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Finding Independence in Bengaluru

Anamica Vinod

As one of India's largest destinations for interstate migration, Bengaluru attracts young people seeking their first taste of independent urban life. For Hanan Salim, a final-year undergraduate student who moved from Ernakulam, the city initially felt unsettling, shaped by popular narratives that portray it as being closely associated with nightlife and party culture.

What stood out to her after moving, however, was the degree of independence among students. She observed that many stayed out late and lived on their own, making the city feel "more adult and less monitored." Such freedom, she said, would have felt alien back home, where family supervision remained constant, and independence was tightly regulated.

First-time Independence and Responsibility

For many students, moving to a metro city brings a sudden mix of freedom and responsibility, as they begin navigating daily life without the safety net of parental oversight. Expressing concern about how abruptly young adults are exposed to choices they had little access to earlier, Sunandha PS, a homemaker whose son has been studying in Bengaluru for two years, acknowledged that "too much independence too soon" can be startling.

This concern, however, is not always framed as a lack of trust in young people. Offering a broader perspective, Diana Joseph, Managing Trustee of the Fourth Wave



The future is young

Allen George Easo

Foundation and the mother of a student in Bengaluru, argued that responsibility cannot rest solely on young adults. While freedom can expose students to the risk of making bad decisions, she pointed out that many are expected to manage independence in an environment that may be unsafe, often without being equipped with emotional resilience. "Children are often not taught to say no at home," Joseph said. "So how can we expect them to suddenly say no once they are outside?"

Peer Pressure and the Need to Belong

For students living away from home, peer groups often become a primary source of belonging and guidance. In the absence of familiar

authority figures, friendships take on greater importance and shape how young people understand independence and decision-making.

Joseph described the need to belong as a powerful force during young adulthood, arguing that the pressure to fit in peaks in cities like Bengaluru, where students from varied social and cultural backgrounds converge.

Adding to this, Sherine Deepak, a Communicative English trainer who has sent all three of her children to study in Bengaluru, emphasised that peer pressure, rather than the city itself, often determines how young people respond to freedom. Exposure to bad choices and opportunities to make mistakes exists everywhere, she said, but it is the social circles that influence whether independence con-

tributes to growth or leads to harm.

Bengaluru from the Inside

For those students who call the city home, the idea that Bengaluru alone changes young people feels reductive. Many argue that the city is unfairly reduced to its nightlife, parties, and popular portrayals, while its everyday realities are overlooked.

Interacting with peers who have moved from across the country, Aaron Nair, a final-year student at St. Joseph's University, said the changes he observed were less about the city shaping behaviour and more about students living independently for the first time. Learning to manage finances, navigate relationships, and take re-

sponsibility for daily life, he noted, would occur in any city once young people move away from home.

Nair also rejected the idea of Bengaluru as uniquely permissive, stressing that what are often labelled as vices exist everywhere. What differs, he suggested, is the absence of constant monitoring, which makes personal choices more visible. For him, Bengaluru does not alter values but offers young people the space to discover who they already are.

Is it the City or the Lack of Restrictions?

Ultimately, the question of whether Bengaluru changes young people reveals more about societal discomfort with youth and independence than about the city itself. The transition to metropolitan life is unforgiving: independence, peer influence, and responsibility arrive simultaneously, often without the gradual adjustment young people experience at home.

Parents spoke less about mistrust and more about uncertainty, while students described learning to manage freedom rather than being consumed by it. For those who grew up in the city, Bengaluru is neither permissive nor dangerous by default. It is simply a space where choices become visible. In that sense, what is often described as change may instead be the discomfort of watching young people grow up in plain sight.

A Fractured Faith: The Spiritual Tug-of-war Defining Manipur's Future

Sneha Loitongbam

When dusk settles over Manipur's Imphal valley, families light incense in the south-west corner known as Sanamahi Kachin, with a small lamp lit for Lainingthou Sanamahi, the ancient 'King of the Household.' Yet in the same house, another set of incense is lit up on the small altar dedicated to Krishna.

The Meitei Hindu exists in a unique liminal space where they strive to maintain a localised faith while being pulled between ancestral roots of Sanamahism, their indigenous nature-worshipping religion, and the institutional gravity of Vaishnavism, a major tradition of Hinduism focusing on Lord Vishnu.

This daily blend reflects a fractured identity, forged by a 1732 event known as Puya Meithaba. At the time, King Garibniwaz, influenced by a preacher from the mainland, declared Hinduism the state religion. In the act of forced imposition, he ordered the burning of the Puyas, the sacred ancient texts containing Meitei history, philosophy, and genealogy.

"Our history was scattered, hidden in fragments by families who risked death to save what they believed in," explained Kamal Toijam, a prominent Manipuri author. This was not just a religious change, but a political strategy to defend against the Burmese by aligning with powerful Hindu neigh-

bours like the Ahom of Assam.

The Mangba System

Meitei Hinduism reshaped the traditional Hindu caste system into 'Mangba' (impure) and 'Sengba' (pure) categories, enforced by Bamons, the immigrant Brahmin priests.

The Meitei system was based on behaviour, unlike the rigid system from the mainland. "In Manipur, purity was a performance," said N Khuman, a Meitei history researcher, "you could be declared Mangba for eating certain meat and rise back to Sengba through a ritual by the Bamon, but his words could also turn you into an outcast," explaining how Bamons could 'purify' individuals and elevate them to Kshatriyas (Meitei Hindus).

This system created the Lois, a community of indigenous Meiteis who refused to convert or were cast out for social offenses. They are now a Scheduled Caste (SC) group under India's Constitution and have lived for generations preserving the Meitei Ariba (Old Meitei) customs.

A Syncretic Way of Living

Over time, Meitei Hindus developed syncretism, or the blending of different beliefs, as a means of survival. They adopted San-

amahi and Pakhangba, two brother-gods, in their rituals and beliefs. Pakhangba rules the State while Sanamahi rules the Household. In every Meitei household, even Brahmins, worship the Sanamahi for the health and prosperity of the family. "We ask Sanamahi's permission for births, weddings, and death," said Akham Ranibala, who is a practising Hindu Meitei.

The performance of Raas Leela, also depicts this balance. The story depiction of Krishna and Radha blends with fluid and circular steps borrowed from Lai Haraoba, an ancient Meitei festival that predated the arrival of Hinduism in Manipur.

Too Hindu, yet not Hindu Enough

The dual existence of Meitei Hindus left them in a state of cultural isolation, not fully accepted and caught between the two worlds. The revivalists (people who converted back to Sanamahism), also known as Meitei Marup, saw the Hindu Meitei as colonised. Toijam Enow, a practising Meitei Marup, states, "There may have been some good that came with Hinduism, but because of it, we've lost too much of what is truly ours."

On the other hand, Meitei Hindus encounter a different rejection while travelling in mainland cities. Often viewed as 'incomplete' Hin-



Raas Leela performance in Manipur

Nexplore Travel

dup despite their 300-year history of Vaishnavism. The inclusion of fish in their diet and lifestyle, as well as the integration of local deities, are some of the reasons.

Ranibala shared her experience while travelling in North India, "The mainland looks at us and sees tribals playing Hinduism; people simply couldn't believe that I was a Hindu."

ST Status Rift

The spiritual tug-of-war has moved into the halls of the government. Manipur is gripped with ethnic violence, partly fuelled by the Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, reserved quotas for indigenous groups, to safeguard valley lands amid population shifts, forest eviction, and Myan-

mar migrant fears, which led to 2023-2025 clashes with Kuki-Zo.

For centuries, Meiteis were categorised as Kshatriyas within the Hindu hierarchy. In the eyes of Indian law, one cannot be classified as both 'Caste Hindu' and 'Tribe' at the same time. Though many argue their tribal identity is an ancestral truth that predates Hinduism, revivalists suggest that they cannot authentically claim to be an indigenous tribe as long as they claim to be part of Hinduism.

As the state navigates an era of conflict, the lamp in the Sanamahi corner still burns. The fragments of history and stories guide the people to find their true identity and home, slowly but surely, as Toijam says, "when one questions themselves, they always have to go back to their roots."

When the Mind Wakes Up But the Body Doesn't

Rochelle Mary Marshall

At midnight, when the world around a person remains awake, but their body refuses, one in twelve people experience fear not just in their dreams. Sleep paralysis is a disturbing condition in which consciousness returns before control does. The brain wakes up, but the body is frozen, often accompanied by vivid hallucinations. Long dismissed as an unknown and personal terror, the condition has entered public dialogue, frequently rebranded online as encounters with a 'sleep demon.'

From Folklore to Diagnosis in India

According to a report published in the *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, experiences now clinically classified as sleep paralysis were historically interpreted in India through folklore and spirituality, rather than science. Feelings of being unable to move, pressure on the chest, and the feeling of an unseen presence were traditionally attributed to supernatural forces. Figures such as the chudail or dayaan in Indian folklore reflect how cultural belief systems shaped not only explanations of sleep paralysis, but also the intensity of fear surrounding it.

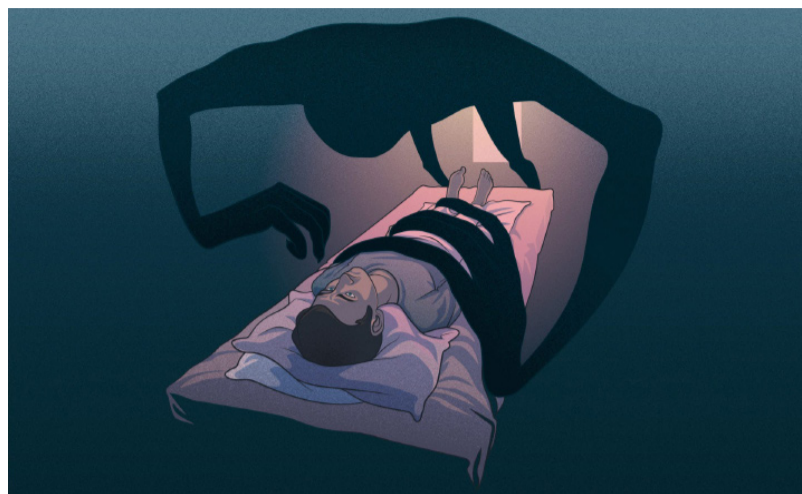
A Campus Phenomenon

Takes Shape

Among children and university students, sleep paralysis has shifted from a rarity to a shared campus experience. Stories are shared in hostel rooms, exam-week conversations, and late-night group chats. Research published in *Sleep*, a journal of the Sleep Research Society, shows that university students report higher rates of sleep paralysis than the general population. Irregular sleep cycles, academic stress, excessive screentime, and caffeine-boosted routines have created ideal circumstances for the condition to take over. Experts note that the condition itself is not increasing biologically, rather, the visibility has grown as students name and share experiences that earlier generations endured silently. In an academic culture that glorifies exhaustion, sleep paralysis has emerged as a hidden cost of burnout.

Why Children and Adolescents are More Vulnerable

Sleep paralysis in children and adolescents has a clear biological and stress-related basis, rooted in how the developing brain functions during sleep. "The developing brain spends more time in REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, and sleep paralysis occurs when REM atonia—temporary muscle paralysis—persists after waking," explained



The shadow many see but few can explain

Pinterest

Dr. Neha R, a pediatric emergency doctor at Manipal Hospital, Bengaluru. Because children experience more REM sleep, they are more prone to REM-wake overlap, especially during stressful periods such as examinations. Puberty further increases risk, as hormonal changes delay melatonin release, leading to chronic sleep disruption. Repeated episodes can cause anticipatory anxiety. "Children may begin to fear falling asleep and avoid sleep altogether," she said.

When Fear Becomes Supernatural

Sleep paralysis becomes significantly more traumatic when interpreted through a supernatural lens, said Keerthi P, Assistant Professor

in the Department of Psychology at Montfort College. "Sleep paralysis already involves loss of motor control, intense fear, and vivid hallucinations," she said. "When these sensations are perceived as external, supernatural threats, the fear responses intensify." According to cognitive appraisal theory, she explained that emotional impact depends on the interpretation rather than the event alone. Over time, recurrent episodes can alter how individuals perceive and relate to sleep itself, leading to anxiety, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviours that may contribute to insomnia and persistent sleep-related fear.

Living Inside the Episode

For those diagnosed with re-

current sleep paralysis, the experience is often described as deeply unsettling because it blurs the line between reality and threat. "Everything in the room looks the same—the bed, the walls, the ceiling—but it all feels wrong, heavy, and uncomfortable," said Schenelle Mary Philomena, a university student. "Your mind is screaming to move, but you're completely stuck," she said. To manage the condition, she follows a structured treatment plan that includes regulated sleep schedules, reduced screen exposure before bedtime, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and grounding techniques to stay calm during episodes. "Understanding what is happening medically has helped," she added, "but learning how to ground myself during an episode is what truly makes it manageable."

The Experiences that Remain Undiagnosed

For many, sleep paralysis remains a frightening but unnamed experience. Yumiko Alex, a university student who has not received a formal diagnosis, described feeling "as if something was holding me down," despite being fully conscious. Experts note that many cases remain undiagnosed, as individuals dismiss these episodes as bad dreams or stress-related events, delaying medical understanding and intervention.

Delaying Parenthood: Why Young Urban Indians Rethink Family

Jencilin Elisabeth J

When Parenthood Feels Less Like a Desire and More Like a Risk

At 23, Tenzin Lhamu, a single working woman, is already certain that children are not part of her immediate future. Living in a city and just beginning her career, her decision feels less emotional and more practical.

"With rising living costs, shrinking resources, and an uncertain future, I don't think it makes sense financially or professionally for me to have children," she says. For Tenzin, the choice is not about rejecting motherhood, but about recognising the risks that now come with it.

Across urban India, similar conversations are becoming increasingly common. Young adults are delaying parenthood, limiting family size, or choosing not to have children at all. While this shift is often described as a personal choice, it is shaped by economic pressure, gendered expectations, and weak support systems, more often than by changing attitudes alone.

Wanting Children, but Waiting for Stability

S Priya Kumar and her partner, both in their early 30s and living in Bengaluru, are still undecided about having a child. "We want to balance our careers and parent-

hood, but we can't predict how it will work in reality," Priya explains.

The high costs of housing, education, and healthcare weigh heavily on their discussions. With both partners working and no family nearby, the idea of raising a child without everyday support feels overwhelming.

"If we had stronger support systems or flexible work policies, the decision would feel less risky," she says. Their hesitation reflects a generation that is not rejecting parenthood outright, but postponing it in search of stability and security.

Urban Life and Shrinking Families

This pattern is visible beyond individual stories. Data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) shows that fertility decline is sharper in urban areas, particularly among educated women.

Rather than signalling a loss of family values, this trend reflects the realities of city life—limited space, high expenses, long working hours, and fragile community networks. For many whose lives are shaped by career goals and financial uncertainty, smaller families simply feel more manageable.

When Personal Hesitation Becomes a National Pattern

Taken together, these choices

point to a broader demographic shift. According to the United Nations Population Fund's State of World Population Report 2025, India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has declined to around 1.9 births per woman, below the replacement level of 2.1.

While this may appear to be just a statistic, it mirrors the lived experiences of young urban Indians. When thousands of individual decisions shaped by pressure and uncertainty come together, they form a visible national trend.

The Mental Weight of Deciding to be a Parent

Psychologist S Smita, who works closely with couples and families, says this hesitation is both economic and psychological. "Parenting today is seen as a lifelong investment emotionally, financially, physically, and socially," she explains.

Many women worry about the long-term impact of motherhood on their careers and independence. Smita notes that clients often fear losing control over their lives or repeating difficult family patterns they witnessed growing up.

Although shared parenting is more accepted today, the emotional and mental labour of caregiving still falls largely on mothers. This imbalance makes the decision to have a child feel heavier for women.

Then and Now: How Motherhood has Changed

The generational contrast becomes clearer through the experiences of M Jessie Florence, a mother in her early 50s with two grown daughters. Looking back, she says motherhood in her time came with fewer choices but clearer expectations.

"I carried most of the parenting responsibilities, especially in the early years," she recalls. Career breaks were common and often unavoidable, but living costs were lower.

"Women today are more aware, ambitious, and confident," Jessie says. "But parenting has also become more demanding. Costs are higher, support systems are weaker, and expectations from parents, especially mothers have increased."

A Personal Decision Shaped by Pressure

So, is India's falling fertility rate a matter of personal choice, or the result of social and economic pressure? The answer lies somewhere in between.

Rising costs, gender inequality, career insecurity, and the psychological weight of modern parenting all shape these decisions. As individual choices quietly add up to national trends, India's fertility decline becomes less a story of changing desires and more a reflection of the conditions under which those desires exist.

Until parenthood feels supported rather than risky, hesitation may continue to define one of this generation's most personal decisions.



Working women delay motherhood

Womenonbusiness

A Tree to Live: The Journey of India's Tree Man

Shanmitha SJ

The Nilgiris are often remembered for their cold weather and deep greenery. Mornings begin with mist settling over tea plantations, warm bakery Varkey and tea bring comfort to the cold weather, while cattle graze quietly on green slopes and narrow roads slowly fade into fog.

This is also the home of the 'Tree man of India,' Marimuthu Yoganathan. He is a government bus conductor in Coimbatore and an environmental activist. Yoganathan has dedicated all of his life planting trees. He grew up in the hills of Nilgiris, which instilled in him a love for plantations, animals, and the green forest that surrounded him. Nature and trees were his home and he started noticing when something began to change.



Marimuthu carrying saplings Tellmystery

When Green Began to Disappear

As a student studying in 12th grade, Yoganathan began witnessing large-scale tree felling. "They were cutting trees like it was nothing. The trunk would go one way, the branches another way," he stated. Trunks were transported to Mettupalayam for timber, while branches were burned as firewood in tea factories. Although this was all happening, yet no one questioned them. He realised if all this continued, the green hills would soon turn into concret.

When Silence was No Longer Possible

He believed that authorities would act and wrote letters to the District Collector and the forest department. There was no response from their side. When this failed, he chose direct action at the Darling junction in Kotagiri, where he began stopping the trucks carrying illegally cut wood. Even though he was beaten up by them, he continued to do it and slowly gained the public's attention and support. Several questions were raised and these

illegal activities came to light.

A Conductor with a Mission

In 2002 Yoganathan moved to Coimbatore, where he began working as a government bus conductor. He started distributing saplings along with bus tickets for five long years. Although he earned over rupees 60,000 a month, he spent over rupees 40,000 to buy sapling, soil and manure. Due to this, frequent arguments at home occurred with his family members. Relatives mocked him for spending so much on planting trees rather than saving money for his two daughters. His colleagues questioned his priorities. "Many times he would come home with only half the salary, it was difficult," says his wife Valarmathi. However, over time she understood him "Today, when people respect him, we feel proud," she adds.

When the World Finally Noticed

Yoganathan's letters to officials were unanswered, and government support remained largely absent. "The state government did nothing," he says. The year 2008 was a turning point when he re-



Marimuthu with APJ Abdul Kalam Yogutree.org

ceived the 'Eco Warrior' award from the Vice President of India, giving him national recognition. What mattered more than the award was the change in how people around him began to respond - the ones who previously mocked his choices, started respecting his work. One of the most memorable moments in his journey was his meeting with the former President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, wherein he spoke about his environmental work and shared a CD of his film Thagam (thirst).

A Tree to Live

The core value of Yoganathan's life is the simple belief of 'uyirvaa-

la oru maram' (A tree to live). He believes that as nature is destroyed, human life suffers alongside it. He urges every household to plant at least five trees, not for beauty but for survival. "If nature is good, humans will be good," he says.

Even after retirement and serious health challenges, Yoganathan's routine remains largely unchanged. Every Monday he visits schools, colleges and universities to speak to students about nature and environment protection, making them realise the importance of small actions. He strongly believes that reaching children is the key to long-term change. He has also utilized various creative forms to carry his message further, that is through films, poetry, and writing.

When he travels through Kotagiri, he often asks the driver to stop the vehicle, so he can look at the trees he planted years ago. He touches them, speaks to them and stands alongside them for a moment. In the world that measures success through recognition, his happiness still relies on a tree that survived on a hill and still breathes. He believes that he has already left behind something that would be ever-lasting.

Can Sustainability Survive in Our Fast Paced World?

Tanvi Harbola

A mother saves an empty chocolate box to store dal. A masterji turns leftover fabric into gloves. Craftspeople build designs no machine can repeat. Just like that, in Bhimanakone, a village in Karnataka's Shivamogga district, Mahalakshmi's days follow a quiet rhythm. She eats dal from an old chocolate tin, completes her household chores, and walks to Charaka - a women's weaving cooperative. There, among more than 300 rural women, she spins cotton, dyes it with plants, and weaves cloth in a space alive with looms, colour, and quiet pride.

Charaka supports nearly 600 women, producing 35,000 metres of naturally dyed handloom fabric every month. In Bengaluru, DESI shop sells these clothes and other handcrafted goods from rural artisans. The stores are quiet, earthy spaces. Women own the enterprise, share profits, charge affordably, and use dyes that do not poison their land. Charaka and DESI do not talk about sustainability, they practise it. Can we do the same in this fast tech driven world? Sustainability, at its core, is simple: using what we have today without stealing from tomorrow.

The Paradox

"Indians are the most sustainable civilization," says Neerja HS, founder of EcoMorphosys, a Bangalore-based sustainability consulting firm. "We have been sustainable for thousands of years. But when the West wanted to lead this conversation, the entire narrative changed."

Step out of the village, and sustainability becomes commercial

branding, says Neerja. Every day brings new 'conscious collections,' clothes that 'respect the planet,' and influencers unboxing 'eco-friendly' fashion. Economic growth is non-negotiable for the corporate world, so sustainability bends into profit and glamour, instead of questioning them.

India, however, understands sustainability instinctively. Reuse, repair, and reduce have long been everyday practices. Yet littered roads, garbage thrown from car windows, and overflowing corners reveal another truth. Caste and class have shaped ideas of cleanliness, teaching many that once waste leaves the home, it becomes someone else's burden. Sustainability becomes selective: careful in private, careless in public.

Science, Not Sentiment

In cities, sustainability often appears on corporate slides before it enters daily life. EcoMorphosys works with companies to measure energy and material use, set reduction targets, and build systems that meet them without collapsing costs. For Neerja, sustainability is an ecosystem rather than a project.

"I would call it a science because it is more data-driven," she explains. "When we address it as an emotion or humanitarian concept, people tend to ignore it. To convince people and repair the environment, we need data and science."

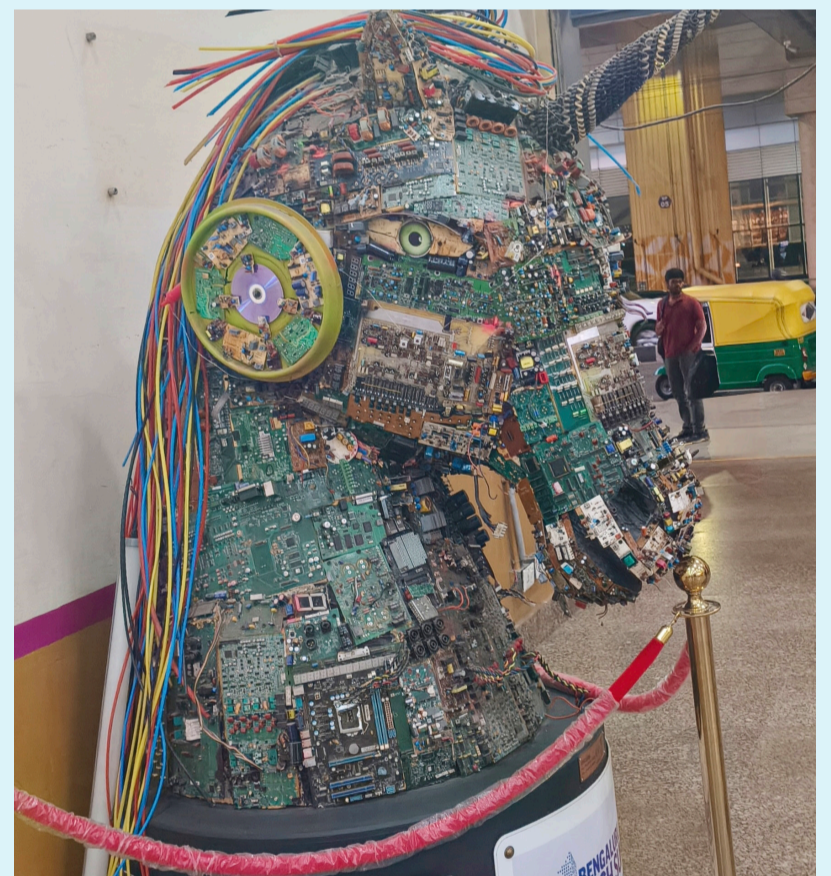
Bengaluru's waste management offers a clear example. Earlier, waste collection followed fixed routes regardless of need. With artificial intelligence predicting waste

patterns and optimising routes, trucks move where waste accumulates fastest and skip half-empty areas, cutting fuel use. "AI models can predict waste generation patterns year over year and optimise waste collection routes," explains civil engineer Akash Raj. "Through route optimization, municipal corporations can create systems so that every corner of the city has streamlined waste collection," he added.

But efficiency exposes another gap. Sanitation workers in Bengaluru often earn far below notified minimum wages for cleaning and scavenging work, and many lack basic safety equipment. AI optimises routes and municipal savings. It does not ask whether workers' wages improve or conditions become safer. Technology solves system problems, not socio-economic inequalities.

The Gap We Live In

This reveals three coexisting realities. Rural sustainability, practised by Charaka's weavers, is rooted in equity and necessity. Household sustainability is selective, careful at home, careless in public. Corporate sustainability is polished and marketable, even as the core business model remains intact. "We don't consider ourselves part of the fashion industry," says Sharada Ganesh, managing trustee of DESI Trust. That distance is deliberate. Fast fashion undercuts this balance. A handwoven sari takes weeks, while machine-made imitation costs a fraction. This shrinks artisan economies, pushing skilled workers into low-wage factory jobs.



Unicorn figurine made with electronic waste

Raj Shekar Reddy

Three Uncomfortable Truths

First, trade-offs are real. Profit, speed, glamour, and sustainability cannot all peak together. Technology may optimise waste collection, but it does not reduce consumption.

Second, scale hides people. When Charaka-like models are repackaged as 'sustainable luxury,' communities vanish from view. Efficiency without dignity is not sustainability.

Third, individual choice has limits. Buying consciously can help one artisan, but it cannot transform an industry built on excess.

What Comes Next

The choice is not between Charaka's looms and Bengaluru's algorithms, it is about using technology to strengthen fair systems while admitting what it cannot fix. Some collectives already show what this looks like, when artisans share profit and control and technology connects them to buyers instead of replacing them. Sustainability does not need to be loud, but the gap between branding and responsibility will remain wide unless we define it for ourselves and make choices that genuinely cost us something.

India's Live Music Revival Drives Youth Culture

V Priyanka



Bigger the stage. Greater the demand.

V Priyanka

Today, urban India sounds different. Across cities big and small, the post-pandemic quiet has been replaced by guitars being tuned, microphones tested, and voices warming up. From late-night cafés in Delhi and Mumbai to emerging cultural hubs like Jaipur and Indore, live music has shifted from an occasional event to a regular part of city life.

The change is visible in how frequently live performances are staged and attended and has altered how audiences engage with music.

The Rise of Venue Culture

One of the clearest signs of this transformation is the integration of live music into the hospitality industry. Restaurants, bars and cafés routinely host singers, bands and Disc Jockeys (DJs).

Rohith RJ, lead male singer of

RJ The Band, sees this as a positive turning point. "Almost every new venue has started hosting live bands," he says. "Exposure for artists has increased, and artists have started generating income for themselves." Independent solo singer Dhruv Gupta echoes this sentiment, noting that gigs are happening far more regularly now, particularly in major cities.

While Bengaluru and Hyderabad remain strongholds, with venues like Airlive and Stonewaters leading the way, the appetite for live performances is clearly on the rise.

For artists, this growth has created two parallel worlds. Large concerts offer reach and validation, while smaller gigs offer something equally valuable: connection. As Jeol Roy, lead female singer of RJ The Band, puts it, "Big concerts are exciting and validating, but small gigs feel personal. You see faces,

emotions, reactions. One feeds visibility, the other feeds the soul."

Opportunity and Pressure Behind the Spotlight

Social media, especially Instagram, has become an essential tool, almost a digital résumé. Through a few well-performing clips, artists can now reach audiences beyond their cities and secure private or corporate bookings.

This has brought a subtle but important shift. Musicians are now expected to market themselves alongside their artistry. "Earlier, you were invited for your talent. Now you are often judged by how much business you can bring," Roy says. "It feels like growth, but it comes with pressure."

The Technical Backbone of Live Music

Behind every strong performance is a technical team ensuring the show runs smoothly. Elshan Sam, a sound engineer with five years of experience, says they are finally receiving recognition. "Our role is being taken much more seriously than before," he says.

Challenges remain, including ageing equipment, tight budgets and long working hours. However, the industry has begun adopting digital consoles, in-ear monitor-

ing and improved sound systems, significantly raising the quality of live shows across the country.

Cultural Inclusivity and Audience Connection

Audiences are increasingly attending performances featuring music in regional languages and styles. Independent artists, regional folk musicians and performers from under-represented communities are appearing more frequently on live music line-ups. Regular gig-goer Khevna Reddy observes that hype is "slowly moving away from global material and back to music that represents the immediate culture of the audience."

For many listeners, smaller venues shape how these performances are experienced. Riddhima Singh says scale matters less than proximity. "Small venues may not have the same resources as big arenas," she says, "but they create a sense of closeness that makes the experience more personal."

Looking Towards a Sustainable Future

As live music activity increases, discussions around monetization and working conditions are becoming more visible. Artists and managers are raising concerns about fair pay and transparent communication with organisers.

Challenges including financial uncertainty, physical exhaustion and disagreements over pay and working conditions continue to affect many performers. Several artists and managers say these issues will need to be addressed if the current pace of growth is to continue. Some venue operators, however, argue that tight margins and rising operational costs limit how much they can offer performers, particularly at smaller shows.

As venues continue to host performances across cities, live music remains a central part of how artists and audiences connect in person. "Live music can never be replaced," Roy says. Band Manager and composer Vardaan Dobhal points to continued expansion in the sector. "It is growing rapidly," he says. "We are seeing new festival concepts, better infrastructure and stronger Indie scenes across cities."



Open-air concerts draw crowds

V Priyanka

Re-release Culture in Kollywood, Boon or Bane?

Karan Siddharth G

The Tamil film industry released a total of 285 films in the year 2025, which made it a year with one of the highest number of releases. The gross total of Rs 2600 crores, however, tells a different story.

A Year of Record Releases but Fewer Hits

While the overall volume of releases increased, the amount of blockbusters have significantly reduced. On the one hand, 15-year-old re-released movies have outsold fresh ones, while young directors have failed to light up the screens directing superstars. This is not an indicator of the market shrinking, but rather the industry changing and reorganizing itself.

The collection data of 2025 proves this transformation. The 285 films released this year collected a total of 2600 crores, which is respectable but there is an issue. The top ten films alone collected 1,600 crores, meaning the remaining 275 films struggled with theatrical runs and audience attention. Rajinikanth's *Coolie*, despite breaking the record for a Tamil film's opening day (151 crore worldwide), ultimately flopped. Its 518 crore worldwide collection proved insufficient to justify inflated budgets and superstar fees. Trade observers noted that *Coolie* was banking on star power for opening weekends but failing to sustain beyond the initial fanbase. In contrast, *Tourist Family* direct-

ed by a debutant, Abishan Jeevith, with an 11 crore budget grossed 62 crores in Tamil Nadu, a 463% profit. *Kudumbasthan* and *Aan Paavam Polathathu* delivered 283% and 400% returns respectively, proving that word of mouth now drives box office.

Nostalgia at the Box Office: The Power of Re-releases

Meanwhile re-releases attracted more footfall than new releases. *Vaarnam Aayiram*, *Vettaiyadu Vilayadu*, *Paiyaa*, and *Ghilli's* anniversary screening all outperformed lower budget originals. The nostalgia was undeniable, audiences sang along to Harris Jayaraj compositions, transforming screenings into concert-like experiences.

Vishnu Kamal, the current owner of Kamala cinemas, Chennai, explained that even though there are people visiting theatres for the re-releases, the whole industry has been in a crisis mode lately. He stated, "Many theatres have not screened any films for months due to the absence of major Tamil releases." His core grievance was because of this lack of big star movie releases theatre owners would rather have old blockbusters re-released which could perform better than small budget movies with unknown cast and crew to have some sort of balance. "With producers earning substantial profits from OTT sales, theatres suffer



Fans rushing to watch a movie re-release

Karan Siddharth

from lack of content," he frowned.

Producers in a Paradox: OTT's Changing Role

Producers on the other hand are stuck in a paradox, fewer blockbusters mean fewer guaranteed OTT licensing deals, yet re-releases offer an unexpected lifeline. What began as desperation by Kamala Cinemas on screening the film, 3 to fill empty theatres has evolved into a sophisticated monetization strategy that reshapes how producers view their film libraries.

The old model of OTT platforms purchasing films before theatrical release based on star power, director reputation, and projected revenue are over. Five Star Senthil, owner of Five Star productions and distributor,

speaking on industry shifts, revealed, "OTT platforms now only buy after observing theatrical success. They look at box office revenue and decide. Offers vary, they might buy only for six months, then renew or drop. The old days where the theatrical run decided everything are back. We've lost guaranteed sales." "The fear," he added is, "What if we shoot a film and are unable to sell it?"

The 49-Rupee Revolution and Youth Engagement

Enter re-releases. For theatre owners like Kamala Cinemas, archival films became low risk and high revenue. Vishnu Kamal pioneered the 49 rupee ticket model targeting 20 to 25 year olds. "I thought, why would audiences watch old films on TV when

they've already aired?" Senthil explained. He said, today's generation want a big screen experience of vintage classics. Vishnu converted screenings into concert-like events, cutting music mid-song so audiences sing live, allowing dancing in aisles. A 49 rupee pocket money price point attracted students in bulk.

Tollywood's Contrast and Lessons for Kollywood

Tamil cinema's uncertainty contrasts with Telugu cinema's momentum with Tollywood movies delivering consistent 150+ crore collections on controlled budgets. Tollywood abandoned remakes and producers perceive originals as less risky. Meanwhile, Tamil filmmakers rely on nostalgia like using retro songs to get audiences into theatres. Sean Roldan in an interview cautioned on retro song overuse, "Retro songs connect audiences emotionally, but overuse erodes that magic. There's a fine line between homage and laziness."

Quality Crisis and the Future of Tamil Cinema

2025 has been a unique year for Tamil cinema. 285 films released, yet old re-releases outperformed 275 originals. The re-release culture has not led to the decline but rather exposed the quality crisis. Audiences still love cinema but would rather watch proven classics than mediocrity.

Tool and Threat: AI Forces Musicians to Rethink Creativity

Nanasu Raghuram

The debate over whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a tool to musicians or a threat to their existence has been ongoing as music is one of humanity's most creative forms of expression. While some senior musicians look at this advancement as the biggest threat they have ever seen and argue that it's impossible for AI to help musicians in any way, some say it is definitely a boon as AI now gives them a perspective they would have never thought of otherwise.

Music director V Harikrishna expresses deep concern over the use of AI in music, calling its impact far stronger than any technology he has seen so far. "AI is now showing that music can be made without musicians." It has "no values" he said, adding that for the first time, technology has begun to emulate human emotion. "Until now, no technology has been able to touch human emotion. AI has

"Until now, no technology has been able to touch human emotion. AI has touched that too."
V Harikrishna,
Music Director

touched that too," he added.

Echoing concerns around job losses, actor, director, music director and lyricist, V Manohar said, "Because of AI, a programmer lost his job, a singer lost his job. In that way, yes, it is a threat." However, talented musicians would survive through live performances and concerts. He emphasised that writing lyrics that align with a film's narrative would remain a human task, as AI relies on pre-existing data. On voice cloning, Manohar feels its appeal is temporary, noting that audiences are more drawn to new voices, new options. He said that since people's taste and preferences in music keep changing over time, the chances of listeners returning to old voices appear limited, a point Harikrishna also agreed upon.

AI software for music is essentially an advanced version of processes that were earlier done manually. Explaining the technicalities of AI software, music director Ananth Kumar Rajan stated that AI is an automated version of previously used tools such as Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI), step sequencers, and sampler modules. "It's the same. The difference is that it no longer requires a human to play the keyboard; instead, it works based

on a prompt," he said. He also viewed AI as a major boon for musicians, as its database is vast and it can generate hundreds of options instantly, whereas mastering a particular style of music can take a lifetime. "I may think in only one way, but AI gives me a hundred ways to manipulate the same idea. It is actually a big boon for me," he expressed. Aspiring artists with limited financial resources tend to use AI extensively. The subscription fee to AI software costs twenty-five to thirty thousand rupees per year. On the other hand, the fee a good musician charges per song is substantially high. "A good musician typically charges rupees 20,000 - 25,000 per song, pushing the total cost to nearly three to four lakhs for a track. In contrast, a paid AI software makes it possible to produce a song with solid arrangements and harmonies, costing as little as rupees 1,000 - 2,000 per song" he said, noting that ethical use of AI can co-exist with artistic integrity.

While today's generation is often stereotyped as tech-savvy, young aspiring musicians present an interesting counterview. They believe that although AI is making its way into the music industry extensively, not many people are turning to AI as their first option and instead remain



When human emotion meets machine

AI generated

keen on recording fresh voices. Madhura Balaji, a professional singer, commented on this advancement, saying, "Music is such a craft that no Artificial Intelligence can ever be a threat. If somebody is threatened by it, then it's a joke." Although emulating emotions is a singer's job, she noted that if a tune is simple, it may not matter whether it is performed by an actual singer or AI. However, when it comes to vocal dynamics, AI will not be able to replicate it, she said. Referring to instances of Ilayaraja recording songs in a single take and A.R. Rahman using multi-tracking, and how coexistence with technology evolved without reducing employment

intelligence opportunities, Madhura said, "I don't think it is financially such a threat either. If you want to do it the authentic way, then you can't resort to programming for everything." However, she also stressed the need for ethical use and regulation rather than blind acceptance. "Just because somebody is using AI to make good music and people are enjoying it doesn't mean it will not grow into a larger issue" she added.

While AI uses human made music databases to generate music, humans use AI for composition, thus forming a loop. However, can musicians ethically make music using AI? Will humans succumb, resist or adapt to AI in the near future is a never-ending debate.

Operation Kagar's Real Prize Lies Under Adivasi Soil

Joswin Pereira

On a moonless night in Narayanpur, a district in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, a young girl lies face down in a riverbed, her clothes soaked and breath shallow, waiting for torchlight to recede from the water's edge. She is not hiding from Maoists but from the security forces deployed in the state's war on Maoism, alleged Soni Sori, human rights activist and torture survivor.

Since its launch by the Union government in late 2023, Operation Kagar has placed Bastar under a doctrine of "maximum force" in its counter-insurgency campaign against Maoist groups, said political scientist and civil rights activist Professor G. Hargopal.

On the ground, activists and residents say, the operation has evolved into a regime where Adivasi communities live under constant fear of detention, humiliation, and violence, with women and children bearing the brunt.

A Region Under Permanent Suspicion

Bastar and other tribal belts sit atop some of India's richest mineral reserves, including iron ore and potential gold deposits. Critics argue that pressure to extract these resources in the name of

economic growth has overridden constitutional safeguards meant to protect Adivasi land and lives. "The interest of the rulers is not in the welfare of tribal people," says advocate Kuldeep, "but in the wealth beneath their feet." For Hargopal, Bastar's story is a long struggle over land, forests and power. Adivasi resistance, he says, began "the moment the East India Company entered the forests," when tribal communities asked, "Who are you, and why have you come here?" Forest and Adivasi life, he adds, are "inseparable", a truth that is largely ignored.

The Machinery of Fear

Sori, who has documented testimonies from villages across Chhattisgarh, says the violence stems from "a system that treats entire Adivasi communities as enemy territory." Following operations near the mineral-rich Karegutta hills, Sori alleges patrols intensified, and young people were taken to camps without formal arrests or the First Information Reports (FIRs). When they returned, they were presented to the media as "surrendered Maoists," alleges Sori. According to her, several detainees were held for extended periods without legal oversight. "For the state, it is just a num-

ber in a surrender list," Sori says. "For us, it is a child taken away, a girl who comes back broken, a boy who will never again walk freely through his own village."

Sexual Violence and Torture

Women, particularly young Adivasi women, face the most brutal consequences of this conflict, Sori alleges. Inside camps, she says, women are reportedly forced to strip during so-called searches, mocked, and physically handled during interrogations. Security personnel allegedly make sexually derogatory remarks, using humiliation as a tool of control. She adds that detainees are often held for ten, twenty, or even sixty days without being produced before a court, with no access to legal remedies or contact with their families. Outside the camps, fear shapes daily life. Villages near Narayanpur and other security hubs see girls leave their homes after dark to sleep in riverbeds, ravines, or trees to avoid night raids, she alleges.

"The hiding itself is dangerous. Some jump into rivers and pretend to bathe when patrols pass. Others sleep in tall grass or on rocky ledges during the monsoon, risking snakebites and illness," Sori says, sharing the agony of young girls.



Protesting mothers with infants in Bastar

Malini Subramaniam

Fear that Silenced Religious Leaders

Pastor Jos Thomas, who works with affected communities, says fear has silenced even religious leaders. "Some pastors are afraid to speak," he says. "If they report abuses, the next day they are beaten and churches are damaged. People are scared to reveal the truth." He shared his personal experience of spending many days in prison for protecting the vulnerable. His family, he says, lives under a constant cloud of fear about what might happen next. As Bastar remains militarised un-

der Operation Kagar, activists warn that the line between counter-insurgency and collective punishment has blurred beyond recognition.

"The interest of the rulers is not in the welfare of tribal people but in the wealth beneath their feet."
Kuldeep, Advocate

The Quiet Pushback Against Constant Connection

Aakanksha Singh

Late night scrolling, unread notifications, and the pressure to stay constantly available have become a normal part of everyday life for students and young professionals. What once felt like convenience now often feels overwhelming. Quietly and intentionally, many are beginning to push back.

This resistance does not involve deleting every app or abandoning technology altogether. Instead, it shows up in small, conscious decisions such as switching off phones for a few hours, leaving them in another room, or setting clear offline hours. This growing practice of digital detox is emerging as a way to cope with stress, digital fatigue, and burnout in an always connected world. For many students, the wake up call comes when constant screen use begins to affect both body and mind.

When the Phone Takes Over Daily Life

Garima Thind, a college student, recalled noticing the impact during her second year. "I was constantly tired, scrolling late into the night, and still felt mentally exhausted even when I hadn't done much work," she said.

Over time, her phone had quietly taken over her daily

routine. "My attention span was really bad, and I realized my phone was the first and last thing I looked at every day."

To regain some control, she began setting offline hours, especially during examinations. Her phone was either switched off or left in another room for several hours. She explained that the motivation went beyond productivity. "I was feeling overwhelmed and anxious all the time, and I needed some mental peace," she added.

What Mental Health Experts Are Seeing

Mental health professionals say such experiences are becoming increasingly common among young people. Psychologists and counselors point out that excessive screen time is closely linked to rising levels of stress and anxiety. They explain that constant exposure to social media can fuel comparison, self-doubt, and a sense of inadequacy.

Excessive screen use also disrupts sleep patterns and reduces face-to-face social interaction, both of which are essential for emotional well-being. According to psychologist Krshita Ori, "Digital overload often presents

itself through irritability, difficulty concentrating, mental exhaustion, sleep problems, and a constant urge to check the phone even when there are no notifications."

Why Disconnecting Feels So Difficult

Disconnecting, however, is not easy. Social media platforms are designed to encourage continuous engagement, and many young people feel pressure to stay visible and responsive at all times. Despite these challenges, experts emphasize that even small breaks from screens can make a meaningful difference.

Mental health professionals strongly support the idea of offline hours. Short periods of disconnection allow the brain to rest, reduce overstimulation, and help individuals feel more grounded. Rather than extreme digital detoxes, psychologists recommend realistic habits such as no-phone mornings, screen-free meals, or fixed offline study periods.

What Research Reveals About Screen Time

Studies show a strong connection between excessive screen time and increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression,

particularly among students and young adults. Screen time has risen significantly in recent years, with many students spending seven to nine hours a day on digital devices.

At the same time, reduced screen use has been linked to better focus, improved memory, and higher productivity. Students who practice offline hours often experience these benefits firsthand.

The same college student shared that her concentration improved noticeably when her phone was not nearby. Tasks were completed faster, and the mental exhaustion that once followed long study sessions gradually faded. Beyond academics, she reported feeling calmer, sleeping better, and feeling less pressure to constantly keep up with others online.

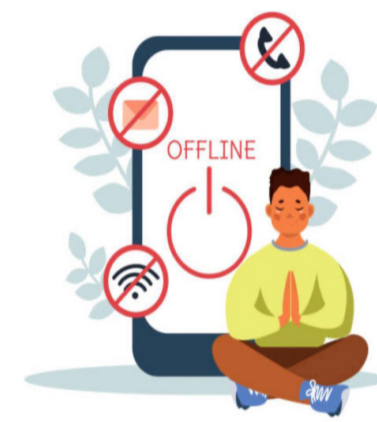
The Psychology Behind Endless Scrolling

Experts explain that the pull of social media is rooted in psychology. Likes, comments, and notifications trigger dopamine responses in the brain, encouraging repeated engagement. Endless scrolling overstimulates the mind, leaving little room for mental rest and increasing the risk of burnout.

However, these habits are not permanent. Research shows that even short digital detox periods can help individuals regain control over their screen usage.

Redefining the Relationship With Technology

Ultimately, digital detox is not about rejecting technology it is about redefining the relationship with it. By choosing offline hours, students and young professionals are quietly reclaiming their time, focus, and mental well-being. In a world that demands constant connection, stepping away, even briefly, has become a powerful act of balance and self-care.



Disconnected to reconnect

Istock

Kerala's New Entrepreneurs Redefine Success

Ann Rose George

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector in Kerala has seen rapid growth over the years. Post the COVID-19 pandemic, people have seemingly begun to think creatively and are driven towards becoming business owners. Statistics indicate that over the past two years, the state has had over 2,40,000 MSMEs established. However, the question that needs to be asked is this: Is owning a business worth the time, money, and risk?

From Home Kitchen to Global Markets

Jose Paul, owner of Alice Homemade Treasures, a homemade pickle business, shared his story about how, when he was working as a network engineer in Dubai, a single phone call from his grandmother changed the course of his life. She insisted that he try taking over the pickle business the family had and suggested that if things didn't turn out well, he still had his regular job to fall back on.

Despite the financial stability the job offered, that one phone call made Jose see the opportunity of converting their already existing small-scale business into a well-established brand, compelling him to return to Thrissur.

He also said that his wife had a huge role to play in the success of the business as she manages prod-



Kerala's MSMEs chasing global dreams

AI Generated

uct testing, finances, and overall supervision of the business. "Coming out of the comfort zone in Dubai and starting a business in Kerala was a huge risk," he said, while expressing that moving from a well-paying job to entrepreneurship was not easy. However, within a week after the launch of Alice Homemade Treasures, they had successfully sold their first batch of unique vegetable pickles.

Currently, the company produces around 4,000 to 7,000 pickles every month and has also expanded its business beyond India through white-label exports to countries like Dubai, the USA, the UK, and Ireland.

Paul also advised aspiring entre-

preneurs not to fear competition until they are confident about the quality they give customers. "Don't stop working hard until you're successful. If you haven't succeeded, it's not the end. If you fail 10 times, do it an 11th time," he concluded, encouraging young business owners.

Beyond the Corporate

While we have Jose Paul, who left his well-paying job to run a business, we also have entrepreneurs like Stephy Thomas, owner of Bhasuri, a clothing brand, who still prioritises her corporate career and views her business as a source of passive income. "Thomas says

balancing a full-time corporate role and running a business is demanding, calling it "a mess," which has also repeatedly affected her health and sleep. However, support from her family, friends, and husband is what makes her strive towards it. "My husband is the main support. My mother also supports me internally. Between the two families, I have a small army," she expressed.

Although Thomas started her business in 2018, it was in 2020, during COVID-19 pandemic, that her interest grew, especially when friends and relatives would ask her to design or source handmade items for them. "I didn't want a loud business; I wanted something I could do with 100% satisfaction," she said while also opining that a loss in business is not a sign of failure, but a signal that something needs to be improved.

She also highlights the role of government schemes, stating that although she is aware of such schemes, finding correct information is still difficult. Managing finances, from initial investment to working capital, is also a huge task. Although the government has various schemes, Thomas says finding the correct information is still difficult.

Supporting Dreams within Rigid Systems

On the contrary, Anu Joseph, the

owner of the first cheese factory in Kerala, mentioned that loans provided by Kerala Startup Mission and Kerala Financial Corporation help provide strong financial support to small-scale sectors. She pointed out that "Government procedures do not happen within a week or or a month. Approvals are given only after authorities are convinced that the business is legitimate and viable," adding that the paperwork for the loan she applied for in 2018 took almost one year to complete.

Naveen Paul, an officer at Canara Bank stated that people do approach banks for loans for MSMEs and schemes such as the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme. Although the loan suffices the initial investment, Naveen said, "The major challenge is that people don't know how to manage working capital, they don't have proper balance sheets too," making them run short of funds.

The journey of these entrepreneurs show that while owning a business involves risk, uncertainty, and relentless effort, it also offers independence, purpose, and long-term growth. With the right support system, MSMEs in Kerala can continue to grow and make a big impact.

Beyond Pickleball: India's Colonial Hangover

Riya Vivek

From being all over Los Angeles influencers' Instagrams to becoming one of the fastest-growing lifestyle sports, 2025 was the breakout year for Pickleball in India, gaining government recognition and official league status. As the sport took over the city, players booked courts, rented equipment, and bought memberships to partake in this phenomenon. The sport became not only an exercise but also a social activity. According to The Pickleball Clinic active players surged by almost 300% to around 70000 regulars, the number of courts in India spiked from a few hundred to over a thousand in just three years. Televised tournaments, sponsored leagues, and recognition by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports have only helped its popularity and provided it with an ecosystem that most older Indian sports still long for.



Indian players engage in a fast-paced pickleball match

Forbes India

The Colonial Hangover

The rise of Pickleball serves as an example of how quickly we mobilised courts, sponsors, and certification systems for a sport that doesn't have its roots here, yet we fail to do the same for our own games and practices. How do we, as a country with such a strong heritage, let go of our own culture and adopt others, while ours gets adopted by others, and struggle to get the similar recognition? Writer and cultural commentator, Rahul Nair, calls it a kind of "colonial hangover", the sense that we don't fully trust our judgment unless it is endorsed by Western audiences.

We seem most confident about our culture only when it returns with Western branding. We have seen the U.S. and Europe not only repackage turmeric as pricey 'golden milk lattes,' but even attempt to patent it. Despite India exporting 80-95% of the world's supply of turmeric, reports and studies have flagged adulteration issues in turmeric, in samples tested across South Asia.

Devaluing Local Wisdom in a Global Market

This phenomenon also influences how we approach areas like fitness and entertainment. Raghul Sridharan,

a senior traditional strength coach at Tagda Raho, sees Indian workouts get sidelined as imported workouts boom. "Western workouts spread via social media, sports science, videos of celebrity physiques, competitions, and Netflix," he says, while Indian equipment stay "local, oral, and community-driven." Western branding gives urban Indians "control and legitimacy." He added that aspirational fitness today is more symbolic than effective.

Neil Khopkhar, a musician rooted in Hindustani Classical music, also sees a similar trend for Western approval. He shared that "the false sense of exclusivity and inaccessibility to Indian classical music has pushed peo-

ple away from it, but that there's an emerging culture in urban India that will expose more people to this music and help create a sense of belonging."

The dismissal and discrediting of our indigenous thoughts and practices have taken place for generations. According to Nair, we end up being indifferent to the very traditions that were nurtured here for centuries and become susceptible to every new fad with constant consumption of Western media instead of our own literature. He also shared that when we devalue our own knowledge systems and wait for external institutions to validate them, "the value is extracted elsewhere – and when it is re-imported,

we have to pay the premium." What we lose in that process, he warns, "is not just revenue, but confidence."

Reclaiming Intellectual and Playful Heritage

Roll the Dice founder Tanushri SN explains how parents hype western games for "logic and future readiness," but view traditional games through "memories or childhood." Yet when played, they see strategy, logic, patience, and emotional control, just like chess. Foreign firms often borrow Indian mechanics from Pachisi or Alquerque without credit. Roll the Dice counters by sharing origins, proving "India doesn't need outside validation to value its wisdom."

Latha Madhusudhan, a Waldorf teacher and author, shares that when we celebrate what is evident locally, it helps children's memory and understanding when they engage and experience festivals with their senses. She added that since we now live in a global world where children live a virtual life, they need logic, facts, and stories about our origins.

While a lot of this can be attributed to the influence of globalisation, repackaging of culture, media visibility, and aspirational consumption, it is in our hands to know our culture well enough to be aware and vocal about the narratives being pushed on us by unlearning colonial conditioning. We need to be our own storytellers and not just the supplier. We have to realize that culture survives when it's lived and not just consumed.

Is Money Batting Ahead of Talent???

Ashutosh Ranjan

Karnataka state has produced several talented cricketers over previous decades, which justifies the immense quality of professional cricket being practised in the state. Cricket academies play the most significant role in shaping the player's skill and enhancing their craft with time. However, are cricket academies in Karnataka commercialising, eventually shutting down doors for young talents who belong to middle class families?

Cricket is celebrated as a religion in our country, but practising it as a professional sport has become a rich man's luxury. Eventually, this is making it hard for existing players to continue playing in the long run. Nitin S, a professional cricketer of Ramaiah University, stated "Over time, they prefer people with buckets of money rather than talent." "These academies tend to manipulate young players and their parents by giving them false hope about their future in the sport," he added.

Considering the desire of middle class parents for their children to excel in cricket, this adds pressure in the minds of these young practicing cricketers and these academies take advantage of it. Practicing professional cricket demands constant spending which these cricket academies do not cover in their fees structure. These spendings include

high match fees, travelling charges of the team, basic food, necessary equipment, cricket kits, tournament registration fees and many more which players have to arrange for themselves. These expenses become a compulsion, otherwise players would miss their chance of playing important tournaments.

On the contrary, Narayan S, state-level cricketer from Arunachal Pradesh stated, "Cricket does not always demand constant spending; after developing the basic skills, players can arrange for regular matches to learn and to stay connected to cricket. Learning professional cricket opens doors for several career prospects, such as mentoring young cricketers through coaching, umpiring in matches, etc., unlocking opportunities to earn additional income in the future."

The young cricketers who play under-14 level view cricket as their most loved game and enroll in cricket academies to enjoy the game, on the other hand, the senior cricketers have maturity to analyze their succession paths in cricket as a career option as well. This way the purpose of cricket academies slowly changes for their players, stated Narayan S.

According to Nitin S, the beginners starting cricket at a much later age, understand the internal politics of these highly branded academies

where favouritism exists. They are benched in matches because the coaches prioritize focus on their already existing set of players for the matches to represent the academy. Beginners would have to consistently train in academies for months, pay their fees to compete for their spot in the team. "They just warm the bench, that eventually builds frustration in the minds of the players, ending up thinking professional cricket is maybe not for them", said Nitin. However, the mindset to learn cricket as a student in a progressive manner becomes crucial to keep them connected to the game.

According to Nitin S, not all of the academies hire good skilled coaches. In fact, some academies even ask their senior cricketers to handle training sessions for younger players and accompany them to their matches. In this case the young cricketer's basic skills might not develop up to the range at which training under a professional coach would develop. Hence, good research about academies could prevent players from compromising on the quality of coaching. Trustable academies encourage coaching staff to build strong friendly bonds with parents to ensure belief and transparency is maintained.

According to former professional cricketers, favouritism and



A cricket coaching academy in Karnataka

Mangala Magnus

influence power exists at bigger levels of state cricket. Even after rigorous training and tons of financial investment only one out of a hundred talented players get an opportunity to appear for selections at higher levels and the others become victims of these unfair practices, resulting in drain of their time, wealth and hardwork. According to Narayan S, "The

state teams switch players according to their performances and even the state players face setbacks, but eventually practicing Cricket consistently, definitely gives platforms for the deserving ones".

Hence learning cricket and practicing it smartly would curb these unfair practices of some academies and ensure the growth of cricket in Karnataka.

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Designers:

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Email: sjccommunique@gmail.com / Facebook: Institute of Communication & Media Studies, SJC