information gap between urban and rural Indians”

care, research and development and infrastructure expands in sync with current growth, the changes in the consumer’s income and predilection for consumption will provide several possibilities. ■

MANAN JINDAL, 18, DELHI

*BTech Computer Science and Engineering,
NIIT University, Manesar*



RAJWANT RAWAT



Walk the Modern Talk

SUKANYA, 21, BENGALURU

*BCom, BHS College,
Bengaluru*

India, a country known for its beauty and diversity, still surprises me when it labels its backward beliefs as “India’s culture”. India still judges women on their choice of attire. The notion of a ‘perfect Indian woman’ is rooted in a pre-Independence point of view. An unmarried woman is deemed ‘unsuccessful’, no matter how much she has achieved in her career. And a woman who gets married is expected to give up everything to focus on “raising a family”. In India we are more focused on telling women how they should behave rather than guiding them towards their dreams. We call ourselves a ‘modern country’, but that applies only to men. Here, we love victim blaming and shaming and coming up with solutions to prevent crimes rather than punishing the criminals. India, a country with so much potential, is being held back by its own beliefs. We can grow as a superpower in the future, but only if our mindset grows too. ■

“India, a country with so much potential, is being held back by its own beliefs”

THINK DIGITAL, THINK INDIA

AASHNA JAIN, 22

DELHI

MBA, Amity Business School, Amity University, Noida

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had famously said, 'A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new—when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance'. The virus played this role. Maybe some things become historic with time, like Covid-19, which has become nothing less than a historic disaster—a time when the whole world was locked inside homes. However, when a few doors are closed, new ones are automatically opened. The lockdown resulted in world digitisation in just a few months. The pandemic accelerated the digitisation of the economy, and digital infrastructure is the bedrock of this change.

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

Everything went online—from education and business to even parties—bringing with it the potential for our nation to grow. The fast-emerging business in cloud storage, artificial intelligence, cyber security and many more technologies proves this. The next several years will determine India's ability to boost employment and reclaim its status as one of the world's fastest growing big economies. When the world thinks 'digital', it should think 'India'. ■

“With India going into lockdown, everything went online—education, business—bringing with it the potential for our nation to grow”



GAYATRI REDDY, 20

KUDAL

Nursing, Nath Pai College of Nursing, Kudal, Maharashtra

Manifesto for My Nation

My vision for the India of tomorrow is a land without violence and terror, where the youth are not compelled to take up a life of crime because of poverty. I dream of a country with safe borders so that our soldiers don't have to sacrifice their lives and stay away from their families on festivals.

I visualise a country which is safe for women so that parents don't have to pull their daughters back from achieving their dreams. Today, women match men in all professions but parents worry about their daughters being out till late. If we have a swift and

“I want an India without violence and terror, where women are safe and every child can go to school”

stringent system of justice, crimes against women will reduce.

I want an India where every child can go to school, irrespective of poverty and geography. A country where everyone is valued and people aren't judged by their profession or social and economic status. ■

A Romantic Partner

For the most part of my life, I was a starry-eyed young girl who strongly believed that 'India is the best' and that it is progressing towards being a global superpower. While that is partly true, my education in development studies has given me a new outlook, a rather cynical one. So, I went from being blindly optimistic to openly pessimistic. And now I have a problem with everything. Or so I like to joke.

India is a land of diversity, culture, resources and has the potential to achieve greatness, but suffers setbacks in politics, policy implementation and mindsets. Nevertheless, I see a future for India where development is intersectional, depoliticised, constant, and, let's not forget, sustainable! One with a population above subsistence levels leading dignified lives. An India that is like a romantic partner: flexible, understanding and open to change. ■

“I see a future for India where development is intersectional, depoliticised, constant and sustainable”



ADITI APPARAJU, 20

HYDERABAD

MA, Development Studies, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, UK



JAB MODERN MEETS TRADITIONAL

HANNAH RAJ BABUTTA, 18, JAIPUR

Class 12, Neerja Modi School, Jaipur

MAYANK KUMAR, 20
JAMSHEDPUR

*BTech Computer Science Engineering
KIIT University, Bhubaneswar*

I Have a Dream

I dream of an India where every child goes to school.
A dream where every person has a job,
A dream where the crime rates have dropped to zero,
A dream where there is love among all Indians,
A dream where people reside in nurturing abodes, not slums,
A dream with no beggars on the streets,
A dream where India is the most powerful nation in the world,
A dream where people don't quit India but instead 'Make in India'.
A dream where people are not hungry for power but hungry to work for the people of India,
A dream where India is safe for women and children,
A dream where India is the most beautiful country,
A dream where we don't fight for territories,
A dream where every Indian shouts at the top of their voice, 'Bharat Mata ki Jai'. ■

“I dream of an India where people are not hungry for power but hungry to work for the people of India”

My country is one of the most diverse in the world, filled with a variety of cultures, traditions, and more than 19,500 spoken languages. This diversity has enriched me with new perspectives and opinions. India has shown me that one can have their ups but also their downs, just like eating golgappa at a street vendor's stall and then coming home to eat *baingan ka bharta* for dinner. Just like travelling from the top of the country to the bottom, experiencing the snow and the mountains and then the sun and the

PURUSHOTTAM DIWAKAR



“We have embraced western culture rapidly, but we are also steeped in our traditions, giving us a balanced outlook”

beaches. My country is a small world in itself. I believe that as a result of this diversity, India is a slow yet fast-developing country in different ways. The way that people are evolving and inculcating western culture is rapid but at the same time keeping in mind age-old traditions and following them has helped them maintain a balance. Overall, I believe India will become one of the most famous, balanced and welcoming countries in the future, inviting people from all over the world. ■



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DHIREN REDDY, 20, HYDERABAD

*Management Studies,
Symbiosis Centre for Management
Studies, Pune*

Self-Reliance for Self-Respect

My vision of India is for it to be regarded as a highly developed country rather than a developing one. We are among the top seven countries in terms of GDP, our poverty rates have been falling and our achievements are being globally recognised. However, we still lack the confidence to see ourselves as a developed nation. Here's why: people here are obsessed with foreign goods; everyone wants foreign technology, even foreign shirts. We have heard it often, that self-respect

comes from self-reliance. I want to live in an India that is self-reliant. The media in India is so negative—only the deaths, terrorism, crimes and scams make headlines, while all the breaking news, achievements and strengths are buried among other news. We are a great nation and the people of India need to be aware of their successes. I want to live in an India where people wake up and recognise India's strengths instead of reading negative headlines. My vision is to see India as a developed, self-reliant and self-assured nation. ■



The Right Education

SUDESHNA DUTTA, 21, BHUBANESWAR

BTech Electronics, KIIT, Bhubaneswar

I dream of an India where every student has access to quality education. The kind of education that ensures children look beyond shallow boundaries among fellow beings and follow ethical paths. India's funding should incline towards R&D, manufacturing and technology to enable the youth to innovate at par with technically advanced countries. Similarly, I dream that the deserving get a chance to lead and are not left behind due to reservation or evil corrupt forces. I visualise India winning medals at the Olympics and not just cricket world cups. Someday, I wish to make everyone aware of their environmental responsibilities by reducing our carbon footprint. But, alas, my dream can be a reality only when my countrymen push themselves to think and act rationally, without differentiating on meaningless boundaries. ■



MIHIKA MUKHERJEE, 18
FARIDABAD

BA LLB (Hons), BML Munjal University, Haryana

Strength of a Country

India's strength is its rich history and how it stops at nothing to create more;
India's strength is its diversity, which is both cultural and geographical;
India's strength is its defence forces that can shake its enemy to the core;
India's strength is how it endures hardships like none other and despite everything stands tall knowing that its people are always ready to catch her if she ever falls;
India's strength is its youth who are willing to fight for what is right, stopping at nothing to create a space where every life matters;
India's strength is the beautiful minds that it houses that will stop at nothing to make their motherland proud.
And...
My view of India and its future is one where we bring all these strengths together and prosper together as a nation and continue to create history. ■



RAJWANT RAWAT

SHYLA UPADHYAY, 16,
DELHI

Vasant Valley School, Delhi

TO THE PEOPLE OF INDIA...

Friends, Indians, countrymen, lend me your ears,
Yes, you too, the one in the 'I love NYC' shirt.
India needs your voices to be heard,
To prove its mettle, its very worth.
The saffron, white and green lace outer space,
Chandrayaan, Mangalyaan and maybe Brahaspatiyaan too.
But astronauts won't be the only ones wearing space helmets.
India, the land of unity in diversity,
With different languages and cultures.
There's diversity even in the animals we fight for,
Cows, pigs or buffaloes? It's a whole lot of fun.
This is an India with many triumphs,
But we can't mend shortcomings while making a fuss.
So, let's come together,
And make this our India—the story of us. ■



**KASHISH
MATHUR, 21**
DELHI

*BA LLB (Hons),
Amity Law School, Noida*

The Past in the Present

In many respects, my idea of India's future reflects the India of the past. One in which the country's genuine potential, its resources and people are recognised, valued and appreciated. An India that is at the forefront of environmental, cultural and archaeological conservation on a global scale. An India that appreciates its diversity's aesthetic beauty and where progress and expansion do not compete with nature, rather complement it. An India where there is a deliberate and well-thought out attempt to narrow financial disparities and unproductive goals. My most fervent wish is for an India where every child is safeguarded and where every woman reaches her full potential in the company of a supportive community. ■

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

**RIDDHIMAN
GANGULY, 17** KOLKATA

St Claret School, Kolkata

Solving the Glorious Puzzle

My dream of India; such a fantastic idea to ruminate on. It is necessary too, for the young are to soon run this nation, making it infinitely important to dream of what we shall construct. As one of that generation, I too visualise my India, where the marble floor of shrines are sacred, and so is all the land, water and air. I yearn for an India where the bovine are divine and so are all other flora and fauna. I wish to see the India where the elite are respected, but so are the ragged vagrants.

How about an India where there are massive fights, but only in blockbuster 'Bolly flicks'? Not to mention an India that is divided, but only on who will win the IPL. Funnily enough, the India I want is already here, a few pieces of the beautiful puzzle are all that's missing. ■



SUBIR HALDER

SRIJAN SHARMA, 19, RAIPUR

*Aspiring law student, Raipur,
Chhattisgarh*

Uncles, Get Your Act Together

India has a population of nearly 1.5 billion. With that comes an equal number of perspectives. There are 'uncles' in parks who have an opinion on everything without really knowing the ground realities. Their opinions are stated to make themselves sound cool, a little like what we did back in school. The need of the hour is to create an environment

where those who are usually left unheard also get an ear, and even the less popular opinions are given a hearing—something that seems to be missing lately in the way we communicate with each other. An India of the future should be more aware, more open-minded and more considerate of the underprivileged. The 'uncles' need to get their act together. ■



HIRAK PATOWARY, 22,
GUWAHATI

MA History,
Cotton University, Guwahati

The Strength of Diversity

India is a land of diversity which makes the country a land of limitless potential. The strength of India lies in the celebration and nurturing of these diversities. It opens windows of multiple opportunities. I want my India to recognise and encourage every voice with a new seed of thought instead of getting divided between the Right and the Left. In my vision of India, there is no place for majoritarian oppression or minority appeasement. When a billion minds unite to learn and draw strength from each other instead of highlighting these differences, no power on earth will be able to stop India from achieving its rightful place in the universe. ■



SHUBHAM GUPTA, 19,
DELHI

BCom (Hons),
Hansraj College, Delhi

I Demand Better!

I dream of an India where equal opportunities for all citizens exist in an environment of communal harmony. My India should have adequate employment opportunities for the youth. Quality education should be accessible and affordable to all. This will ensure that the best human resources of India don't migrate to developed countries. I aspire

for an upward growth curve for India's economy propelled by sustainable development for future generations. I expect a nation with diligent enforcement of law and order. And finally, with rising pollution, I demand the right to breathe clean air for every Indian. For all these to happen, we need better socio-economic infrastructure and policy implementation. ■



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ANNIVERSARY
YOUTHSPEAK

Food for Thought

**REYNAA
AZMATHULLA, 20**
BENGALURU

*International Studies and
Journalism, FLAME
University, Pune*

We see India divided on matters of religion, caste or politics, but I also see India divided when it comes to food—vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The idea of sustainable eating takes away from the fact that food is politics out here. Contrary to popular belief, meat is an affordable staple for communities and it sustains their livelihood. So, when your friend tells you about a trending internet diet for its sustainability, it's important to know that eating meat is as ethical as anything else. We have had our tryst with some myths about our country—that we're a land of elephants and snake charmers, that all Indians are poor, etc. Now, here's a myth that's much bigger—that India is a vegetarian country! Acceptance of diversity, including food, is my view of India and its future. ■



ADSC

MANYA VARMA, 17
MUMBAI

*C.P. Goenka International
School, Mumbai*

DREAMS OF GREEN

I host a travel show along with my brother called *Zip Zap Zoom*. This gives me the opportunity to travel. Almost all of the Northeast has said no to plastic. I came across villages where trees were worshipped and the greenery was in full bloom. I think if what is in one part of my country is adopted by the whole nation, India will be a paradise on Earth. I believe travel should be an integral part of our education system because travelling is the best teacher. And if our generation learns to respect nature, we will create our own beautiful world—that future that we would want for India. ■





ANNIVERSARY
YOUTHSPEAK

PUMDEE GAMLIN, 20
ITANAGAR

*BA English (Hons),
Hansraj College, Delhi*

Fascinating India

India as a country has always fascinated the outside world. I hope India in the future continues to do so, and for good reasons. I hope India is able to acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate the diverse and unique cultures present here, something that has been lacking for a few years now. I hope in the future, India is full of educated people, people who won't give in to the rhetoric of religion. Last but not the least, I sincerely hope India is able to recognise the sheer volume of corruption which takes place in the largest democracy of the world. If that doesn't happen, my dream of India will never come true. ■



INDIA
TODAY

JANUARY 2022

Travel Plus

QUARTERLY

Best WEEKEND GETAWAYS

PREYRANA MISHRA, 19, BHUBANESWAR

*Computer Science Engineering, KIIT University,
Bhubaneswar*

Safety for All

I would like to see a more inclusive India, which is safe and offers dignity to every individual. It is important to see which areas can be immediately improved. For example, women's safety—how often do we hear those in power talking about this issue? It took India five years to sentence to death people who were 100 per cent culprits of a heinous crime like rape. With stricter laws and better implementation, this can change drastically.

The safety of non-binary or transgender groups is another issue. The social acceptance of these groups still seems a far-fetched idea, despite us living in a country where the majority of the population worships the gender fluid Lord Shiva. ■

—S. Sahaya Ranjit, Kaushik Deka, Amarnath K. Menon, Rohit Parihar, Romita Datta, Shelly Anand, Aditi Pai, Rahul Noronha, Aravind Gowda

**THOMAS
ZACHARIAS'
TRAVEL MENU**

**NEW
LUXURY
HOTELS**

**WINTER
ROAD
TRIP**

CHASING GREY GHOSTS

Snow leopards are called 'grey ghosts' for a reason. Not many get to see them. Writer Peter Matthiessen, for instance, spent two months looking for one in Nepal but found nothing. In his 1978 classic, *The Snow Leopard*, he consoles himself by saying, "I am not disappointed...that its frosty eyes watch us from the mountain—that is enough." Since not all of us share the author's equanimity, it's prudent to throw in our lot with trip organisers who've added leopard-spotting to their expertise. It's estimated that 100 to 300 snow leopards currently live in and around Ladakh. From end January to March, these cats move to lower, snow-free elevations, giving trackers a better chance to spot them. Typically scheduled for 12-14 days, snow leopard holidays are organised using the Ulley Valley as base, but of late, Uttarakhand has also begun organising tracking tours in high-altitude areas like Uttarkashi and Harsil.



WHAT IS THE TOP WINTER DESTINATION IN YOUR STATE?

Rajgir, the ancient capital city of Magadha, known for its warm water ponds, is a top winter destination in Bihar. Rajgir abounds in monuments and places that can enrich the traveller's knowledge and experiences that can thrill anybody. Home to some beautiful Hindu and Jain temples, Rajgir attracts scores of Hindus and Jains. Added to this, a nature safari has also come up here—this includes a glass skywalk in a natural environment, a suspension bridge, a zip line cycle, an adventure park, a butterfly zone and a nature camp area."



—NARAYAN PRASAD, Tourism Minister, Bihar

WHAT WILL BE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF TOURISM IN YOUR STATE NEXT YEAR?

The new tourism policy gives lot of weight to developing experiential tourism products and new offbeat destinations such as Banswara, Dholpur, Deeg, Bharatpur, the Shekhawati area, etc. Ranging from desert biking to chopper rides, adventure tourism activities are emerging in several areas of the state and with the launch of our rural tourism policy, we are expecting that rural areas of Rajasthan would be a major attraction in coming years."



—VISHVENDRA SINGH, Tourism Minister, Rajasthan

"Uttarakhand is focusing on both the religious and adventure tourism sectors. The infrastructure is in place to receive tourists in the Char Dham—Ukhimath (winter seat of Lord Kedarnath and Madhyamaheshwar), Pandukeshwar (Udhava idol, the emissary of Lord Bari), Khushimath (winter home of Goddess Yamunotri) and Ukhwa (winter home to Goddess Gangotri) near Harsil. We are also pushing Auli winter sports in a big way."



—SATPAL MAHARAJ, Tourism Minister, Uttarakhand

Karnataka's variety of eco-tourism destinations—wildlife sanctuaries, hill stations, waterfalls, reservoirs and beaches—will continue to be a highlight. Nandi Hills is a key destination we shall be focusing on in the coming year. Six cities—Bengaluru, Mysuru, Mangaluru, Hubballi, Kalaburagi, and Ballari—shall also act as hubs for heli-tourism from which helicopters will cover other destinations across the state."



—PANKAJ KUMAR PANDEY, Tourism Secretary, Karnataka

The Museum of Faith

Home to the Gurdwara Sri Qatalgarh Sahib, Punjab's Chamkaur Sahib has been on the travel map of Sikh pilgrims for several decades. This is where Guru Gobind Singh's eldest sons—Saahibzaade Ajit and Jujhar Singh—died fighting the Mughals in 1704. To honour their sacrifice, the Punjab government recently inaugurated 'Daastan-e-Shaahadat', a theme park and museum, all rolled in one. Its 14 acres house 11 galleries that cover almost all the highlights of Sikh history.



THE HUMP MUSEUM

WINGS OF WAR

In January 2022, a new museum commemorating a long-forgotten chapter of WW2 will be opening its doors. The 'Hump Museum' in Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, will house artefacts recovered from some of the hundreds of transport aircraft lost in flying the perilous route from north-east India to the Chinese towns of Kunming and Chonqing, carrying supplies and troops to support the Kuomintang army's war effort against the Japanese Empire. The operation was a logistical triumph but it took its toll in aircraft—the remains of which lie scattered along the 'Aluminium trail', largely in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh. The new museum will honour the lives lost in these crashes, as well as the ongoing efforts to document these



sites. It will also tell the surprising story of the Hump operation's legacy in jump-starting Indian civil aviation, particularly in the northeastern states.

Reaching for the Stars



Until recently, Meena Bagh Ratnari offered its guests the "surreal experience" of living smack in the middle of an apple orchard with cats, dogs, sheep, chicken and ducks for company. Some 85 km from Shimla, the four-bedroom Himachali bungalow is where you went for the vistas and the tranquillity. Earlier this month, Sanjay Austa, Meena Bagh's owner, decided to double up the delights of his farmstay. The 20-inch Dobsonian telescope he has installed in Ratnari is India's largest privately owned telescope. A journalist and photographer, Austa is an astronomy enthusiast and hopes the telescope will help his property earn a new reputation as an observatory: "We are an offbeat location, so with the observatory, we hope to attract the kind of travellers who are interested in nature, mountains, the sky and stars." ■

**GARTANG
GALI
'SKYWALK' IN
UTTARAKHAND**

Located at a height of 11,000 ft, this 136 metre-long and 1.8 metre-wide Gartang Gali bridge is like no other. Believed to have been built by Peshawar Pathans some 150 years ago, Gartang Gali did, of course, always offer breathtaking views of the Nelong Valley, but more importantly, it was the route that Indian and Tibetan traders once took when ferrying their goods—salt, jaggery, spices, pashmina—from one country to another. Having fallen into disuse after the 1962 Indo-China War, it was only this year that the Uttarakhand government again opened the renovated bridge in Uttarkashi.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ARUN PARDESHI

THE GREAT ESCAPES

The best weekend getaways India has to offer

By Shreevatsa Nevatia

TOP 5 ADVENTURE DESTINATIONS NEAR **BENGALURU**

Iruppu waterfalls in Madikeri, Karnataka

TOP 5 PILGRIMAGE DESTINATIONS NEAR **CHENNAI**

↔ **COORG**

Known for its waterfalls and coffee plantations, Coorg is also home to the beautiful Madikeri Fort and the exquisite Namdroling Golden Temple at Bylakuppe. Recently, however, visitors have been seen forsaking these somewhat typical attractions for the adrenaline rush of outdoor adventure. If, like them, you want to sample Coorg's biodiversity, trek through its forested Brahmagiri range or climb Thadiyendamol, the region's tallest peak. There's rock climbing and windsurfing you can do at the Hyrige reservoir, while kayaking and canoeing are options on the Kabbe river. Also, if you want a bird's eye-view of the perennially lush Coorg, sign up for microlight flying at Ponnampet. It's worth the hype.

MADURAI

One of the oldest cities in India, Madurai earns mention even in ancient Greek and Mughal texts. The Meenakshi Amman Temple is inarguably Madurai's heart. Dedicated to Meenakshi, an incarnation of Parvati, the enormous temple, with its high *gopurams* (towers), is one of the finest examples of Dravidian architecture. The Koodal Alagar Temple, on the other hand, shows Vishnu sitting, standing and lying down, while Thiruparankundram is a must-see on the bucket list of Lord Murugan devotees.

KUMBAKONAM

You're likely to find a temple around Kumbakonam's every bend, but there are some you absolutely must visit. Built by the Cholas, the Adi Kumbeshwara (known for its floral motifs) and Nageswaran (famous for its chariot-shaped sanctum) temples are dedicated to Shiva. The Chakrapani Temple has an eight-armed idol of Vishnu, and the Sarangapani Temple has a 15-tiered *gopuram* that is 175 ft high.

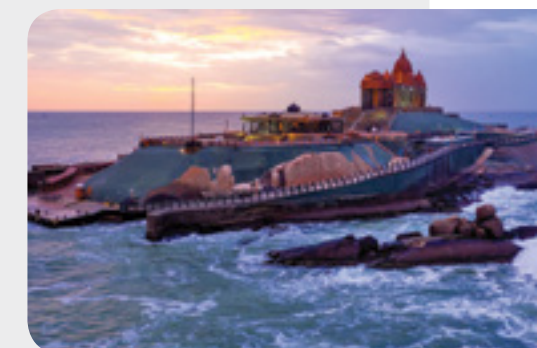
THANJAVUR

Thanjavur (Tanjore) is an essential stop. It is here that Raja Raja Chola I built the Brihadeeswarar Temple. The temple's inscriptions, frescoes and sculptures all narrate Shaivite lore with a beautiful, unprecedented elegance. Luckily,

the carefully carved Gangaikonda Temple is only a short drive away.

KANYAKUMARI

Kanyakumari, India's southernmost town, is also the point where the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean meet. Called 'Triveni Sangam', this point of confluence is considered sacred by many. Close by is the Kumari Amman Temple. In 1892, Swami Vivekananda visited Kanyakumari, and on the large offshore rock on which he meditated, there stands the magnificent Vivekananda Rock Memorial.



Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Kanyakumari

TIRUPATI

Devotees believe Vishnu came to Tirupati, following his beloved Lakshmi, who had left Vaikuntha in a huff. For the thousands who flock to the city's Sri Venkateswara Temple, Vishnu has never left this earthly adobe. Situated in the hilly suburb of Tirumala, the temple is said to be the richest in the world.

ANTHARGANGE (ANTARA GANGE)

Approximately 65 km from Bengaluru, situated near Kolar village, are the Shathashruna mountains. Amongst these, the 5,616 ft Anthargange or Antara Gange is inarguably the most popular. With the Kashi Vishweshwara Temple at its top, the mountain is frequently visited by devout pilgrims, but adventure enthusiasts have now also discovered a forested trail behind the temple. The path is lined with caves that are a treat to crawl through, especially at night. Do not forget your torch!

NANDI HILLS

At a distance of just 60km, Nandi Hills seems only a stone's throw away from Bengaluru. At 4,851 ft above sea level, it is a great place to paraglide from. The ancient hill fortress also boasts of several trekking trails, not to mention the 1,175 steps you need to climb to reach its top. Tipu Sultan's summer retreat sits here, where the Tiger of Mysore escaped gruelling heat and battle. Tipu's Drop, a 600-metre-high cliff face, is a staggering sight. This is the precipice from where prisoners were hurled and executed. Not for the faint-hearted.

KUNTI BETTA

Named after the Mahabharata's Kunti, Kunti Betta is the name given to two rocky hills in Pandavapura (Mandya district), 125 km outside Bengaluru. If local lore is to be believed, this is where the Pandavas stayed during their 14-year exile. The cave at the base of the two hills is said to have been their home, and the giant footprint-like rock formations are said to be the marks that the weight of Bhima's feet left behind. If swimming and kayaking are what you are after, the Thonnur Lake is only 10 km away.

BHEEMESHWARI

Home to a wonderful, tucked away wildlife sanctuary, Bheemeshwari offers Bangaloreans a bit of everything—angling, kayaking, trekking, camping and safaris. Only 103 km away from the city, Bheemeshwari is situated on the banks of the Cauvery, and the abundance of fish here has led to several fishing camps come up in and around the town. Angling enthusiasts often come here looking to catch the Mahseer, one of the finest game fish in the world. Lovers of wildlife, on the other hand, come here to see the sanctuary's crocodiles and leopards.

*Jumbo rides
at Agra Fort*



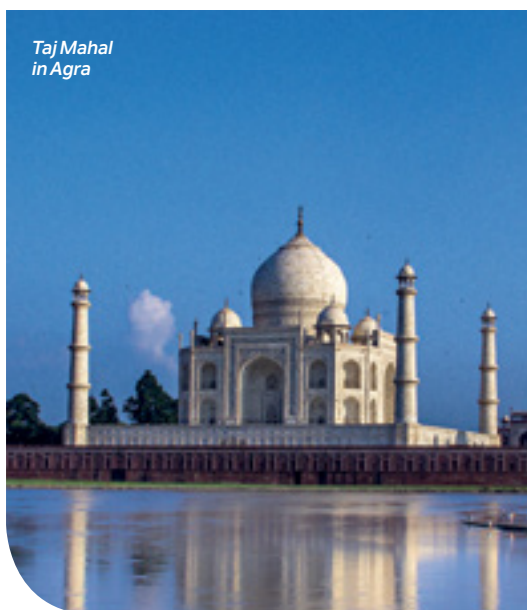
**TOP 5 HERITAGE
DESTINATIONS NEAR DELHI**

➔ **AGRA**

Though built in the 17th century, the Taj Mahal really never grows old. Even if you have visited the monument a few times, its majesty keeps renewing itself with your every visit. The Agra Fort and Jama Masjid are, of course, also worthy exemplars of Mughal architectural brilliance, but other lesser-known monuments such as the Khas Mahal and the Itimad-Ud-

Dualah are marvels that are both surprising and ornate. The architectural legacy of Agra—one that stretches from the Mughals to the British—is also on full view in places like Lohamandi, Nai ki Mandi and Civil Lines. The Civil Lines area, for instance, houses both the grand Indo-Saracenic St John’s College and the lovely Jahanara’s Garden.

*Taj Mahal
in Agra*



JAIPUR

Having struck a fine balance between modernity and heritage, Jaipur is now a template for great cities to follow. The Pink City's several forts speak of a fairy-tale grandeur. The history of the Amer Fort, for instance, is as fascinating as its byzantine passages. Whether it's the City Palace in the centre of the city or the Jal Palace in the middle of Man Sagar Lake, the royal past of Jaipur is still accessible today.



Hawa Mahal, Jaipur



Bhimtal's centrepiece, the pristine lake

BHIMTAL

Legend has it that finding Draupadi thirsty once, Bhima struck the ground with his mace. The water that gushed out gave the area a lake and the town, Bhimtal, its name. Once the best route between the Kumaon mountains and the Indian plains, the scenic Bhimtal, located at an altitude of 4,494 ft, is the perfect getaway for nature lovers and trekkers, but, also, for artists and writers looking for quiet.



Party time at Mehrangarh Fort



JODHPUR

Built in 1459 by Rao Jodha, Jodhpur's Mehrangarh Fort was the site of many a battle, and the museum here recounts several Rajput tales of valour. The rulers of Jodhpur, however, were as attracted to opulence as they were to bravery. Built in the 1920s, Umaid Bhavan Palace is proof of their regal taste.

ALWAR

Barely a three-hour drive from Delhi, the erstwhile princely state of Alwar lies nestled in the heart of the Aravalis. The Bala Qila or Alwar Fort sits majestically on a hill 300 m above the city, while the City Palace or Vinay Vilas Mahal houses extraordinary Rajput and Mughal art. The Nikumbha Mahal Palace and the Tomb of Fateh Jung are also feats of Rajput architecture that deserve a place on your itinerary.

TOP 5 LUXURY DESTINATIONS NEAR MUMBAI

GOA

Goa somehow keeps growing. Seeing the north of the state being overrun by tourists and travellers, Goans began to shore up the south. Today, both sides of Goa offer travel experiences that are equally quintessential and restorative. There are today dozens of Goas, one for every kind of visitor. Anjuna with its hippie markets or the more laidback Mandrem are just two examples of the diverse beach life on offer, but Goa has a lot more than just sun and sand. While there are the Bhagwan Mahavir and Cotigao wildlife sanctuaries you can visit, Goa's thriving art scene also now affords thrills of its own.



Vagator Beach, Goa

ALIBAUG

Alibaug was always only a three-hour drive from Mumbai, but thanks to the Ro-Ro car ferry service, you can now journey from Mazgaon to Mandwa in just 60 minutes. Even though it's beaches—Akhsi, Nagaon and Korlai, in particular—are hard to tire of, Alibaug does much to exceed the tag of 'coastal town'. Built during Shivaji's reign, the 17th century seaside Kolaba Fort still boasts of functioning freshwater wells. If your enthusiasm for history is matched by your love for art, Alibaug, you'll find, is home to several modern museums—The Guild, the Dashrath Patel Museum, the Karmarkar Museum.

MATHERAN

If it's peace and quiet that you are after, there really could be no better destination than Matheran. After automobiles

were banned inside this pretty hill station, it seemed to eliminate air and noise pollution altogether. During monsoons, waterfalls and wildflowers in the area spring to life, making your long walks here even more rewarding. Matheran is dotted with close to 40 look-out points, many of which provide jaw-dropping views of the valley below. Though Hanuman Langurs and Bonnet Macaques can be seen everywhere, it is the charm of Matheran's narrow-gauge train that never dies.

MULSHI

While the Mulshi Dam and its picturesque surroundings are the main attraction here, there are plenty more options for activity that Mulshi offers. You could walk through the deep forests of nearby Sahyadri or visit the Dhangad and Koraigadh forts. From

Valanewadi, only 6 km away from Mulshi, you will be able to witness the magnificence of the Mulshi Lake. The hills of Ratnagiri aren't very far either. Recently, Mulshi has also become home to several luxury resorts.

MAHABALESHWAR

Given that Mahabaleshwar accounts for 85% of India's strawberry production, a visit to the town's strawberry farms is always a treat. Built on a plateau, the hill station has 25 look-out points, many of which offer grand views of waterfalls, the sunrise and sunset. You could sign up for a boat ride at the Venna Lake, one of Mahabaleshwar's major tourist attractions. The trekking trails here also promises staggering vistas, and with Panchgani nearby, paragliding becomes a ready possibility for visitors, too.

TOP 5 RURAL DESTINATIONS NEAR KOLKATA

MANDARMANI

Hidden away in West Bengal's East Midnapore district, the seaside resort village of Mandarmani is slowly coming to replace Digha as Kolkata's preferred weekend beach destination. Only four hours (170 km) from the city, Mandarmani now offers visitors several water sports options—jet-skiing, parasailing, etc. Since the waves here are mostly calm, Mandarmani is also an ideal spot for swimming.

CHANDANNAGAR

In the late 1600s, the French paid the Nawab of Bengal 40,000 coins in order to make Chandannagar (then Chandernagore) their trading post. Expectedly, French influence can be found everywhere here. Walking down the Strand, the town's promenade, one sees the charming Dupleix House. Even the churches here—Sacred Heart, St Joseph's—borrow their design and

stained-glass finish from France.

SANTINIKETAN

In 1888, when Debendranath Tagore set up an ashram in Santiniketan, he is said to have been taken in by the tranquillity of the town, but it was his son, Rabindranath, who realised its true potential. Visva Bharati, the gurukul-style university he set up here, still serves testimony to his forward-looking modernity. The campus is a delight to walk through. There are many bookstores and cafes here, all of which are quaint and quiet. The Sonajhuri Khoai Forest and Kopai River are only a short bike ride away.

SERAMPORE

Only 24 km away from Kolkata is the quaint Serampore. A Danish colony between the years of 1755 and 1845, the town's architecture is marked by a mishmash of European influences.



Basant Utsav at Santiniketan

On the one hand, you have the colonnaded entrance of Serampore College, while on the other you have the Catholic Church with its Doric columns. The Danish Government House in the town centre is a must-see, but so is St Olav's Church. The building borrows its design and style from London's St Martin-in-the-Fields.



MURSHIDABAD

It was Aurangzeb, who in 1704 had declared that Murshidabad (then Muqsudabad) will be the capital of Mughal Bengal. Even though the town's prominence has diminished with time, its yesteryear glory is still apparent in Lalbagh, the centre of imperial Murshidabad. The Katra Masjid, one sees, is modelled after the Kaaba in Mecca. The Nizamat Imambara and Medina Masjid are also incredible pieces of Islamic architecture. Dedicated to Shah Jahan, Jahan Kosh is now a major attraction, but it's the museum in Hazaarduari Palace—famous for its 1,000 doors—that'll make your trip here worth it. ■



Hazaarduari Palace in Murshidabad

DRIVE

PARADISE FOUND

The Atal tunnel has made it possible to drive to the heavenly Lahaul Valley in winter

By Yogendra Pratap

If you have ever taken a road trip from Leh to Manali, you might already know that one of the journey's many highlights is the overnight stay. Situated in the Lahaul Valley of Himachal Pradesh's Lahaul and Spiti district, both Keylong and Jispa become options for you to rest your heels. Not only is the Lahaul region around the Baga river an area of pristine beauty, it can also seem like a different world, wholly distinct from the chaos and crowds on the other side of the Rohtang Pass. You'll find here some of the region's oldest settlements. Flying into Leh is a possibility, but that may not afford quite as much fun.

For the longest time, the Lahaul Valley would be totally cut off from the world for the better part of the year. Since Rohtang Pass usually gets the first, and also, at times, the heaviest snowfall, the Lahaul Valley would be accessible only in the late summer or monsoon months. The road to Manali would be the first to close, and then the two other routes—from Lahaul, north to Leh through Baralacha La, and east to Spiti through the Kunzum La—would also get snowed under. The valley, as a result,

The pristine Lahaul region is distinct from the chaos and crowds on the other side of the Rohtang Pass





would be closed to the world through late autumn, winter and spring. All that, however, changed last year with the completion of the Atal tunnel. As soon as I heard it was open, I knew I just had to head to Lahaul.

While getting to the Atal tunnel is usually easy, the road on the other side can sometimes be treacherous, especially for summer-tired and 2WD vehicles. The black tarmac disappears and is replaced by a white track—there's some ice here and a liberal sprinkling of snow. While getting to the police check post at Sissu isn't too much of a problem, it is best to be cautious thereafter. If one loses momentum on a climb or if you stop to let another vehicle go by, you ought to be careful when restarting. It is, perhaps, ideal to deflate your tyres somewhat and to then forget using your first gear.

The Lahaul Valley in winter is like manna for the eyes, but the tranquility we found in its small towns was manna for the soul. One can go up all the way to Darcha, enjoying the many sightings of the Ibex and if lucky, of the black and brown bear, leopard, the Himalayan Thar, as well as some yak and deer.

We went in search of the Moravian mission in Keylong, only to hear that it was demolished many decades ago. If you are architecturally inclined, though, you can still find various influences of Moravian architecture on the houses in the village. The tower fort of Gondhla, for instance, a seven-storey structure built in the kath-kuni style of archi-



tecture, is a sight to behold. Its 18th century artefacts are a treat to explore. The pictures on these pages will, perhaps, better describe the beauty of the valley.

Though this winter trip has only been made possible after much labour, time and capital, the joys of Lahaul in the winter are unparalleled. Sadly, though, we are seeing some worrying signs—construction along the roads continues unabated, and there are today more and more people venturing through the tunnel in order to get to the other side. The Lahaul paradise may not remain pristine for too long. ■

(Top) The tower fort of Gondhla, built in the kath-kuni style of architecture; the unparalleled joys of driving in Lahaul in the winter



WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Even if tigers prove elusive in the Tadoba reserve, the newly opened Waghoba Eco Lodge quickly transforms disappointment into delight

By Ishani Nandi



The 12-acre Waghoba Eco Lodge, set amidst wildflowers, native trees and picturesque farmland (top); a safari inside Tadoba. With 100-odd tigers in the reserve, sightings of this magnificent, but shy, big cat are a good bet, if one's luck holds

“They were here, just a few minutes ago,” Laxman, our forest guide, exclaims, pointing towards a wet smudge on the ground. Leaning over the jeep guardrails, I peer hard at the red forest floor—nothing but mud. When squinting fails, I try quick-blinking to bring the patterns into existence. No dice.

“Lara and her cubs. They must have come here for a drink,” concurs Swanand Deshpande, one of the naturalists at Waghoba Eco Lodge, where I am spending the



The outdoor swimming pool at the Waghoba Eco Lodge offers scenic views

weekend, a luxury wilderness resort set in the heart of the buffer zone of Tadoba Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra's Chandrapur district.

Our safari had begun at the crack of dawn. After an hour of searching, we had our first real lead—a clear, four-toed tiger pugmark, an unmistakable lazy-gait swipe at the heel, lightly embedded in the damp clay, left behind by one of the 100-odd tigers that call Tadoba their home.

I feel a sighting may be close but recall what my cab driver Jabir said on the two-hour trip from Nagpur airport to the lodge the night before: “I’ve encountered tigers—some crossing the road we’re on right now. Running into one is really a matter of fate,” he quipped. Having never seen a tiger in the wild, I had high hopes on this trip. Surely, I was in the right place for it.

The newest offering by Pugdunde Safari, Waghoba Eco Lodge is a down-to-earth, sustainability-conscious property located at a half-hour distance from the Khuta-wunda and Moharli gates leading into Tadoba’s core wilderness. Surrounded by open spaces and jungle-encrusted hillocks, the 12-acre property sits nestled amidst wildflowers, native grasses and trees in an unmanicured sprawl, perfectly in tune with the rustic landscape.

This seamlessness is hardly by accident—great care was taken in its three-year construction to ensure its presence impacts the area as little as possible. Mughdha Deshpande, another naturalist there, cites some examples: “Sun-baked adobe bricks made from local soil and stone ensure that degradation does not

introduce non-native materials into the land. Overlapping burnt-clay cylinders forming the guna vault ceilings in every room helps reduce air-conditioning needs.” The land itself, once barren and overgrazed, is being revived. “Only vegetation that thrives here naturally are planted,” says Mughdha. From composting to rainwater harvesting, Waghoba employs a variety of eco-friendly ways to sustain its needs. “We even have our own plant-based sewage treatment plant that feeds clean water into a bird hide—a small waterbody where many small animals come for a sip,” she adds.

Larger fauna—sambar and spotted deer, gaur, wild boars, nilgai, wild dogs, sloth bears, tigers and leopards—limit their ambit to the thicker cover of the forest, though herbivores often venture into crop fields at night. We encounter most of these as our jeep winds through teak, jamun, flame of the forest and ghost trees as kingfishers, egrets and hornbills flit through the air. Along the banks of Lake Tadoba, a pair of Nilgai fawns chase each other while the adults stop for a drink. They don’t seem to notice the large marsh crocodile only a few feet away, imperceptible but for the trained eyes of my guides. Perhaps we’ve been just as oblivious to a nearby tiger, camouflaged amidst the tall, winter-yellowed fronds and bamboo groves.

As we head back from the safari, the forest, as if sensing my disappointment, seems to offer some rare run-ins as recompense: a massive Sambar buck preening at a watering hole, a four-horned antelope (chausingha)—an exceedingly shy and skittish ungulate—with her days-old infant.

HERE TO STAY

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NEW PROPERTIES

By Prachi Joshi



The Connaught, New Delhi. Its retro-chic bar is a popular watering hole in the city

The Connaught, New Delhi

The Connaught's design is influenced by the Georgian architecture of Delhi's Connaught Place. With tourist attractions and entertainment options at its doorstep, it's the ideal place to stay in the capital. Make sure you grab a signature cocktail at its art deco-themed bar, followed by poolside dinner. Even if temporary, it's nice to have a Lutyens address. seleqtionshotels.com

Aramness, Gir

Opened in November this year, Aramness is one of very few uber luxury stays in Sasan Gir National Park. Its 18 spacious, double-storey *kothis* feature opulent furnishing, Kutchi motifs and a shaded



Tadoba's core forest offers visitors a glimpse at dozens of graceful herbivore species, including the elusive four-horned antelope (chausingha)—seen here with her days-old infant

Much like the camera traps along the safari trails that capture images of the felines, Waghoba too chooses a 'here-but-not-here' approach. "Zero impact is impossible but we ensure our carbon footprint is close to it," says Swanand. This earth-friendly ethos percolates all the 14 cottage-style rooms, each with its own reading nook and outdoor sit-out. Bespoke herbal bath products come in refillable glass pump bottles, dental kits comprise a wooden toothbrush and a vial of toothpaste tablets and two-litre jugs replace plastic water bottles. A tent card on the writing desk sports a QR code that can be scanned for the day's pre-set meals. The fare includes continental and Indian regional cuisine as well as breads and desserts made in-house. Low-energy LED lights speckle both the indoors and external pathways, all facing down to illuminate one's steps while keeping local wildlife undisturbed at night.

In all things, little and large, it is ultimately the environment that shines. No televisions, limited network, Wifi available only in common areas, and a strict policy against loud music mean true nature and wildlife lovers will find a haven of harmony. The outdoor swimming pool, guided nature walks, cycling tours, boat rides along the scenic Irai dam and the lounge's library of books, wildlife films and board games offer relaxing entertainment and family time.

Regret, I find, is surprisingly short-lived in this place. When darkness takes over, the sky counters by unfurling a tapestry of glittering stars. The silence of a retired day tunes into the music of chirping tree frogs, fox howls and rustling leaves. Where dismay turns so quickly into delight, what's not to love? ■

Website: <https://www.waghobaecolodge.com/home>

How to get there: Waghoba Eco Lodge is a 2.5-hour journey from Nagpur airport on the eight-lane NH-44 Nagpur-Hyderabad highway.

Tariff: Rs 15,000 to Rs 21,000 per night, including three meals.

Ideal time to visit: October to January is ideal for nature safaris. Bird migrations and the annual flowering season between March and April may be of interest for photographers.

courtyard with private pool. If all that luxuriating leaves you hungry, their unmissable Kathiyawadi *thalis* will help fill you up. aramness.com

Hilton Goa Resort

For your next Goa escape, consider Hilton Goa Resort in Candolim overlooking the Nerul river. Besides their four outdoor pools (including one for children), their suites also come with a private plunge pool. The glamorous lounge bar Coco is the place for sundowners, and the Mediterranean menu is a feast unto itself. hilton.com

Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa, Nashik

The swanky Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa is the latest addition in India's wine capital. With 224 rooms and suites that overlook the pool and verdant mountains nearby, this thoroughly modern urban resort also offers the rejuvenating ATMAN Spa and, of course, wine trails. radissonhotels.com

Taj Chia Kutir Resort & Spa, Darjeeling

Nestled in the lush Makaibari Tea Estate (which dates to 1859), Taj Chia Kutir Resort & Spa has 72 rooms kitted with four-poster beds, wooden interiors and balconies that are perfect for a hot cuppa. Head out for tea trails and forest treks, and come back to al fresco meals with misty views. tajhotels.com



The Rohet House is dressed up with hand-painted frescoes and Rajasthani furnishings; (below) kothis at Aramness, Gir, blend traditional design with a contemporary aesthetic

The Hyatt Regency Dharamshala Resort

Perched on a hillside, the 80-key Hyatt Regency Dharamshala Resort has spacious rooms and suites with a view as well as four chalet-style villas—all with a clean aesthetic and Tibetan motifs. Guided tours, bespoke dining experiences, and rejuvenating spa therapies all aid your brief salvation. hyatt.com

The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru

The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru is the hotel group's second opening in the Garden City, located in its largest integrated township. With 281 luxurious rooms and suites, five dining options, a state-of-the-art fitness studio and curated experiences, it's ideal for both business and leisure

travellers. theleela.com

The Rohet House, Jodhpur

With an air of refinement and quiet opulence, The Rohet House is a peaceful oasis in the hubbub of Jodhpur. Rooms and suites are done up in soothing colours and feature hand-painted wall frescos, elegant furnishing and luxurious amenities. houseofrohet.com/rohet-house

Tree of Life Homestead, Corbett Country, Uttarakhand

Just 18 km from Corbett National Park, the Tree of Life Homestead offers 12 cosy rooms and cottages set in a lush green space, complete with a six-hole golf course and a private airstrip. Jungle safaris, birding walks, ATV rides and bonfire evenings all help bring the wild home. treeofliferesorts.com

WelcomHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa, Rajasthan

Opened in October 2021, WelcomHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa is spread across 20 acres of wild land. Surrounded by the Aravalli Range, chalets and villas here come with garden or lake views. Head out on a jungle safari to spot leopards and later, go on a guided village walk with Rabari tribespeople. ■ welcomheritagehotels.in



TRAVELLING FEAST

Travelling across India, chef Thomas Zacharias has sampled cuisines from almost all the states. Here, he talks about some of his favourites

By Joanna Lobo



It was the summer of 2013. Thomas Zacharias was on an adventure: a four-month tour of France, Italy and Spain. He ate, drank and worked his way through 36 town and cities. This was his first Chef on the Road (COTR) journey.

After returning to India, a restless Zacharias decided he needed to embark on something similar here. He had just been signed on as chef for The Bombay Canteen (TBC) and wanted to highlight unknown Indian fare. Five months later, he began his first culinary trip across India. "It blew my

mind, learning the depth and nuances of Indian food," he says. Thus began the Indian edition of COTR, one that continues to this day.

For eight years, Zacharias has been exploring India, focusing on the different regions, meeting locals and food experts, going to markets, learning artisanal and traditional recipes and visiting farms and producers to get a deeper understanding of Indian cuisine in a more authentic way. Back then, the idea was to take inspiration and create his own interpretation of the food for the TBC menu. Today, having left TBC,

he wants to focus on making a deeper intervention in the Indian food system and galvanise a movement around it.

Zacharias makes copious notes of his trips; he has about 146,000 photos and videos. These days, he travels with a team that visually documents his experiences. The chef hopes to turn all their footage into a TV series someday. Here, we got him to pick ten memorable dishes and meals from COTR—chosen from different parts of the country, with a healthy combination of meat, veggies and desserts. Think of it as a COTR menu.



POKKALI RICE DISHES, KERALA

Saline-resistant, climate-adapting, and tall, Pokkali is a rice that is native to Kerala. "It is extremely wholesome, flavourful and versatile," says Zacharias. He tried this variant at Thekkanatt, the farm of Hormis Tharakan and his wife Molly. He remembers eating it plain boiled, in *appams*, *puttu*, and *idiappams*. "Visiting the farm, understanding the process and challenges of cultivating the rice, and ending it with a meal makes you appreciate the ingredients a lot more," he says. The farm grows rice for half the year and cultivates prawns for the remaining six months, in the interest of commercial viability.

MEPFIGHA, NAGALAND

In 2018, a visit to Khonoma, India's first green village in Nagaland, introduced the chef to a first: bee larvae. He ate Mepfigha, bee larvae cooked with tomatoes, shredded *bastenga* (fermented bamboo shoot), ginger, garlic, chillies and water. "They cook it with tomatoes, reducing the liquid till it dries up, so the ingredients get nicely browned. The finished dish has a nutty flavour and the texture and taste of scrambled eggs," he says.

Another interesting dish he ate on that trip was *lulu*: silk worms cut in half and cooked with garlic, bamboo shoot water and Naga chilli.



DONNE OR SUVA BHAKRI, GOA

On his trip to Goa, Zacharias tried a different form of the sweet dish *patolli*. "Donne is a typical snack among the Velip community. It has rice dough with a coconut jaggery filling, shaped into a cone, and steamed inside jackfruit leaves," he says. Jackfruit leaves add flavour, and impart a lovely design to the dough. The community also uses the local *madachem godh* (coconut jaggery).

Zacharias first tasted this at Cotigao, at the home of Devidas Gaonkar, a member of the Velip tribe who has been documenting the oral history of his tribe. "I saw it made from scratch. There's some skill involved in shaping the leaves, kneading the dough to the right consistency, and choosing the right ratio of dough to filling. Also, it is important to eat it when still hot," he says.

VENDAKKAI MANDI, TAMIL NADU

Zacharias spent part of his trip to Tamil Nadu at Karaikudi, where he spent a day learning how to cook Chettinad food from the chef at The Bangala heritage homestay. He remembers one dish—*Vendakkai mandi*—particularly well. “It has bhindi, shallots, cloves of garlic, mustard and curry leaves. What really makes it special is that the bhindi is soaked in *mandi*, starch water left from soaking rice, which is then added to the curry. The starch allows it to thicken,” he says. “Most associate Chettinad cuisine with meat-heavy preparations, but it has some fantastic vegetarian food.”



KHEEMA, LUCKNOW

Zacharias’ favourite restaurant in Lucknow is one he discovered by accident. It’s a place in Alamgir that offers food cooked in the *bara handi* style: slow cooking different cuts of meat in 12 vessels. “The kheema there was rich and satisfying. It was prepared simply, with garlic, green chillies and ghee and barely any masala. It had so much ghee!” he says, adding that he even carried some back to Mumbai to share with others.

MISHING MEAL, ASSAM

In a house built on a stilt on the island of Majuli in Assam, Zacharias had what he described as one of his favourite meals ever—Borasaul sticky rice, *patodia maach* (marinated holmaas wrapped in a banana leaf and buried under smoldering wooden planks), *pura mangsho* (country chicken cooked on wooden skewers near an open flame), *singha diya mangsho* (marinated pork stuffed in bamboo and cooked over fire), a stir-fry of fiddlehead ferns and a Mishing fish curry with *bhul* (local ridge gourd). “I learned a lot about their cuisine. They use an open wood fire to cook. Fermentation and sun-drying are important to preserve their food,” he says.

PATRA PODA, ODISHA

The dish stood out because it was simple to make and used pumpkin leaves, which are rarely eaten anymore. “Patra Poda has chicken, prawns, mushrooms, greens or tiny fish, which are mixed in a paste of black mustard, cumin, green chillies and garlic. This is then wrapped in pumpkin/ poi saag leaves and roasted on an open fire till charred,” says Zacharias. “You find leaf-wrapped food across the country, but here, you can eat the leaves as well.” Zacharias recreated the Chingudi (prawn) Patra Poda at TBC, and shared the recipe on his channel too.



SUNDARKALA, UTTARAKHAND

“Sundarkala are hand-rolled, long and thick whole wheat noodles, flavoured with turmeric powder. They are tossed in green chilli, garlic leaves and *faran* [a herb from the onion family],” says Zacharias. He likens it to penne tossed in dry pesto. “I loved the fact that we have such interesting pasta in India.” Sunderkala originates in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, and likely has Tibetan roots. Zacharias learned how to make it from a family in Dehradun. “As I ate it, I kept thinking of the applications it could have as a restaurant dish,” he says.



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GIRDA BREAD, KASHMIR

In Kashmir (Srinagar, to be specific), Zacharias had an epiphany. He realised that bread isn't eaten as part of a main meal like everyone assumes, but instead is restricted to breakfast or tea time. "They have a different bread for every need [in Kashmir] and they come in varied shapes and size," he says. Of all the varieties, *girda* was one that caught his eye. "It is flattened by hand and patterned with finger impressions. It is crunchy on the outside and soft within, with a subtle sourness from the addition of yoghurt." Zaharias learned about this process at a *kandur* (old bakery) near the Hazratbal Shrine. He likens the process to poetry in motion: shaping the bread, putting it in a tandoor, removing the freshly baked bread, and handing it to customers.



WILD FOODS, CHORLA GHAT

"When people think of Goan food, they think of Catholic/ Portuguese or Goan Saraswat cuisine. But there are indigenous communities [in Goa] whose cuisine is so different," says Zacharias. During a recent trip, he spent a day foraging for wild food in the Chorla Ghats with a member of the Gaonkar community. "We ate [what we foraged] for lunch. It was cooked very simply, with barely any spices—green chilli and sometimes onion," he says. His plate had tender bamboo shoots cooked with dried peas, wild greens like *nali bhaji* and *karado* and a tomato *saar*. "It's so far removed from how we think of Indian food in the restaurant context, not overly complicated, where the ingredient gets to shine." ■



LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY



PICTURE COURTESY: NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERNART, NEW DELHI

Gondhla Castle, Lahaul
Watercolour and tempera on paper
8.5x5.5 cm

Bireswar Sen, 1920

One of the northernmost territories in India and literally 'the southern lands' according to its Tibetan name, Lo-yul—or Lahaul—has always been an enigmatic place. Cut off from the rest of the world as the snows closed the surrounding passes each winter, the valley developed a unique culture related to but equidistant from the neighbouring kingdoms of Kulu and Tibet. Now that the newly-built Atal tunnel has pierced its ancient idyll of winter isolation, one of the first sights tourists will encounter on the road to Keylong (see **Paradise Found** on page 296) is the striking 'castle' of Gondhla. This imposing tower, built in the 18th century, once housed the 'Thakurs' of Gondhla, local potentates who owed political allegiance to Kulu and spiritual deference to Lhasa. It's abandoned today, though the Thakurs' descendants live in a cosy home nearby. But a hundred and one years ago, the noted painter Bireswar Sen, sometime disciple of both Nandalal Bose and Nicholas Roerich, captured the scene on a starry night before they turned out the lights in the castle.

'I Keep Things Authentic'

If you follow actor **Gul Panag** on social media, you should know that she has the same mantra for her posts and her travels—always keep it real!

Q. How has the pandemic changed your travel philosophy?

We were always outdoorsy, but now the scales are tipping in favour of camping and road trips. We are seeking our unique, safe experiences that centre around the outdoors.

Q. Is there one trip from recent times that has been deeply memorable?

Earlier this year, we went to Ranthambore for a family trip with my parents and my brother and his wife. Being together as a family in these uncertain times gave us much to be grateful for... that, and my son saw his first tiger!

Q. A lot of your trips seem to centre around driving. How does that change the itinerary?

A lot more camping, for starters! My father got a large new tent to operate as a family common area, to supplement our existing tents. In addition, we plan trips around stand-alone boutique properties and homestays.

Q. Did social media change the way you travel? Do you ever look at new things through Instagram eyes?

Not really. I have been travelling way before Instagram came along. It's a place to capture and chronicle memories (and perhaps discover new places). For me, social media has always been a reflection of the real me, not the curated me. I like to keep things authentic.

Q. Travelling solo versus travelling with family... what do you yearn for?

Travelling with family, for sure. Notwithstanding the insane coordination of the schedules it involves, travelling together as a family is pure joy. As mom to a three-year-old, the reality of solo trips is clear to me—worrying about him the whole time. I would rather have him with me!

Q. If you had to pick three winter destinations for our readers this year, which would they be?

The hills around Shimla. They are easy to get to, there are many options and there is snow. Ranthambore—desert winters mean you can really soak in the sun. Tigers are a bonus, if you get lucky. And Moscow—easy to get to, no embargo on travel, and, yes, the architecture!

—with Sandeep Unnithan

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