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together

a national family magazine



Together is a national family magazine. It is a monthly, published by the Franciscans (OFM) in India. It was started in 1935 in Karachi, now in Pakistan. It got its present name in 1966.

The magazine *Together* is a conversation platform. Nothing changes until our families change. It is an effort at making worlds meet by bringing

down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. *Together* is a journey, an ever-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to all of us, and from all of us to all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, we discover even more paths to talk about and travel together.

Together is also an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

Your critical and relevant write-ups that promote goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity are welcome. Your articles must be mailed to **editor@togethmagazine.in** before the 15th of every month.

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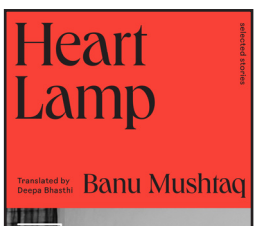
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Looking Back at 2025

What Moved Us, Shook Us, and Changed Us

The year 2025 was marked by several significant global and national events, including the Maha Kumbh Mela, India's victory in the ICC Champions Trophy, a tragic Air India plane crash, and major geopolitical shifts like the election of Donald Trump as US President, and the US-India tariff war.

13 January to 26 February

The world's largest religious gathering, The Maha Kumbh Mela, was held at the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, drawing over 660 million pilgrims. The event saw a tragic crowd crush on January 29 that resulted in dozens of deaths. This edition was astrologically unique, featuring a celestial alignment witnessed only once every 144 years.

09 March

India reasserted its dominance in cricket. In March, the Men in Blue lifted the ICC Champions Trophy in Dubai, defeating New Zealand by four wickets in a thrilling final. Later, in November, the Women's Cricket team made history by clinching India's first-ever Women's Cricket World Cup title.

Other notable events

- An Indigo crisis severely impacted the Indian aviation industry in December.
- Delhi's air pollution reached unprecedented levels in November.
- The BJP secured electoral victories in Delhi and Bihar in February and November respectively.



THE DARKER MOMENTS

28 March

A magnitude-7.7 earthquake struck Myanmar, causing over 3,600 deaths.

22 April

A brutal terror attack in Pahalgam claimed 26 civilian lives. The nation's response was swift and decisive; Operation Sindoor saw precise strikes on terror infrastructure across the border, redefining India's counter-terrorism doctrine.

12 June

Aviation safety also came under intense scrutiny following the catastrophic crash of Air India Flight 171 in Ahmedabad. The Boeing 787 Dreamliner plunged into a medical hostel just 32 seconds after take-off, killing 260 people.

28 October

Cyclonic Montha brought heavy rains and destruction to India.

23 November

Hayli Gubbi volcano in Ethiopia erupted for the first time in about 12,000 years, though unrecorded eruptions may have occurred during that time.

2025 proved to be a year of significant loss for India's entertainment and cultural community, marked by the deaths of prominent personalities including Manoj Kumar (in April), Zubeen Garg (September), Govardhan Asrani (October) and Dharmendra (November).



WORLD AFFAIRS

20 January

Donald Trump assumed the office of US President, an event that coincided with a historic low in US-India relations amidst an escalating tariff war.

08 May

Following the death of Pope Francis 21 April, Pope Leo XIV was elected. His first major act included the canonisation of Carlo Acutis, the "Patron Saint of the Internet."

02 July

The 14th Dalai Lama announced he would reincarnate, confirming a 15th Dalai Lama.

September

The most dramatic of the Gen Z protests begins in Nepal as thousands of students protest the government's sweeping social media ban, an apparent attempt to silence dissent. The uprising created a political crisis and eventually led to the ouster of the country's prime minister.

10 October

The war between Israel and Hamas remains in a state of a fragile, frequently violated ceasefire that began on October 10.



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

4 February

History was made in the operating theatre with the world's first pig-to-human kidney transplant, a breakthrough that promises to revolutionise organ donation.

19 March

After an astonishing 286 days in space, astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore safely returned to Earth.



The First Quarter of the Third Millennium...

Change, as we had known it, is changed; it no longer follows a beginning, middle, and end.
Get used to total shifts, and parallel worlds.

SAJIP MATHEW OFM

We have run the first quarter of the third millennium. It may be more honest to say that the first quarter of this millennium has happened to us—in this relatively short period we have changed and aged beyond recognition, we have advanced more than the last two millennia put together. The change is so accelerating that nothing has remained the same, except humanity's eternal desire to remain young. There has been no time in recorded history when change was so rapid and unsettling. Change itself has undergone uprising and rebellion. Change is not happening in its given swiftness and stride—it no more has a beginning, middle, and end. Things no more change; they take a total shift—everything at once—every now and then we find ourselves in a strange new world. The generation gap is growing with evolving neocultural norms and lifestyle changes; generation spans have shrunk to 5–10 years. Some of us feel far left behind

in the passage of mere twenty-five years. Multiple generations and worlds are at play simultaneously. Technologies, lifestyles, values, and even the lingo are changing at an accelerating speed. Change, as we had known it, is something of the past—get used to total shifts, and parallel worlds.

The World Is Feeling Fast, Loose, and Unsettled: The industrial era is collapsing and the Internet of Things, the digital revolution, and artificial intelligence are replacing it. This is the biggest shift since electricity. We are moving from labour and toil-driven times to intelligence-driven times; yes, a quick-witted intelligence, a smart new world. Intelligence is no one's monopoly; thus the hierarchies and pyramids are falling apart. Millennials exhibit a preference for a more lateral and collaborative approach to thinking and operations, moving away from the rigid, hierarchical vertical thinking models of previous generations.

Anchors of Society No Longer Anchor Anything:

Institutions and establishments cannot keep up with the velocity. Governments, schools, families, and regulatory systems still operate on timelines and logic of the second millennium; they still follow hierarchical knowledge transfer, decision-making, and governance. Natives of the third millennium feel disoriented—I would say reoriented—because the customary anchors of society no longer anchor anything. Parents, teachers, traditional leaders, and all sorts of folks have a fear of losing it all. Read it along with the recent instances of several world leaders facing generational pressure and low approval ratings and thus seen in media and in political commentary making erratic or frantically stupid comments and decisions, like Internet blackouts, control, and violent crackdowns. Parents and teachers too do the same in their jurisdiction to frantically hold on to the control that they have exercised all along.

Attention Is the New Currency: In today's information-saturated world, human focus and awareness have become incredibly valuable resources, like or more than money for brands, creators, and individuals. As platforms compete fiercely for our limited mental bandwidth, having the ability to capture and hold it is the key to success, connection, and revenue. Creators and influencers adapt to new algorithmic designs, provide dopamine loops, to keep users hooked. Worse still, they exploit the negativity bias of users seeking out and getting trapped in cycles of alarming and distressing headlines. Remember the Oxford Dictionary's Word of the Year for 2024 was *brain rot*—mental decline from excessive, low-quality online content. And the Word of the Year for 2025 is *rage bait*—content engineered to generate emotional outrage and reaction. Yes, attention is the new currency—buy, borrow, or steal—they will have it for their survival.

Access, Adaptability, and Agency Create

Influence: Having no access is digital homelessness. Access to big data and AI literacy is the key. Power comes from access to the Internet, big data, and artificial intelligence, and not from armies, oil, and land. Parents and leaders cannot control and govern the young by promising benefits, money and inheritance. The young hold the stage; they amplify themselves and influence the world, not military and trade leaders.

It is not just about being an expert, but adaptability; a lifelong profession with a single

proficiency is fragmenting. Those who have adaptive talent are skyrocketing, and those with static talent are falling behind. Identities are fluid: careers are not linear, expertise is not fixed, roles aren't stable, meaning isn't inherited, community is not local—everything is remixable.

Clarity Is Not Just Power, but Sanity: In this age of democratisation of content creation, with every piece of content posing as the final word and the truth, and living in a sea of information and opinion, what one needs is clarity. Debashis Chatterjee, a leadership speaker and author, gives an interesting understanding: "Clarity is fewer thoughts per minute." A cluttered mind is like a drawer filled with too many loose socks—you never find a matching one when you need it. Clarity is a journey from a cluttered, confused mind where everything is piled up to a clear and committed mind. With social media and the unending flow of information, our minds reach a cognitive overload, and are not equipped to process so much. So when we have to make decisions, make policies or vote, we find shortcuts, we fall back on our biases and prejudices, we just go by popular opinions, and the mindless echo chambers of WhatsApp university.

I believe that it is a transitional era; and it will create considerable anomalies. We stand at a threshold—not merely witnessing a shift, but living through a fundamental reorganisation of the systems that shape human existence. Culture, politics, technology, economics, and even religion: each is undergoing a necessary reckoning with its own foundations. This is not reform but a total shift, and it carries with it both disruption and possibility. Those who recognise this moment for what it is gain something profound: agency. The choice to act with intention rather than be acted upon, to shape the future rather than inherit the past unchanged.

The remnants of the last millennium—structures and values built for a different world—are trying hard to hold it back for political gain and control. Modern ultra-nationalism, religious fundamentalism and intolerance are not new phenomena; they are old strategies deployed with renewed urgency, attempts to reassert control over generations that have already begun thinking differently. They will refuse to mistake rigidity for strength. The question is not whether this transition will continue—it will—but would we embrace the other side of change? The millennium is still young, still unfolding.

Happy New Year 2026!

The Aravallis Have Shielded North India for Millennia; It Is Now Our Turn to Be Their Shield

The debate is a microcosm of the global tension between economic development and ecological preservation. The Aravallis are a finite resource, a billion-year-old shield that cannot be restored once destroyed.

Dr ANVI RATHORE

The Aravalli Range, one of the world's most ancient mountain chains, stretching across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi, is currently at the centre of a profound environmental and political controversy. The core of the issue lies in a technical, yet far-reaching, decision by the Supreme Court of India in November 2025 to adopt a uniform definition for what legally constitutes an "Aravalli Hill". This decision, aimed at streamlining regulation and curbing illegal mining, has instead ignited widespread

protests and fierce debate over whether administrative clarity has been prioritised over essential ecological preservation.

The Aravalli Range is an ancient geological formation two billion years old, and now it is facing an existential crisis. This is not merely an environmental concern; it is a critical matter of public health, water security, and climate resilience for millions across North India. Recent developments and a controversial new legal definition have sparked widespread protests, underscoring a desperate need for us all to act now.

The Aravallis are far more than just hills; they are a vital life-support system.

- **A Natural Barrier:** They act as an essential shield, physically blocking the expansion of the Thar Desert eastwards into the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains. Without them, dust storms would be more frequent and intense, and desertification would accelerate rapidly.
- **Water Security:** The range's unique rocky structure functions as a giant sponge, capturing monsoon rainfall and recharging vital underground aquifers that supply water to major cities like Delhi, Gurugram, and Jaipur.
- **Climate & Air Quality:** As the "green lungs" for the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR), the Aravallis help regulate the local climate, moderate temperatures, and improve air quality by trapping dust and pollutants.
- **Biodiversity Hotspot:** The hills provide a critical habitat and wildlife corridor for leopards, hyenas, and numerous bird species, supporting a rich biodiversity that is increasingly under threat.

The Government's Stance

For years, the absence of a single, consistent definition for the Aravallis across different states had created regulatory loopholes, which allowed rampant illegal mining to flourish. The Supreme Court, seeking to address this issue and acting on recommendations from a committee led by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, accepted a new, objective definition. Under this new framework, an "Aravalli Hill" is defined as any landform that rises 100 metres or more above the local surrounding terrain, including its entire supporting slopes and foothills. An "Aravalli Range" is a cluster of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other, ensuring the land between them is also protected.

The government's justification is rooted in the belief that this standardisation brings transparency and objective map-verifiable boundaries, making enforcement against illegal activity more effective. Officials argue that the framework strengthens protection, not dilutes it, by mandating:

- A complete ban on all new mining leases until a comprehensive Management Plan for Sustainable Mining is finalised by the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education.

- Explicit prohibition of mining in core "inviolable" areas, such as wildlife sanctuaries, tiger reserves, wetlands, and eco-sensitive zones, with exceptions only for certain critical and strategic minerals.
- Strict regulation and monitoring of existing legal mines using advanced surveillance technologies like drones and CCTVs.

The Centre has downplayed fears, stating that it is wrong to assume mining is now permitted on all land below 100 metres and reiterating its commitment to the Aravalli Green Wall initiative, a massive afforestation project aimed at landscape restoration.

The Controversy

Despite the government's assurances, the new definition has triggered outrage and a widespread "Save Aravalli" campaign. The core controversy lies in the 100-metre threshold itself. Environmental experts, supported by internal data from the Forest Survey of India (FSI), contend that this criterion is arbitrary and ecologically blind.

An internal FSI assessment revealed a startling fact: only about 8.7% of the total mapped Aravalli hill features meet the 100-metre elevation benchmark. Critics argue that the vast majority of the range is comprised of lower, scrub-covered ridges and hillocks (often only 10-30 metres high) that are ecologically critical but would now fall outside the legal definition of an "Aravalli Hill".

The potential consequences are severe:

- **Desertification Risk:** These lower ridges act as the primary natural barrier against sand and dust storms from the Thar Desert. Breaching them could accelerate desertification towards Delhi-NCR.
- **Water Crisis:** The foothills and slopes are crucial for rainwater infiltration and recharging groundwater aquifers for millions. Opening these areas to construction could worsen the already severe water scarcity.
- **Air Pollution:** The Aravallis are often called the "green lungs" of North India; their removal would likely exacerbate air pollution in the NCR region.
- **Fragmentation:** By focusing only on high peaks and closely grouped hills, the definition ignores the essential landscape-level continuity of the range, fragmenting wildlife corridors and habitats.

Activists like Neelam Ahluwalia of the 'People for Aravallis' group and environmentalist Vikrant Tongad argue that mountain systems should be defined by their functional ecological role, not an arbitrary height. They point out that key scientific inputs were allegedly sidelined during the committee process that recommended the 100-metre rule.

A Call to Action

The public response has been immediate and sustained. Peaceful protests, silent marches, and social media campaigns have erupted across Gurugram, Udaipur, Jaipur, and Delhi. Citizens, farmers, and lawyers have united under banners like the Aravalli Bachao Citizens Movement to demand that the government revise the

scientific criteria that include geology, ecology, and wildlife connectivity.

The "Save Aravalli" movement represents a potent call for environmental accountability and intergenerational equity. The immediate freeze on new mining leases offers a temporary reprieve, but activists are pushing for permanent, legally binding protection that encompasses the entire geological span of the range, regardless of local elevation.

The "Save Aravalli" movement represents a potent call for environmental accountability and intergenerational equity.

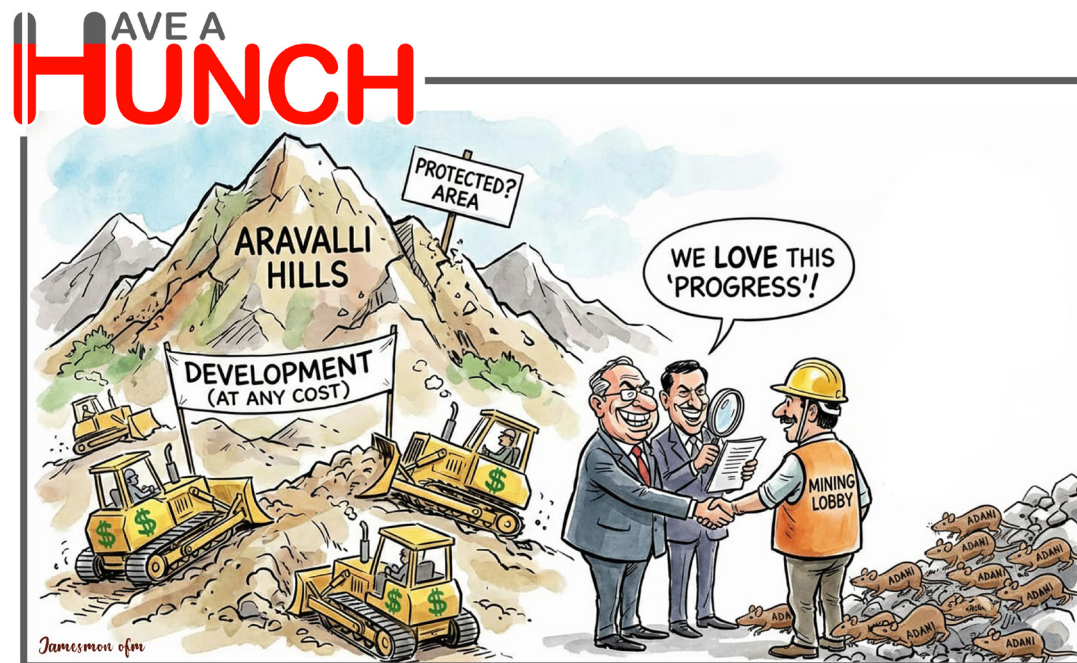
Ultimately, the debate is a microcosm of the global tension between economic development and ecological preservation. The Aravallis are a finite resource, a billion-year-old shield that cannot be restored once destroyed. The ongoing protests underscore a clear message: the long-term survival of North India's

environment and public health must take

Do We Belong to Homeland or Does Our Homeland Belong to Us?

Home is not the soil we stand on but the stories we tell. Diasporic homes are often full of recreated festivals, mixed languages, cuisines and nostalgia-filled narratives.

VIRONIKA



What is home? A simple question with a complex answer, so complex that even the heart of the wisest struggles to articulate it. For some, home is made of bricks and walls where family resides, a birthplace, familiar streets one grew up with, the scents that shaped one's childhood or the language that naturally flows off one's tongue. But the more deeply we look, the more this concept becomes tainted and complex. So, we need to ask ourselves: Is home really a place we come from or is it the place we return to in our memories, which gives us comfort and oneness? Is it merely geographical or a romantic construction of the mind which contrasts with reality? Is it a concrete foundation of bricks and stones or a fragile construction out of stories, emotional narratives and shifting realities?

In this ever-evolving time, where humanity has faced wars, pandemics and genocide, the phenomenon of diaspora has turned from a geographical or philosophical question to

an existential one. Diaspora in its simplest definition means the condition of being away from one's homeland. But diaspora is not just about geographical distance but also the emotional distance that brings in transformation, constructs our realities, identity, memory and belonging. It is about learning—just as life is never stagnant or constant, so home is never fixed but a moving landscape within us.

The traditional idea of homeland assumes stability: one soil, one culture, one language, one identity. But for millions who live outside the land where they were born, either by force or choice, homeland comes in multiple layers and phases through memory, experiences and sometimes even longing. For some, like the sages, home is not at all physical but something which transcends this material world. This article explores how diaspora reshapes the idea of home, asking the fundamental question: Do we belong to our home or does our home belong to us?



Salman Rushdie argues that those who leave home can never see it as it is, only through memory — fragmented, romanticised, exaggerated, and frozen in time.

We often speak of home as a place of comfort and belonging, yet we forget that home itself is constantly shifting like the seasons. What feels like home at one stage of life may feel completely strange and foreign at another. For a child, home may be its physical environment where he is growing up—its warmth, its colors, sounds and routines. But as he grows up, he starts adding to this definition: his community, people and even nation. It takes on more abstract meaning and understanding becomes layered yet not complex.

Even for people who never left their home, the definition becomes layered. But for those who left their home for education, job, marriage or because their conditions forced them, it becomes very complex. Even when one returns to their home, only to realise they do not fully belong there anymore—the people have changed, the landmarks have changed, the smell of the air even feels unfamiliar—the individual realises that this place is indeed home but not complete. Something is present but yet absent.

This very moment is the gateway into the diasporic condition; it reveals that home is not a permanent identity but more like a relationship

that continuously needs to be negotiated. If even for people who never left home the idea becomes so layered, then what does it mean for those who indeed moved away? For some it becomes complicated and for some it becomes creative. Salman Rushdie's quote, "The past is a country from which we all have emigrated," summarises this whole experience.

One of the most powerful ideas about this perspective of diaspora comes from Salman Rushdie's phrase "imaginary homelands." He argues that the person who walked away from home can never see it exactly for what it is; they always see it through the prism of memory—fragmented, romanticised, exaggerated and even frozen in time.

Memories can never be preserved but only be reconstructed; they are ever evolving and transforming. Home soon becomes a place in the mind, an emotional geography rather than a political one. The mother's voice, the fragrance of her food from the kitchen, the sound of your loved ones in the language so close to mind and heart—these small fragments of memory stay with the individual, which may no longer exist. A person in diaspora tends to remember all the healthy and good things about home and returns one day just to realise the reality is quite different, yet the individual makes the decision to carry these memories within and continues to think of home in a beautified manner.

Home is not the soil we stand on but the story we tell ourselves about where we come from.

Two siblings who have migrated from the same place may have different ideas of home: for one it might be very beautiful and colorful while for the other it can be very traumatic and dark. Thus, diaspora does not simply displace people geographically; it reconfigures their memories, creating homelands made of emotions rather than soil.

For some like Mahmoud Darwish and Farida Khalaf, diaspora becomes essential to finding their true selves. Not only for them but for us, diaspora acts like a teacher. It teaches us something radical: Home is not something we inherit but something we make, something we choose. We choose to move forward, we choose to forget, we choose to make and recreate.

A migrant may choose to hold on to culture, beliefs and practices, but one might recreate it to fit their new identity or completely let go of it and form a new identity in a new land. Both choices are valid; both form diasporic identity. This is because diasporic individuals have multiple realities and layered homes and identities.

Diaspora turns home into a mobile, evolving idea and never a fixed origin. Home can be a childhood memory, the city one lives in, mother tongue, the dreams they nurture. Home can even be a person or an animal or even something beyond the realm of the physical. Thus, when we ask a diasporic person "Where are you from?" the answer is never simple. They may be from here, there, from nowhere and everywhere. Their citizenship may lie in one country and their emotions in another, or vice versa.

One of the defining features of diaspora is loss—loss of home, family, language, culture, familiarity. But there is a creative, transformative side to it. For those who leave their homeland or whose family left generations before, home doesn't simply vanish but rebuilds. Diasporic homes are often full of recreated festivals, mixed languages, cuisines and nostalgia-filled narratives. A person living in the United States may decorate their home with Kashmiri decorative crafts, giving a touch of their homeland to this new home. These are not imitations; they are new beginnings, their own recreated homes. Some may worry that this might dilute or tamper with the original culture. But culture, like this world, is ever-changing and

evolving. It is not something to be preserved but to be embraced.

This act of recreating is deeply human, a form of comfort in the state of displacement, and helps them stay in touch with their past while actively creating the present and future through resilience, imagination and emotional depth.

In the true sense, diaspora does not simply fragment home; it enriches it. Yet the deepest question that diaspora raises is whether anyone truly belongs to a single home at all. Even those who never migrate feel alienation. The feeling of alienation is universal; this creates artists, poets, sages and even people like us. Tracing our identity or reminiscing about it is a beautiful concept, yet it can turn into something dangerous and deadly—a theme we see often in Indian politics. Nothing is the same or static in this universe: culture changes, seasons change, political identities shift, homes break, people meet, they move away, humans even grow old. How can home stay the same, and thus how can anyone trace themselves back or truly belong anywhere? This reveals a profound truth: Belonging is not a condition; it is a feeling, and feelings can change.

We often ask the question "Where is home?" Perhaps we have been asking the wrong question all along. The real question is: What feels like home? Or what do we call home and why? The answer may change tomorrow, and that ought to be acceptable. In the end, home is not the place we return to. Home is a creation which continues throughout life. Reality is just a question of perspective. Diaspora does not destroy home; it just makes us question its identity and reveals its complexity.

We don't simply belong to one homeland; we carry many homelands within us, through memories, our physiological features, language and even experiences. And perhaps this is the reality of this bittersweet condition. Although the memories ache in our hearts and make us long, they also let us craft home with intention. They let us form attachments based not on obligations or tradition but on emotional truth.

In the end, the question is not "Where is home?" but "What is home?" We are not exiles from home but the authors of it, as home is not something we return to but something we continue to create.



A LOOKBACK AT THE MOST TALKED ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA MOMENTS OF 2025

I can't believe it! I have lived another round year trip across the Sun. I have been teaching media studies and mass communication for the past eight years now, and every year I try my best to look back at the year with some hope, insight, useful critique and what have you. 2025 has been a series of surgical strikes made live on social media and stitched through public diagnosis of civic problems, political debates happened on comment threads, and grief, outrage, and the surreal were all smashed together to be forwarded on WhatsApp.

SUMIT DASGUPTA

1 Delhi becomes unbreathable

When Delhi's winter inversion trapped pollution like a lid, the city's anger moved from WhatsApp lungs to marching feet. In November hundreds gathered near India Gate to protest toxic air and the repeated failure of governing institutions to stem an annual public-health crisis. The environmental harm is also a failure of governance and that citizens no longer accept technical euphemisms in place of action. The government later changed the metrics set by many experts across the world and proudly claimed that there's nothing wrong with Delhi's air.

2 Campus dissent across universities in India

Universities remained the clearest flashpoints of generational



impatience. Jamia Millia Islamia's repeated student sit-ins, detentions and suspensions, reported across independent outlets, are part of a pattern in which campuses operate as staging grounds for political education and confrontation. Students have responded with

strategies that mix old-fashioned sit-ins and new digital organising. The reaction from administrations and police has repeatedly reopened the question of what civic life in a university should look like in a democracy.



3 The South Kolkata Law College case

The brutal gang-rape at a law college in Kolkata exposed the spaces of learning that can harbour violent, hierarchical cultures. Feminist commentators argued that the case was less an exception than a symptom of a persistent rape culture, and that accountability requires structural rather than episodic remedies.

4 Updating electoral rolls

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR), a bureaucratic exercise in updating electoral rolls acquired a political valence this year. Critics warned that the process risked creating administrative hurdles that might disenfranchise vulnerable groups. The argument mattered because it showed how bureaucratic language can be weaponised into a political claim about citizenship.

5 Diaspora moments and civic embarrassment

A minor quarrel over paan stains and civic cleanliness on London pavements made viral by many content creators turned briefly into a diasporic morality play. Such episodes reveal how small cultural habits can be seized on as identity shorthand in transnational debate.

6 Cricket's ritual and its ruptures

Although the women of the Indian cricket team had a larger, harder, more perilous journey towards their historic women's World Cup win. Their win cemented women's legitimacy and it was a strong bid towards equality. Members of the team were on the receiving end of cruel castiest, and communal attacks online. At a different register, the retirement of Virat Kohli from Test cricket was a genuinely elegiac story prompting a public conversation about legacy and the changing economics of the game.

7 The Prashant meme

The "Prashant" croissant joke, a comically misheard word turned into a meme revealed how quickly

linguistic quirks can become collective property. The spread of such memes bonds users through mockery but also exposes class and education fault lines. In a nation that revels in wordplay, the incident was both comic relief and an uncomfortable prompt about how quickly private slips become public ridicule.

8 Gen Z activists want the world to catch hands

Younger activists in neighbouring Bangladesh and Nepal supplied both inspiration and warning. Student movements there, energetic, media-savvy and impatient with political inertia, forced introspection on how political change now looks in South Asia. Their methods, from meme-led organising to sustained street occupations, travelled digitally and politically across borders.

9 Words, words, and more words

Language carried its own politics: lexicographers chose different "words of the year" (Oxford's "rage bait"; Merriam-Webster's "slop") was a reminder that 2025's defining moods were attention, disgust and low-quality digital overload. The fragmented choices themselves tell a story about a year whose central emotion was exhaustion with spectacle.





10 Coldplay wants you to kiss

The Coldplay kiss-cam incident, where a short clip with social consequences far beyond the concert became an object lesson in how a single, shareable image can produce cascades of reputational damage, HR crises and debates about privacy and consent.

11 Epstein files and Johnson's baby oil

The newly released Jeffery Epstein files by the US government's FBI did not say much of anything. It was heavily redacted, pages upon pages of redacted information. Pictures were released that included Noam Chomsky, former US president Bill Clinton, Michael Jackson, Bill Gates and many more. On Netflix, Curtis Jackson aka 50 Cent produced true crime documentary about Sean Combs aka P. Diddy revealing the vile world of the entertainment industry. The documentary reveals that at one point, Diddy had around a thousand bottles of baby oil.

12 The Louvre heist

The Louvre heist is a film waiting to happen. Glass cases emptied or tampered with, security questioned, priceless objects in transit rewired the public imagination. It became a social media phenomenon. Media coverage oscillated between

cinematic fascination and forensic scrutiny. For critics, the theft was evidence of underfunding, symbolic vulnerability, and an age when spectacle can be weaponised for attention.

13 Labubu mania

A strangely appealing vinyl creature with a bulbous head took hold of global youth culture. Labubu was not just a cute collectible toy but a meme made real, turning mood-centric aesthetics into commerce. There were limited-edition drops, resale markets that looked suspiciously like small-time finance, and influencers who styled the little beast as if it were a Prada scarf. Critics accused collectors of late capitalist consumption therapy and fans called that critique humourless.

14 AI Ghibli art

Who owns an image once an algorithm has "Ghiblified" it? More pressingly, what does it do to memory when the past is routinely retouched into a particular tone? The Indian government created a tasteless Ghiblified art in memory of the lives lost of people in Kashmir in a terrible terrorist attack. The synthetic tenderness combined with platform metrics to create a kind of emotional currency—likes as validation, filters as the new memory.

15 The Kashmir terrorist attack

The terrorist attack in Kashmir in 2025 once again exposed the region's fragile calm and the persistent volatility beneath official claims of normalcy. Social media reacted predictably with grief quickly giving way to polarisation, conspiracy theories and rhetorical chest-thumping. The incident underscored a recurring truth: Kashmir continues to exist in a permanent state of exception, where violence is both shocking and, tragically, familiar.

16 The Vadodara hit-and-run case

The Vadodara hit-and-run case gripped public attention because it followed a grimly familiar script; reckless driving, delayed accountability and a justice system struggling to keep pace with public outrage. CCTV footage circulated widely, turning the incident into a morality tale about privilege, impunity and urban indifference.

17 Gen Z and the mystifying matcha

Matcha's popularity among Gen Z was less about taste and more about identity. The drink became shorthand for wellness, aesthetic minimalism and digital self-branding. In a generation fluent in signalling values through consumption, matcha functioned as caffeine without chaos.

18 RCB brought home the cup

The Royal Challengers Bangalore's 2025 IPL campaign dominated cricket discourse, reigniting debates about legacy, fandom and redemption. RCB's season became a reminder that sport is sustained as much by narrative as by results.



19 3 Idiots inspiration Sonam Wangchuk is in prison

The detention of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk triggered widespread concern among civil society groups. Known for peaceful protest and educational reform, Wangchuk's imprisonment was interpreted by supporters as a warning shot against dissent framed as disruption. The episode reinforced an uncomfortable pattern in contemporary India where activism increasingly treated as inconvenience.

20 The MET Gala was relevant this year thanks to SRK

Shah Rukh Khan's appearance at the Met Gala was less about fashion and more about symbolism. His presence marked a moment of cultural crossover—Bollywood not as exotic guest, but as equal participant in global celebrity culture. Khan became a vessel for projection: nostalgia, national pride and global aspiration stitched into couture.

21 Banu Mushtaq and The Heart Lamps

Banu Mushtaq's *The Heart Lamps* gaining international recognition brought overdue attention to Indian regional literature. The book's success was framed as both literary achievement and cultural correction, positioning Mushtaq not merely as an author, but as a bridge between literary worlds too often kept apart.



22 K-Pop Demon Hunters

K-Pop Demon Hunters and the rise of Huntr/X reflected the continued global dominance of Korean pop culture, now blended seamlessly with fantasy storytelling. The series' success lay in its genre hybridisation: idol culture meeting mythic warfare, spectacle balanced with self-awareness.

23 Mamdani mubarak ho!

Zohran Mamdani's prominence in the New York mayoral race drew attention far beyond city limits. His progressive platform, grassroots campaigning and outspoken positions resonated with younger voters and diasporic communities, signalling shifting urban priorities around housing, inequality and representation.

24 Dhurandar criticism and Indian patriotism

The film *Dhurandar* sparked sharp debate over how Indian patriotism is represented on screen. Critics argued that its nationalism leaned towards spectacle rather than substance, while supporters defended it as unapologetically proud. In 2025, films no longer merely entertain, they are read as political texts, scrutinised for ideological intent as much as narrative craft.

25 Ba****ds of Bollywood, Akshaye Khanna renaissance, and the Saiyaara wave

B****ds of Bollywood amplified by SRK's son Aryan Khan's controversial image became a hit. The Gafoor song became a meme and the audiences ate it up. The *Saiyaara* craze illustrated how a single gesture, sound or mood can dominate digital culture overnight. Viral videos of young people, bawling their eyes, screaming, singing loudly in the theatres became a common sight. Later in the year Akshaye Khanna became a cinematic icon yet again, thanks to Flipperaci's song Fa9la. These moments showed Bollywood recalibrating its relationship with virality.

India and the world in 2025 felt like a place practising multiple futures at once. Whether it's digital surveillance and digital dissent, climate catastrophe and climate litigation or the pleasures of a cricket team, a viral film moment and new anxieties about AI. The common thread is exposure. Everyone is now both subject and audience. That is empowering, and exhausting. It's also political because visibility and attention is a resource, and in 2025 more people than ever were trying to claim it.

Sreenivasan

THE HEALER OF THE MALAYALI SOUL

Sreenivasan's body of work reminds us that cinema, at its best, is a civic tool. It is a way for a community to laugh at itself so that it might eventually heal.

SHRINI MENON

In the lush, cinematically obsessed landscape of Kerala, where celluloid often dictates the rhythm of reality, few figures have wielded the pen and the persona with as much surgical precision as Sreenivasan. A polymath of the Malayalam film industry—screenwriter, director, actor, and producer—Sreenivasan, who passed away in late 2025, occupied a singular space in Indian cinema. He was not merely an entertainer; he was a master satirist, a social cartographer who mapped the insecurities, hypocrisies, and endearing follies of the Malayali middle class with a wit so sharp it felt like a caress before the sting.

To understand Sreenivasan is to understand the evolution of Kerala's social consciousness over the last five decades. He did not traffic in the hyper-masculine heroics of his contemporaries. Instead, he championed the 'everyman'—the flawed, often delusional, yet profoundly relatable figure struggling against the tides of modernity, politics, and tradition.

The Aesthetics of the Ordinary

Sreenivasan's genius lay in his rejection of the grandiose. While the 1980s and 90s were elsewhere defined by explosive action and melodrama, Sreenivasan looked inward. His screenplays were studies in sociological observation. Whether he was portraying a man obsessed with his own physical inadequacies in the cult classic *Vadakkunokkiyanthram* (1989) or a lazy husband masquerading as a spiritual seeker in *Chinthavishtayaya Shyamala* (1998), he utilised the mirror of cinema to reflect the spectator's own shadow.

His prose—written in a colloquial yet intellectually dense Malayalam—demolished the pedestal upon which the Malayali ego often rests. He possessed an uncanny ability to find the 'tragic-comic' in the mundane. In his hands, a simple job interview or a domestic squabble became a stage for a larger

discourse on the unemployment crisis, the vanity of the 'Gulf-dream', and the erosion of agrarian values.

The Political Iconoclast: *Sandesam* and Beyond

Perhaps his most enduring legacy as a social commentator is the 1991 political satire *Sandesam*. In a state defined by intense political literacy and partisanship, *Sandesam* was a revolutionary act. Sreenivasan, who wrote the script and starred as the character Koteeshwaran, dismantled the performative nature of party politics. He exposed how ideology often serves as a veneer for personal failure and familial neglect.

The film's famous dialogue regarding "Poland" has become an immortal linguistic trope in Kerala, symbolising the absurdity of local politicians arguing over global geopolitical shifts while their own backyards crumble. Sreenivasan did not take sides; instead, he stood on the periphery, mocking the very idea of blind allegiance.

By doing so, he encouraged a generation to look at politics not as a religion, but as a flawed human endeavour. It was social commentary at its most potent—accessible enough for the masses, yet profound enough to be cited in academic circles.

The Critique of the Malayali Diaspora

As the 1980s saw a mass exodus of Keralites to the Middle East, Sreenivasan became the primary chronicler of this demographic shift. Films like *Varavelpu* (1989) were heartbreakingly accurate depictions of the 'Return Emigrant'—men who spent their lives building sandcastles in the desert only to find their homeland hostile to their return.

Through the character of Murali, Sreenivasan critiqued the militant trade unionism and the bureaucratic red tape that stifled entrepreneurship in Kerala. He highlighted the irony of a society that survived on foreign remittances but remained ideologically allergic to the labour that generated them. These films were not mere comedies; they were cautionary tales that forced the state to confront its own structural contradictions.

Masculinity and the Fragile Ego

Sreenivasan's work also delved into the fragile architecture of Indian masculinity. Unlike the stoic, invincible heroes of the era, Sreenivasan's characters were often besieged by inferiority complexes. In *Vadakkunokkiyanthram*, which he also directed, he explored the psychological rot of jealousy and self-loathing. Dineshan, the protagonist, remains one of the most sophisticated character studies in Indian

cinema—a man whose inability to believe he is worthy of love leads to his inevitable descent into paranoia.

By playing these roles himself, Sreenivasan subverted the traditional 'hero' archetype. His slight frame and deadpan delivery became symbols of authenticity. He taught the audience that there is more truth in a man's insecurities than in his triumphs.

Sreenivasan stripped away the pretensions of the intellectual and the illusions of the commoner, leaving behind a naked, honest portrait of a society in transition.

A Legacy of Satire

In his later years, Sreenivasan continued to observe the changing winds of the 21st century. Even as he battled health issues, his collaboration on films like *Njan Prakashan* (2018) showed that his nib had not lost its edge. He turned his gaze toward the 'New Gen' Malayali—

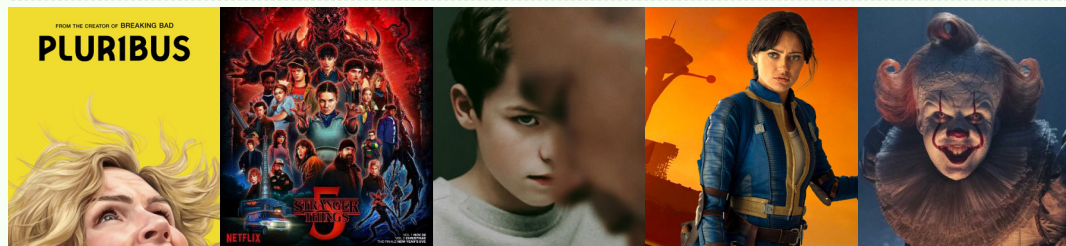
ambitious, tech-savvy, yet frequently devoid of a moral compass.

His passing in December 2025 marked the end of an era, but his influence remains ubiquitous. His sons, Vineeth and Dhyan, carry forward his cinematic lineage, yet the specific brand of 'Sreenivasan-esque' satire remains inimitable. He was the court jester who was secretly the wisest man in the room.

Sreenivasan's body of work reminds us that cinema, at its best, is a civic tool. It is a way for a community to laugh at itself so that it might eventually heal. He stripped away the pretensions of the intellectual and the illusions of the commoner, leaving behind a naked, honest portrait of a society in transition. In the grand tapestry of world cinema, Sreenivasan will be remembered as the man who looked at the ordinary and saw the extraordinary, the man who spoke truth to power not through a megaphone, but through a wry, knowing smile.

Sreenivasan (1950–2025)





WEB SERIES

THE BEST OF WEB SERIES IN 2025

These episodic, digital-first entertainment programs offers fresh, realistic content with higher creative freedom and lower production costs than TV. They are crucial for promoting diversity, addressing social issues, providing on-demand flexibility for younger audiences, and acting as a pathway for new talent. NIKHIL BANERJEE picks the best of them.

5 BEST INTERNATIONAL

1 **Pluribus** Platform: Apple TV+ / Episodes: 09

Pluribus is a surreal sci-fi drama set in a world infected by a “happiness virus,” where enforced cheerfulness masks control. As Carol Sturka, the most miserable person alive, becomes humanity’s unlikely hope, the series unfolds as a slow-burn puzzle box. Its Lynchian mood may divide viewers, but Vince Gilligan’s sharp writing and Rhea Seehorn’s commanding performance make it one of 2025’s smartest originals.

2 **Stranger Things Season 5** Platform: Netflix / Episodes: 08–09

Stranger Things Season 5 closes the Hawkins saga with apocalyptic stakes as the Upside Down spills into the real world. Darker horror, emotional payoffs, and long-brewing character arcs give fans catharsis, even as the ensemble feels crowded. Nostalgia, spectacle, and friendship once again anchor the show, securing its status as one of 2025’s defining pop-culture finales.

3 **Adolescence** Platform: Netflix / Episodes: 04

Adolescence is a harrowing limited series about a 13-year-old accused of murder, forcing adults to confront their failures. Tackling social media, bullying, mental health, and online radicalisation, it turns a family tragedy into a societal indictment. Its realism is emotionally exhausting, but critics hail it as one of 2025’s most urgent and uncompromising dramas.



4 **Fallout Season 2** Platform: Amazon Prime Video / Episodes: 08

Fallout Season 2 widens its post-apocalyptic canvas with stranger vaults, bigger factions, and darker humour. Balancing game-faithful lore with fresh character arcs, it delivers striking visuals and sharp satire on power and survival. While dense mythology may overwhelm newcomers, genre fans will find it one of 2025’s most entertaining sci-fi spectacles.

5 **It: Welcome to Derry** Platform: HBO / JioCinema (India) / Episodes: 08

It: Welcome to Derry explores the cursed origins of the town and Pennywise’s earlier reign of terror. Mixing coming-of-age drama with atmospheric horror, the series deepens Derry’s mythology while probing trauma and prejudice. Though its slow build may test patience, its moody storytelling and nightmarish imagery make it a standout horror prequel of 2025.

5 BEST NATIONAL

1 **Kerala Crime Files Season 2: The Search for CPO Ambili Raju** Platform: Disney+ Hotstar / JioHotstar / Episodes: 06

Kerala Crime Files Season 2 investigates the disappearance of CPO Ambili Raju, as SI Noble uncovers institutional rot beneath procedural calm. Rooted in Kerala’s lived realism, the series builds tension through interviews and moral ambiguity. Its methodical pacing rewards patience, reaffirming the franchise as Malayalam streaming’s most credible crime drama.

2 **Kuttram Purindhavan: The Guilty One** Platform: SonyLIV / Episodes: 07

Kuttram Purindhavan follows a retired pharmacist whose attempt to save his grandson entangles him in a girl’s disappearance. As investigators peel back guilt and secrecy, the show becomes a tense moral maze. Pasupathy’s restrained performance anchors the slow burn, with dense plotting giving way to a devastating emotional payoff.

3 **The Family Man Season 3** Platform: Amazon Prime Video / Episodes: 08

The Family Man Season 3 drops Srikanth Tiwari into a Northeast conspiracy involving insurgency, cyber threats, and family danger. Manoj Bajpayee balances espionage chaos with domestic comedy, navigating moral grey zones and generational conflict. Though geopolitics occasionally crowd the narrative, Raj & DK’s wit and stakes keep it compulsively engaging.

4 **Mandala Murders** Platform: Netflix / Episodes: 08

Mandala Murders links ritual failures from the 1950s to modern killings marked by cryptic mandalas. As investigators decode occult symbols and cult histories, the series blends mythology with procedural dread. Stylised visuals and cultural ambition elevate the thriller, even if pulpy narrative leaps occasionally strain credibility.

5 **The Ba****ds of Bollywood** Platform: Netflix / Episodes: 08

*The Ba****ds of Bollywood* satirises the film industry through an outsider navigating nepotism, egos, and shady deals. Aryan Khan’s directorial debut skewers casting couches, botched stunts, and insider absurdities with unapologetic excess. Its loud satire may polarise viewers, but its fearless jabs make it 2025’s most gleefully messy industry critique.



THE THROWAWAY CULTURE

We stand at a crossroads where convenience battles sustainability.

MONICA FERNANDES

In bygone days, nothing was discarded easily. Our parents and ancestors believed in simple living and were happier than us in the process. In large families, school uniforms, shoes, and school bags were handed down from one child to the other. A friend recalls how her mother would give a new look to her sole party dress

as she grew taller. A frill below, a ribbon or two, and the dress looked quite presentable. In order to keep up with their peer group, today's children insist on everything new, even if their parents cannot afford new items. I remember my mother transforming used saris into half curtains for the windows.

Have you noticed that white goods purchased today do not have the same quality as those purchased, say, fifteen years ago? The old fridges and air conditioners were sturdy and trouble-free. Similar products from reputed companies today cost a lot but don't last for a long time. Earlier, mobile phones lasted for around five years. Today's fancier versions last for two or three years. The same goes for computers. In other words, consumers are being taken for a ride. Companies deliberately lower the quality of goods to increase profits.

It is opined that the throwaway culture began with the 'planned obsolescence' of the Phoebus cartel of light bulb manufacturers in Europe and North America from 1925 to 1939. This cartel, consisting of reputed companies, hit upon the idea of decreasing the life of light bulbs, thus ensuring repeat sales. They even tested the bulbs in a central laboratory to ensure that their lifespan was shortened. Previously, bulbs lasted for 2,500 hours. The new bulbs lasted for 1,000 hours. This increased wastage, but the companies with myopic vision focused on profitability.

This tactic has resulted in the 'use-and-throw' culture, resulting in massive garbage dumps and increased pollution. We dump clothes, shoes, mixers, microwaves, computers, and irons. The clothing industry is a major culprit. Through a blitzkrieg of advertisements, we are convinced that we must jettison our clothes and replace them with the latest fashion, even if we can't afford the designer garments.

Similarly, the cosmetic industry convinces us that we could look young and beautiful forever. We all want to be praised by our peer group and follow trends without weighing the consequences. My daughter Minal had a college classmate who came from a poor background. At that time, film stars were wearing coloured contact lenses. They sported brown eyes one day and green eyes the next day. This young girl tried to copy them and bought cheap coloured contact lenses. Unfortunately, she caught an eye infection and lost an eye as a consequence.

The trappings of money have become the new status symbol. Our roads are not meant for large SUVs, and the parking problems make it worse. Consumers are falling prey to what is termed 'perceived obsolescence'. The onslaught of advertisers is insidious. They imply that old products are inferior. After all, in this materialistic age, we feel that our ego will go for a toss if we stick to old products.

To counteract this wasteful trend, we need to ask ourselves the following questions before buying a product:

- Do I really need it, or am I buying it to satisfy my ego?
- Is it possible to get my old fridge/air conditioner/microwave oven repaired?
- Am I just throwing electronic goods in the dustbin? Am I acting responsibly? This will create pollution issues when they leak into the soil. There are separate bins for electronic waste in some places.
- Instead of just throwing our old clothes and sheets into a bin, am I donating these items instead?

The throwaway culture is not merely an economic or environmental issue—it is a mirror reflecting our values as a society. Every discarded phone, every prematurely retired appliance, every closet purged of last season's clothes represents

a choice we've made about what matters to us. We stand at a crossroads where convenience battles sustainability, where ego confronts conscience. The wisdom of our ancestors, who

found contentment in simplicity and pride in preservation, offers us a path forward. But walking that path requires courage—the courage to resist the siren call of endless consumption, to repair rather than replace, to value longevity over novelty. The question is not whether we can afford to change our habits, but whether we can afford not to. For in the end, what we throw away is not just material goods, but our responsibility to future generations who will inherit the consequences of our choices.

The throwaway culture is not merely an economic or environmental issue—it is a mirror reflecting our values as a society.

ROCK WITHOUT BORDERS

The 10 Most Dominant Bands Across Spotify, YouTube Music and Apple Music in 2025

KAPIL ARAMBAM

This list reflects the rock bands most engaged by global audiences across streaming platforms in 2025, primarily using monthly listener counts and cumulative streaming impact where available. It balances legacy appeal and current consumption to represent both enduring icons and active favorites in the modern streaming ecosystem.



Queen

The single strongest cross-platform rock band.

- Spotify: among the highest monthly listeners for rock
- Apple Music: permanent catalog fixture
- YouTube Music: billions of cumulative views on official tracks



The Beatles

While Spotify monthly listeners fluctuate, no band matches their aggregate presence across Apple Music and YouTube.

- Apple Music privileges legacy catalogs, benefiting The Beatles
- YouTube Music consumption is massive and evergreen



Linkin Park

Arguably the most balanced modern rock band across platforms and their music is native to the digital ecosystem.

- Spotify: extremely high monthly listeners
- Apple Music: strong Gen-Z and millennial catalog performance
- YouTube Music: exceptionally high official video/audio streams



AC/DC

A hard-rock anomaly that performs equally well on all three platforms.

- High repeat consumption
- Strong YouTube Music usage due to riff-driven tracks
- Apple Music classic-rock playlists consistently feature them



Fleetwood Mac

Streaming revival success across ecosystems.

- Apple Music's older demographic boosts their numbers
- YouTube Music keeps *Rumours*-era tracks in constant circulation



Red Hot Chili Peppers

One of the most platform-stable rock catalogues benefiting from genre hybridity without drifting into pop.

- Spotify: high monthly listeners
- Apple Music: strong album-oriented listening
- YouTube Music: steady long-tail performance



Nirvana

Limited catalog, maximum impact and their cultural centrality compensates for fewer releases.

- Spotify algorithms favour them heavily
- Apple Music treats them as canonical rock
- YouTube Music engagement remains consistently high



Metallica

Moves up in cross-platform rankings.

- Apple Music strongly favours metal catalogs
- YouTube Music usage is particularly high for Metallica
- Spotify listeners slightly lower than top tier but extremely loyal



Guns N' Roses

A compact catalogue with extraordinary cross-platform penetration.

- YouTube Music is a major strength (iconic videos and tracks)
- Apple Music classic-rock consumption remains high



Radiohead

Spotify numbers alone underrate them while retaining strong intellectual and cultural capital across platforms.

- Apple Music's album-centric listening favours Radiohead
- YouTube Music consumption is steady but less viral

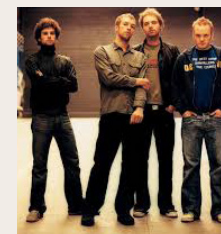
Interpretative Notes

Many legacy bands including Queen, Fleetwood Mac, AC/DC, The Beatles still dominate due to their vast, historically established catalogues and inclusion on curated playlists. Some artists such as RHCP and Coldplay straddle rock/pop classifications but are included based on rock playlists and listener self-identification in metrics. Publicly available follower counts for bands on platforms like Apple Music or Spotify are limited. While downloads and shares are meaningful for artist reach, global streaming reporting generally does not publicly disclose these per band. Proxy indicators like playlist saves, viral chart inclusion, and cross-platform presence suggest engagement but lack standardised global data to quantify them here.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS



Arctic Monkeys



Coldplay



Foo Fighters



Green Day



Pearl Jam





TOMY PALAKKAL OFM



We live in resistance to our own becoming. Like trees that might wish to hold their blossoms forever, or rivers that dream of standing still, we cling to single versions

of ourselves—afraid that change will erase who we are. Yet nature offers a different teaching: that transformation is not the enemy of identity but its very essence. We are in constant conversation.

Human: I grow weary of change. Each season alters me, and I fear that nothing in me endures.

Nature: Tell me, what do you believe should endure?

H: My sense of self—the one I recognise. The one that feels coherent and whole.

N: And is that self the same in joy and in grief?

H: No. In joy I expand; in grief I contract.

N: Then which of these is the true self?

H: Perhaps neither entirely. Or perhaps both.

N: If both can be you, why must one exclude the other?

H: Because I long for permanence. Spring feels right—light, hopeful, unburdened. Why can I not remain there?

N: What happens to a blossom that refuses to yield to fruit?

H: It withers.

N: Then is remaining in spring an act of preservation or of quiet destruction?

H: I see your point. Yet summer overwhelms me. Its demands are relentless. I feel exposed by my own growth.

N: Is growth gentle?

H: No. It stretches, burns, and insists.

N: Then why do you ask life to grow without intensity?

H: Because intensity exhausts me.

N: And does exhaustion mean error, or merely participation?

H: Perhaps participation. Yet autumn troubles me most. Things fall away—relationships, roles, certainties. I feel diminished.

N: When leaves fall, is the tree diminished?

H: No. It prepares for survival.

N: Then could loss be a form of preparation?

H: It could be. Still, winter feels like erasure. Silence replaces meaning. Who am I when nothing moves?

N: When movement ceases, does existence cease?

H: No. It waits.

N: Then is waiting emptiness, or discipline?

H: Discipline—though it feels like abandonment.

N: Is it abandonment, or protection from premature growth?

H: I'd not thought of it that way.

N: Tell me—do you wish life to end, or to continue?

H: To continue.

N: Then why resist the cycle that makes continuation possible?

H: Because falling feels like failure.

N: Does the fruit fail when it returns to the earth?

H: No. It completes its purpose.

N: Then might your falling be completion rather than defeat?

H: If that is so, then identity is not something I keep, but something I pass through.

N: Or something that ripens with each passage.

H: Then what is wisdom?

N: Not choosing a season, but allowing each to speak. Not clinging to form, but trusting rhythm.

H: And what is a meaningful life?

N: One that blooms without fear, labours without resentment, releases without bitterness, and rests without shame.

H: Then I am not broken because I change?

N: You would be broken if you did not.

H: I understand now—to become is not to lose myself, but to meet myself again and again.

N: And each meeting will be truer than the last.

The dialogue ends, but the lesson continues. We carry within us the four seasons—the exuberance of spring, the intensity of summer, the letting go of autumn, the silence of winter. Each has its place, each its purpose. To honour one is not to reject the others, but to recognise that wholeness comes not from constancy but from completeness. We are not diminished by our seasons; we are made whole by them. And in accepting this, we discover that identity is not a fixed destination we must defend, but a living river we must trust—always moving, always changing, always returning us to ourselves, renewed.

Ten must watch Indian films of 2025

NITHIN G TOM

Indian cinema continues to captivate us as profoundly as ever. In 2025, regional industries led the charge with innovative content, while Bollywood saw a significant resurgence, delivering some of its best work in years. As Malayalam cinema continues its incredible dream run, other industries are rapidly catching up with bold, novel ideas. Here are the ten Indian films from 2025 that took me through a true gamut of emotions.

1 **Homebound** (Hindi) Director: Neeraj Ghaywan Available on Netflix

After a long hiatus, India has finally struck gold with an official Academy Award submission that successfully made the shortlist. *Homebound* is more than just a film; it is a mirror reflecting the everyday reality of the common man in India. Neeraj Ghaywan brilliantly portrays the apathy of leadership toward the struggles of ordinary citizens. This isn't just a movie that makes you cry—it's one that will make you bawl.

2 **Ponman** (Malayalam) Director: Jotish Shankar Available on JioHotstar

Arguably the best Malayalam film of the year, *Ponman* offers everything a cinephile could ask for. It is a modern David versus Goliath story that tackles the societal scourge of dowry, gold obsession, and toxic masculinity. Basil Joseph delivers a career-best performance in this work of art, which is pure gold.

3 **Feminichi Fathima** (Malayalam) Director: Fasil Muhammed Available on ManoramaMax

This film is a masterclass in how to deliver a message without being loud, dramatic, or preachy. Using subtle humour found in daily life, it conveys a profound social message. Fasil Muhammed's impeccable debut leaves us eagerly anticipating his future projects.

4 **Lokah Chapter 1: Chandra** (Malayalam) Director: Dominic Arun Available on JioHotstar

Indian superhero movies rarely felt this original and rooted in our culture. Dominic Arun and his team bring magic on screen with this masterfully written superhero movie that blends the folklore of Kerala with technically superior film making. The cinematic universe established here holds immense potential if future installments are executed with the same level of finesse.

5 **Bison Kaalamaadan** (Tamil) Director: Mari Selvaraj Available on Netflix

Mari Selvaraj is cementing his status as one of the most vital voices in Tamil cinema. This sports drama, layered with complex themes of caste and politics, is exceptionally crafted. Dhruv Vikram delivers a breakthrough performance, frequently echoing the raw intensity of his father, Vikram.



6 **Eko** (Malayalam) Director: Dinjith Ayyathan Expected soon on OTT

Writer Bahul Ramesh is making the industry sit up and take notice. His *Animal Trilogy* comes to a brilliant conclusion with *Eko*. Bahul has mastered the craft of building suspense, utilizing impressive world-building skills to keep the audience hooked until the final frame.

7 **Mithya** (Kannada) Director: Sumanth Bhat Available on Amazon Prime Video

Kannada cinema has found its footing this year with gems like *Mithya*. It is a compelling exploration of the grief and trauma experienced by an eleven-year-old boy. Sumanth Bhat offers a refreshing alternative for audiences tired of the clichéd commercial cinema that has attempted to mimic the success of *KGF* and *Kantara*.

8 **Bad Girl** (Tamil) Director: Varsha Bharath Available on JioHotstar

When titans like Vetrimaaran and Anurag Kashyap collaborate to produce a film, expectations are high—and *Bad Girl* more than meets the challenge. Varsha Bharath helms this beautiful story with splendid sensitivity. Shanthipriya, playing the protagonist's mother, is a true delight to watch.

9 **Vash Level 2** (Gujarati) Director: Krishnadev Yagnik Available on Netflix

The first fifteen minutes of this movie is something that might remind you of classic Korean or Thai horror films. Indian horror is evolving rapidly, and *Vash Level 2* is proof. By mining the fertile ground of superstition and black magic, it creates a terrifying experience that is sure to leave you with nightmares.

10 **The Girlfriend** (Telugu) Director: Rahul Ravindran Available on Netflix

Telugu cinema redeems itself with this perfect antidote to the "Arjun Reddy" school of thought. Rashmika Mandanna delivers a powerhouse performance. Rahul Ravindran's innovative use of horror tropes to depict a woman trapped in a toxic relationship is a stroke of brilliance that highlights his craft.

Special mentions

Superboys of Malegaon (Hindi), *Humans in the Loop* (Hindi/Kurukh), *Ronth* (Malayalam) and *Tourist Family* (Tamil)



Between Bells: Seven Books Worth Your Break

CELESTE CHARLES

At the start of the year, I promised myself a book a week, though I quickly realised how far I was from keeping it, caught in doomscrolling and the brain rot I happily subscribe to. No excuse could save the new editions, borrowed volumes, and hand-me-downs from gathering dust. Still, I arrived at seven books that truly lingered with me. I skipped obvious bestsellers, favouring those I had to scroll, search for, and stumble upon—books that surprised me and made me pause. Quick to read yet rich in reflection, they offered a detour from academia: conversations rendered in language and ideas that refused to leave my mind.

1 **Heart Lamp** Banu Mushtaq (translated by Deepa Bhasthi)

Heart Lamp by Banu Mushtaq, translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhasthi, is a quietly powerful collection of short stories rooted in the everyday lives of a South Indian Muslim community. Rather than relying on dramatic plots, Mushtaq focuses on domestic spaces, family tensions, and the subtle ways patriarchy, religion, and socio-economic hierarchies shape women's lives. Many stories centre on wives and daughters whose desires are constrained or dismissed, revealing how suffering is normalised within familiar social structures. A key strength lies in Bhasthi's translation, which resists smoothing out cultural specificities, preserving the multilingual, oral texture of the original. Quiet, observant, and deeply humane, *Heart Lamp* offers intimate insights into a literary world rarely encountered in translation.

2 **Courtesans Don't Read Newspapers** Anil Yadav (translated by Vaibhav Sharma)

Anil Yadav's *Courtesans Don't Read Newspapers*, translated from Hindi by Vaibhav Sharma, exposes the machinery of respectability and the deceptions it produces. The eponymous novella turns the journalistic gaze inside out, showing how newspapers deny voice to the courtesans of Manduadih even as they thrive on their sexuality and labour in the name of public morality. Other stories echo this inverted world through flooded slums, riot-wishful prayers, and middle-class anxieties, where irony replaces resolution. Sharma's translation carries over the musicality and contradictions of the Hindi without flattening difference. What remains is not closure but a lingering bitterness about how power decides who is seen, silenced, or allowed to remain "decent."

3 **Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism** Amanda Montell

Cultish examines how language, rather than ideology alone, sustains belief, loyalty, and submission across groups ranging from canonical cults like Jonestown to multi-level marketing schemes, influencer cultures, fitness communities, and political movements. Montell traces recurring linguistic patterns: euphemism, insider vocabulary, moral absolutism, and the suppression of doubt. The book is not a scholarly treatise nor an exhaustive taxonomy; instead, it operates as a cultural and linguistic survey that widens the definition of "cult" to include socially sanctioned coercion. While its scope occasionally outpaces its analytical depth, *Cultish* leaves readers side-eyeing motivational slogans, "community" rhetoric, and anyone who insists this is a safe space for questions while discouraging them.



4 **Embroideries** Marjane Satrapi

"To speak behind others' backs is the ventilator of the heart." *Embroideries* opens with this line, and everything follows its spirit. Satrapi structures the graphic novel as fragmented, overlapping conversations among women gathered around tea in a Tehran drawing room, allowing gossip, memory, and confession to replace conventional plot. Stories interrupt one another, opinions clash, laughter undercuts tragedy, and no single voice claims authority. Satrapi's spare black-and-white drawings heighten intimacy, capturing pauses, glances, and laughter as meaning accumulates between panels. By embracing the broken rhythm of oral storytelling, *Embroideries* turns dismissed chatter into a powerful narrative mode revealing how women survive, adapt, and quietly resist imposed constraints.

5 **Cubbon Park: The Green Heart of Bengaluru** Roopa Pai

This book offers a compact, engaging history of Cubbon Park, a space both geographically and emotionally central to Bengaluru. Organised into short, accessible sections and illustrated with evocative black-and-white photographs, it traces the park's colonial origins, cultural life, and lived-in present through people, performances, trees, and everyday users. Moving from Mysore royals and British administrators to Shakespeare in the Park and tabebuia blooms, the narrative balances anecdote with insight. Beneath its nostalgic warmth lies a warning: once 300 acres and now reduced to 197, Cubbon Park is a fragile public commons. The book makes a quiet but firm case for vigilance, reminding readers that to love the park is to protect it.

6 **The Midnight T timetable** Bora Chung

Bora Chung returns after *Cursed Bunny* by making the ordinary deeply suspicious. *The Midnight T timetable* unfolds inside a research institute that functions as a governing metaphor: part haunted house, part disciplinary space, where cursed objects, looping corridors, and strict schedules regulate movement and meaning. Chung's deceptively plain prose folds labour precarity, institutional power, and trauma into ghostly logic; the night watchman's timetable reads like a Foucauldian script of surveillance. The horror is cheeky, dry, and absurd, yet politically alert: ghosts feel less like intrusions than residues of systems already at work. Uneven yet unsettling, the collection lingers as a reminder that today's haunted houses come with ID cards and HR-approved silence.

7 **Burma Chronicles** Guy Delisle

"Oh, right! I almost forgot! We're under dictatorship here." This line sets the tone for Guy Delisle's *Burma Chronicles*. Spending a year in Myanmar with his young son while his wife works for Médecins Sans Frontières, Delisle turns everyday experiences—blackouts, water shortages, removing shoes—into a lens on life under military rule. His deceptively simple illustrations and self-deprecating humour capture the quiet resilience of ordinary citizens. From puppet shows to jade mines, censored newspapers to restricted neighbourhoods, Delisle balances intimacy, irony, and political observation with precision, producing a quietly devastating and deeply human portrait of life under oppression.



The Soul of Nature

I think of *soul* as anything's ultimate meaning which is held within. When we meet anything at that level, we will respect, protect, and love it.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

The modern and postmodern self largely lives in a world of its own construction, and it reacts for or against its own human-made ideas. While calling ourselves intelligent, we've lost touch with the natural world. As a result, we've lost touch with our own souls. I believe we can't access our full intelligence and wisdom without some real connection to nature.

My spiritual father Francis of Assisi spent many days, weeks, and even months walking the roads of Umbria and letting nature teach him. Francis knew and respected creation, calling animals, sun, moon, and even the weather and the elements his brothers and sisters. Through extended time in nature, Francis became intimately connected with non-human living things and came to recognise that the natural world was also imbued with soul.

Without such soul recognition and mirroring, we are alienated and separated from nature, and quite frankly, ourselves. Without a visceral connection to the soul of nature, we will not know how to love or respect our own soul. Instead, we try various means to get God and people to like or accept us because we never experience radical belonging to the world itself. We're trying to say to ourselves and others, "I belong here. I matter." Of course, that's true! But contrived and artificial means will never achieve that divine purpose. We are naturally healed in this world when we know things center to center, subject to subject, and soul to soul.

I think of soul as anything's ultimate meaning which is held within. Soul is the blueprint inside of every created thing telling it what it is and what it can become. When we meet anything at that level, we will respect, protect, and love it.

Many human beings simply haven't found their own blueprint or soul, so they cannot see it anywhere else. Like knows like! When we only meet reality at the external level, we do not meet our own soul and we have no ability to meet the soul of anything else either. We clergy would have done much better to encourage Christians to discover their souls instead of "save" them.

While everything has a soul, in many people it seems to be dormant, disconnected, and ungrounded. They are not aware of the inherent truth, goodness, and beauty shining through everything. If God is as great, glorious, and wonderful as religions claim, then wouldn't such a God would make such "wonderfulness" universally available? Surely, such connection and presence are as freely available as the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Making a Morning Connection

On spring and summer mornings, I love to go out early with my little cup of coffee and walk through my garden with my dog Venus. If I can somehow let my "roots and tendrils" reconnect me with the "givens" of life, as Bill Plotkin calls them—not the ideas about life, but the natural world, what is—I experience the most extraordinary grounding, connection, healing, and even revelation. One little hopping bird can do me in!

Many of us have a sense of self or identity created by our relationship to ideas, thoughts, and words. We can spend our whole lives rattling around inside of ideas, rarely touching upon what is right in front of us, when it's the "givens" that heal us and reconnect us to Reality. We spend a majority of our time interacting



with thoughts and opinions about everything. We're almost entirely fixated on our computers, smart phones, news feeds, email, social media, and selfies. This is, of course, an "unnatural" world of our own creation. We don't even realise that we've disconnected ourselves from the only world that people lived in for most of human history.

One of the foundational reasons for our sense of isolation and unhappiness is that we have lost our contact with nature. In the natural world, there is no theology to agree or disagree with. We don't have to identify as Presbyterian or Lutheran, male or female, conservative or progressive. There is nothing to argue about. It is in contact with all the "givens"—that which has been available to every creature God has created since the Big Bang—that something is indeed given. I guess in the spiritual world we would call it *grace*.

This is not some New Age idea. In Scripture we read, "What can be known about God is perfectly plain, since God has made it plain. Ever since God created the world, God's everlasting power and divinity, however invisible, have been there for the mind to see in the things that God has made" (Romans 1:19–20). Every day, we are given a natural way to reconnect with God and it doesn't depend upon intelligence, education, or a religion. It depends on really being present and connecting with the soul. If we can find a way to be present to the "givens," especially the natural "givens," I believe we can be happy.

The Stones Cry Out

Marya Grathwohl, describes an experience with a longtime friend driving up Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains: Dorie, who had distanced herself from organised religion, nevertheless coins the phrase "rock rosary" to express the sequence of

life mysteries locked in the rock layers: reptiles, forests, amphibians, fish, bodies of cooperating cells, photosynthesis. As the mountain reveals the splendor of life's evolution, I find myself asking, "Who are we human beings? Within this array of life-forms, what is our role, our gift to Earth?" Then near the summit, we abruptly round a cliff. Another sign: Precambrian, 2.9 billion years ago. Granite. And my soul slams into awe....

We find a pull-off. I race back to the cliff and near the sign pick up something small. A stone, heavy for its size, glistens with quartz. I hold it close to my lips. "You," I whisper, "you witnessed life's genius in creating photosynthesis." I stand silent, listening. Time stops. In my hands is a scripture, a stone crying out. I recall that it was a mere two thousand years ago that Jesus said, "If the people are silent, the stones will cry out."

Earth, a rocky planet, cries out. Earth cries out against global mass extinction of species, the destruction of human-caused climate change, and the prowess of militarised and industrialised humanity to poison and destroy Earth's support systems: soil, air, and water.

Here is my question for the mountain. How do we learn to become contributing members of the pageant of life, of this ongoing story of a communion of species, subjects in their own right?

A Pattern of Reciprocity

Robin Wall Kimmerer, Potawatomi botanist, writes of our place in nature: In the indigenous view, humans are viewed as somewhat lesser beings in the democracy of species. We are referred to as the younger brothers of Creation,

so like younger brothers we must learn from our elders. Plants were here first and have had a long time to figure things out. They live both above and below ground and hold the earth in place. Plants know how to make food from light and water. Not only do they feed themselves, but they make enough to sustain the lives of all the rest of us. Plants are providers for the rest of the community and exemplify the virtue of generosity, always offering food....

Many indigenous peoples share the understanding that we are each endowed with a particular gift, a unique ability.... It is understood that these gifts have a dual nature, though: a gift is also a responsibility. If the bird's gift is

song, then it has a responsibility to greet the day with music. It is the duty of birds to sing and the rest of us receive the song as a gift.

Author Debra Rienstra considers the destructive role humanity has often played in relation to the earth: If humans didn't exist at all, life would continue

on earth. Let's not flatter ourselves: biologically speaking, the earth does not need us to tend and care for it. Life on earth existed for eons before we arrived. Have we made the earth better by our arrival? "Stewarding" and "caring" are only necessary because humans take things from the earth to survive.

When we love something, we grant it soul, we see its soul, and we let its soul touch ours. We must love something deeply to know its soul (*anima*). Before the resonance of love, we are largely inattentive to the meaning, value, and power of ordinary things to "save" us and help us live in union with the Source of all being. In fact, until we can appreciate and even delight in the soul of other things, even trees and animals, we probably haven't discovered our own souls either.

**Earth, a rocky planet, cries out.
Earth cries out against global mass
extinction of species, the destruction
of human-caused climate change,
and the prowess of militarised and
industrialised humanity to poison
and destroy Earth's support systems:
soil, air, and water.**

CLIMATE CHANGE AND MENTAL HEALTH

MOURAVI

Climate change is increasingly being recognised for its effects on both the environment and mental health. As extreme weather events and environmental degradation worsen, many people experience increased anxiety, depression, and stress. This article investigates the connections between climate change and mental health, emphasising the critical need to address both environmental and psychological resilience in our response to the global crisis.

Direct Effects of Natural Disasters: Natural disasters, exacerbated by climate change, cause immediate trauma. Hurricanes, floods, and wildfires can result in PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Survivors frequently experience the loss of loved ones, homes, and livelihoods, which exacerbates feelings of grief and helplessness.

Chronic Stress and Anxiety: The ongoing threats posed by climate change cause chronic stress. Concerns about future environmental conditions can lead to eco-anxiety. This anxiety can be crippling, impairing daily functioning and quality of life.

Displacement and Migration: Climate change is driving migration by displacing communities due to rising sea levels, droughts, and other environmental changes. Displacement can cause feelings of instability, loss of identity, and social disconnection.

Vulnerable Populations

Certain groups are more vulnerable to the mental health implications of climate change, including: Indigenous communities, which rely heavily on their environment for cultural practices and sustenance, may experience significant disruptions to their way of life. Low-income families may lack the resources to adapt to or recover from climate-related disasters, which increases their stress and anxiety. Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable to the anxiety caused by climate change, which can have an impact on their development and future prospects.

Providing access to mental health resources is critical. This includes counselling services, community support groups, and training mental health professionals to address climate-related issues.

Creating resilient communities through engagement and collective action can help people feel more empowered. Community gardens, local climate initiatives, and support networks can help alleviate feelings of helplessness.

Raising awareness about the mental health effects of climate change can encourage people to seek help and support. Educational programmes can also teach coping strategies for managing eco-anxiety.

Advocating for policies addressing both climate change and mental health is critical. Integrating mental health considerations into climate action plans can help ensure that affected communities receive comprehensive support.

The intersection of global climate change and mental health is an urgent issue that requires attention. We can build healthier, more resilient communities by acknowledging the psychological effects of environmental change and prioritising mental health in climate action.



Postal Stamps 2025

TOM JOHN OFM

Though surface mail is on a steep decline, postal stamps are still in popularity. In 2025, postal stamps featured the Maha Kumbh, cinema legends, and various Indian statehood anniversaries. Key releases include the 125th anniversary of Kodaikanal Solar Observatory and 50 years of Sikkim statehood. International Posts celebrated themes such as , the Year of the Snake, Pope Francis, 80 years of the close of the second World War, and so on. Here are some of the more popular ones.

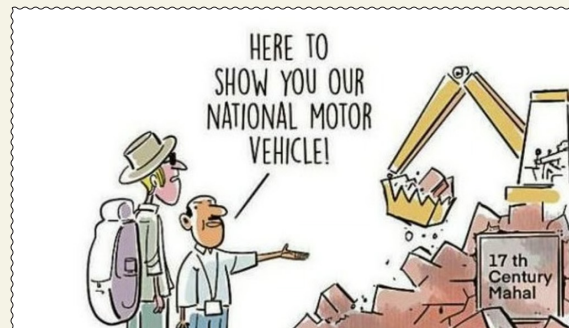
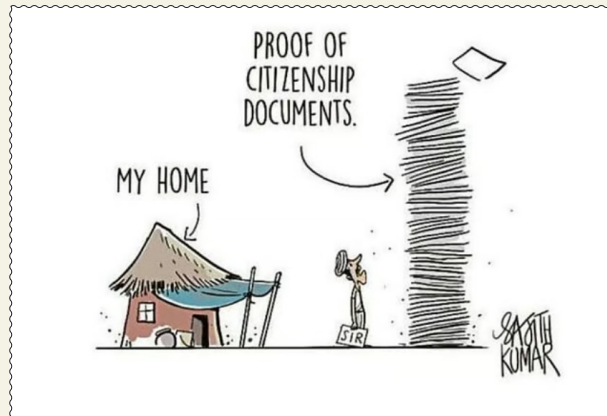
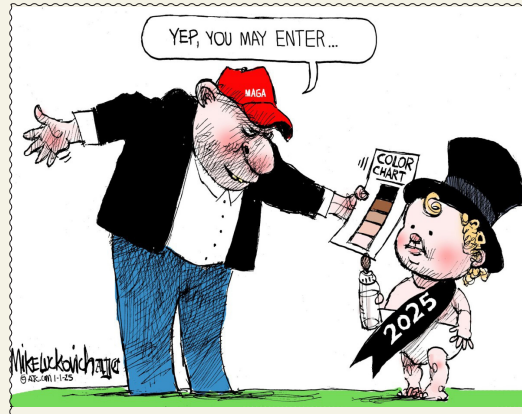


POLITICAL CARTOONS 2025: SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

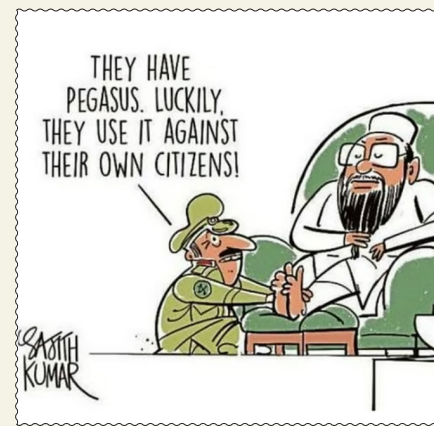
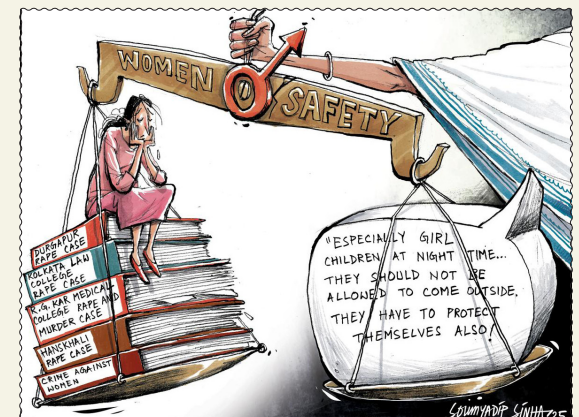
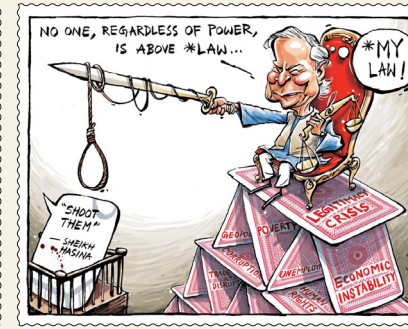
SAJIP MATHEW OFM

Political cartoons are a vital form of democratic expression, using humour and visual metaphor to challenge power more immediately than written commentary. A single image can crystallise complex political issues, cut through partisan noise, and transcend

literacy barriers. Through exaggeration, satire, and symbolism, cartoonists expose hypocrisy, question official narratives, and hold the powerful to account. *Together* brings notable Indian political cartoons that have made us think, stand up, and speak up.



Sources:
The Hindu,
Deccan
Herald, The
Times of
India, The
Enterprise
Journal



“Writing Is a Way to Understand Myself and the World”



Dr Sweta Kumari was born and raised in the quiet town of Rajauli in Bihar, Nawada district, a place where everyday life moved in harmony with folklore, storytelling, and community rhythms. She completed her schooling at a Hindi-medium government school before moving to Magadh University, Bodhgaya, where she earned her under graduation, post-graduation with a gold medal, and later PhD in English. Today she is poet and a cultural activist. Here Dr Sweta is in conversation with Dr PERUGU RAMAKRISHNA.



PR: Could you tell us about your family and background?

SK: I come from a small, progressive, and deeply supportive family including my parents, two sisters, and my only younger brother. Their faith in education, individuality, and creative freedom has been the quiet force behind my journey. Growing up in Bihar's culturally vibrant atmosphere, I developed a natural affinity for language and storytelling. That early exposure, combined with my academic grounding, shaped my identity as a bilingual poet, short-story writer, editor, interviewer, and cultural activist. Literature has been both my inheritance and my compass, guiding me steadily through my creative and intellectual life.

PR: How did your journey as a writer and poet begin? What inspired you?

SK: Writing came to me long before I fully understood the meaning of the word “poet.” I still remember the night it all began during my first year of graduation. It was past one in the morning, sleep refusing to come, and my mind restless with questions about life and the future. Almost instinctively, I picked up my pen and opened my diary. By the time my thoughts settled, five poems had poured out of me. I stared at the pages in disbelief, as though I had discovered a voice within me that had been waiting quietly to be heard. From that night onwards, writing became a

way to understand myself and the world. My inspiration has always arisen from ordinary moments, human emotions, and the beauty and ache woven into everyday life. Poems like *Penning Down the Unsaid: An Alleviation* and *Knowing Our Father* later won awards and reached readers across platforms, affirming that words written in solitude can resonate deeply with others. What began as an unplanned outpouring has evolved into a lifelong journey that continues to define who I am, both on and off the page.

PR: Which genre of literature do you connect with the most? Why?

SK: I mostly connect to poetry, because this form grants me freedom—the freedom to feel deeply, to question boldly, to break rules, and to express thoughts that often remain unspoken. Poetry, in particular, allows me to explore the layered terrain of memory, femininity, silence, resistance, and personal transformation. It is a space where intellect and intuition meet, where the personal expands into the universal.

PR: Are you a bilingual writer/poet? In which language do you feel more comfortable writing?

SK: Yes, I am a bilingual poet and writer, working in both Hindi and English. Hindi connects me to my roots—its rhythms are intimate, earthy, and instinctive. English offers expansiveness and subtlety, allowing me to explore ideas with nuance and reflection. I feel at home in both languages, and the choice often depends on the emotion or theme I wish to express. Some feelings arrive naturally in Hindi, while others seek the quiet discipline of English.

PR: How many books have been published so far? What is the soul of your writing?

SK: I have published around 16 books so far including poetry and research anthologies. Nevertheless, numerous poems, interviews, book chapters, and research writings have been published across journals and anthologies. The soul of my writing lies in truth, empathy, and human vulnerability. I write to illuminate what often remains hidden; unspoken emotions, quiet griefs, small triumphs, and the inner lives of people who rarely find a voice. Writing is both self-exploration and a bridge toward others.

PR: What is poetry to you? Please provide your own definition.

SK: For me, poetry emerges during moments when I am entangled within my own thoughts and emotions. Writing lines in those moments brought a sense of relief and joy, and I realised that, “just as music soothes the mind, poetry heals the soul”. Poetry is the language of the soul before it becomes speech. It is where emotions breathe before becoming thoughts, the silence between breaths, the memory that refuses to fade, and truths that cannot be spoken in straight lines. Writing allows me to understand and articulate my feelings, connect with my inner self, and share experiences with others. It is the most honest dialogue between the mind and the heart—a space where memory, emotion, and imagination converge, bridging the inner and outer worlds.

PR: What are the current trends in Hindi and English literature, in your view?

SK: In both Hindi and English literature, I see a powerful shift toward authenticity and self-representation. Writers today are reclaiming narratives that have long been overlooked. In English literature, especially Indian English writing, themes of identity, gender, mental health, migration, and socio-political consciousness are becoming central. Hybrid forms including prose-poetry, autofiction, and experimental narratives are also emerging. In Hindi literature, there is a resurgence of marginalised voices, women's experiences, and socially rooted realism. Digital platforms have democratised expression, allowing writers from non-traditional backgrounds to be heard. Both languages are moving toward inclusivity, emotional honesty, and bold storytelling, reflecting the complexity of our times.

PR: Please tell us about the awards you have received.

SK: Over the years, I have been honoured with several prestigious national and international awards, reflecting my contributions to literature, research, and cultural activism including Nobel Laureate Kabi Rabindranath Tagore Award, 2020, Vrindavan, Mathura, World English Writers Union Film and Literature International Indian Award, 2020, Hyderabad, Literoma Laureate – Best Aspiring Author, 2020, Newtown, Kolkata, Rashtriya Ratna Award, 2019, Mumbai, Uttar Pradesh Ratna Samman, 2019, Lucknow,

Vivekananda Award – Best Youth of the Year, 2019, Patna, Outstanding Performance in Poetry Recitation, Literati Council, India, 2019, Mathura (International Conference on Widow's Problems), Best Budding Poet of the Year, 2019, and others.

PR: Please quote a few of your favourite lines from your poems.

SK: Here are some lines that continue to resonate deeply with me:

Where does the Soul Find Peace?

*Where the mind is unfettered from the
The cacophony of fleeting steps;
And the heart is uncaged in the digital age?
Where knowledge soars, but wisdom still guides;
And truth is bright through vast technological surge?*

*Where progress pace with balanced grace;
And not squashing the solace of life and the tender space?
Where the chorus of spinning wheels
do not silence the rhythm;
Of Nature's melody as modest and profound?*

*Where the power of creation steers with gentle care;
And the conscience wakes to the silent prayers?
Where the algorithm bows to the human spirit;
And the quest for meaning never ceases?*

Footprints of Tomorrow

*So many things I penned down,
Some embraced the pages,
Deep into the veins of paper,
And stayed with me-
Inked with the breath of my courage,
Irreversible as scars
Carved beneath the skin of memory.*

*Some words dissolved into silences,
As stars collapse into themselves,
Leaving only quiet behind,
Some effaced by time,
Some traced by trembling hands
Of fear and doubt-
And there are the Footprints
That the tide slowly reclaims.*

Life: A Pilgrimage Without Maps

*Life is a journey from breath to dust,
There is no blueprint, no destination,
Only a soft cries during birth,
And silently we go from the earth.
We enter the world with no queries
But we leave behind many stories,
Many unfinished epics in other's memories.*

*Life is no straight path,
But a spiral-like Dante's descent,
where each turn is a trial, each descent is a mirror.
We climb, like Sisyphus, blindfolded,
Carrying the burden of meaning,
Only to realise-like Camus,
That rebellion itself may be ecstasy
Each creaking step leads not to certainty
But to windows,
Brief epiphanies of agonise, love or wonder.*

The Walls Within

*What comes out of
A wilted soul,
The language I knew
Could not communicate.*

*I speak today,
What I never knew,
Beneath the shadowed shroud,
My heart whispers my bliss and woes.*

*A symphony of silence,
In the weary heart,
And my passion finds solace,
In mended hope and hushed talks.*

Though My Soul Smiles

*Taking my pen to scribble black and white
Melodious words in unrhymed lines.*

*In each blank pages, the solace hides
Words spill like tears through the canvas of life.*

*A rainbow of woe, snow at night
On a sunny day, the stars are not on my side.*

*Witnessing grey in an innocent mind
And the shadow whispers, waking life.*



LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR AT THE SERVICE OF THE ELDERLY POOR!



In 1839 in cold winter, Jeanne Jugan met and found God in the face of a poor elderly woman, blind and paralysed. She gave her bed to the poor woman, opened her home and her heart to her. Since then, many elderly people were welcomed by Jeanne Jugan and her daughters who are called "Little Sisters of the Poor" present all over the world in 32 countries. Jeanne said, "It is so good to be poor, to have nothing and to count on God for everything." She literally lived her saying and taught her daughters to trust in God's divine Providence.

**"Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me."
Would you like to take care of Jesus in the elderly poor?**



**If you hear the call to follow Jesus in the footsteps of Saint Jeanne Jugan,
COME AND SEE!**

Little Sisters of the Poor

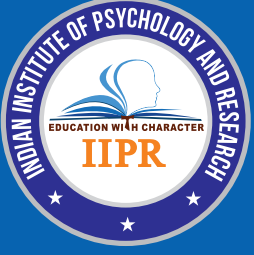
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