

POPP DAPP

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Stories we wear
Hrishikesh Lonkar

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the beauty Playbook
She Rewrote it.
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of CHOICE
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POPP DAPP | EDITOR'S NOTE



Hi,

Why become like someone else when you can unapologetically *be like you*?

That thought sits at the heart of this issue, which brings together people who have questioned the obvious, challenged the expected and, in several cases, politely refused to follow the instruction manual altogether. From Puja Goyal Sarvaiya mapping fashion's missing corridors to Mehek Mandhana reimagining the unstitched garment as a canvas of choice, these stories cultivate a rather radical idea: individuality is not a finishing touch. It is the starting point.

Kamalini Paul explores what it means to build a life rather than simply inherit one. Divya Malpani Maheshwari takes on the beauty playbook and rewrites its rules. Manisha Kandkur embraces the unfinished nature of becoming, while Ruhee

Dosani, our cover star, embodies the very spirit of ambition, identity, creativity being uncopiable. Because honestly, the world already has enough duplicates.

This issue also looks closely at the details that make a point of view memorable. Zighrana and A Fragrance Story explore scent, memory and identity. Sahil Kochhar's Tarana reminds us that luxury often reveals itself on the second glance, through craft, texture and details designed to outlive a season. The Linen Shirt Company makes a persuasive case for linen beyond summer, while Vipul Juneja reminds us that even in an algorithm-obsessed world, a genuine way of seeing still matters.

Then come the stories of courage, reinvention and persistence. Jesica Siingh, Lincia Rosario, Pallavi Das, Zara Umrigar, Cynthia Khalifeh, Knya, Shailesh P Ramugade and Shivvani Paati each add another perspective

Brings together people who have questioned the obvious & challenged the expected!

to a larger conversation about ambition, identity, creativity and the freedom to define success on your own terms.

Perhaps that is what this issue is really about. Not perfection. Not popularity. Certainly not fitting in. It is about having the nerve to develop your own grammar, your own rhythm and your own wonderfully inconvenient point of view.

So turn the page. Be curious. Disagree with us if you must. Dog-ear something. Send a story to someone who needs it. And above all, resist the temptation to become a version of somebody else.

There is already one of them!

Love,

ANUJA MATHUR
Editor-In-Chief, POPP DAPP
www.poppdapp.com





Mapping fashion's missing corridors

PUJA GOYAL SARVAIYA

Some entrepreneurs spot opportunities where others see gaps. They understand that the real work is not always about creating something entirely new, but about connecting what already exists: bringing a designer closer to the customer who has yet to discover her, giving a beautifully crafted garment relevance beyond a passing season, or introducing a homegrown label to a buyer in Paris who simply did not know it existed. Puja Goyal Sarvaiya is that entrepreneur. Across a career that has moved through GQ, Vogue India, Louis Vuitton, and Le Mill, before turning entirely toward building her own ventures, she has developed an almost forensic instinct for locating the gap — the quiet, unglamorous space between a good thing and the people who would love it — and then constructing something sturdy enough to close it.

Today, that instinct powers a small constellation of ventures: Goyé, her brand strategy practice, which has worked with over five hundred brands; The Chic Indian, her fashion-tech platform for homegrown Indian labels; L'Agence G&A, which is building an international corridor for Indian design into Paris, London, Dubai, and New York; and Project Second

Season, her most quietly radical undertaking, which is attempting to change what the fashion industry believes an unsold garment is worth. In conversation, Puja is precise, unsentimental, and disarmingly honest about the mechanics of her own thinking — treating instinct less as magic and more as a discipline of noticing what people do rather than what they say.

THE BRIDGE, NOT THE BRAND

Puja's defining realisation was that the most valuable role in fashion is not always to build another brand, but to build the bridge between discovery and desire. That philosophy sits at the heart of The Chic Indian, which connects audiences with homegrown labels that deserve attention but may not yet have the visibility, reach, or recognition to find them. For Puja, fashion is ultimately about closing that gap: understanding what a customer is looking for, identifying the brands capable of delivering it, and creating the context that makes discovery feel intuitive and trustworthy. The Chic Indian is therefore less about simply showcasing fashion and more about creating meaningful connections between emerging Indian labels and the audiences ready to embrace them.

DISCIPLINE, BORROWED FROM THE HOUSES

Her experience with global institutions — GQ, Vogue India, and most formatively, Louis Vuitton — did not teach her taste so much as rigour. "At a house like Louis Vuitton, nothing is accidental," she reflects. Every touchpoint, from packaging to the language a sales associate uses, has been decided, argued over, and protected. What she now translates for the emerging Indian labels she advises through The Chic Indian is not that discipline at scale, but its essence at a fraction of the resources: deciding clearly what a brand is, and then refusing to contradict it. What she has come to admire most in the homegrown labels she works with — over a hundred and fifty of them, by her count — is a kind of proximity that global brands spend enormous budgets trying to manufacture artificially. They know their customer by name. They know which artisan cluster their fabric came from and what happened to that cluster last monsoon. "The tragedy," she notes, "is that the small label often doesn't recognise this as an asset."

That same clarity governs how she distinguishes lasting brands from merely well-marketed ones. Marketing, in her framework, builds attention; genuine relevance answers a question the customer was already asking — sometimes one they hadn't even articulated, but simply felt. "A brand that is merely good at marketing has answered a question that it invented," she says, "and then convinced people, briefly, to care about it. The first kind compounds. The second kind needs to be re-purchased every quarter through spend." >>



THE STATED ANSWER VERSUS THE REVEALED ONE

Puja is refreshingly candid about failure. Pamper Perks, the tech-led beauty rewards platform she built during the pandemic, did not survive — but it taught her, in her words, "a lot about courage." It is this same appetite for risk that now defines her process for spotting a need before the market has named it: listening for the gap between what people say and what they actually do, and treating that gap as data. When she and her team first approached designers about Project Second Season by The Chic Indian, the stated response was near-universal reluctance — brands insisted they weren't especially interested in a secondary channel for older stock. But a proper survey told a different story: nearly every brand that wasn't strictly made-to-order was sitting on unsold inventory, and most reported real financial consequences from it. When the archive actually opened, the same labels who claimed disinterest uploaded pieces within weeks. "The stated preference was no," she says. "The revealed preference was yes."

THE HONEST DOCUMENT

Nowhere is Puja's diagnostic clarity sharper than on the subject of unsold inventory itself, which she calls "the industry's most honest document." Somewhere between ten and thirty percent of what fashion produces never sells within its season — a number the industry knows intimately and rarely names aloud, choosing instead to obscure it through markdowns, discount platforms, quiet liquidation, or, in the worst cases, outright destruction. Each of those routes, she argues, teaches the customer that the piece was never worth its original price. "That is the actual cost of unsold stock," she says, "not the warehouse rent, but the erosion of belief."

Project Second Season is her answer: reframing a past-season piece not as diminished but as simply released from

the tyranny of the fashion calendar — new, unworn, and no less considered than the day it was made. Priced with intention rather than panic, the designer's brand equity stays intact and the buyer, she says, "feels like a collector rather than a bargain-hunter." It is, at its core, a shift in narrative rather than in product — and one she hopes eventually renders the term "unsold inventory" as unremarkable and well-managed a part of the industry's vocabulary as a flagship launch.

ON PROOF, POWER, AND HOLDING THE QUESTION STEADY

Ask Puja whether she has felt compelled, as a woman building across fashion, luxury, and technology, to make her expertise more visible or more defensible than it needed to be, and she does not hesitate. "Every woman who has sat in an investor meeting knows the feeling of over-preparing," she says, "because the room's starting assumption about you is set a little lower." She has since made peace with the limits of over-preparation — "more proof rarely changes a mind that's already assumed" — and her understanding of leadership has shifted accordingly, from believing it meant having every answer to recognising it as something quieter: the discipline of holding a question steady long enough for others to answer it, and making the constant, largely invisible decisions about what not to do.

THE CORRIDOR TO PARIS

Through L'Agence G&A, Puja is now building formal pathways — runway presentations, red carpet placements, international store partnerships, and buyer access at trade shows — connecting Indian labels to Paris, London, Dubai, and New York. Her frustration with how the global industry currently receives Indian design is pointed: it is met either as anonymous craft, a "source of inspiration" folded into someone else's collection, or as maximalist fantasy —

both reductive, and both missing the vast middle ground of contemporary Indian labels designing for a woman who might live in Bandra and travel to Lisbon. Her counsel to Indian brands chasing global relevance is correspondingly firm: resist the pull to homogenise. "The specificity — the ajrakh, the cluster, the founder's own reason for existing — is precisely what a buyer in Paris can't get anywhere else."

TASTE AS THE LAST SCARCE THING

A collector of vintage jewellery, brooches, and clothing since her early twenties, Puja has strong, considered views on what taste means in an age of algorithmic recommendation. "Taste is knowing which of the things you like belong together," she says, "and which of them, however lovely, don't belong or work for you personally." An algorithm, she points out, can tell you that you'll like something because you liked something similar — but it has no concept of context, sequence, or restraint. Taste, by contrast, is built slowly, through having seen and held and been wrong about a great many things. "It's mostly memory," she says. "It can absolutely be built. It can't be downloaded."

THE THROUGH-LINE

Asked what she wants her body of work to ultimately stand for, Puja's answer circles back to where she began. Indian design, in her view, does not need to be discovered by the world. It already exists, fully formed, on its own terms. What it needs is proper distribution, with its price integrity and specificity left intact. That belief lies at the heart of The Chic Indian, which seeks to close the distance between exceptional homegrown design and the audiences who are looking for it. For Puja, the gap between a good thing and the people who would love it is not accidental. "It's a gap," she says. "It can be mapped, and it can be bridged." One label, one discovery, one connection at a time. 



THE LUXURY OF CHOICE

MEHEK MANDHANA IS QUIETLY REDEFINING INDIAN
LUXURY WITH *PIRONI*



Walk into the world of Pironi and you will notice, quite quickly, that nothing is presented as finished. A length of hand-printed fabric sits folded on a shelf, undecided — is it a kaftan, a sharara, a kurta, or something no one has named yet? That deliberate incompleteness is not an oversight. It is the entire idea. At the centre of it stands Mehek Mandhana, who founded the label at twenty-three with a conviction that has only sharpened since: that the most luxurious thing a woman can be handed is not a finished outfit, but a choice.

In this exclusive conversation, she speaks about reimagining the Indian unstitched suit as a canvas rather than a category, the humbling process of designing for women twice her age, and the invisible labour of building a fashion brand from scratch in the digital era.

THE INSIGHT BEHIND AN UNFINISHED GARMENT

Ask Mehek what led her to build a label around the unstitched suit, and her answer strips the idea down to something almost obvious in hindsight. "Women don't always want to be told what their clothes should look like. Sometimes, they want to have a say in what they become," she says. "You start with the fabric, the print, the colours and the craft, but the final garment is still yours to decide — the length, the neckline, the fit, the way you want the dupatta to fall."

For her, this wasn't a novel concept so much as a very Indian one, rediscovered. "We've always had this relationship with our local tailors, our mothers deciding necklines, sisters borrowing dupattas, clothes being altered and reimagined to suit the woman wearing them," she explains. "I didn't want Pironi to take that personalisation away. I wanted to give women something beautiful to begin with, and then let them make it their own."

STYLING AS PHILOSOPHY

Long before Pironi existed, Mehek's fascination lay in styling — in watching how a single piece of clothing could transform entirely depending on how it was worn. That instinct became the label's founding logic. "I didn't want to tell a woman, 'this is how this suit is meant to be worn.' I wanted to give her the freedom to decide," she says. "The same fabric can become a kurta set, a sharara, a kaftan, a gown — or something completely different, depending on the woman, her personality and the occasion." ***"We create the canvas, and the woman creates the outfit."***

INDIVIDUALITY AS THE CORE PRODUCT

Where most fashion labels sell certainty — a finished silhouette, styled and photographed one particular way — Mehek built Pironi around ambiguity, and trusted her customer to resolve it herself. "Two women can look at the exact same fabric and imagine completely different clothes. One sees a kaftan, another sees a sharara, another sees a simple everyday kurta," she says. "With Pironi, the customer becomes part of the design process." The result, she believes, is a garment that is never truly complete until it leaves her hands and enters someone else's imagination. "The product isn't really finished when it leaves Pironi. It's finished when you make it yours."

LUXURY, REDEFINED AS FREEDOM

Mehek is quick to complicate the easy equation between rarity and luxury. For her, the more meaningful definition lies elsewhere entirely. "I do think there is something luxurious about individuality, but I wouldn't define luxury simply as something being one-of-a-kind," she says. "The real luxury is having the freedom to make something your own." In a fashion landscape she describes as increasingly uniform — where a woman sees something online and simply buys the exact same thing — Mehek believes Pironi's value lies

precisely in the space it creates between inspiration and expression. "That individuality is a far more meaningful form of luxury than simply owning something expensive."

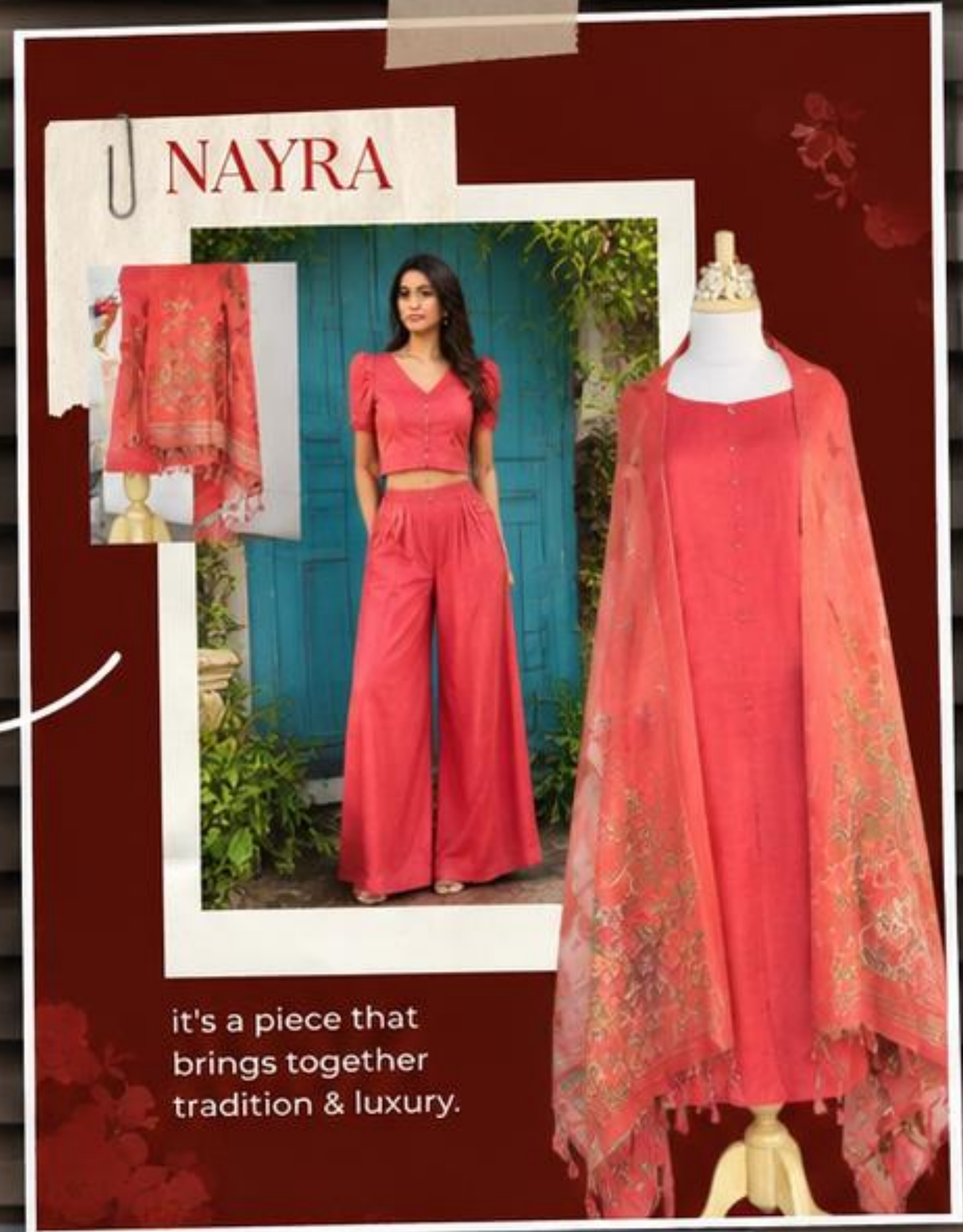
A YOUNG FOUNDER, AN OLDER AUDIENCE

Starting a label at twenty-three meant designing, almost immediately, for women considerably older than herself — a gap Mehek admits she underestimated at first. "I honestly thought I understood women because I was one. Very quickly, I realised that wasn't enough," she reflects. Her early instinct was to design purely from personal taste, assuming her own preferences would translate. Women in their thirties and forties taught her otherwise, and forced a shift from assumption to observation. "I started listening much more — to customers, to conversations, to what women were actually wearing and asking for, rather than assuming I knew."

What eventually bridged the age gap, she says, was never generational at all. "I realised that age wasn't really the common ground. It was the emotion. Women of very different ages could still connect with the same love for Indian textiles, colour, craft and the feeling of finding something that felt like 'them.'"

WHAT CUSTOMERS TAUGHT HER

The most valuable education Mehek received, she says, came not from research decks but from real conversations. "They taught me that women don't necessarily dress to impress people — they dress to feel like themselves," she says. Beauty, she came to understand, was only ever half the equation; comfort, ease and a sense of everyday confidence mattered just as much. "A lot of my early assumptions were wrong, honestly. And I think being willing to admit that — and actually listen — has been one of the most valuable parts of building Pironi." >>



RECLAIMING THE CATEGORY

When Mehek entered the unstitched suit market, she found a category defined more by convention than by imagination — fabric sold with a fairly predetermined idea of what it was meant to become. "What excited me was everything that could happen in between," she says. "Instead of saying, 'this is the outfit,' we wanted to say, 'this could become whatever you want it to be.'" Into that space, she brought a sharper fashion vocabulary — bolder prints, unexpected colour pairings, Indian art and craft reframed for a contemporary eye. "I wanted unstitched clothing to feel less like a traditional category you shopped from, and more like a creative experience you participated in."

A WARDROBE THAT GROWS WITH HER

Unlike a finished garment tethered to a single occasion — a wedding, an event, a fixed moment in time — an unstitched Pironi piece, Mehek explains, is designed to evolve alongside the woman who owns it. "Your body changes, your style changes, your life changes. Maybe today you want a dramatic sharara and five years later you want a beautiful, understated kurta from the same fabric," she says. "The value isn't just in getting more than one outfit out of a piece. It's that the piece gets to have a longer life and a changing meaning."

TEXTILE AS STORY

Mehek describes herself as instinctively rooted — drawn to tradition, culture and the histories embedded in the things she surrounds herself with, an instinct visible across Pironi's collections, from Pichwai and Ajrakh to Madhubani and Kalamkari. "They're not just beautiful motifs to put on a fabric. There is history, craftsmanship and a story behind each of them, and that is what makes them interesting to me," she says. What has struck her most is how universally that appetite for meaning is shared. "Whether she is twenty-five or forty-five, I think a woman still wants to feel that there is something behind what she is wearing."

FAMILY, FOUNDATION, AND A NEW LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS

Behind Pironi's product sits a less visible story — of building an entirely new kind of fashion business from the ground up. "A huge part of my journey has been figuring out how to sell it and how to build a completely new kind of fashion business," Mehek says, describing the steep, largely self-taught curve of digital marketing, content, e-commerce and shaping an online presence that could make someone feel a fabric they had never touched.

That journey, she is careful to note, did not happen in isolation. "My mother and my sister were quite literally my first canvas. I would try things on them, get their opinions, experiment with styling, colours, silhouettes and ideas." Her father, with decades of experience in the textile industry, offered a different but equally vital kind of support — not a fixed template to follow, but openness to reinvention. "He has never made me feel like I have to build Pironi exactly the way the traditional textile business has been built. Instead, he has supported me in understanding what is changing and how the business needs to evolve with it."

WHAT SHE WANTS PIRONI TO CHANGE

Looking ahead, Mehek's ambitions extend well beyond her own label. "I don't think Indian luxury needs to look a certain way to be considered luxurious," she says. "It can be colourful, playful and deeply Indian, while still feeling contemporary." Above all, she hopes Pironi will loosen the unwritten rules many women still carry around traditional dressing. "I want her to experiment, to style a suit in a way nobody has shown her before, to wear a saree without waiting for a wedding, or to take an unstitched piece and make something completely her own." ***"I don't think our culture needs to be reinvented. It just needs to be lived."***

It is a line that captures, better than any campaign could, exactly what Mehek has spent the last several years building — not a brand that dictates how Indian fashion should look, but one that simply hands a woman the fabric, the story, and the freedom to decide the rest for herself. ■■■■



A Life Built, *Not Simply* Inherited

KAMALINI PAUL
IS BUILDING
WHAT COMES NEXT!

LEGACY
THROUGH
PURPOSE.
PROGRESS
BY CHOICE.



Some entrepreneurial journeys begin with a business plan. Kamalini Paul's began with a life-altering responsibility. At 18, following the untimely loss of her father, she found herself stepping into a world where decisions could not wait for experience to catch up. There were businesses to protect, employees to support, families whose livelihoods were connected to those enterprises, and a future that had suddenly become hers to navigate.

She does not romanticise that beginning. "I think I learnt responsibility before I learnt entrepreneurship," she says. At that age, leadership was not a concept she was trying to embody, nor was ambition the driving force. She simply had to show up. In retrospect, that early confrontation with responsibility became one of the most formative experiences of her life, teaching her that leadership is not necessarily about possessing every answer. Sometimes, it is about having the courage to find one.

FROM INHERITANCE TO INTENTION

For the first few years, Kamalini describes herself as an "entrepreneur by chance." Her immediate objective was preservation: to understand what she had inherited, protect it and keep it functioning. But somewhere between managing responsibility and learning the realities of business, a more personal question emerged. Instead of asking how she could preserve what had been built before her, she began asking what she could create herself.

That shift marked the beginning of a different kind of entrepreneurship. Hospitality, real estate, cafés and experiential spaces became not merely business verticals, but mediums through which Kamalini could articulate her own understanding of how people live, work, eat, gather and experience a place. Her relationship with legacy remains deeply respectful, but she

refuses to confuse honouring the past with remaining imprisoned by it. For her, evolution is perhaps the more meaningful form of inheritance.

LEARNING AN INDUSTRY FROM THE GROUND UP

When Kamalini entered hospitality as Managing Director of Hotel De Sovrani, she had no prior experience in the industry. What followed was an education in the most literal sense: learning an entire business while simultaneously being expected to lead it. She was young, surrounded by people who had been working in their respective fields longer than she had been an adult, and confronted with an industry whose complexities could not be mastered from theory alone.

Her response was refreshingly direct. Rather than performing expertise she did not yet possess, she asked questions. She immersed herself in operations and learnt the business from its foundations: numbers, kitchens, rooms, service, people and the psychology that sits underneath hospitality. Mistakes became part of the education. So did proximity. Kamalini remains a hands-on leader because she believes credibility is earned through consistency and presence, not simply conferred by a designation.

THE VALUE OF KNOWING WHAT NOT TO BUILD

There is an interesting restraint to Kamalini's approach to entrepreneurship. Her instinct is not to build simply because something can be built. Before committing time, capital or energy to an opportunity, she asks a deceptively simple question: "Does this need to exist?"

The question becomes particularly revealing in an era of relentless development, where new businesses

and experiences can be created at extraordinary speed. For Kamalini, the answer has to go beyond commercial possibility. She wants to understand the consumer, identify what is missing and imagine how a space might actually be used and felt. Financial viability determines whether an idea can survive, but curiosity is often what makes her want to build it in the first place.

"Earning confidence was gradual. I do not think people ultimately respect you because of your designation. They respect consistency!"

MINIMALISM WITHOUT DEPRIVATION

Kamalini's philosophy of "urbane minimalism" offers another insight into the way she thinks about value. In industries where luxury can easily become synonymous with excess, she sees minimalism not as subtraction for its own sake, but as a discipline of intention.

More marble, more chandeliers or more expensive materials do not automatically create a more luxurious experience. Thoughtful design, cleanliness, comfort, functionality, efficient service and a strong sense of place can produce something considerably more valuable without unnecessary consumption. This philosophy informs everything from spatial design to pricing and capital allocation. She would rather invest in something that genuinely improves the experience than in an element whose primary purpose is to signal expense.

>>



“Numbers determine whether an idea can survive. But curiosity is usually what makes me want to build it in the first place!”

WHEN INNOVATION HAS A PURPOSE

Kamalini's approach to innovation is equally pragmatic. She is not interested in novelty simply because novelty photographs well or performs well on social media. Her work at Serra Cafe offers a telling example. Its automatic retractable rooftop concept was conceived around an actual problem: Kolkata's dramatic shifts between winter, monsoon and summer make an open-air dining experience inherently dependent on weather.

The solution was therefore not innovation for spectacle, but innovation as problem-solving. Kamalini draws a sharp distinction between the two. Trends ask what everyone is doing now. Innovation asks what could be done better. That difference is crucial in hospitality, where visual novelty can attract attention but rarely guarantees a lasting experience. For her, the strongest ideas are those that continue to make sense after their novelty has worn off.

REIMAGINING ACCESS TO INDIA

Kamalini's ambitions extend beyond individual properties. She sees a larger opportunity in making India, and particularly West Bengal, more accessible to travellers while simultaneously improving the availability of safe, clean, well-designed and reasonably priced hospitality for domestic consumers.

She points to an important gap between luxury hospitality and extremely inexpensive accommodation. The middle ground, she believes, has

enormous potential: spaces that are reliable, hygienic, thoughtfully designed and accessible without becoming impersonal. For international travellers, the challenge is broader still. Connectivity, public infrastructure, cleanliness, information and consistency of service all influence how confidently people explore a country. West Bengal, with its architecture, food, wildlife, Himalayas, Sundarbans, tea country, art and distinctive cultural identity, represents to her an especially compelling opportunity waiting to be better understood by the world.

BUSINESS WITH A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

There is a tendency to separate commercial ambition from social responsibility, as though the two belong to different worlds. Kamalini does not see them that way. She is clear that profitability matters because a business that cannot sustain itself cannot sustainably support anyone else. But she also believes the responsibilities of a successful entrepreneur extend beyond the balance sheet.

Businesses occupy communities, employ people, consume resources and influence the environments around them. That creates obligations, whether through community development, providing opportunities to people with fewer privileges, supporting causes or considering how resources are used. Her involvement in animal welfare, particularly the rescue, sterilisation and support of stray dogs, is another expression of that philosophy. Importantly, she does not believe responsibility needs to arrive as a grand corporate gesture. It can exist in everyday decisions: treating employees fairly, giving someone an opportunity, using resources consciously or simply showing up for something because it matters.

THE REAL MEANING OF SUCCESS

Awards can offer external punctuation to a career. They mark achievement, create visibility and occasionally give an

individual a moment to pause and recognise how far they have travelled. But Kamalini's definition of success has changed considerably since she first entered business.

At 18, success meant survival. Later, it became proof: evidence that she could build, grow and make decisions independently. Today, she associates success more closely with freedom. The freedom to decide what she builds, who she works with, where she invests her time and what kind of life she creates around her work.

That evolution says something important about ambition itself. Kamalini still describes herself as ambitious, but she no longer equates ambition with endless accumulation. An award, title or balance sheet can acknowledge achievement, but none of them can define an entire life. For her, the deeper measure is whether she can look back and know that she consciously built her life rather than simply inherited its circumstances.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF LEGACY

Legacy is a complicated word for Kamalini because it once meant something very specific: her father's legacy, which she had inherited and felt responsible for protecting. With time, the meaning has shifted. She still wants to create enduring businesses, but she understands that buildings change, brands evolve and leadership positions eventually belong to someone else.

What interests her more now is continuity through people. A person who worked with her going on to create something of their own. A young entrepreneur facing circumstances that feel impossible seeing her story and deciding that perhaps they, too, can figure it out. Communities benefiting because her businesses exist. These are the less visible forms of legacy, but perhaps the more durable ones. >>

THE COURAGE TO BEGIN WITHOUT A MAP

There is an understated wisdom in Kamalini's story: she did not begin with certainty. She began with circumstances that demanded action. Her eventual entrepreneurial identity was not handed to her alongside the responsibilities she inherited. It was constructed through experience, mistakes, curiosity and the gradual realisation that preserving someone else's work was only the beginning.

That may be why her understanding of entrepreneurship feels less performative than the conventional mythology surrounding it. There is no insistence that every decision must emerge from a perfectly articulated five-year plan. Instead, there is an acceptance that sometimes life places you inside a problem before you know how to solve it. The important thing is what you choose to build from there.

Kamalini's journey ultimately moves from responsibility to agency, from inheritance to authorship. She entered business because she had to. She stayed because she discovered that she loved creating. And somewhere between the two lies the story of an entrepreneur who has learned that the most meaningful businesses are not necessarily the ones that occupy the most space, but the ones that leave something valuable behind.

THE FUTURE SHE WANTS TO BUILD

For Kamalini, the future is not simply about expanding a portfolio. It is about building businesses that have purpose, spaces that improve experiences and opportunities that extend beyond herself. Her vision of entrepreneurship is grounded in a deceptively difficult idea: that commercial success and human consequence should not exist in separate compartments.

The businesses may change. New ventures may emerge. The physical spaces may eventually belong to another generation. But the larger ambition remains consistent: to create things that need to exist, to make experiences better, to make places more accessible, and to give people the confidence to build something of their own.

Perhaps the most revealing line in her story is also the simplest: "I certainly did not" have her entire life planned before she began.

There is no weakness in that admission. There is freedom in it.

Because Kamalini Paul's story is ultimately not about having known the destination at 18. It is about learning to build while moving forward, and discovering that a life can begin with circumstances you never chose and still become something entirely your own. ■■■■



SHE DIDN'T FOLLOW THE BEAUTY PLAYBOOK. SHE REWROTE IT.

DIVYA MALPANI MAHESHWARI is building what the industry **CAN'T FAKE!**



She built SKINVEST on a bet that patience, precision, and an unglamorous kind of honesty would outlast every shortcut the beauty industry has ever sold. She was right, and she isn't finished proving it.

Confidence doesn't always announce itself. Sometimes, it simply comes from knowing you've earned your place. Divya Malpani Maheshwari has it in the way she talks about skin,

not as an aesthetic problem to be solved, but as a system to be understood, respected, and occasionally left alone. It is this instinct, sharpened over years into something closer to a discipline, that built Skinvest: a brand that started as a college student's frustration with her own bathroom shelf and has since become one of the more considered voices in Indian skincare. >>

What began as instinct has since been reinforced by years of data, research and experience. "Back then I understood the problem intuitively," she says. "Today, after years of formulation, customer conversations, and watching real results play out, I understand it clinically, down to specific actives, specific concentrations, specific skin tone and undertone considerations." The founding hunch has calcified into expertise. That has become the throughline of her story: not a single flash of inspiration, but the long, often unglamorous work of turning a hunch into expertise.

THE LINE SHE WON'T CROSS

The beauty industry, as an institution, has built fortunes on making women feel there is something to fix. She knows this history intimately, she has to, in order to position Skinvest against it, and she draws the boundary not around aesthetics but around intent. "Traditional beauty marketing often starts by naming a flaw and then selling you the fix, it manufactures the insecurity as a business model," she says. "Our approach is the opposite. We start with a real, documented skin concern, hyperpigmentation, barrier damage from over-exfoliation, a genuine scalp health issue, and we address it because it exists, not because we've convinced someone it exists."

The distinction sounds obvious, but it is one the industry does not always honour. She is equally deliberate about vocabulary. The brand avoids the language of shame entirely, no talk of what's "wrong" with a customer, only of regulation, equilibrium, results. "Skincare that's rooted in real dermatological need, delivered with honest claims, empowers people because it gives them agency and information," she explains. "Skincare that's rooted in manufactured shame just keeps them coming back to fix something that was never actually broken." It's a line she says she thinks about constantly, particularly now, as

the brand's ambitions grow and the temptation to reach for easier, flashier marketing grows with them.



LEARNING TO TAKE UP SPACE

Ask any young woman who has built something from nothing about the moment she realised competence wasn't enough, and you will usually get a story about a room that wasn't ready to listen. Her version is characteristically unsentimental. "Competence gets you the right to be in the conversation. Presence gets you heard within it," she says. "That was a hard thing to accept, because it felt unfair, like an extra tax I was paying that others weren't."

What changed wasn't her material, the formulation data, the numbers, the answers were always sound, it was her relationship to delivery. "I used to think if the work was good enough, it would speak for itself. Now I make sure I'm the one speaking for it first: clearly, directly, without over-explaining or over-apologising for taking up space." It is a lesson that has since shaped how she approaches the rest of the business.

THE COST OF CHOOSING PATIENCE

In an entrepreneurial culture that treats speed as its own virtue, Skinvest's long runway before launch, years of research, formulation, and testing, reads almost like defiance. She frames it differently: as a recognition of

what the brand was actually selling. "A skincare brand that rushes a formulation to market is borrowing against its own credibility, and that's a debt that comes due eventually, usually in the form of a customer who doesn't come back."

The harder part, she admits, is knowing the difference between patience and avoidance. Her test is specific enough to double as advice for any founder stalling on a launch date: "If I'm still iterating because the stability testing isn't where it needs to be, or the sensorial feel isn't right for our climate, that's discipline. If I'm iterating because I'm scared of the customer's reaction, that's fear wearing the costume of diligence. I've learned to ask myself, specifically, what data am I still waiting for, and if I can't name it, it's usually time to launch."



She brings the same precision to customer feedback, which she separates cleanly into two categories: intelligence and noise. Feedback becomes strategic, she says, "the moment it's telling you something about a problem you hadn't fully understood." It stops being useful the moment it starts asking the brand to become something different for every voice that speaks to it. "My rule is: feedback tells me what problem to solve, but it doesn't get to tell me how to solve it or who we are while solving it. The 'what' is often collective. The 'how' has to stay mine."

ROOTED IN INDIA, BUILT TO TRAVEL

As Skinvest looks beyond India, Divya is equally clear about what she does not want to lose. She sees the trap most brands fall into when they go global: sanding down everything specific about themselves in pursuit of universal appeal. She wants the opposite. "What makes Skinvest relevant isn't in spite of being built for Indian skin and Indian weather, it's because of it. Specificity, done well, is actually what travels." A product engineered to solve a real problem for a real climate, she argues, reads as more credible everywhere, not less. "We're not 'another global skincare brand', we're the brand that took skin science seriously enough to build for a specific, underserved profile first. Roots only become a limitation if you're embarrassed by them. I'm not."

LEARNING TO LET GO

For Divya, focus has meant learning what to hold on to and what to let go of. "Early on, I wanted to touch every formulation decision, every piece of content, every ad script, partly because I cared, and partly, honestly, because I didn't trust anyone else to care as much." What she has kept for herself is formulation integrity, brand voice, and the biggest strategic bets, fundraising, positioning, the long-term chips. Everything else now belongs to a team she has had to learn to trust.

That trust has been built, in part, through hiring mistakes she is willing to name. She once weighted résumés over instinct, only to learn that "you really don't know how someone will work until you work with them." The harder lesson was about timing, recognising when something wasn't working and acting on it sooner. "Being liked and being respected as a leader aren't the same thing," she says. "I've realised since that clarity, even when uncomfortable, is often the kinder thing you can offer someone. It respects them enough to be honest."

WHAT SUCCESS MEANS NOW

Five years ago, success was a scoreboard, revenue, retention, proof that the thing worked. Today, she describes it as sustainability across every part of her life at once, not growth cordoned off into one lane while everything else waits. "I don't think 'having it all' means doing everything at the same intensity simultaneously," she says. "It means I've stopped treating ambition and a full personal life as competing resources, and started treating them as things that actually feed each other."

Strip away the titles, founder, entrepreneur, industry leader, and what's left, she admits, is still partly a woman trying to prove she belongs in rooms she wasn't obviously destined for. It's an honest admission, and a rare one. But she is equally clear about where that instinct is meant to lead: not toward louder arguments, but toward a body of work substantial enough that the argument becomes unnecessary. "I think that's what all the louder goals eventually come down to," she says, "to build something so real that I can finally stop explaining myself, and just be in it." ■■■■■■





A LEGACY — THAT DOES NOT — ANNOUNCE ITSELF

Inside Zighrana, the House of Akhilesh Pathak and Swapnil Pathak Sharma

Long before Zighrana existed as a name on a bottle, it existed as a smell — the smell of wet earth rising off the fields of Kannauj after the season's first rain, of roses gathered before dawn, of sandalwood warming slowly under a Kannauj sun. For a hundred and fifteen years, this was not an aesthetic. It was simply life, passed silently from one generation of the Pathak family to the next, distilled patiently in copper stills long before the word "luxury" was ever attached to it. What Akhilesh Pathak and his daughter, Swapnil Pathak Sharma, have built with Zighrana is not a reinvention of that inheritance, but a translation of it — carrying a lineage rooted in one small city in Uttar Pradesh onto some of the most distinguished stages in the world.

In this exclusive feature, Swapnil speaks about what it means to carry forward a craft that cannot be taught, only lived, and why she believes Indian perfumery never needed to become less Indian in order to become global.

A CRAFT INHERITED, NOT LEARNED

For Akhilesh, perfumery has never been a career in the conventional sense so much as a lifelong devotion — decades spent understanding raw materials with an instinct that resists formal instruction. His daughter describes this inheritance with evident reverence. "I grew up around this craft, and I've seen how much knowledge, patience and emotion goes into creating a traditional attar," she says. That closeness shaped her core belief about where Indian perfumery belongs on the world stage. "I don't believe Indian perfumery needs to become less Indian to become global. We simply need to present its authenticity with confidence. The more you stay true to your heart, the more deeply you connect with people."

KANNAUJ IS NOT WHERE ZIGHRANA IS FROM — IT IS WHAT ZIGHRANA IS

To reduce Kannauj to its reputation as India's perfume capital, Swapnil says, misses what the city truly represents to the brand. "For me, Kannauj is much more than 'the perfume capital of India.' It's my home. My soul. It is a part of who I am," she says, describing a childhood shaped by its fragrances, its flowers, its seasons and its artisans. As Zighrana reaches further into global markets, she remains firm about what must stay unchanged. "Even as we take Indian perfumery to a global audience, I want that sense of rootedness to remain at the heart of everything we do. Kannauj isn't just where Zighrana comes from. It is what Zighrana is."

EMOTIONS DON'T NEED A PASSPORT

Translating ingredients as culturally specific as mitti, rose and sandalwood into a language that resonates across borders might seem to demand compromise. Swapnil disagrees entirely. "I believe emotions don't need a passport. You may not know Kannauj or have grown up around attars, but you understand the feeling of rain on earth, the freshness of a rose, or the warmth of sandalwood," she says. Rather than chasing universality, Zighrana pursues honesty. "We don't try to make something 'global.' We try to make something honest. We stay true to the ingredient, the craft, our roots and, most importantly, our Indianness."

"We don't have to change who we are to be understood by the world."

A RHYTHM DICTATED BY THE SEASONS

What distinguishes Indian attar-making within a global luxury industry increasingly obsessed with provenance and authenticity, Swapnil explains, is its intimate relationship with time itself. "Rose belongs to the cooler months, jasmine and mehendi come alive in summer, while mitti is born from the intense summer heat" she says. "Every ingredient has its own time, place and story. That rhythm between the earth,

the seasons and the scent is what gives Indian perfumery its soul" — a rhythm that cannot be rushed, replicated, or manufactured out of season.



NEW YORK, AND A MOMENT OF ARRIVAL

Zighrana's global journey formally began on February 14th, 2022, when the house was unveiled in New York by the Consul General of India, Mr. Randhir Jaiswal, alongside India's Ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. T. S. Tirumurti. For Swapnil, the evening carried a significance beyond ceremony. "New York represents the world in many ways — it brings together people and cultures from every corner of the globe. To launch there and be received so warmly felt like a moment of arrival," she recalls, describing a room of the city's most influential figures arriving curious and leaving genuinely impressed. "The next morning, we were all over the news."

That momentum carried further in 2023, when Zighrana's creations were selected for the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India's official gift hampers presented to world leaders at the G20 Summit. "It made us realise that what we were carrying was not just our family's heritage, but a part of India's larger fragrance legacy," she says. "Since then, our ambition has become very clear: to take Indian perfumery to the world without diluting what makes it Indian."



"You may not know Kannauj or have grown up around attars, but you understand the feeling of rain on earth, the freshness of a rose, or the warmth of sandalwood. That's really how we think about fragrance at Zighrana. We don't try to make something "global." We try to make something honest!"



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO GENERATIONS

What makes Zighrana distinct, Swapnil believes, is that it is not simply a father's legacy continued by his daughter, but an active dialogue between two very different forms of expertise. "My father has spent decades around fragrances. He has what I can only describe as a powerful nose — he can smell an ingredient or an attar and very quickly tell whether it is of genuine quality or not," she says. "That instinct comes from years of experience, and it is something that cannot simply be learnt in a laboratory." Her own training, formalised at New York's Pratt Institute, sits alongside — never above — what she absorbed working beside her father. "The past gives us our knowledge and our roots. The present gives us a new language to take that heritage forward."

That philosophy extends even into the brand's visual identity: Swapnil designed the Zighrana logo herself, drawing every detail from the architecture of the Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur — a quiet reminder that heritage, for this house, runs through every layer of the brand, not just its formulas.

LUXURY THAT DOES NOT NEED TO SHOUT

In an industry often driven by the next fragrance trend, Zighrana has deliberately positioned itself against noise. "Quiet luxury is the confidence that comes from authenticity and trust. It is craftsmanship that speaks for itself, and a product people choose because they believe in what stands behind it," Swapnil says. Every creation, including the house's debut fragrance developed in collaboration with chef Vikas Khanna, is built through traditional distillation techniques and rare Indian ingredients, designed less to impress instantly than to evoke — a first rain, a rose garden, a familiar place long left behind. "A fragrance doesn't have to be loud to leave an impression," she says. "Trends are temporary. What we create is timeless."

A VISION LARGER THAN FRAGRANCE

For Swapnil, the future of Zighrana has always extended beyond the boundaries of a fragrance house. The ambition is to build a global luxury and wellness brand rooted firmly in India, while changing the way the world understands Indian perfumery. It is a

distinction that matters. The story of attar is often told through its association with the Mughals, yet Indian perfumery reaches much further back, woven into the lives of kings and queens, kingdoms, temples, Ayurveda, Indian medicine, rituals and traditions. Zighrana's larger purpose is to bring that deeper history back into the conversation.

But heritage, in Swapnil's vision, cannot exist only as nostalgia. She does not want Indian perfumery to be seen simply as something belonging to the past. She wants it experienced as a living, sophisticated tradition that has a legitimate place within contemporary luxury. That conviction brings the conversation back to the craft itself, and to the question of authenticity.

In traditional deg-bhapka distillation, botanical material is heated in water inside a copper deg, with the vapours travelling through a bamboo pipe into the bhapka, where the fragrance is traditionally captured in sandalwood oil. In an industry where lower-priced attars may use alternative chemical carrier bases, Zighrana has deliberately remained with pure sandalwood oil. More significantly, the house also distils the sandalwood oil that forms the foundation of its attars, giving it control over quality from raw material to finished fragrance. For Zighrana, authenticity is therefore not simply a claim on a label; it is control over the process itself.

And fragrance, ultimately, is only the beginning. Swapnil sees Zighrana evolving into a broader luxury wellness brand, bringing together India's botanical wealth, fragrance traditions, natural ingredients, ritual and wellbeing through a contemporary luxury language. The ambition is not to preserve heritage behind glass, but to allow it to live, evolve and travel.

In that sense, the larger vision encompasses all three ambitions: building a global luxury brand rooted in India, redefining how the world perceives Indian perfumery, and ensuring that a precious craft continues to thrive. But beneath all three lies something more enduring: legacy.

Zighrana does not want simply to preserve India's fragrance heritage. It wants to add the next chapter to it. ■■■■



The Unfinished Canvas

MANISHA KANDKUR

on patience, presence
and becoming several
people at once!



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very young woman who enters the visual industries arrives carrying some private theory of who she is, one she will spend years testing against cameras, casting rooms and the shifting demands of an audience that rarely asks permission before deciding what it wants from her. Manisha Kandkur describes her own theory, refreshingly, as still unwritten. Having moved between beauty, fashion, content creation and now Telugu and Kannada cinema, she resists the temptation to settle prematurely into a single defining identity, choosing instead to treat the uncertainty itself as the most interesting part of the work.

"I don't think I can define myself by just one version of who I am yet," she says, and rather than sounding unmoored, she sounds like someone who has made peace with an open question — content, for now, in the simple instinct to create, perform and experiment, and curious to see exactly where that impulse eventually leads her. It is a rare kind of composure for someone still early in a career built on being watched, and it colours nearly everything else she has to say about ambition, image and the slow, deliberate work of becoming an artist rather than merely a presence.

PATIENCE AND THE WRONG TIMELINE

Long before her acting career gathered momentum, Manisha spent years in the uncertain arithmetic of auditions — the waiting, the near-misses, the

silence that follows a room you thought went well. She speaks of that period now with something closer to gratitude than resentment, convinced she would not have valued her eventual opportunities in quite the same way had they arrived any earlier. Rejection, in her account, was never a referendum on her worth, simply an unavoidable feature of the process — one that made every eventual yes feel considerably more earned. Her most striking reframing, though, is temporal rather than emotional: she has come to believe the question was never really about being on the wrong timeline at all, but about trusting that the timeline she was on was quietly preparing her for something she could not yet see coming. It is a distinction that matters more than it might first appear, since it converts a period that could easily have curdled into bitterness into something closer to preparation — patience recast not as passive waiting, but as a kind of quiet, ongoing readiness.

LANGUAGE AS EXPANSION, NOT LIMITATION

Having entered Indian cinema through Telugu and Kannada roles, with ambitions extending into Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi, Manisha refuses outright to treat India's multilingual film landscape as an obstacle to be managed. At its foundation, she argues, acting remains constant regardless of language — the real craft lies in translating a character's emotion through expression, body language and

the texture of one's connection to the story, elements that exist prior to, and independent of, any particular tongue. Where others might see fragmentation, she sees opportunity: each new industry offers exposure to a distinct culture, perspective and cinematic style, and she finds something quietly moving in the way Indian cinema, for all its linguistic diversity, still manages to gather the country's many audiences into a single, shared experience.

FROM BEING PHOTOGRAPHED TO BEING INHABITED

Manisha describes her early years in front of the camera with unusual honesty, admitting she arrived close to a blank canvas — uncertain, still assembling the confidence that now defines her on set. What acting has since taught her, she says, is a far deeper comfort with the self that photography alone never quite demanded: today, she feels most authentically herself specifically when the camera is rolling. That shift has rippled outward into how she now approaches fashion and beauty, both of which she describes as arriving far more naturally to her now, less through instruction than through the slow, unglamorous accumulation of trial and error. The blank canvas, in other words, has not been replaced by a finished portrait — simply by a far more confident hand holding the brush. >>





HOW MUCH OF MANISHA TO LEAVE IN

Following a role she describes as livelier and more outspoken in her earlier Telugu work, Manisha's quieter, more grounded turn in *Brat* required a different internal calculation — deciding precisely which parts of her own personality to carry into a character and which to consciously set aside. She admits the process of muting one's own instincts can be genuinely difficult for someone who has always been unguardedly herself, but describes eventually discovering something like a method in it: beginning each scene by asking herself how Manisha would actually respond in that situation, and building the character outward from that honest starting point rather than erasing herself entirely. The resulting performance, she believes, gains a kind of legitimacy precisely because a sliver of her real self remains inside it — even while the character is allowed to become someone unmistakably different from her.

THE DISCIPLINE OF BEING LOOKED AT

Few of Manisha's answers carry as much unguarded vulnerability as her reflection on constantly being observed, evaluated and interpreted — an occupational condition shared

uneasily by both fashion and acting, industries that ask a woman to be endlessly visible while rarely offering her much protection from the scrutiny that visibility invites. She confesses this remains genuinely difficult territory for her, admitting to a persistent self-consciousness she is still learning to soften into something gentler and more forgiving. Her comfort, such as it is, comes from a broader cultural shift she has noticed — a growing appetite for authenticity over an impossible, airbrushed perfection, an audience increasingly drawn to people willing to show the good, the bad and the unresolved, rather than a performance of flawlessness nobody actually believes.

LEARNING BY WATCHING

Rather than crediting formal training as her primary education, Manisha locates most of her real growth as an actor in the discipline of simple observation — watching directors, fellow performers and the ordinary rhythm of daily life with an attentiveness she describes as almost instinctive. She notices mannerisms, the particular cadence of how people speak, react and carry their emotions through a room, and channels that raw material directly into her performances. Much of what she brings to a role, she insists, originates not from anything she was formally taught, but from real people, observed patiently and without agenda — evidence that curiosity about ordinary human behaviour may be as valuable to an actor as any classroom instruction could ever be. It is a method that costs nothing and demands only attention, and Manisha treats that attention less as a professional technique than as a habit of mind she carries everywhere, on set and off it alike.

THE LINE BETWEEN IMAGE AND SELF

Manisha is candid about how thin the boundary has become between cultivating a public image and protecting the private, imperfect self she believes ultimately makes her a better artist. The pressure to remain

visible and relevant, she suggests, has intensified considerably in the social media era, and she admits to occasionally losing herself inside that pressure, or placing expectations on herself that serve the algorithm more than the artist. What has helped, she says, is developing the awareness to recognise the moment it happens, and the discipline to deliberately pull back and refocus on who she actually is beneath the performance of relevance — a practice she frames not as vanity management, but as the very thing that keeps her grounded.

BEAUTY BEYOND THE FRAME, AND THE DECADE AHEAD

Travel, Manisha says, has repeatedly reshaped her understanding of what genuinely compelling people look like — pushing her well past conventional ideas of beauty toward something rooted instead in perspective, experience and the particular energy a person carries into a room. She speaks of travel as an antidote to staying stuck inside one environment, a practice that consistently deepens gratitude and widens the mind in ways no other experience quite replicates.

That same appetite for expansion defines how she imagines the decade ahead. Freed from the constraints of trend or box-office expectation, she wants roles that would genuinely hold her own attention as a viewer — characters demanding enough to keep her from ever repeating herself, since she admits candidly to becoming bored by sameness. Beyond the screen, her ambition is disarmingly simple: to remain unmistakably herself, posting on her own terms and encouraging others to do the same. If there is a single legacy she is quietly building toward, it is this — to be remembered, above all, as someone who trusted her instincts and never once talked herself out of them. ■■■■■■

THE SCENT STORIES WE WEAR

HRISHIKESH LONKAR WITH THE NEW LANGUAGE OF INDIAN PERFUMERY



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perfume can announce itself in seconds, but the idea behind it can take generations to arrive. For **HRISHIKESH LONKAR**, fragrance begins somewhere beyond the bottle, the formula or even the conventional language of luxury. It begins with a question of identity: what happens when a country with one of the world's oldest relationships with scent begins telling its own stories through contemporary perfumery?

That question sits at the heart of A Fragrance Story, the brand Hrishikesh founded with a distinctly Indian point of view and an ambition that extends well beyond the domestic market. His premise is neither to romanticise India's olfactory past nor to reproduce it wholesale. It is to take the country's landscapes, ingredients, memories and cultural associations and translate them into fragrances that feel unmistakably rooted yet entirely of the present. >>



<< For Hrishikesh, that distinction is important. India has contributed sandalwood, vetiver, jasmine, rose, spices, aromatic woods and attars to the global fragrance vocabulary for centuries. Yet the contemporary story of perfumery has often been narrated through European houses, leaving India's contribution less visible than its historical significance would suggest. A Fragrance Story emerges from that gap, not as an exercise in nostalgia, but as an attempt to reclaim authorship.

BEYOND THE BOTTLE

The name itself reveals the philosophy. A Fragrance Story does not begin with a note pyramid or a fashionable ingredient. It begins with a narrative. "Every fragrance begins with a narrative, not a trend," Hrishikesh explains. That philosophy

fundamentally changes the way a perfume is imagined. A place is not reduced to a list of smells. A river is not simply translated into aquatic notes. A city cannot be recreated by assembling ingredients that supposedly smell like its streets. Instead, Hrishikesh and his team ask what a place feels like, what memories it contains and what atmosphere might allow another person to experience something of that emotional world.

The fragrance becomes an interpretation rather than a replica. It is a subtle but significant distinction. In an industry where storytelling can sometimes become an elaborate marketing layer placed over a product, Hrishikesh wants the story to precede the product. The perfume exists because there is something worth saying through it.



That gives scent a different kind of role. It becomes less an accessory and more an emotional medium.

AN INDIA THAT DOES NOT NEED TRANSLATION

The most interesting aspect of Hrishikesh's vision is perhaps his refusal to treat Indian identity as a limitation. India offers an extraordinary raw vocabulary for perfumery: sandalwood and saffron, jasmine and rose, vetiver and attar traditions, alongside landscapes and cultural experiences that are almost impossible to

exhaust. But drawing on these references comes with a creative responsibility. Heritage can easily become decorative, reduced to visual motifs, familiar ingredients or a nostalgic version of the past.

Hrishikesh takes a more contemporary approach. For him, heritage is not about recreating what existed. It is about understanding what made it meaningful and giving that essence a new expression. >>

<< An ingredient becomes a starting point rather than a destination. A cultural memory becomes a creative direction rather than a costume. This is where A Fragrance Story finds its individuality. The brand does not appear interested in proving how Indian it can be. It is interested in demonstrating how naturally Indian stories can exist within modern perfumery. The distinction allows the fragrances to be culturally specific without becoming culturally restrictive.

DESIGNING FOR THE INDIAN CLIMATE

There is also a practical intelligence behind the brand's Indian focus. Fragrance does not behave identically everywhere. Heat, humidity and temperature can dramatically alter how a composition develops, projects and lasts. In India, where climatic conditions vary enormously across regions and seasons, creating perfume for the local consumer requires an understanding of performance that goes beyond simply making a scent stronger. A Fragrance Story develops its perfumes as Eau de Parfum, with an emphasis on depth, longevity and performance. Yet Hrishikesh is careful about the distinction between longevity and impact.

A fragrance should remain present, he believes, without becoming oppressive. That balance is increasingly relevant to a consumer who is becoming more educated about perfume. Indian fragrance enthusiasts are no longer a single audience with a single preference. Some are drawn to fresh and subtle compositions; others seek richness, intensity and projection. The opportunity for a contemporary Indian fragrance house therefore lies not in assuming what the consumer wants, but in creating enough sophistication and individuality to meet a more discerning audience. The objective is presence, not volume.

THE NEW INDIAN FRAGRANCE CONSUMER

Something has changed in the way

fragrance is being understood in India. The consumer is increasingly curious about notes, ingredients, composition and the larger culture surrounding perfume. Global fragrance houses have expanded the vocabulary available to Indian audiences, while the renewed interest in traditional Indian perfumery has created another kind of curiosity: a desire to understand what India itself has contributed to the world of scent.

Hrishikesh sees this convergence as an opportunity rather than a competition. The next chapter, in his view, should not be about Indian brands imitating international fragrance culture. It should be about absorbing its sophistication while developing an unmistakable point of view of their own. That is a more ambitious proposition than simply being "made in India." It suggests that Indian fragrance can be both geographically rooted and globally relevant, with neither identity having to compromise the other.



AUTHENTICITY AS A BUSINESS DECISION

In an industry crowded with launches, campaigns and rapidly shifting consumer trends, authenticity can

sound like an abstract virtue. Hrishikesh gives it a far more practical definition: having a clear point of view and maintaining it even when the market is moving elsewhere. That means resisting the temptation to create a fragrance simply because a particular note is trending. It also means accepting that independence comes with commercial realities.

Established global fragrance houses operate with enormous advertising budgets, extensive retail networks, deep discounting strategies and constant visibility. An independent brand cannot realistically compete by attempting to outspend them or make more noise. So Hrishikesh has chosen a different form of competition. The things A Fragrance Story can genuinely own are its stories, its creative identity, the quality of its fragrances and the emotional relationship it develops with its audience. The brand's strategy is therefore rooted in distinction rather than volume, and in building slowly through product and experience rather than relying on perpetual promotional noise. His most meaningful validation does not necessarily come from visibility. It comes when someone discovers a fragrance, connects with its story and returns to describe what it made them feel. That is the kind of loyalty advertising cannot manufacture.

LETTING THE WEARER FINISH THE STORY

There is a paradox at the centre of every successful perfume. The creator builds the composition, but the wearer ultimately decides what it means. Hrishikesh understands that fragrance cannot be completely controlled. The same scent might transport one person to childhood, remind another of a journey and evoke someone beloved for a third. It may even create a new memory that the creator never anticipated. >>

<< That unpredictability is not a flaw in the medium. It is its greatest strength. For A Fragrance Story, therefore, the ambition is not to dictate an emotion but to create the conditions for one. The fragrance begins the narrative. The wearer completes it. This idea also explains why scent can possess an unusually powerful relationship with memory. Unlike a visual image that can be observed from a distance, fragrance enters an experience almost invisibly. It attaches itself to moments without necessarily announcing what it is doing. Years later, a familiar scent can bring an entire emotional landscape back with startling precision. For Hrishikesh, that is where the true power of perfume lies.

THE BUSINESS OF BUILDING SLOWLY

There is a romantic tendency to imagine independent fragrance brands as purely creative enterprises. The reality is considerably more complicated. Behind every perfume sits a network of sourcing, formulation, manufacturing, consumer education, distribution and brand building. The creative idea may be the beginning, but it cannot exist without the infrastructure required to carry it to the consumer. Hrishikesh's entrepreneurial journey has reinforced that reality.

Building a meaningful fragrance brand means accepting that there are things money cannot shortcut. Trust has to be accumulated. A consumer has to encounter the product, understand it, wear it and decide whether it deserves a place in their life. That process can be slower than chasing immediate attention. But it can also be deeper. For A Fragrance Story, the decision to build through product and experience rather than excessive discounting or constant trend-chasing reflects a larger conviction: a brand should be remembered for what it creates, not simply for how often it appears.

WHY CONTEXT MATTERS

The global fragrance industry is also

moving toward greater curiosity about provenance, craftsmanship and transparency. Consumers increasingly want to know not merely what something smells like, but why it exists. For Indian fragrance brands, this conversation carries particular weight. India has an extraordinary reservoir of stories, ingredients, landscapes and traditions. Yet the richness of that heritage means little if it is reduced to superficial branding. The cultural context needs to be communicated with enough depth for the consumer to understand the creative thought behind the perfume.

"It has taught us to focus on what we can genuinely own, our stories, our creativity, the quality of our fragrances and the emotional connection we create with the consumer!"

Hrishikesh believes a fragrance should therefore answer questions beyond its notes. What inspired it? What place or memory does it come from? What emotion is it trying to evoke? And, perhaps most importantly, what story is it inviting the wearer to begin? When those questions are answered, the bottle acquires a life beyond its physical contents.

FROM INDIAN STORIES TO WORLD STORIES

The larger ambition for A Fragrance Story is clear: to move from telling stories about India to carrying Indian stories into the world. That does not mean turning every fragrance into an overt cultural statement. Quite the opposite. Hrishikesh wants the compositions to retain enough emotional universality that someone far removed from India can encounter them without needing an explanation

to appreciate them. That is the real test of cultural expression in a global marketplace.

The story can be local. The emotion cannot be limited by geography. India should not be seen only as a source of exceptional raw materials or as the historical home of attar. It can also be understood as a country capable of producing contemporary, original and globally relevant fragrance houses. That is the space Hrishikesh wants A Fragrance Story to occupy.

THE MEMORY THAT REMAINS

Ultimately, A Fragrance Story is built around an idea that is both simple and surprisingly profound: scent disappears, but its consequences do not necessarily disappear with it. A fragrance fades from the skin. What it awakens may remain. For Hrishikesh, the future of the brand is therefore larger than building a successful perfume label. It is about contributing to a new narrative for Indian perfumery, one in which heritage is not preserved behind glass but interpreted, challenged and carried forward. His ambition is to create fragrances that are rooted in India without being confined to it; contemporary without abandoning history; distinctive without becoming inaccessible.

And perhaps that is the most intelligent way to understand A Fragrance Story. It is not simply a brand attempting to put India into perfume. It is an attempt to demonstrate that India has always had stories worth smelling, and that the next chapter of those stories can be written for the world. Long after the final trace of a fragrance has disappeared from the skin, the memory it leaves behind may still remain. For Hrishikesh Lonkar, that lingering emotional imprint is not merely the afterlife of perfume.

It is the point! 



Craft Of Being Uncopiable!

RUHEE DOSANI

A POPP DAPP cover story on the dancer-turned-creator redefining what personal style means in the algorithm age!

Long before the world knew her as a Bollywood dance sensation with a trademark pair of braids, Ruhee was simply a woman who moved through the world instinctively — through cultures, through cities, through a corporate career she eventually left behind for a camera and an internet connection. That instinct, it turns out, was the whole story all along. What began as an Instagram reel that caught Diljit Dosanjh's attention and sent her career into overdrive has since evolved into something more layered: a genuine fashion sensibility, an evolving public identity, and a philosophy of authenticity that feels increasingly rare in a culture built for replication. In this exclusive POPP DAPP cover story, Ruhee opens up about the moment her style stopped being incidental and became identity, why she refuses to let her personality become a trend, and what she believes the next generation of creators will need to survive an AI-saturated internet.

WHEN STYLE STOPPED BEING DECORATION

For a creator whose career was built on visibility, Ruhee is disarmingly clear that her fashion evolution was never really about being seen. "I've always dressed based on how I felt rather than what I was supposed to wear," she says, tracing the shift back to years of movement — between cultures, cities, dance floors and the sheer range of people she found herself around. What started as instinct slowly revealed itself to be storytelling. "It wasn't just, 'This looks good on camera.' It became, 'This feels like me.'" That distinction, subtle as it sounds, marks the exact point where a wardrobe stops being an accessory to a public career and starts becoming the identity itself.

It is a distinction she has had to actively defend in an industry engineered to blur it. Asked how she separates self-expression from algorithmic performance, her answer is refreshingly unglamorous: she asks herself whether she would wear the outfit if nobody was watching at all. "I love experimenting with trends, but I don't want my personality to become a trend," she explains, adding that she would rather commit to something "slightly weird that feels very me" than chase a look everyone else is already wearing. In an economy that rewards recognisable, repeatable aesthetics — the kind of content that performs identically across a thousand accounts — that stubbornness is closer to a creative strategy than a personal quirk.

REINVENTION WITHOUT REJECTION

Few visual signatures in Indian digital culture have been as recognisable as Ruhee's braids — a look so tied to her public persona that, by her own admission, she began conflating it with her sense of self. Her recent, quieter beauty transformation forced a reckoning with exactly how attached she, and her audience, had become to a version of her that was never meant to be permanent. "It taught me that reinvention doesn't mean you're rejecting your old self," she reflects. "Sometimes you're just giving yourself permission to evolve." There is something notably mature in how she frames the change — not as a rebrand engineered for relevance, but as private permission finally made public. She is candid, too, about the pleasure in it: watching an audience discover an unfamiliar version of someone they thought they already knew. >>



CONCEPT & PHOTOGRAPHY KIRTI NARAIN | FASHION DIRECTION & STYLING DOS'TWO | HMU ABHISHEK INDU | HAIR ARSHIYA | CLOTHES HUEMN



CONCEPT & PHOTOGRAPHY KIRTI NARAIN | FASHION DIRECTION & STYLING DOS'TWO | HMU ABHISHEK INDU | HAIR ARSHIYA |
CLOTHES HUEMN

<< That comfort with evolution runs through nearly everything she does, in part because her two creative languages — dance and fashion — have always operated on the same principle. "Both are ways of communicating without necessarily saying anything," she says, describing how dance sharpened her instinct for movement, proportion and how a garment actually behaves on a moving body, rather than a static one. It has changed how she approaches content entirely: outfit, movement, music and energy are no longer separate decisions but a single visual composition. Fashion, in her world, was never a layer added on top of performance — it has always been part of the choreography.

"I love experimenting with trends, but I don't want my personality to become a trend. I'd rather wear something slightly weird that feels very me than something perfect that everyone else is wearing!"

THE LUXURY THAT CANNOT BE COPIED

If there is a single thesis running through Ruhee's worldview, it is her conviction that authenticity, not polish, is the scarcest resource left in digital culture. She describes scrolling through a feed where ten different creators are wearing the same outfit, using the same transition, set to the same audio — a hall of mirrors she finds increasingly uninteresting rather than aspirational. "Perfection is becoming less interesting because it's so easy to manufacture," she says. "Personality isn't." Her argument is less about fashion than about defensibility: in a

creator economy where any aesthetic can be cloned within a news cycle, the only asset that resists duplication is a genuinely original point of view — one's humour, experience and perspective. "To me, that's the real luxury," she says, reframing luxury away from acquisition entirely and toward something closer to irreproducibility.

That philosophy extends to how she treats her own wardrobe day to day, which she describes less as a considered aesthetic and more as an emotional readout. "Fashion is the mood for me," she says, moving fluidly between oversized comfort, put-together polish, and outfits she admits she "genuinely" cannot explain. What has changed, she notes, is the motivation behind the choice. Earlier in her career, as her dance reels first found a mass audience, she dressed with the camera in mind. Now, the calculation has flipped: "I think much more about what makes me feel good," she says, describing clothing less as a look to maintain and more as a daily expression of wherever she happens to be.

"I think perfection is becoming less interesting because it's so easy to manufacture. Personality isn't. The most valuable thing you can have as a creator is something that cannot be copied, your perspective, your humor, your experiences and your point of view. To me, that's the real luxury!"

THE WEIGHT OF INFLUENCE

Ruhee's trajectory — from viral dance videos shared by some of Bollywood's biggest names to campaigns with major global brands and a presence at international platforms including Cannes — has given her a front-row view of how influence actually accumulates, and how casually it is often wielded. She recalls a time when success in her field was measured purely in numbers: followers, views, velocity. Her understanding of the job has since matured considerably. "If millions of people are watching you, you inevitably have some impact on culture, whether you consciously want it or not," she says. She resists the idea that creators must constantly moralise to their audience, but is equally clear that visibility carries an obligation to be deliberate about what gets normalised and celebrated. "I'd rather contribute something to culture," she says, "than just react to whatever is already happening" — a distinction that quietly separates a content strategy from an actual point of view.

That same clarity shapes the advice she offers to young women navigating their own style under constant digital pressure. Her counsel bypasses the usual mood-board logic entirely: stop searching Pinterest for a ready-made aesthetic and start noticing what you are already drawn to. "Don't be afraid to mix things that technically shouldn't go together," she says, noting that some of her favourite outfits "probably wouldn't make sense on paper." Crucially, she insists that discovering a personal style requires tolerating the occasional miss. "Give yourself permission to look 'bad' sometimes," she says. "Experimentation is literally how you figure yourself out." >>





CONCEPT & PHOTOGRAPHY KIRTI NARAIN | FASHION DIRECTION & STYLING DOS'TWO | HMU ABHISHEK INDU | HAIR ARSHIYA | CLOTHES HUEMN



WHAT SURVIVES THE ALGORITHM

Looking toward a digital landscape increasingly shaped by AI-generated imagery and immersive platforms, Ruhee is unambiguous about what she believes will separate lasting creators from disposable content. "AI can create an image, a campaign or even an aesthetic, but it can't replicate lived experience in the same way," she says, predicting that the next wave of influential figures will be defined less by audience size than by depth of connection and strength of perspective. It is a notably unsentimental read on an industry she has watched transform in real time — one where personality, not production value, becomes the genuinely un-automatable asset.

Asked what she ultimately hopes people remember about her — beyond the views, the collaborations, the viral dance clips that started it all — Ruhee doesn't reach for a career milestone. She wants to be remembered as someone unafraid to keep changing course: through dance, comedy, fashion, content, and whatever comes next. "I want people to look back and feel like I gave myself permission to try things, fail at things, change my mind and still be completely myself," she says. It is a fittingly unpolished note for a career built on the radical idea that the most valuable thing a creator can offer an audience isn't consistency — it's the courage to stay legible only to herself.

It is that same refusal to be fixed that makes Ruhee such a compelling study in what modern influence could look like when it grows up. She has never treated her platform as a single, static brand to be protected at all costs — braids, career pivots, and public reinvention included — and that willingness to keep moving is precisely what has kept her relevant across a landscape that discards most creators within a single algorithmic cycle. In an industry obsessed with consistency as a metric, Ruhee has made an unusually persuasive case that evolution, not repetition, is the real long game. ■■■■■■

The Beautiful Accident

RAHUL JHANGIANI ON WHY THE BEST PICTURES ARE NEVER THE PLANNED ONES

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sk most photographers what makes an image work, and they will speak of light, styling, technique — the visible architecture of a well-executed frame. Ask Rahul Jhangiani, and he will tell you about the mistake. Not the failure, but the small, unscripted moment that slips past the lighting plan and the mood board and lands somewhere no call sheet could have predicted. Across a career spent photographing some of the country's most recognisable faces and campaigns, Jhangiani has built his reputation less on technical polish than on a rarer instinct: knowing precisely when to stop directing and simply watch. It is a philosophy that reveals itself not through any single image, but through the quiet, considered way he speaks about all of them.

SEEING WITHOUT A CAMERA

Years spent looking at people through a viewfinder, Jhangiani says, have permanently recalibrated how he reads them even without one in hand. What has sharpened is not

so much his eye for composition as his eye for behaviour — the almost imperceptible signals of comfort and discomfort that most people move through a room without ever registering. He speaks of noticing body language, energy, the specific moment someone relaxes into themselves or, conversely, tightens up. It is a kind of attentiveness that photography demanded of him professionally, and one that has since spilled quietly into every other room he enters. The camera, in other words, was never really the instrument. It was the training.

BEAUTY VERSUS TRUTH: THE IMPERFECTION DOCTRINE

Jhangiani draws an unusually sharp line between a picture that is beautiful and one that is true, and he is disarmingly modest about how easy the former can be. Good light, the right clothes, a capable team — the ingredients of a beautiful photograph, he suggests, are almost formulaic once you have access to them.



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<< What he is actually chasing is something less obedient: the picture that happens when something goes slightly off-script, when a plan quietly gives way to an accident nobody staged. "I think the best pictures have a little imperfection in them," he says, and he means it as something closer to doctrine than modesty.

That imperfection, he explains, tends to arrive at a very specific juncture in any shoot — the point at which a subject simply stops performing for the lens. Fashion and celebrity photography, by nature, invite a pursuit of visual perfection that can flatten a subject into something merely decorative. Jhangiani's interest lies just past that flattening, in the interval where a subject settles, forgets the camera is there, and briefly stops managing how they appear. He describes these as "little in-between moments," and it is here, consistently, that he locates whatever it is that separates a photograph worth remembering from one that is merely well lit. He is careful to note that this is not an argument against glamour or polish, both of which he clearly enjoys as part of the craft — it is simply an argument for leaving room, inside all that polish, for something no one planned to arrive.

TRAVEL AS A CURRICULUM IN CURIOSITY

Extensive travel across cultures and geographies has shaped Jhangiani less as a technician than as a person — and he is careful to draw that distinction precisely, because he believes the latter shift is what actually produced the former.

Moving through different environments, he says, pulled him out of a kind of visual and cultural bubble, exposing him to entirely different ideas of beauty, style, success and the small choreography of how people relate to one another. The visual harvest of travel is real, he acknowledges — light, colour, architecture, the endless variation of faces — but the deeper inheritance has been curiosity itself, which he now regards as close to the single most essential quality a photographer can possess. Where some careers calcify with experience, Jhangiani's account suggests his has stayed porous precisely because he never stopped travelling into unfamiliar rooms.

BETWEEN THE PERSONA AND THE PERSON

Years spent photographing some of the most visible personalities in the country have taught Jhangiani a fairly unglamorous truth about the people who appear most polished in front of a camera: nearly everyone arrives with a version of themselves they intend to project, and there is nothing dishonest about that instinct — it is simply one facet of who they actually are. His real interest, though, lives just beyond that curated surface. Getting there, he says, has less to do with clever direction than with making someone comfortable enough to let their guard drop, even slightly. The photograph he is actually hunting for rarely belongs entirely to the persona or entirely to the unguarded self — it tends to live in the narrow, unstable space between the two, where projection and instinct briefly overlap.

PREPARED ENOUGH TO BE SPONTANEOUS

Commercial photography, by definition, runs on precision — a brief to satisfy, a brand to please, boxes that must be visibly ticked. Jhangiani's method for reconciling that discipline with genuine spontaneity is almost counterintuitive: know the brief exhaustively, execute it fully, and only then allow yourself to set it aside. Once the clothes look right and the brand's requirements are met, he gives himself deliberate room to improvise — and it is consistently in that unscripted margin, rather than the carefully planned portion of the shoot, that his favourite images have emerged. "It's really about being prepared enough that you can afford to be spontaneous," he says, a line that could double as a working definition of professional maturity in any creative field, not only his own. >>

PHOTOGRAPHY IN AN AGE OF INFINITE IMAGES

Asked how an era of constant, disposable visual content has altered our collective sense of beauty and originality, Jhangiani offers an observation that is both sober and quietly hopeful. Consuming hundreds of polished images daily, he argues, has made audiences harder to impress even as it has made them, paradoxically, easier to influence — perfection has been produced in such volume that it has stopped registering as remarkable. The upside, in his reading, is that beauty itself has broadened considerably, with far more faces, references and ideas of what qualifies as compelling now in circulation than at any earlier point in his career. His own discipline against this noise is simple to state and evidently harder to practise: absorb everything, but keep trusting his own eye above the algorithm's. And he notes something that reads almost like a law of visual fatigue — that the more manufactured perfection saturates a feed, the more powerfully audiences respond to anything that feels unmistakably real. It is a paradox he seems genuinely energised by rather than unsettled by: an industry drowning in images, he suggests, is not necessarily an industry running out of originality — it is simply one where originality has to work a little harder to be noticed.

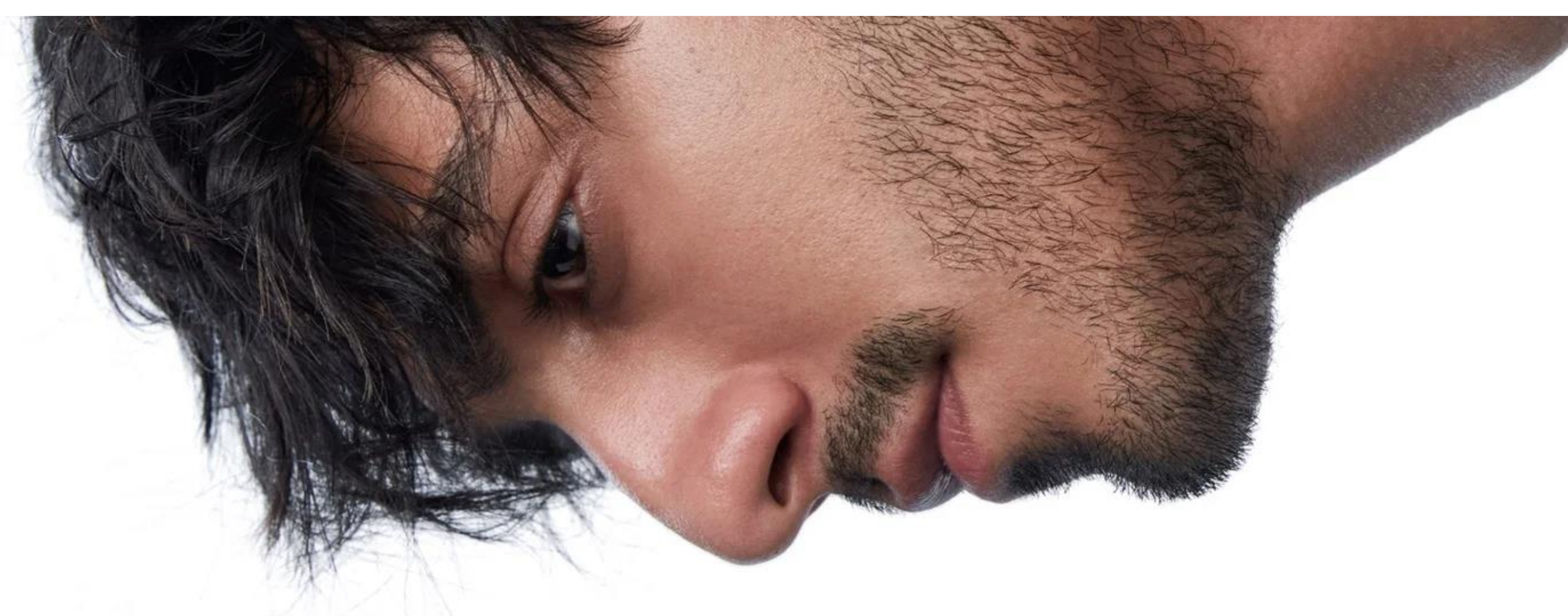
WHAT BUSINESS TAUGHT CREATIVITY

A photography career sustained over years, Jhangiani is quick to point out, cannot survive on talent alone — it requires an entrepreneurial discipline that creative training rarely provides. Business, in his account, taught him that creativity needs structure: the best ideas mean little without the unglamorous work of showing up, delivering consistently, managing people and building relationships that outlast a single project. But the exchange runs in both directions. Creativity, he suggests, has taught him not to run his business too rigidly, since some of his most significant career opportunities never emerged from any deliberate strategy — they arrived instead through curiosity, through saying yes, through simply meeting people and following an unplanned thread. It is the same philosophy that governs his photography, applied now to the architecture of an entire career: enough structure to function, enough looseness to stay lucky.

PERSPECTIVE AS THE REAL PORTFOLIO

Asked, finally, what matters most when he looks back across his career — the photographs, the people, or the perspective accumulated along the way — Jhangiani chooses perspective without much hesitation, on the reasoning that it is the only category broad enough to contain the other two. The photographs, he concedes, are simply the visible evidence of the work. What has actually shaped him is everything harder to hang on a wall: the people he has met, the places the work has taken him, the strange and unrepeatable situations a career like his tends to produce. And after years photographing some of the most visible faces and campaigns in the country, what still pulls him toward the camera is disarmingly unchanged from wherever he started — plain curiosity about people, and the specific, undiminished thrill of watching a great picture appear on the screen. As long as that feeling remains intact, he suggests, the question of why he keeps working answers itself. ■■■■

“You see hundreds of beautiful pictures every day, so perfection doesn’t really feel that special anymore. At the same time, beauty has definitely become broader, which I think is a great thing!”



VIRAL BRANDS

DISCOVER NEW & VIRAL BRANDS

DISCOVER NEW & VIRAL



LEARNING TO FORGET HERSELF



Pallavi Das

ON IMAGE, RESILIENCE AND BECOMING SOMEONE ELSE



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omewhere between the glare of a camera flash and the silence before a take, **PALLAVI DAS** learned two very different definitions of being seen. One taught her to hold an image steady, to communicate everything through the smallest tilt of an expression. The other is teaching her to disappear entirely — to give herself over so completely to another person's story that "Pallavi" briefly stops being the point. It is a rare kind of duality, one most performers spend a lifetime reconciling, and at just this stage of her career, she already speaks about it with the clarity of someone who has done the work of understanding herself twice over.

In this exclusive conversation, she talks about the difference between inhabiting an image and inhabiting a moment, the resilience Mumbai has quietly built into her, and the small, unhurried rituals — a cup of Americano, an empty café at dawn — that keep her whole.

TWO LANGUAGES OF BEING SEEN

Having modelled for most of her life before stepping into acting, Pallavi has come to see the two crafts as entirely different vocabularies for the same instinct. "Modelling has given me a strong foundation in discipline, professionalism and collaboration. You learn very quickly how to adapt to different people, different creative environments and whatever a particular set demands," she says. Acting, by contrast, pulled her inward. "It has made me much more interested in what exists beneath the image, to really feel something, to be present in a situation and to respond honestly to what the moment demands." "Modelling taught me how to inhabit an image, acting is teaching me how to inhabit a moment."

THE PULL TOWARD A FULL LIFE

Ask her what draws her to a character, and Pallavi doesn't reach for edginess or reinvention — she reaches for range. "I think I'm most drawn to characters who have a real journey, where you get to experience many different sides of a person rather than staying in one emotional space," she says, describing the appeal of playing someone whose "joy, vulnerability, strength, confusion, love, loss and contradictions" unfold across an entire arc. "I think that kind of role would allow me to be completely immersed, to give myself fully to someone else's life for a while and discover where that takes me."

WHERE THE TWO CRAFTS MEET

For Pallavi, modelling and acting are less opposing disciplines than sequential lessons in the same subject. "Modelling taught me to be comfortable in front of a camera, to understand it, respond to it and communicate through the smallest changes in expression, movement or presence," she explains. Acting deepened that comfort into something more demanding. "It has taught me to be vulnerable, to stay present and, most importantly, to stop thinking about myself — how I look, how I'm coming across — and instead focus on what the character and the moment require."

WHAT THE CITY TAUGHT HER

Mumbai, Pallavi says, rewired her understanding of ambition entirely. Arriving as a young student, she found herself modelling, living independently, and growing up faster than she expected — through disappointments she admits were harder than she anticipated. "Mumbai has taught me that ambition isn't always about knowing exactly where you're going. Sometimes it's simply about finding the strength to begin again," she says. "The yes's come, the no's come, and you learn not to let either define you for too long." >>

<< She credits the city itself with instilling that particular resilience. "Mumbai has this incredible energy, it's constantly moving, constantly offering something, and somehow it makes you want to keep moving with it. I don't think I could have learned that kind of resilience anywhere else."

STAYING WHOLE IN A WORLD OF IMAGES

Working across two industries built on perception could easily blur a sense of self, but Pallavi has found her own quiet defence against it — full presence in the moment, rather than resistance to it. "Individuality doesn't always mean having to be the same version of yourself in every space," she says. "If I'm on a modelling set and there is a certain image or feeling the team wants to create, I'm happy to step into that completely." What anchors her, she says, is what happens off-camera. "My yoga, meditation, reading, and the time I spend quietly by myself give me a space that isn't about appearances or anyone else's expectations."

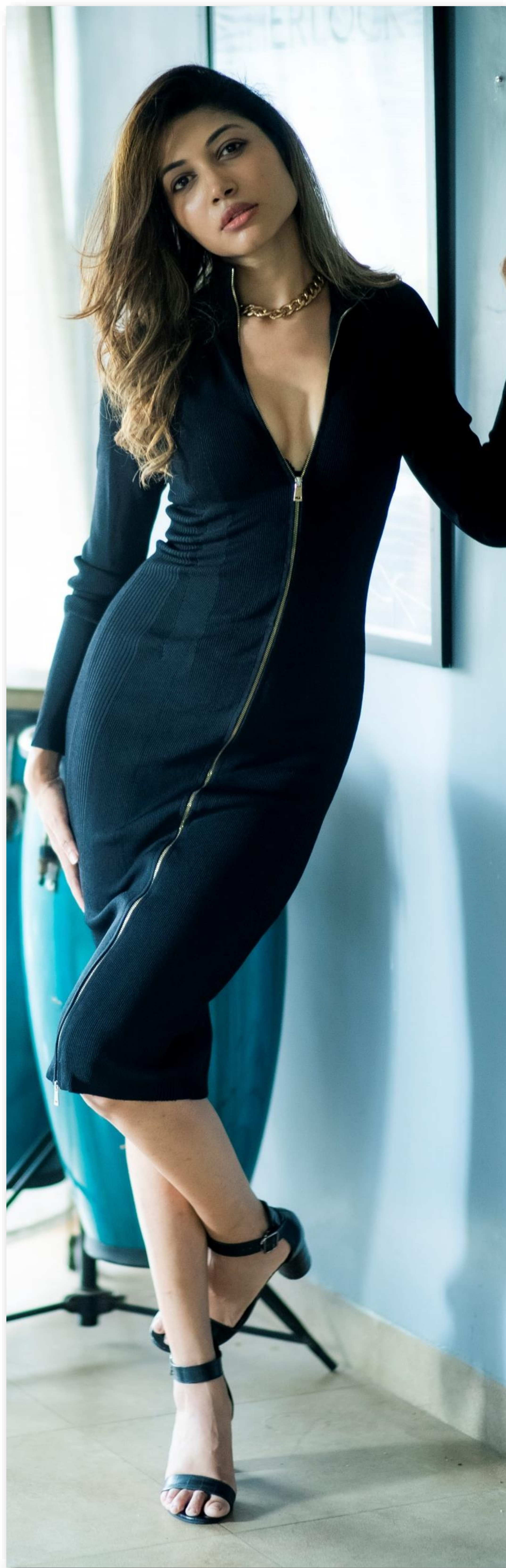
THE STORIES SHE'S CHASING NOW

Increasingly, Pallavi finds herself drawn toward roles that offer discovery over familiarity — a counterweight, perhaps, to a private life she describes as deliberately routine. "There is something incredibly liberating about stepping into a completely different world and becoming someone else for a while," she says. Whether a character sits close to her own personality or far from it matters less than what the role reveals. "That feeling of discovering a side of myself through someone else is one of the things that makes acting so exciting for me."

THE ART OF NOTICING

Much of Pallavi's instinct as a performer, she reveals, is built quietly — through observation rather than performance. "I find myself noticing how differently people respond to the same situations," she says, describing a growing fascination with how childhood, experience and

circumstance shape behaviour in ways that keep shifting. "Everyone is carrying a story, dealing with something, learning something, and becoming someone slightly different," she reflects — an awareness she now consciously carries into how she approaches character.



A RITUAL CALLED STILLNESS

Beyond the industry's noise, Pallavi's love for coffee — and her digital diary of cafés, The Caffeine Project — reveals something closer to a philosophy than

a hobby. "I usually have an Americano, sometimes a matcha. What I really love is the ritual around it," she says, describing a pull toward "beautiful cafés, especially early in the morning when there aren't too many people around." The project began, she explains, as something more personal than content. "I document it, not just because of the coffee, but because of how the place made me feel. Looking back at those cafés almost becomes a way of remembering different places, trips and moments in my life."

"It's a space where I don't have to be anything for anyone. I can just sit with my coffee and be myself."

VISIBILITY WITHOUT LOSING HERSELF

In an era that pressures artists to be perpetually online, Pallavi maintains a boundary most would find difficult to hold. "I'm quite strict about giving myself time away from all of that," she says, listing routines she protects fiercely — reading, yoga, meditation, quiet time with people she loves. That protected space, she believes, is precisely what makes public life sustainable. "It keeps me grounded and, in a strange way, makes being visible much easier. I can give myself fully to the work and the public side of it because I know I've protected a part of my life that belongs only to me."

THE ARTIST SHE HOPES TO BECOME

Asked to look a decade ahead, Pallavi's answer resists the language of milestones and instead settles on something more personal — evolution, truthfulness, a life built well alongside the work. "I would want people to see Pallavi as someone who was constantly evolving but never lost her sense of self," she says, "someone who cared about doing beautiful work, treated people well, and found a way to genuinely enjoy the life she was given."

It is a fittingly unguarded note to end on — not the ambition of an image carefully maintained, but of a woman quietly insistent on staying true to herself, one role, one city, one quiet morning at a time. ■■■■

THE GRAMMAR OF GRACE

A CONVERSATION WITH COUTURIER
ZARA UMRIGAR

Long before a single thread is set, a **ZARA UMRIGAR** gown exists as an idea of a woman: the way she will hold her shoulders, the way a room will shift its attention toward her, the way she will remember, years later, exactly how she felt in it. This is the peculiar alchemy at the centre of the designer's practice: garments engineered less for the eye than for the interior life of the woman wearing them. Mumbai-born and London-trained, Zara's relationship with couture, however, began much earlier than her formal training. "I grew up watching my mother design hand embroidered outfits all my life. So, it's been like second nature to me," she says.

Many of her younger years were spent behind the scenes in her mother's workshops, observing the craft, the rhythm of the ateliers and the generations of karigars who brought intricate ideas to life. Today, the next generation of those same artisans works alongside her, creating a rare continuity between inheritance and evolution. For over a decade, Zara has built a house where sentiment and structure remain inseparable, where a cape, a hand-set crystal or a sweeping train exists first as an emotion, and only later as embroidery.

In this candid interview, she speaks about the discipline behind timeless design, the vanishing art of true craftsmanship, and what it means to dress a generation of women who refuse to be defined by geography, trend, or convention.

A FEELING, NOT A COSTUME

Ask Zara why an era as distant as Old Hollywood continues to define her aesthetic, and her answer resists easy nostalgia. For her, the appeal was never the silhouettes of the past for their own sake, but the intention behind them. "What fascinates me about Old World glamour is that dressing carried intention — it could completely change the way a woman felt when she entered a room," she says. "It was unapologetically feminine, with this beautiful sense of fantasy and theatre, where Old Hollywood transported you into a world of beauty, mystery and romance."

She is careful, however, to draw a line between homage and imitation. "I love taking that timeless elegance and bringing it into the present through bolder, more unexpected elements, blending nostalgia with the modern feel of today without allowing the past to become a limitation," she explains, adding that the goal has never been to reconstruct history but to translate its emotional register. "It's not as much about recreating a particular era, but about taking the emotion it represented and reinterpreting it for the woman of today."

THE FIRST STITCH IS ALWAYS INVISIBLE

For a designer whose gowns are renowned for their sculptural drama and painstaking embroidery, the true starting point of any creation might come as a surprise. It is not sketch, nor silhouette, nor fabric — but feeling. "It all starts with an emotion, a feeling, one that I want to ingrain into the soul of the piece, and hopefully make the woman wearing it feel too," Zara says. "Creating something that resonates with how someone envisions themselves for a special moment in their life carries so much meaning."

"It begins with emotion, but that emotion is tied so closely to the silhouette, the craftsmanship and every other element that ultimately brings the piece to life."

SLOWNESS AS A FORM OF REBELLION

In an industry engineered for velocity — where trends surface and expire within a single scroll — Zara's house operates on an entirely different clock. Her belief is that true luxury cannot be manufactured on a deadline; it must be earned through time. "I think the idea of creating something that can not only live on, but be carried forward through generations, is incredibly special," she says. "My silhouettes are classic, ones that celebrate the female form, and every piece is constructed and hand embroidered with enormous attention to detail."

That patience is not incidental — it is, in fact, the entire point. "It can take weeks to perfect a single garment, and that time, patience and craftsmanship are what give it the quality to endure beyond a season or a trend," she notes, framing slowness not as inefficiency but as the very mechanism by which permanence is made possible.



TAMANNAAH BHATIA IN
ZARA UMRIGAR



SHRADDHA KAPOOR IN ZARA UMRIGAR

CONFIDENCE, TAILORED

Beyond the embroidery and the silhouette lies Zara's real ambition: to design not for the camera, but for the woman's own sense of self the moment the zipper closes. "I want the woman wearing our gowns to feel like the best version of herself, and no one else," she says. Her counsel to brides and clients is consistent — steer clear of trends, and choose what genuinely feels authentic. "Our pieces are created to make a woman feel confident, fearless, feminine and effortlessly glamorous, and that feeling is such an important part of my design process."

LUXURY, REDEFINED IN A WHISPER

For Zara, the word "luxury" has quietly shed its old, louder connotations. It is no longer about scale or spectacle, but about intimacy and irreproducibility. "The heart of couture lies in its craftsmanship, and in the fast-paced world we live in today, there is something incredibly special about creating a piece that takes time, patience and skill," she reflects. "Luxury today feels quieter to me, it's the feeling of owning something that has been created by hand for you, where every stitch is intentional and the final piece feels like it's one of a kind."

And when it comes to what she will never compromise on, her answer is immediate. "The quality," she says. "Creating heavily hand-embroidered garments requires a great amount of patience and skill, and we really take our time to be sure it's made with great attention to detail."

DRAMA, HELD IN CHECK

What distinguishes a Zara Umrigar piece from mere spectacle is her instinct for restraint — the discipline of knowing exactly how much boldness a silhouette can hold before it tips into excess. "I love playing in that space between elegant and bold, a little hint of sexy within a timeless silhouette," she says. "As women, there are so many different sides to our personalities, and I love creating pieces

that let you step into any version of yourself." Her formula is deceptively simple: one statement of drama — a cape, an oversized bow, a sweeping train, exaggerated shoulders — offset by everything else falling quietly into place.



A GARMENT SHAPED AROUND A WOMAN

In an age of algorithmic sizing and faceless e-commerce, Zara treats fit as an intimate, almost sacred negotiation between body and cloth. "That, to me, is the most special and luxurious part of owning something made to measure, it's created specifically for you, to fit and complement your body

in every way, right down to the last stitch," she says. "There's something incredibly personal about a garment being shaped around the woman, rather than the woman having to fit into the garment."

BORDERLESS GLAMOUR

As Zara Umrigar's reach extends across continents through worldwide shipping, its founder has come to see her clientele less as a market and more as a shared sensibility. "The global woman today moves effortlessly between cultures, cities and sensibilities, and I think luxury has to reflect that fluidity," she says. "Different women interpret glamour differently, but the desire for craftsmanship, confidence and a sense of occasion is universal." Her ambition is not uniformity but recognisability with room for reinterpretation: "creating pieces that feel unmistakably Zara Umrigar, while still allowing every woman to make them entirely her own."

AN INHERITANCE, NOT JUST A GARMENT

When asked how she hopes her label will be remembered, long after the runways have gone quiet, Zara's answer circles back to where the conversation began: emotion. "I would love for Zara Umrigar to be remembered for creating pieces that made women feel like the best versions of themselves," she says.

"If one of our gowns is still being worn decades from now, I hope it speaks of a woman who was confident, expressive and completely herself, and of a designer who cared deeply about beauty, craftsmanship and creating something with meaning that could outlive a moment."

It is a fitting note on which to end — not with a description of a garment, but with the woman inside it. For all its embroidery and architecture, drama and discipline, Zara's world ultimately asks one question of every piece she makes: not how it will look, but who it will allow a woman to become. ■■■■

CYNTHIA KHALIFEH

WOMAN
BEHIND
THE MOMENT



PHOTOGRAPHER MOHAMED EL MARGOUSHY | DOP JOESDOSE | PR GHANIM YOZBAKI | FEATURING CYNTHIA KHALIFEH



For this POPP DAPP editorial spread, we turn the lens towards CYNTHIA KHALIFEH, an actress whose career has been defined not by staying within the frame, but by continually expanding it.

Some careers are built on visibility. Others are built on velocity, the instinct to keep moving before the world has had time to define you. Cynthia Khalifeh belongs to the latter. From her beginnings on Lebanese television to her emergence as a pan-Arab screen presence and an increasingly recognised international talent, Khalifeh has shaped a career around movement, reinvention and the refusal to be confined by expectation.

There is an assuredness to her screen presence, but it is her intelligence as an actor that gives it staying power. Across Arabic dramas and contemporary productions, Khalifeh has consistently gravitated towards characters with interiority, women who are not designed simply to be understood, but to be questioned. Her performances find the tension between vulnerability and strength, restraint and rebellion, allowing complexity to become their most compelling quality. It is this instinct for dimensional storytelling that has established her as one of the more distinctive voices of her generation.

Her multilingual sensibility further expands that vocabulary. Khalifeh moves between cultures with an ease that feels increasingly essential to the contemporary entertainment landscape. Her regional success has become a foundation rather than a boundary, opening the way towards international

productions and global streaming audiences. As she steps onto international red carpets and into collaborations beyond the Arab world, the trajectory feels deliberate: not an attempt to leave one identity behind, but to make room for all of them.

There is something particularly significant about that transition. For an Arab actress entering an increasingly global entertainment industry, representation is not merely about being present. It is about possessing the freedom to arrive with complexity intact. Khalifeh's growing international profile suggests a new kind of cultural fluency, one in which Arab talent is neither translated nor softened for a global audience. It simply arrives on its own terms.

Away from the screen, fashion offers another language through which Khalifeh expresses that same instinct. Her appearances at international fashion weeks, particularly in Paris, reveal a woman unafraid of visual risk. She moves between elegance and experimentation, embracing dramatic silhouettes, unexpected details and a certain cinematic quality that makes an entrance feel less like an appearance and more like a scene.

Perhaps that is the thread connecting all her worlds. Khalifeh understands the power of a memorable image, but she is equally interested in what exists beneath it. Actress, fashion presence and emerging global name are not separate identities so much as different expressions of the same creative impulse: to evolve without explanation.

And she is only getting started.







DEFEATING THE ODDS

Jesicaa Siingh,
the voice rewriting
India's communications
future!



R

Real authority is rarely something a person can claim. It is earned over time, often through being underestimated, challenged, and overlooked until the need for outside validation simply disappears. **JESICAA SIINGH** carries that authority the way most people carry a signature scent: quietly, but unmistakably. Founder and CEO of Stanley Communications, architect of the education initiative Talent Lab, and a woman who has spent a decade building narratives for some of the most scrutinised names in luxury, beauty and lifestyle, Jesicaa has become something rarer than a successful entrepreneur. She has become a translator — of brands into markets, of pain into philosophy, and of an industry's future into language the rest of us are only beginning to understand.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF RELEVANCE

Ask Jesicaa what makes a story impossible to ignore, and she does not reach for the language of virality that dominates most marketing conversations today. Instead, she speaks of honesty, consistency, and a story's proximity to a clear set of values. "Virality may make people notice you for a moment," she reflects, "but a strong and consistent story is what makes them remember you." It is a philosophy she has applied as rigorously to her own career as to the brands under her stewardship — building not for the fleeting high of a viral news cycle, but for narratives designed to outlast them. In an industry addicted to the dopamine of attention, she has built her name on something slower and, ultimately, sturdier: relevance that compounds rather than expires.

THE WEIGHT OF BEING UNDERESTIMATED

Jesicaa founded Stanley Communications at twenty-two, a decade she now surveys from the vantage point of thirty-two with unflinching clarity. The obstacle that defined those early years was not capital, nor competition, but something harder to name and harder to fight: ageism. Rooms did not always want to hear what she had to say, particularly when what she said challenged the established order of an industry already crowded with older, more entrenched players. Her response was not defiance for its own sake, but a quieter discipline — an understanding that "the more attention you give them, the more powerful they become," referring to obstacles that could easily have consumed her

focus. What she learned instead has become something close to doctrine at Stanley today: that consistency, good work and strong ethics eventually speak louder than scepticism ever can, and that real leadership is forged less in classrooms than in the friction of being doubted and choosing to continue anyway.

TRANSLATING LUXURY WITHOUT DILUTING IT

As Stanley Communications expanded its footprint across India and Dubai, Jesicaa confronted a question that has undone many global-facing agencies: how does a brand's identity survive translation across radically different cultural terrain? Her answer rejects the idea of a single universal narrative altogether. A brand's core — its values, heritage and emotional register — must remain immovable, she argues, while the cultural lens through which that story is told shifts entirely with the market. India, she notes, is an increasingly layered and culturally conscious landscape, one where conversations around representation and appropriation now shape consumer response as much as the campaigns themselves — and where meaning can vary even within the country, region to region, industry to industry. Dubai, by contrast, presents an entirely different complexity: a deeply international, multicultural ecosystem where cultural codes and aspirations rarely mirror those of any single nation. "It is not about dilution," she says. "It is about thoughtful and culturally aware translation." The brands that endure globally, in her estimation, are never the ones broadcasting one narrative everywhere — they are the ones remaining unmistakably themselves while listening closely to the culture they are entering.

This same instinct informs her reading of luxury storytelling more broadly, which she believes has expanded rather than been replaced. Aspiration, exclusivity and craftsmanship remain non-negotiable pillars of luxury communication, but audiences today demand to see what sits behind the polished image — the values, the people, the occasional imperfection. Transparency, in her view, does not strip luxury of its mystique; it simply makes the brand more human. >>



<< She predicts that the next chapter of luxury storytelling will be defined less by scale and more by specificity — increasingly personal, experiential and culturally attuned, even as artificial intelligence reshapes how such stories are produced. "In a world where content is becoming easier to produce," she observes, "genuine human emotion, craftsmanship and credibility will become even more valuable."

THE LINE BETWEEN SHAPING AND MANIPULATING PERCEPTION

Few in her field are willing to draw as sharp a boundary as Jesicaa does between influence and deception. Shaping perception, she insists, means presenting truth with clarity and context; manipulating it means distorting or concealing that truth altogether. This distinction becomes most consequential during a reputational crisis, when her instinct is never to make a problem disappear but to interrogate what has actually happened and what accountability looks like. Sometimes the correct response is clarification; other times, it is an apology followed by visible, corrective action. "Communication without action is simply spin," she says, "and audiences today can see through it almost immediately." It is a philosophy built on a conviction she returns to often: that perception, however cleverly managed, cannot indefinitely outrun reality.

A WOMAN-LED EMPIRE, AND WHAT AUTHORITY ACTUALLY MEANS

Stanley Communications today employs 130 women, a statistic Jesicaa treats not as a marketing point but as an ongoing responsibility. For her, the deeper question was never whether women were being hired, but what happened to them once they arrived — whether they were handed authority, financial independence and an actual seat at the decision-making table, or simply a job title. Having started her

own career needing a voice and someone willing to open a door, she has built Stanley around the conviction that empowerment without ownership is incomplete. The organisation's internal motto, "You grow, we grow," is less a slogan than an operating principle: the growth of each woman inside Stanley is treated as inseparable from the growth of the company itself. That same conviction animates Talent Lab, her education initiative for emerging communications professionals aged fifteen to their forties. She identifies the industry's central gap not as a deficit of knowledge but of application — the judgment, adaptability and instinct that no curriculum can fully teach. Talent Lab exists to close that distance, pairing formal learning with direct mentorship from working professionals, converting years of industry experience into tangible opportunity for the generation behind her.

BUILDING FOR 2026 WITHOUT ABANDONING TRUST

Asked what she would do differently if she were founding Stanley today, Jesicaa does not hesitate: technology would be embedded from day one, shaping hiring, training and process alike. She refuses to treat artificial intelligence and algorithmic culture as threats to be feared, viewing them instead as tools capable of sharpening understanding of audiences and culture. Yet one principle remains, for her, entirely non-negotiable — the primacy of genuine relationships and earned credibility. "None of them can replace trust," she says of technology's rapid advances. It is a rare kind of clarity: total openness to reinvention, paired with an absolute refusal to let speed or virality replace human judgment.

DEFEATING THE ODDS

Behind her professional philosophy lies a personal history she has only recently begun sharing publicly. Diagnosed with

polio at twenty-two days old, she underwent eighteen surgeries before the age of eighteen, navigating a childhood shaped by physical, emotional and mental pain in equal measure. Yet she has never allowed that history to calcify into identity. "Polio was an odd I had to overcome," she says, "but it was never going to become my entire identity." What emerged from those years was not merely resilience but a particular strain of empathy — an instinct to recognise burdens in others that remain invisible, and a conviction that community is not optional but essential. That belief now lives inside Stanley itself, in her insistence on building an organisation where no one navigates difficulty alone.

THE LEGACY BEYOND THE BRAND

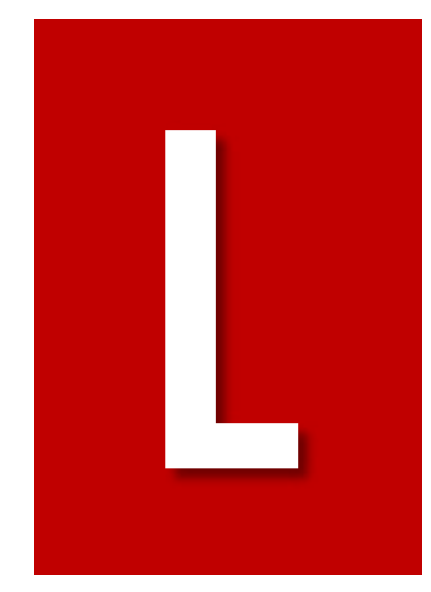
When asked how she wishes to be remembered, her answer extends well past the walls of Stanley Communications. She wants to be known not simply as a successful entrepreneur, but as someone who changed how India communicates with the world — someone who helped the country's extraordinary founders, brands and creative voices reach global audiences with confidence rather than imitation. Her larger ambition is to reposition communications itself: not as a cosmetic function bolted onto business decisions after the fact, but as a serious strategic discipline deserving of real education, real understanding and real influence at the table where decisions are made.

It is, in the end, a fitting summary of everything Jesicaa represents — a woman who has spent a decade proving that the loudest voice in the room is rarely the one that endures, and that the truest legacy is not the one you announce, but the one you leave standing quietly behind you, in every door you managed to open for someone else. ■■■■



SAHIL KOCHHAR ON TARANA

An exclusive POPP DAPP interview feature with the designer behind Tarana, the Pret-a-Couture label rewriting what Indian luxury sounds like!



ong before Sahil ever sketched a garment, he was listening for one — a frequency somewhere beneath language, waiting to be given form. That instinct has defined his eponymous, self-described Pret-a-Couture label since its founding in 2014: a body of work that resists the seasonal churn of contemporary fashion in favour of something closer to sediment, where craft, restraint and instinct settle over one another until a garment feels less designed than discovered. It is an approach that has carried his label from runway showings at India Fashion Week to a sustained presence at Who's Next Paris and a much-discussed Autumn/Winter presentation at the Hotel de Crillon, without ever diluting the intimacy of the work itself. His latest collection, Tarana, extends that philosophy into new territory, and in this exclusive conversation with POPP DAPP, he unpacks the rhythm, the risk and the quiet radicalism behind it.

A COLLECTION THAT BEGAN AS A SOUND

Most origin stories in fashion begin with an image. Sahil's began with a frequency. "A tarana exists before language," he explains, describing the moment sound, instinct and movement converge before meaning arrives to organise them. That pre-verbal impulse became his compass, pulling him toward what he calls the rhythms already present in nature — the unfurling of a flower, the creep of a vine, a form quietly repeating itself until it becomes structure. What emerged was a collection balanced precariously and deliberately between the organic and the ordered: florals rendered almost architectural as they climbed across garments, arches and scallops supplying a counter-rhythm of control. Tarana, in his own words, is "an ongoing conversation between nature and design" — not a resolution of the two, but a sustained negotiation.

That negotiation is not new to his practice. Nature, fantasy and the idea of paradise have threaded through his visual universe for years, and he is candid that Tarana continues rather than abandons that lineage. What shifts this time is emphasis. "I wanted to explore it through rhythm and movement rather than form alone," he says, describing how flowers, vines and foliage become a kind of living architecture across the garments, while geometric arches and linear structures introduce a quieter, more disciplined order beneath the exuberance. It is a collection that trusts its own instincts enough to let two opposing energies — the wild and the measured — occupy the same silhouette without cancelling each other out.

CRAFT AS A LIVING LANGUAGE, NOT AN ARCHIVE

Any designer working within India's textile heritage inherits a delicate custodial burden: how to honour a lineage without embalming it. Sahil's answer is characteristically unsentimental. "Tradition is a living language," he says, "and its beauty lies in how it evolves while still holding on to the skill, the thought and the human connection at its core." With Tarana, that meant channelling craftsmanship into distinctly modern proportions — fluid drapes, sculptural silhouettes, a floral vocabulary that stays legible even as embroidery, appliqué and layered surfaces refract it into something new. The hand of the artisan, he insists, remains the true centre of gravity. It is patience and precision, not novelty for its own sake, that keep the work timeless.

This is also where his six formative years working alongside Rohit Bal continue to surface, nearly two decades after he struck out on his own. Sahil graduated from NIFT in 2006 and

spent the better part of the following decade apprenticing under one of Indian fashion's most theatrical minds before launching his own label in 2014. "The lesson that has stayed with me the longest is the importance of detail, and the emotional world a garment can quietly create," he reflects, describing how he learned to see clothing as an accumulated experience rather than a single design decision. He also credits that period with instilling a lasting respect for the collective nature of the craft — a recognition that "the skill of the artisan is as much a part of that story as anything else." What he has since unlearned, by his own account, is any deference that might have muted his own instincts. Today, he says, he designs "with a much stronger trust in my own vocabulary," a freedom that has opened the door to unconventional textures, quieter forms and a more patient relationship with longevity.

THE LUXURY OF LOOKING TWICE

Ask Sahil where luxury actually lives, and he will not point to logos or price tags. "Luxury lives in discovery," he says, "in the details that reveal themselves slowly." He describes the placement of a single bead, the precision of a thread, the way an appliqué shifts character as light and movement pass over it — details built not to announce themselves but to reward attention. Tarana, he says, is constructed entirely around that premise, with every embellishment placed so the garment continues to disclose new dimensions the longer it is worn. It is a philosophy that runs counter to the instant legibility much of contemporary fashion optimises for; Sahil is, in effect, designing for the second and third glance rather than the first. >>





<< Achieving that required pushing his ateliers into genuinely difficult territory. Tarana leaned heavily into hand embroidery, appliqué, beadwork, sequins and layered textures, with scale, depth and movement adjusted until the balance felt instinctively right. In one of the collection's more inventive gestures, remnants from the atelier's own archive were folded back into new appliqué work — offcuts and leftovers granted a second life within the very garments they might once have been discarded from. The exercise, he says, reinforced a belief he already held about restraint: that a surface can carry real complexity and still let the garment breathe underneath it. That equilibrium, he notes, has become increasingly central to how he designs.

CLOTHING BUILT TO OUTLIVE ITS SEASON

Sahil's garments have long occupied an ambiguous, interesting space between prêt-à-couture and collectible object, and he believes that ambiguity points toward where luxury fashion is heading. "Luxury is moving closer and closer to emotional ownership," he says, describing a shift from clothing as seasonal consumption to clothing as inheritance. A garment becomes meaningful, in his framing, the moment it outlives the occasion it was made for and folds itself into "a woman's memories, her experiences, and eventually her own personal archive." It is a vision of fashion that measures success not in how quickly a piece sells through, but in how long it is kept, re-worn and eventually passed down — an idea that quietly repositions the designer less as a trend-forecaster and more as an archivist of future memory.

That same instinct for permanence shapes how he wants Tarana to be remembered. Asked what he hopes a woman recalls years after the season has passed, he does not describe a silhouette or a colour story. "I would want her to remember how she felt," he says, pointing to the way meaningful garments attach themselves to moments — the people present, the places visited, the version of oneself that existed at the time. His hope is that a Tarana piece keeps yielding new details on return: an embroidery not previously noticed, a fresh way the light lands on a surface, a different

quality of movement in the silhouette. "I just want Tarana to become part of her own story," he says. "That, to me, is what timelessness really means."

THE UNFINISHED CONVERSATION ABOUT INDIAN DESIGN

Having presented in Paris — including a Who's Next Paris presence sustained since 2017 and a Hotel de Crillon runway moment for his Autumn/Winter 2018 collection — and built a footprint across India and the Middle East, Sahil has a clear-eyed view of what the global fashion conversation still gets wrong about Indian craftsmanship. The issue, he suggests, is not visibility but reduction. "There isn't really one single definition of what Indian fashion looks like," he says, noting the sheer range of textiles, embroideries and techniques that Indian designers continue to reinterpret. He is emphatic that this craftsmanship belongs across the entire spectrum of global fashion — from the conceptual and experimental to minimalism, sculpture and contemporary luxury — and that its real strength lies in its capacity to keep evolving while remaining tethered to where it began.

It is a fitting closing note for a designer whose work is essentially an extended meditation on that same tension — between memory and motion, heritage and reinvention, the quiet permanence of craft and the restless pulse of a tarana that existed before anyone thought to name it.

What ultimately distinguishes Sahil within a crowded field of Indian couturiers is his refusal to treat any of these tensions as problems to be solved. Nature and structure, heritage and modernity, permanence and desire — in his hands, they remain generative frictions rather than settled compromises, and Tarana is simply the latest, most articulate expression of that ongoing dialogue. For a designer who began his creative reasoning with a sound that exists before language, it seems fitting that the work itself keeps refusing to arrive at a final, tidy sentence — choosing instead to keep unfurling, one considered detail at a time. ■■■■

LINEN AFTER DARK

*An Irish classic,
recut for Autumn/Winter.*



CREATIVE DIRECTION JENNY RUSSELL
HAIR HAIRITAGE KELLS
MAKE UP ANN-MAIRE LYNAM
PHOTOGRAPHY TAZ
LOCATION KILLUA CASTLE

L

inen has traditionally belonged to summer. It arrives with the first warm days, finds its way into holiday wardrobes and disappears with the changing season. The Linen Shirt Company is challenging that familiar cycle with an Autumn/Winter collection that places Irish linen firmly back into the fashion conversation.

Crafted from 100% Irish linen and made in Ireland, the new collection approaches the fabric through a distinctly cooler-season lens. Rather than treating linen as a lightweight alternative reserved for sunshine, the label explores its texture, structure and natural character as qualities that can bring depth to autumnal dressing.

At the heart of the collection is a simple proposition: linen deserves to be worn all year.

“Linen has been put into a box as a summer-only fabric for far too long,” says Anneliese Duffy Fallon, founder and designer of The Linen Shirt Company. The new collection responds to that limitation with pieces designed to layer, transition and evolve with the wardrobe. Shirts, separates and occasion pieces become building blocks for looks that can move effortlessly between casual and elevated dressing.

There is something particularly compelling about linen in this context. Its appeal lies not in immaculate perfection but in its ability to develop character. The natural creasing, tactile surface and subtle variations in texture give each garment an individuality that feels increasingly relevant in an era of highly processed fashion.

The Linen Shirt Company does not attempt to disguise those qualities. It makes them the point.

The result is a collection where linen becomes an accent fabric with genuine visual presence. Worn alone, it offers an understated elegance; layered, it introduces texture and dimension. The pieces can be dressed down during the day, elevated for evening or integrated into a colder-season wardrobe without losing their distinctive identity.

There is also a deeper story in the making. Every garment is designed and manufactured in Ireland, keeping the relationship between design, craftsmanship and production unusually close. This commitment gives the collection a sense of place, while its emphasis on longevity positions it firmly within a more considered approach to fashion.

The new A/W collection also coincides with the opening of The Linen Shirt Company’s retail space within Fashion Connect Ireland, allowing customers to encounter the clothing alongside the craftsmanship behind it. Located within the company’s fashion and manufacturing hub, the space offers a direct connection between creation and consumer.

This season, The Linen Shirt Company is not asking us to rethink linen completely. It is asking something more interesting: why did we ever decide linen belonged only to summer?



CREATIVE DIRECTION JENNY RUSSELL
HAIR HAIRITAGE KELLS
MAKE UP ANN-MAIRE LYNAM
PHOTOGRAPHY TAZ
LOCATION KILLUA CASTLE



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LOCATION KILLUA CASTLE

THE FRAME BEFORE THE FEED

Vipul Juneja on building a visual language of his own!

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For Vipul Juneja, storytelling begins well before the camera starts rolling. A thirty-second reel is rarely just a sequence of images; in his mind, it has already taken shape as cinema, complete with a considered frame, an emotional register, a rhythm and a soundtrack waiting to be heard. What the audience eventually scrolls past in a matter of seconds is, in truth, the smallest visible fraction of a much longer process: locations scouted, references

gathered, shots reshot because they didn't match the version only he could see. It is this quiet, almost obsessive attention to how something looks and feels that has made him one of the more distinctive voices to emerge from a creator economy often accused of producing everything and originating very little. >>

<< In this candid conversation, he speaks about the moment he realised his content carried real influence, the discipline of resisting the algorithm's shortcuts, and what he hopes will outlast the very platforms he currently creates for.

THE MOMENT INFLUENCE BECAME REAL

For Vipul, the realisation that his content shaped real decisions didn't arrive as a single dramatic moment — it built quietly, message by message. "It was when people started messaging me saying they had bought something because they saw me wearing it, or asking where something was from," he recalls. "That was probably when I understood that people weren't just watching, they were actually taking little cues from what I was putting out." Rather than reshaping his process, the discovery simply sharpened his instincts. "It made me more conscious of not forcing things. I feel people can tell when you genuinely like something and when you're just trying to sell them an idea."

REFUSING TO LET THE ALGORITHM DECIDE

In an ecosystem engineered to reward speed and constant output, Vipul has deliberately protected space for a slower, more considered way of working. "I do think about the algorithm, obviously, but I've never really wanted it to decide what I create," he says. His process begins visually, almost instinctively cinematic. "I naturally look at things in a cinematic way, so even a simple idea can sometimes turn into a whole visual in my head. And once I see it that way, I want to actually build it out properly." "I'd rather take that extra time and make something I'm genuinely excited to watch myself than rush it out just to stay relevant."

THE CREATOR AS AN EXTENSION OF THE PERSON

Ask Vipul where the public creator ends

and the private individual begins, and he resists the premise of the question entirely. "I don't think I've ever really separated the two," he says. "What I create is very much an extension of what I'm naturally drawn to — fashion, travel, architecture, films, music, even the way I notice a space or a particular frame." For him, the content isn't a performance layered over identity; it is simply identity, rendered visually. "I'm not consciously trying to maintain a distinction between the two. I'm just trying to create in a way that feels true to what I like and how I see things. So I guess the creator is just another expression of the person."

WHAT THE AUDIENCE NEVER SEES

Behind the effortless polish of a finished reel sits a considerable amount of invisible labour, something Vipul believes is widely underestimated. "Probably how much happens before you see the final twenty or thirty seconds," he says, listing out the unseen scaffolding — "the idea, references, locations, styling, planning the shots, figuring out how everything is going to come together, and then actually shooting it." Even then, the work isn't guaranteed to land. "Sometimes you shoot something and realise it just isn't what you had in your head, so you go back and do it again."

PARTICIPATING WITHOUT DISSOLVING

Trends, in Vipul's view, are tools to be selectively used rather than obligations to be met. "I'm not against trends. If something catches my attention and I can see a way of making it feel like me, I'll do it," he says. But he is equally clear that chasing every moment would come at the cost of something more valuable — consistency of vision. "I don't think every trend needs to become your content. I'm more interested in developing a visual language that feels consistent over time. Trends come and go pretty quickly. The way you see things and the references you're naturally drawn to stay with you."

WHAT ATTENTION TAUGHT HIM ABOUT PEOPLE

Years of creating for an audience have left Vipul with a healthy respect for how unpredictable attention truly is. "You can spend days working on something and be convinced people are going to love it, and sometimes it just doesn't connect. Then something you weren't expecting much from suddenly takes off," he says. The experience has reinforced his instinct for visual storytelling over explanation. "People don't always need everything explained to them. Sometimes a good visual or a feeling is enough to make someone stop."

WHERE COMMERCE MEETS CREATIVE INTEGRITY

As brands shift their attention from follower counts toward authenticity and cultural fit, Vipul has developed a clear personal filter for collaborations. "For me, it has to make sense both visually and personally," he explains. "I don't want the product to suddenly feel like it's been dropped into a completely unrelated video. I'd rather find an idea where the brand naturally belongs in the world we're creating." He is comfortable working within a brief, provided his own creative voice survives it. "There's obviously a brief and things the brand needs, and I'm completely comfortable with that. But there should still be room to make it feel like my work."

THE LESSON NO ONE POSTS ABOUT

Every visible career carries an invisible one alongside it — of ideas that failed to translate, work that underperformed, moments of doubt. For Vipul, the most valuable lesson from that hidden side has been detachment. "Probably learning not to get too attached to one idea," he says.





"Sometimes something looks amazing in your head and just doesn't translate when you shoot it. Or you put a lot of work into something and it doesn't get the response you expected." What matters, he's learned, is what each attempt teaches for the next. "I've learnt to take what I can from it and move on. Every piece you create, even the ones that don't work, changes the way you approach the next one."

WHAT WOULD REMAIN WITHOUT THE METRICS

Stripped of likes, views and followers, Vipul insists his instincts wouldn't change much at all — a claim that reads less like a platitude than a genuine account of where his motivation actually originates. "Honestly, probably a lot of the same things," he says. "I'd still want to photograph clothes, travel, architecture, places I find interesting. I'd still want to take an idea in my head and turn it into something visual." The numbers, he clarifies, were never the origin point. "They aren't why I started. I've always just loved the process of making something."

A POINT OF VIEW, BEYOND ANY PLATFORM

Looking toward a future shaped by AI, immersive media and formats yet to be invented, Vipul is notably unconcerned with preserving the "digital creator" label itself. "The platforms and technology will keep changing, but I think having a point of view will always matter," he says. His real ambition is for his sensibility, not his medium, to be recognisable. "I'd like someone to see something I've made years from now and still recognise that it came from me, even if the format is completely different — whether it's a photograph, a film, something immersive or something we haven't figured out yet."

"I think being known for the way you see things is more meaningful than being known as a digital creator."

It is, in many ways, the most honest thing a creator working at the intersection of art and algorithm can say — that formats will change, platforms will dissolve, and audiences will move on, but a genuine way of seeing the world is not so easily replaced. ■■■■

FASHION BEHIND SCRUBS

VANSHIKA &
ABHIJEET KAJI
ON BUILDING
KNYA

For as long as anyone can remember, the scrub has existed outside the reach of fashion — a garment issued rather than chosen, tolerated rather than loved, built for function and forgiven for having none of the design language that governs the rest of a person's wardrobe. It took a global health crisis, and two founders willing to look closely at an industry no one else had bothered to reimagine, to ask an obvious but strangely overlooked question: why should the people who work the longest, most demanding hours of anyone's day be the ones least considered by design? >>



<< That question sits at the heart of Knya, the medical apparel company built by Vanshika Kaji and Abhijeet Kaji, which has grown from a workwear concept into a national healthcare platform supplying more than five hundred institutions across six hundred and fifty cities. In this exclusive conversation, the co-founders speak about the gap they discovered in an entire industry, the pressure of scaling during an emergency, and their ambition to become nothing less than the Nike of medical professionals.

THE GAP NOBODY HAD DESIGNED FOR

The idea for Knya did not begin with a business plan; it began with observation. "The pandemic made us look closely at the healthcare ecosystem, and it revealed a very real gap in medical apparel," the founders explain. Rather than approaching the category as outsiders, they spent time listening. "We spent a lot of time listening to healthcare professionals, understanding what they actually needed from their everyday apparel, and identifying where we could add value." What they refused to compromise on was their design instinct. "We didn't want to leave our fashion DNA behind. Medical apparel doesn't have to be purely utilitarian. It can be thoughtfully designed, functional and make the person wearing it feel good."

BEYOND THE GARMENT

What began as workwear has since evolved into something considerably larger in ambition. "From day one, our vision for Knya has been to build a complete lifestyle brand for healthcare professionals, one that understands their everyday needs, aspirations and identity, not just what they wear on shift," the founders say, pointing to expansions like stethoscopes and the Drift Jacket, with footwear reportedly on the horizon. "The larger problem we are solving is the lack of a brand that shows up across a healthcare professional's entire day, not just their

workwear." "Success would be when Knya becomes a brand healthcare professionals actively choose and identify with, rather than simply a brand they buy their scrubs from."

THE NIKE OF MEDICINE

Knya's founders are unapologetic about the scale of their ambition, drawing a direct parallel to a brand that transformed an entire category of clothing into identity. "Just as Nike made sportswear part of performance and identity, we want Knya to make medical apparel something healthcare professionals actively choose and feel connected to, not just something they're issued," they say. That means treating fashion not as decoration but as strategy. "We believe medical apparel can be highly functional while also being well-designed, fashionable and reflective of the person wearing it."

WHAT SCRUBS NEVER LEARNED FROM STREETWEAR

Long before building Knya, the founders discovered just how quietly resigned healthcare professionals had become to poorly designed uniforms. "Scrubs existed in a strange bubble outside the rest of the apparel industry, untouched by the design thinking, colour theory, and silhouette experimentation that every other category had already embraced," they explain, recalling conversations with doctors and nurses who had built small workarounds simply to survive twelve-hour shifts in garments never designed with them in mind. That discovery became the founding brief. "The idea was to make uniforms desirable, something that changes how you feel and carry yourself the moment you put it on." The result: more than thirteen colours across scrub and underscrub combinations, with more on the way.

SCALING UNDER PRESSURE

Growing during a global emergency reshaped how the founders understood responsibility at scale. "Scaling isn't just about increasing capacity. It's about

building the systems, supply chain, people, and processes that let you deliver consistently, even when the pressure never lets up," they say. Supplying hospitals across hundreds of cities left little room for error. "Quality, timelines, and reliability stop being operational metrics and become something much more serious, because there are people on the other end depending on what you deliver actually showing up, on time, working exactly as it should." If the period taught them one word, they say, it was resilience.

TWO MINDS, ONE PRODUCT

Knya's evolution has been shaped as much by the tension between its founders' perspectives as by their alignment. Vanshika's grounding in fashion technology and product development keeps the brand's design instincts sharp — "my focus is naturally on product, design, brand communication and consumer understanding," she notes — while Abhijeet's background across venture capital and operations keeps the business disciplined at scale. "He leads areas like expansion, retail and operations," Vanshika explains, adding that the friction between their lenses ultimately strengthens the company. "The balance helps us avoid looking at Knya through just one lens. We can be very particular about the product, design and brand experience while also making sure the business is operationally sound."

TWO AUDIENCES, TWO PSYCHOLOGIES

Selling to a hospital and selling to an individual nurse, the founders explain, require entirely different instincts. "In B2B, we are solving for an organisation — its procurement processes, its compliance and hygiene standards, uniformity across large teams, and durability at scale," they say, citing institutional partners like Breach Candy Hospital and Vantara.

Direct-to-consumer demands something more personal entirely. "D2C is a completely different psychology. Here, we are solving for an individual, their comfort, their sense of identity, how the apparel makes them feel while they're on a twelve-hour shift." The bridge between the two, they say, is a strong product foundation with enough range built on top for personal choice to feel genuine.

REDEFINING FASHION FROM WITHIN HEALTHCARE

For Vanshika, a fourth-generation textile entrepreneur whose experience includes Biba, working in healthcare fundamentally expanded her definition of fashion itself. "I started looking at clothing not just as something that communicates personal style, but as something that has to work seamlessly with the person's everyday life," she says. In medical apparel, she notes, even the smallest choices matter disproportionately. "It has made me realise that the most valuable garment isn't necessarily the one that makes the strongest visual statement, but the one that genuinely improves the experience of the person wearing it."

FROM EVALUATING BUSINESSES TO BUILDING ONE

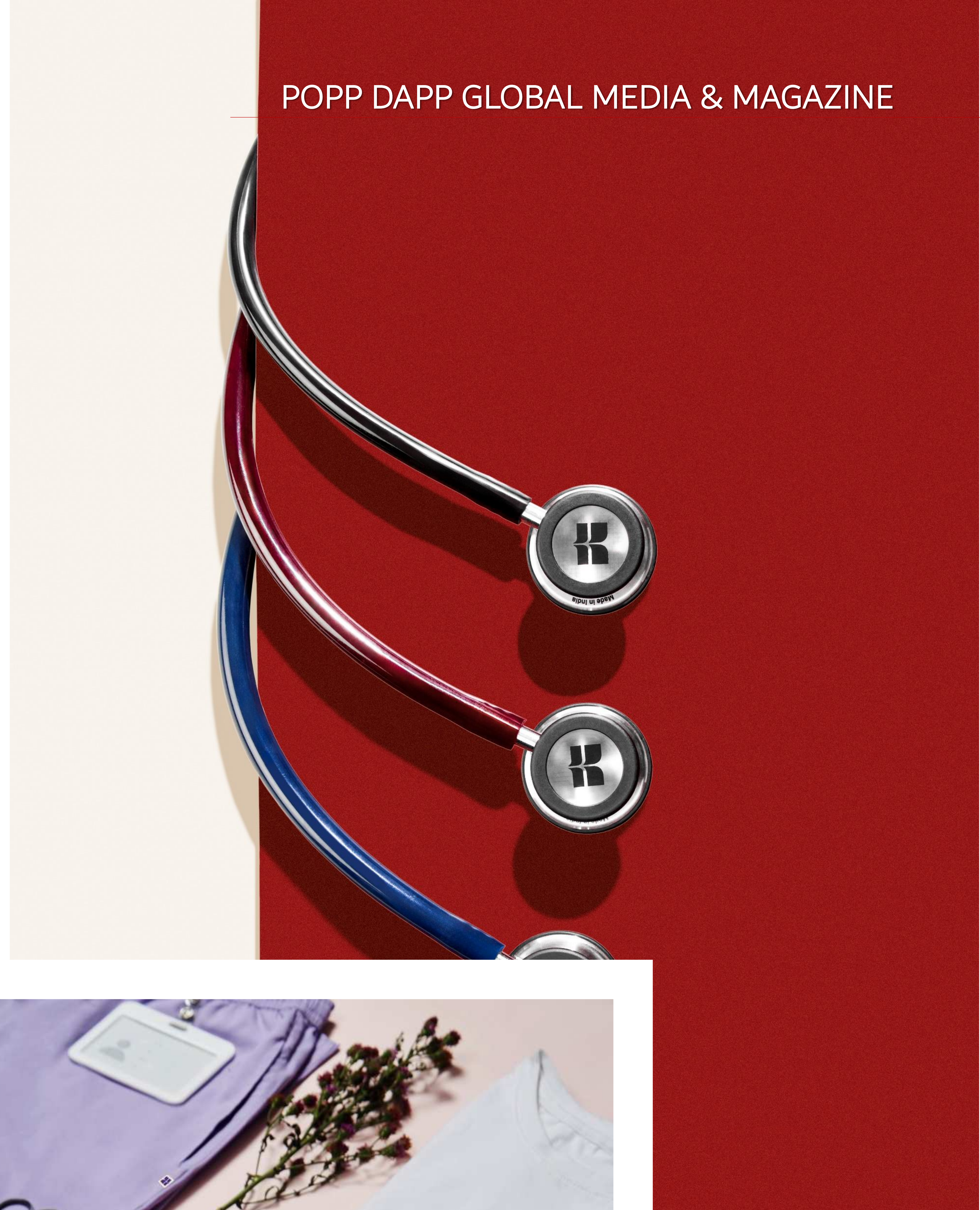
For Abhijeet, whose career spans Reliance Industries, Warburg Pincus and Filter Capital, the shift from investor to operator reshaped his entire understanding of entrepreneurship. "As an investor, you can evaluate a market, a business model and its potential from the outside. As an operator, you quickly realise that a good thesis is only the starting point — execution is what creates the business," he says. That shift has changed the very questions he asks. "I now look at a business less through the lens of 'Is this a great opportunity?' and more through 'What do we need to build, and execute well, for this opportunity to become a great business?'"

WHERE PERFORMANCE MEETS IDENTITY

At the centre of Knya's product philosophy lies a tension the founders have chosen to design into rather than around. "We don't see performance and personal expression as two separate things to balance," they explain, describing invisible decisions that shape every garment — how fabric behaves across a sixteen-hour shift, where pockets sit, how an ID badge is carried without becoming a nuisance. "A healthcare professional should never have to pick between looking good and feeling functional. That shouldn't be a trade-off in the first place."

"Good medical apparel is when you stop noticing it altogether. It performs when you need it to, looks considered without trying too hard, and lets you focus entirely on your work instead of what you're wearing."

It is, in the end, the quiet ambition running through everything Knya has built — not louder scrubs or a flashier uniform, but clothing so intuitively right that the people wearing it can finally stop thinking about what they have on, and simply get on with the work of caring for everyone else. ■■■■



COURAGE FIRST, CONFIDENCE LATER

THE MAKING OF LINCIA ROSARIO

There is a ten-second walk that Lincia Rosario has made hundreds of times — from backstage to centre stage, past crew members and cue cards and the low electric hum of an audience she cannot yet see. By her own account, her mind still writes a hundred small catastrophes into those ten seconds. The fear, she says, has never fully left. What has changed is what she does with it. That single admission tells you almost everything about the woman behind one of India's most recognisable stages — an MC, television host, interviewer and self-described "outrageousness coach" who has spent over a decade learning that mastery was never about eliminating fear, only about outgrowing its authority over her.



THE ANATOMY OF PRESENCE

Ask Lincia what actually creates presence — the quality that lets someone command a room in Punjab one week and Sydney the next — and she resists the easy, single-word answer. Presence, she says, is confidence, preparation, emotional intelligence and the ability to make people feel seen, all at once. But there is a fifth ingredient she insists on adding: the belief that she belongs in every room she enters. Cultures shift, languages shift, expectations shift, but underneath all of it, she has learned, people share the same handful of fundamental emotions — joy, sadness, anger, surprise, excitement. "I do not look at the audience as people who are completely different from me," she reflects. "I see them as an extension of me." It is this instinct, more than any technique, that has let her walk into rooms from Oman to Australia and feel immediately at home in them.

That instinct comes with an occupational danger she is unusually honest about: the slow erosion of curiosity that can follow a decade of doing anything well. After ten, twelve, fifteen years on stage, she admits, experience can quietly curdle into arrogance — the sense that one could "wake up from bed" and deliver a show on autopilot. Her defence is deliberate: she keeps returning to a beginner's mindset, summoning the version of herself who was simply grateful to have a stage at all. She is candid that she cannot always access that hunger — some days she is tired, some days unmotivated — but she can still choose curiosity, still choose preparation, still remind herself that for someone in that audience, this particular evening is happening only once. That reminder, she says, is what keeps the work honest.

THE ART OF LETTING GO

Some of Lincia's sharpest insight concerns the mechanics of a good interview — a craft she has practised opposite some of India's most

recognisable names, and, more recently, at the Sydney Cricket Ground alongside Steve Waugh and Vellayan Subbiah. She had questions prepared, as always. But somewhere inside that conversation, she realised she had to abandon her script and follow what was actually unfolding in front of her — a discipline she describes simply as giving up control. Too often, she notes, interviewers are so preoccupied with their next question that they miss what has just been handed to them: a hesitation, an offhand word, a half-finished story, precisely the material from which the real conversation is built. "Preparation can get you an answer," she says. "But listening can reveal the person." Her formula, distilled, is almost paradoxical: prepare so thoroughly that you can afford to let the preparation go.

FROM ANCHORING TO IDENTITY

Lincia's evolution from anchoring into entrepreneurship, personal branding and executive coaching was not, by her own telling, the product of a five-year plan. It was curiosity, followed relentlessly, that carried her into different rooms and different versions of herself — some experiments succeeding, others quietly failing, all of them adding something. Even within the singular discipline of hosting, she discovered entirely different registers of herself: one energy for sport, a different, more familial warmth at weddings, an altogether more restrained intelligence inside a corporate ballroom. Television and interviewing introduced her to her fascination with people; coaching CEOs on communication and stage presence deepened it further. Somewhere in that accumulation, she arrived at a distinction that now anchors everything she does: "MCing is something I do. Communication and expression are who I am." The moment that realisation landed, she says, the business became larger than any job title — because whether she is hosting, interviewing, coaching or creating, the medium changes, but the underlying purpose, to make people feel more

alive through words and story, does not.

REDEFINING OUTRAGEOUSNESS

Few descriptors sit as provocatively on a business card as "outrageousness coach," and Lincia is precise about what she means by it. In her early years as an anchor, she admits, she was seeking attention outright — the applause, the approval, the sense of being liked. There is nothing unusual in that, she notes, for a performer just starting out. But as her craft deepened, so did her relationship to it: she wanted to perform for herself as much as for any audience, and she no longer wanted her freedom of expression to be governed by anyone's approval. That shift is the entirety of what outrageousness means to her — not volume, not shock value, but the courage to remain fully expressed without constant self-editing for acceptance. She offers her own laugh as evidence: loud, distinctive, once a source of self-consciousness she now refuses to soften. "Attention seeking says, Look at me," she explains. "Authenticity says, This is me." Real authenticity, in her framing, does not require universal approval — only the willingness to be disliked without abandoning the self underneath.

COURAGE BEFORE CONFIDENCE

Perhaps Lincia's most quietly radical idea is her insistence that confidence is not where transformation begins. In her earliest days on stage, she says, she could not even convincingly fake composure — she describes an audience that must have wondered what she was doing up there at all. What carried her forward was not confidence but repetition: showing up once, uncomfortable, and then again, and again, until some fragile self-belief accumulated by the fiftieth attempt, and something sturdier by the hundredth. Crucially, she is clear that the fear itself never disappears — only her relationship to it changes. >>



<< "Performing confidence says, I hope nobody discovers I am scared," she explains. "Real confidence says, I am scared, and I know I will be okay anyway." Her advice to anyone chasing confidence directly is almost contrarian: stop working on confidence, and work on courage instead — ten times over, until, somewhere around the eleventh attempt, confidence finally arrives on its own.

THE CREATIVE LONELINESS NOBODY SEES

Behind the glamour and spontaneity audiences associate with a polished host, Lincia points to an uncomfortable truth that rarely makes it into the highlight reel: the isolation of the craft. What audiences never witness is the night before — alone in a room, repeating the same lines, rewriting, second-guessing, with no one present to confirm whether any of it actually works. Unlike an actor, who benefits from a director, a coach, an entire scaffolding of feedback, a live host is frequently their own writer, director and harshest critic simultaneously. Event agencies and brands are present, she notes, but their mandate is delivery, not artistic development — by the time she reaches the stage, she is expected to already be the finished professional. What she sometimes misses, she admits with disarming candour, is a soundboard: someone simply present while she rehearses, willing to say try that again, or that's the line. It is, she concludes, one of the strange dualities of live performance — the act itself is entirely public, while so much of the becoming happens in private, and often alone.

COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES, AND THE PRIVATE SELF SHE PROTECTS

Having hosted across India, Australia, Dubai and Oman, Lincia has arrived at a working theory of communication: the emotion

beneath it is universal, but its expression must adapt. In the GCC, she has worn an abaya and consciously adjusted her rhythm — more stillness, more restraint, more power drawn from brevity. At an Indian wedding, by contrast, she might be dancing through the crowd, animated and unguarded. It is still her, she insists, simply a different expression of the same self — proof, in her view, that adaptation does not dilute authenticity so much as expand it.

That same discernment now governs what she will and will not accept professionally. Collaboration, she says, has become one of her clearest non-negotiables — not creative control, but what she calls creative respect: rooms where a brand's vision and her own expertise are allowed to meet rather than collide. And offstage, in a career built on visibility, she deliberately protects its opposite. "The world gets the performer," she says. "The people closest to me get the person."

THE NEXT BEGINNER

Asked what she is still hungry to master, Lincia returns to something Mahendra Singh Dhoni once told her during an interview — that winning once is one thing, but winning consistently is the real test. She no longer sees herself only as an MC, but as a performer and communicator with an unfinished range still to explore: deeper storytelling, sharper interviewing, perhaps even acting, improv or music. Some of it frightens her, she admits — there is real comfort in staying inside a craft already mastered, and real discomfort in choosing to become a beginner again. But that discomfort, for Lincia, is precisely the point. Mastery, she suggests, may not be about becoming better and better at the same thing. It may simply be the courage to keep starting over. ■■■



THE MAN BEHIND THE MIRROR

Shailesh P Ramugade on
Identity, Relevance and
The Art of Becoming!



“When I started, I thought success meant a big name, big projects, recognition and fame. Today, I understand that these things are only parts of success!”

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eing compared to a star can sound like an advantage, but for Shailesh P Ramugade, the resemblance to Salman Khan has been both a calling card and a complication. It has brought recognition before introductions were made, while also creating the inevitable challenge of being seen for more than a familiar face. For years, the comparison has followed him, opening certain doors while quietly demanding that he prove there is much more to his story than the resemblance itself.

But spend even a few minutes inside his answers, and it becomes clear that he has spent his career quietly, deliberately, walking out from under that shadow. What emerges is not a man auditioning for resemblance, but one negotiating, in real time, the far more difficult project of authorship over his own name.

A QUIETER SELF, OFFSTAGE

Ask Shailesh who he is when the cameras stop rolling, and the answer arrives without theatre. "The Shailesh you see in front of the camera and the Shailesh behind it are not very different, but when the cameras are off, I am definitely much quieter and simpler," he says. It is a disarmingly modest admission from a figure whose public identity sits at the crossroads of cinema, fashion and the accelerant of social media — a life built, in part, on visibility. And yet he is candid about what that visibility conceals. "People usually see the glamorous side of my life, but very few see the hard work, struggles, mistakes, self-doubt and the battles I have had with myself along the way."

What grounds him, he says, are the unglamorous constants — family, relationships, honesty in his work. It is here that he offers what might be the closest thing to a personal manifesto: "It is more important to know who you are than to be known by everyone else." In an industry engineered around recognition, it is a quietly rebellious thing to say.

BEYOND RESEMBLANCE

The Salman Khan comparison is, by his own admission, a compliment — and a complicated one. "In the beginning, such comparisons can feel flattering and can even create opportunities," he concedes. But he is equally clear-eyed about its limitations. "My identity cannot be built only around how I look. Looks can create a first impression, but a career is sustained by talent, hard work, personality and the ability to connect with an audience."

His ambition, stated plainly, is to outgrow the comparison entirely. "I don't want people to remember me as 'the person who looks like Salman Khan.' I want them to eventually say, 'Shailesh Ramugade — an artist who created his own identity.' That is the real goal." It is a sentiment that recasts resemblance not as a curse or a gift,

but as a starting point — one chapter in a story he intends to write considerably further.

VISIBILITY IS NOT THE SAME AS RELEVANCE

Few figures navigating the current media landscape are naive about the mechanics of virality, and Shailesh is no exception. "Social media can give you visibility, but it cannot guarantee longevity," he says. "A post can go viral today, get millions of views and people may move on tomorrow. But the real value of an artist is determined by how long their work stays relevant in people's minds."

This distinction — between being seen and being remembered — has become a governing principle for him. "Visibility and credibility are two very different things," he explains. "Today, my focus is not just on being seen. It is on building work that gives me credibility beyond social media." The ambition, ultimately, is for the work itself to do the talking his profile cannot.

THE ROLES HE HASN'T PLAYED YET

For an artist who has already moved fluidly between modelling, acting and digital content, the question of what remains unconquered draws out some of his most animated answers. He is explicit about wanting to be surprised by his own range. "I don't want to restrict myself to only playing a hero or glamorous characters," he says. "I want to play a role that makes people say, 'We never imagined Shailesh in this character.'"

He lists the territory with evident appetite — "a negative role, an emotionally complex character, an action-driven role or even a very realistic story about an ordinary person" — framing each as less a departure than a necessary discomfort. "I want roles that challenge me and force me to discover a different side of myself."

But acting, for him, is only half the

ambition. He speaks with equal seriousness about production. "I have a strong ambition to grow as a producer as well. I want to create meaningful cinema and content, not just be a part of it." It is a telling reframe of scale: "The next stage of my career is not simply about becoming bigger — it is about creating something bigger."

SUBSTANCE, DELIBERATELY BUILT

If there is a thesis running underneath the entire conversation, it is this: appearance opens doors, but only substance keeps them open. "Looks can open a door, but performance is what keeps that door open," he says, describing an ongoing, almost technical self-education — "acting, body language, dialogue delivery, camera presence and different kinds of characters." As a producer-in-training, he is equally attentive to craft from the other side of the camera, "learning how stories are developed, how content is created and what truly connects with an audience."

The goal, distilled to its simplest form: "When people hear the name Shailesh Ramugade, I don't want them to remember only my face. I want them to remember my work."

GIVING WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE

Public figures often find philanthropy folded into their brand narrative, whether they intend it or not. He draws a sharp line between the two. "Social responsibility is not about taking a photograph while helping someone and putting it on social media," he says. "There is a big difference between helping someone for publicity and helping someone because you genuinely want to."

His framing of privilege is notably unromantic, rooted in resource rather than sentiment: "Whatever we have — whether it is time, money, influence, recognition or a platform — we can use a part of it to make a difference to someone else's life." >>



<< He credits his own shifting fortunes with sharpening this instinct — "I have seen different phases of life myself, and that has made me more sensitive towards people going through difficult situations" — and is candid about scaling that responsibility alongside his own growth: "If my work and platform become bigger in the future, I want that influence to be useful not just for me, but for society as well."

LIVING BETWEEN THE CURATED AND THE REAL

On the democratising promise of social media, Shailesh holds a nuanced position. "Social media is an incredible opportunity, but it also comes with responsibility," he says, noting how it has dissolved the old gatekeeping of the industry: "Earlier, artists needed several platforms and gatekeepers to reach an audience. Today, an artist can directly showcase their work to millions of people."

The risk, as he sees it, lives in the gap between persona and person. "There is always a risk of creating a gap between the person you actually are and the image you present online," he says, describing his own effort to manage that tension: "Public image is important because it is part of my career, but it should never become the entire definition of who I am." His hope for the audience is a kind of eventual unmasking, achieved through output rather than disclosure: "I don't want people to know only my curated version. I want my work to eventually reveal the real person and artist behind the image."

A MOVING DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Success, Shailesh admits, has been thoroughly redefined since he entered the public eye. "When I started, I thought success meant a big name, big projects, recognition

and fame," he says. "Today, I understand that these things are only parts of success." What has replaced it is something closer to autonomy and integrity — "the freedom to choose meaningful work, working with good people, making my family proud and building an identity that is genuinely my own."

His preferred metric is entirely internal: "Am I better than the Shailesh I was yesterday? I believe competing with your own previous version is far more meaningful than constantly competing with other people."

SHAILESH, 2036

Asked to imagine himself a decade from now, once the novelty of the platforms that made him has faded, his answer turns almost philosophical. "I didn't build my career simply to become famous. I built it to create something meaningful," he says. "I want to be remembered as an artist for my work, as a producer for my vision and, most importantly, as a person for the way I treated people and carried myself."

His final measure of achievement is disarmingly modest for a man discussing legacy: "No matter how successful I became, I never lost the person I was when I started." And in a closing note that feels less like publicity and more like personal creed, he offers something closer to faith than strategy: "If your intentions are pure, destiny decides how far you are meant to go. Your job is to keep doing your karma with honesty, patience and consistency." It is, perhaps, the most honest thing an artist balancing image and identity can say — that the work of becoming is never finished, and that the only real control lies in doing it with integrity, one role, one choice, one day at a time. ■■■■

Creator *Before the* *Word Existed*

SHIVVANI PAATIL
ON STYLE, SELF AND
STAYING WHOLE ONLINE



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here was a version of the internet, not long ago by calendar years but a lifetime ago by its own accelerated clock, when the word "influencer" had no fixed meaning in the Indian market — when a young woman posting photographs of her outfits online was simply doing so because she loved telling a story visually, with no algorithm to answer to and no category yet built to contain her. Shivvani Paatil belongs to that founding generation, the one that arrived before the vocabulary did, and eleven or twelve years later, she remains one of the more thoughtful voices to have survived the industry's transformation from fashion blogging into full-scale digital creation. What makes her worth listening to now is not merely longevity, but the unusual candour with which she examines the very platforms that made her — admitting, in the same breath, to their pressures and their pleasures, and refusing the tidy, triumphant narrative arc that so many creators are tempted to perform for an audience that expects one.

WHAT ENDURES BENEATH THE FORMAT

Photographs gave way to blogs, blogs gave way to reels, carousels and vlogs, and the entire architecture of how a creator communicates has been rebuilt more than once during Shivvani's career. And yet, she insists, the underlying impulse has never moved an inch. What drew her to content creation originally — the sheer joy of watching something conceived in her imagination take visible form — remains, by her account, exactly what sustains her today.

something conceived in her imagination take visible form — remains, by her account, exactly what sustains her today. The mediums evolved around her; the motive did not. It is a distinction she draws with quiet precision: she has changed with the times, but not for them.

STAYING HERSELF INSIDE THE ALGORITHM

Few admissions from a working creator feel as refreshingly unguarded as Shivvani's account of algorithmic pressure. She does not pretend to stand above it — she is candid that the endless calculation of what will perform, what is trending, what the platform currently rewards can be genuinely disheartening, capable of eclipsing the very reason a person began creating in the first place. Her discipline is not resistance but boundary: she has had to insist to herself that an algorithm has no authority over her emotions, her self-worth or her creativity, even while acknowledging, with characteristic pragmatism, that some degree of feeding the system is simply part of the job. Her working test, when a trend surfaces, is deceptively simple — not "how do I recreate this," but "how would I make this feel like me." That single reframing, repeated often enough, is what she credits with keeping her output recognisably, stubbornly Shivvani, and it is a distinction worth pausing on: the difference between chasing a trend and simply passing it through the filter of one's own voice before deciding whether it deserves a place in the work at all.

LONDON AND THE GRAMMAR OF SELF

Ask Shivvani how travel has shaped her sense of style, and she resists the easy answer entirely — this was never about souvenirs or borrowed silhouettes. Nearly four years spent living in London, she says, altered something closer to her foundations: how she understood herself, and only consequently, how she chose to dress. The city made her more willing to experiment, but more importantly, it sharpened her awareness of who she actually was beneath the experimentation. Her conclusion is one that separates a genuine style philosophy from a merely aesthetic one — that travel does not hand you a new wardrobe so much as it hands you a clearer self, and personal style, done honestly, is simply that self finding its outward expression.

ASPIRATION WITHOUT ARTIFICE, TOLD THROUGH MOOD AND MOVEMENT

Shivvani rejects, almost instinctively, the notion that aspiration and authenticity must sit in opposition — a tension many digital creators struggle to reconcile. She is unembarrassed about her love of beautiful, elevated imagery, but insists the polish is rarely the product of conscious image management. The difference, in her framing, lies in refusing to manufacture a version of herself purely for the camera; elevation and honesty, she maintains, are entirely capable of coexisting in the same frame.



That philosophy extends beyond the subject herself into everything surrounding her — she speaks of photography, location, movement and mood as forces that shape not just how a piece of content looks, but where the original idea comes from in the first place, every peripheral detail quietly bending the outcome of the story she is trying to tell.

CREATIVE TRUST AS THE REAL CURRENCY OF COLLABORATION

Having worked across Indian designers and international brands alike, Shivvani draws a clear distinction between a collaboration that merely showcases a product and one that becomes an actual creative partnership — and that distinction, for her, comes down almost entirely to trust. A partnership becomes meaningful the moment a brand is willing to relinquish some ownership of the story to the creator, rather than dictating a predetermined script for them to perform. She notes, without much diplomatic softening, that international brands and agencies have generally proven more willing to extend this trust than their Indian counterparts — an observation that doubles as a quiet challenge to the domestic industry to better recognise what creators have spent years earning: an intimate, hard-won understanding of their own audience.

CONFIDENCE AS THE ONLY TRUE STYLE

For Shivvani, genuine style has very little to do with the inventory of a wardrobe and almost everything to do with the person wearing it. What signals real taste to her is the ability to communicate personality through clothing — and confidence, she argues, is the variable that does the heaviest lifting, capable of turning the simplest outfit into something genuinely striking when worn with total ownership. Her own definition of style has shifted considerably over the years, growing more experimental and more willing to wander beyond the familiar, even as the underlying story she wants her style to tell has stayed constant. Style,

in her view, should evolve exactly as a person does — without ever losing the essential thread of who they are. It is a philosophy that quietly resists the idea of style as a fixed identity to be perfected once and maintained forever, offering instead something closer to a living record of a person's ongoing self-discovery.

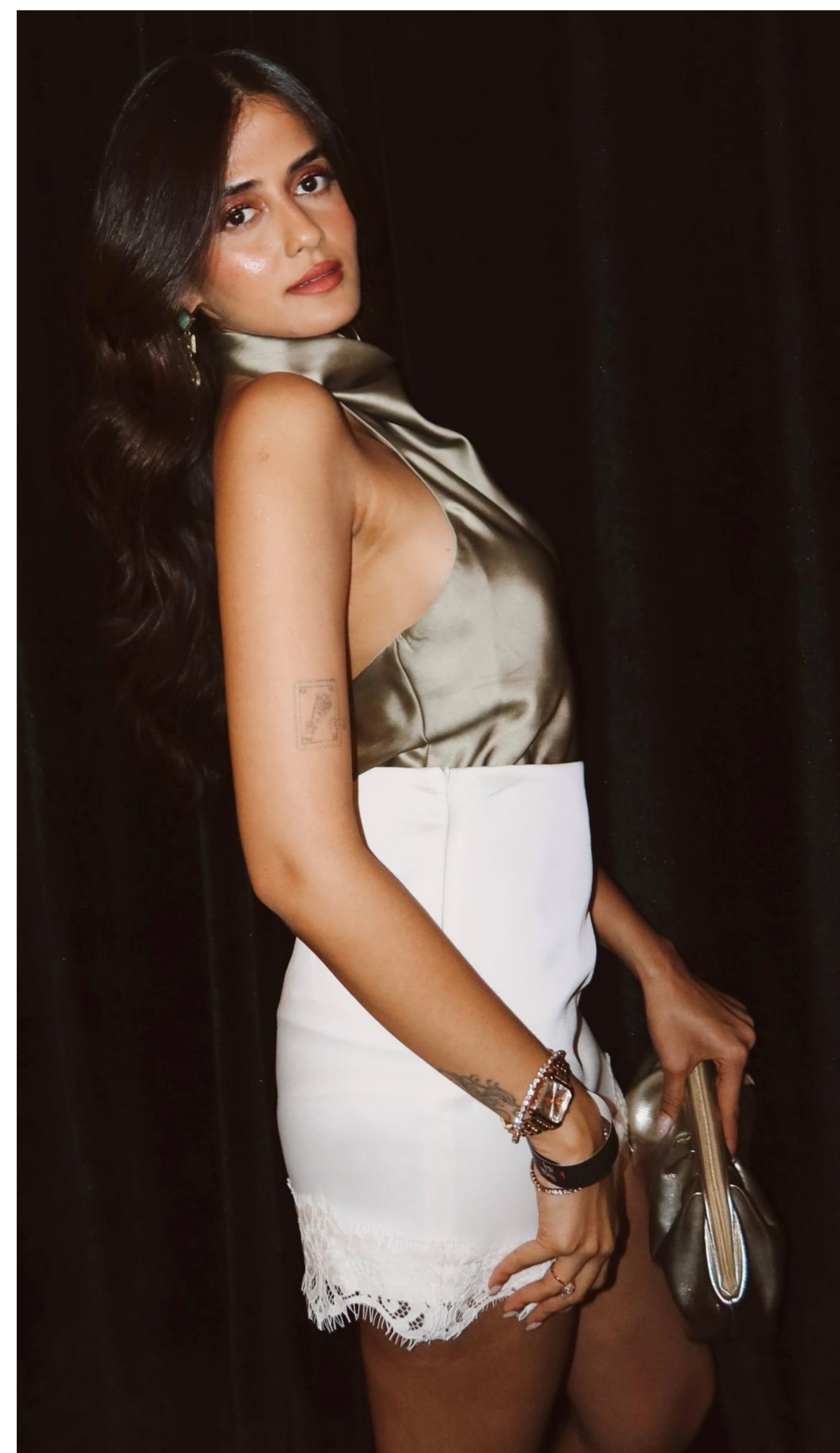
THE GUILT OF VISIBILITY

Perhaps the most striking honesty in the conversation arrives when Shivvani addresses the pressure to remain constantly visible — a tension she admits, after more than a decade in the profession, she still has not fully resolved. She describes a familiar and uncomfortable guilt that surfaces whenever she has not posted in a while, driven by a quiet fear that both algorithm and audience might simply forget her if she steps away too long. She is unusually forthright in admitting that she does not always recognise, in the moment, when she is creating from that anxious place rather than from genuine inspiration — it is typically only in hindsight, looking back at certain pieces of content, that the distinction becomes visible to her, often accompanied by regret. She offers no tidy resolution to this, only the more honest admission that awareness, even without a full solution, is itself a form of progress.

INDIA'S FASHION VOICE ON THE GLOBAL STAGE — AND WHAT COMES NEXT

Looking outward at her own industry, Shivvani expresses genuine pride in how Indian fashion creators are choosing to enter the global conversation — not by contorting themselves into a Western template of what fashion should look like, but by bringing forward a culture she describes as rich and layered, rendered with creativity, originality and unmistakable pride. Yet she believes there remains further ground to cover, particularly in showcasing the many different faces of contemporary India, and in dissolving the false choice

between cultural rootedness and global relevance. Indian fashion, in her view, need not pick a side — it can be deeply cultural and unapologetically forward-facing in the very same frame.



As for what lies ahead of her personally, Shivvani offers no rehearsed five-year plan, only an honest admission that she is drawn toward eventually building something beyond content itself — a business, perhaps in accessories, perhaps in beverages, the specifics still unsettled, offered with a wink rather than a press release. It is a fittingly unfinished note for a creator whose entire career has been defined less by certainty than by a willingness to keep discovering, in public, exactly who she is becoming next — and, eleven years in, still finding that discovery to be the whole point. ■■■



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