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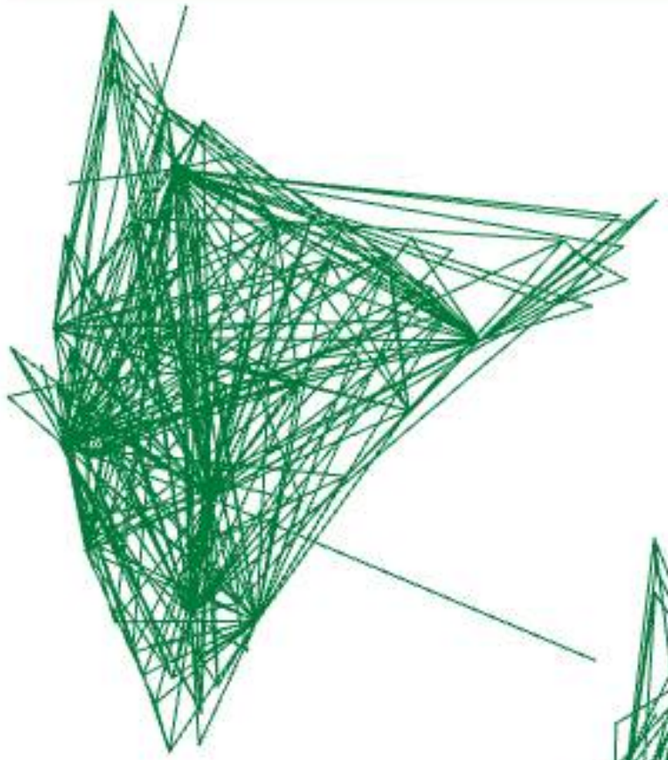
171st Issue, Oct 2026

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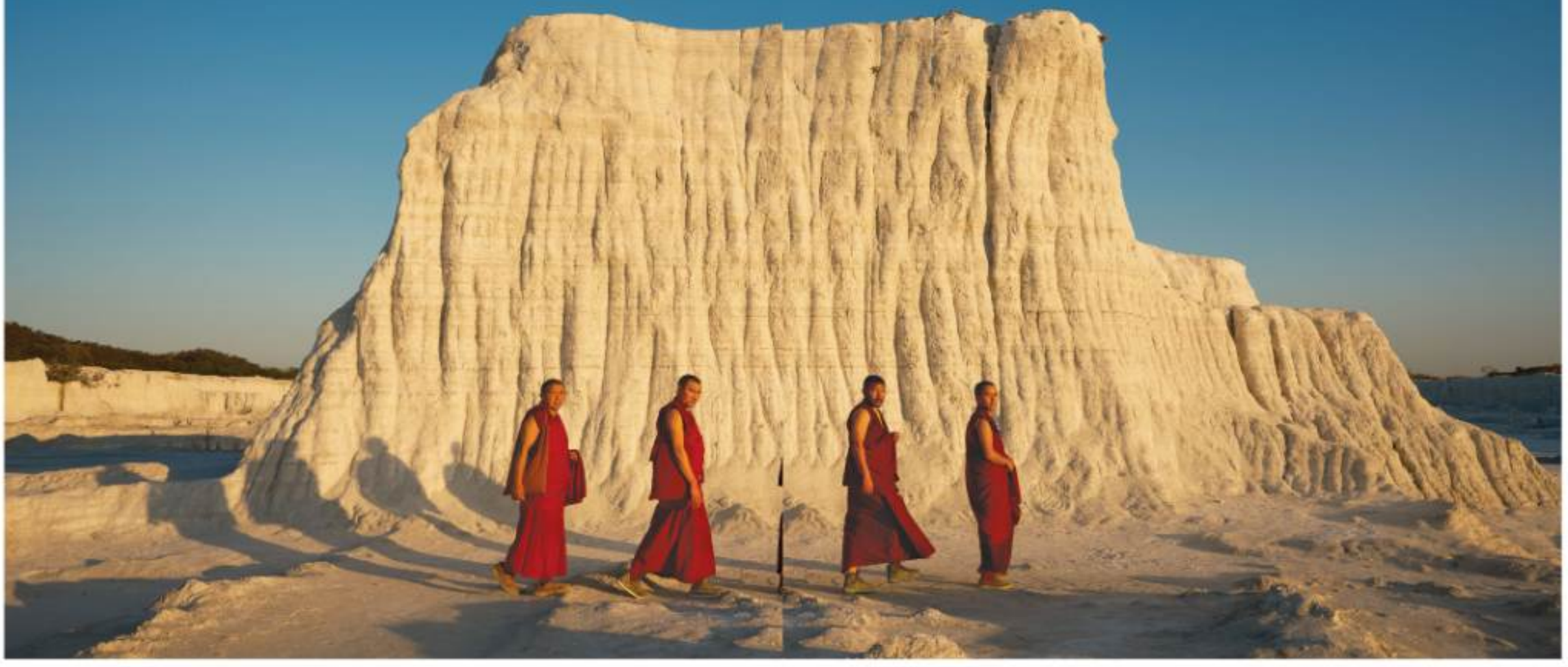


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The Ministry of Civil Aviation has upgraded the AirSewa portal, which is accessible through an interactive web portal and a mobile app.

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CORRIGENDUM

In our September 2025 issue, the Assamese literary piece by Aruni Kashyap incorrectly carried the honorific "Professor" before the author's name. The correct credit is Aruni Kashyap.

In our September issue, an incorrect figure was published for the number of employees at IndiGo. We regret the error.

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HELLO 6E

Indigo has always carried more than colour. But what interested us about it in 2026 was not simply its extraordinary past. It was how insistently it keeps finding new forms.

Across this issue, indigo moves. From the living vats of natural dyers to Himanshu Shani's experiments with indigo as he describes it, 'a living thing'; from Darshan Shah's remarkable textile archive to contemporary artists pushing pigment onto stone, resin and unexpected surfaces. At Hampi Art Labs, Meera Curam asks what happens when an ancient material enters a contemporary art conversation. Elsewhere, Nila House reveals the ecosystem of growers, dyers, makers and knowledge that keeps a craft alive. Briana Blasko's powerful portrayal of creating indigo is goosebump-inducing, as we glimpse into her portraits that also hang at the New York MET.

Then we let the circle widen. A Kashmir sapphire becomes a story about rarity and obsession. Morocco's nila opens a conversation about beauty and ritual. India's cricket jersey asks how a colour becomes part of a nation's popular identity. We look at why blue can make us feel calm or melancholy and why we rarely want to eat it. Along the way, we'll discover how a simple five-paise coin inspired the design of IndiGo BluChip, our digital loyalty currency.

What emerges is not an issue about a shade on the spectrum. It is about a colour that became a material, a commodity, a memory, a language, and continues, centuries later, to become something new.



The colour that travelled the world

Across 6,000 years, indigo has moved between continents and cultures, from ancient dye vats and coveted 'blue gold' to colonial rebellion, laboratory chemistry and the denim we wear today



Indigo occupies that elusive territory between blue and violet, but its history is considerably harder to pin down. Even its name carries the trace of a journey: derived from the Greek indikon and Latin indicum, essentially meaning "from India", it reflects the subcontinent's centuries-old association with the dye and its trade. Yet indigo was never exclusively Indian. Across continents, different civilisations independently discovered ways of coaxing an extraordinary blue from otherwise unremarkable green leaves.

Before blue had a name

The oldest known indigo-dyed textile fragments were discovered at Huaca Prieta in Peru and date to roughly 6,000 years ago. Indigo traditions would emerge across India, Egypt, China, Japan, West Africa and Central America. Nor did the colour come from a single plant: India became famous for Indigofera tinctoria, while European dyers used woad and East Asian traditions employed plants including Persicaria tinctoria. Different leaves, remarkably similar blues created this incredibly versatile hue. India nevertheless became one of the great centres of indigo cultivation and trade. The precious pigment travelled from the subcontinent across ancient trade routes, eventually becoming valuable enough to earn the nickname "blue gold".

The blue that begins green

Indigo's chemistry contains one of its best tricks: there is no obvious blue inside the plant. Its leaves contain colourless precursor compounds that must be broken down before the pigment can form. During dyeing, cloth can emerge from the vat yellow-green; exposure to oxygen then transforms it, seemingly before your eyes, into blue. Its chemistry also explains something considerably more contemporary. Indigo largely colours the exterior of cotton yarn rather than penetrating completely through it. As denim is worn and abraded, lighter fibres underneath are gradually exposed. The fades we now prize in old jeans are, essentially, chemistry made visible.

When blue became power

Europe's appetite for imported indigo was not universally welcomed. It threatened the established European woad industry so seriously that authorities and producers attempted at various points to restrict or prohibit the foreign dye. A battle over blue had become a battle over trade. Its global expansion had much darker consequences. European colonial powers developed lucrative indigo plantations in the Americas and Caribbean, often dependent on enslaved labour. In British-ruled India, cultivators were pushed into deeply exploitative arrangements to grow indigo for export. Resistance followed. The Indigo Revolt of 1859–60 saw thousands of Bengali cultivators refuse to sow the crop. Dinabandhu Mitra's 1860 play Nil Darpan (The Indigo Mirror) dramatised their exploitation. Decades later, indigo would intersect with Indian history again at Champaran in Bihar, where Gandhi's 1917 campaign on behalf of exploited indigo cultivators became his first major satyagraha in India.

The laboratory changes everything

Then chemistry overturned the economics of blue. German chemist Adolf von Baeyer spent decades investigating indigo and developing methods of synthesising it. By 1897, BASF had introduced commercially viable synthetic indigo. A colour once dependent on land, seasons and enormous amounts of human labour could now be manufactured industrially, contributing to the rapid decline of the natural indigo economy. Synthetic indigo eventually found its great modern canvas: denim. Today, blue jeans have transformed what was once a rare and expensive colour into one of the most ubiquitous colours on earth.

Is indigo even a colour?

There is one final twist. Indigo owes its place in the rainbow partly to Isaac Newton. His early descriptions of the visible spectrum used fewer colour divisions before he eventually settled on seven: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Historians have long debated why seven mattered to him, including possible connections to musical scales and contemporary ideas about numerical harmony. Which leaves indigo with an appropriately elusive ending. For thousands of years humans have cultivated it, traded it, fought over it, rebelled against it, recreated it in laboratories and worn it on their bodies, all while still debating exactly where blue ends and indigo begins.



The living archive

From cloth and dye to contemporary culture, an ancient material is being reconsidered by artists, designers and textile practitioners. Three voices explore why it remains coveted centuries later, and where it might go next



Image Credit: Pratik Khatri

Your pair of denims didn't just come to be. There is an almost 6,000-year-old history associated with it, and a connection to India that runs deep. That inky blue pigment that has traditionally been used to dye denim is none other than indigo, which has been cultivated for centuries in the Indian subcontinent. Once a prized commodity and highly sought after for its natural blue hue, it earned the moniker of 'blue gold', thanks to the nuanced, almost painstaking process of extracting dye from the plant, as well as its myriad uses beyond clothing. In ancient Peru, for instance, indigo was used for ceremonial purposes, while in West Africa, it was a symbol of prosperity and fertility.

Even the name indigo has been derived from Indicum, the Latin term for 'from India' and the Greek word, Indikon. It's not lost today that India was once the world's largest supplier of indigo, extracted from the plant species indigofera tinctoria, while several other species grow in parts of East Asia, like Japan, West Africa and South America.

But the more interesting question today may not be where indigo has been, but where it is going. Across contemporary India, the material is being reconsidered not simply as a historic dye or textile tradition, but as a living medium capable of taking on new forms.

A complicated inheritance

Much of the Western world was once infatuated with this 'blue gold'. From the late 18th century onwards, European commercial interests, including the British East India Company, expanded indigo production in India, forcing many farmers to allocate land to the crop instead of food. Coercive contracts, debt and exploitative cultivation practices eventually helped fuel the Indigo Revolt of 1859–60. By the end of the 19th century, another transformation was underway: the development of synthetic indigo would dramatically diminish demand for the natural dye, even as denim helped take the colour into mass culture. It is against this complicated inheritance that indigo is being reconsidered today, through a renewed interest in natural dyeing, the revival of cultivation and, increasingly, experimentation with what the material itself can do.

Shani Himanshu: Keeping the vat alive

"Indigo is one of the oldest dyes humans have ever known, and it's the only colour I know that behaves like a living thing," shares Shani Himanshu, co-founder of New Delhi-based label 11.11 / eleven eleven, which works with natural indigo dyes. The brand's tangaliya shirt was spotted on Brad Pitt in the 2025 movie F1. "Indigo doesn't sit on cloth—it lives in it," says Shani, explaining that the dye oxidises the moment the fabric leaves the vat. "You pull out yellow, it turns green, and blue is born in front of your eyes."

Tracing the process to its roots, the indigo plant is first harvested after which green leaves are carefully immersed and steeped in vats of water. Then comes fermenting and alkalising the solution, where the liquid turns yellow-green. Once exposed to air, oxidation turns the liquid into blue, and what you're eventually left with is a thick paste that's dried in the form of cakes and the residual pigment is your dye.

"A natural indigo vat, tended well,



Image Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven



Image Credit: Indigo Art Museum

can live longer than a human lifespan, and its water isn't discarded," says Shani.

Mayank Mansingh Kaul: Why we're returning

Mayank Mansingh Kaul, a leading textile expert, believes that we're seeing a re-enchantment with indigo. "I attribute this to a few reasons, one of them being an interest in the revival of cultivation of the plant which we are seeing on a small scale across India, especially parts like Kutch, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. This fits within a demand for natural dyeing by consumers shifting to mindful, slow consumption of fashion," he explains.

"Come to think of it, indigo has more international resonance as compared to, say, a cloth like khadi, which people outside of India may not be as aware of," he adds. There are textile labels doing more with natural indigo now. Shani's label is just one such example. In fact, the New Delhi store is home to vats of indigo which gets customers to stop and ask about the process. "Every day around 500 grams to 1 kilo of yarn is dyed here and the living vat is fed, stirred and monitored daily. So, when someone watches cloth come out of a vat in a shade of green and turn blue in the air, they stop being a customer for a moment. They ask questions. They slow down," he says.



Image Credit: Karan Anand



Image Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven

Kavin Mehta: The material experiment

Indigo's usage is no longer limited to just textiles. Ask Kavin Mehta, artist and director of the Ahmedabad-based Indigo Art Museum (set up by Arvind Ltd) which is entirely devoted to the blue hue, encouraging artists to experiment with indigo in contemporary forms. Mehta's work with indigo primarily includes using stone and wood. "I find it fascinating pairing something rigid like stone, with a soft dye like indigo," he observes, noting that it easily takes months to achieve the desired shade of blue on stone. Mehta believes there is a distinction between preserving a tradition and keeping it alive. So, it's important that indigo finds new ways of expression, beyond just cloth. "Keeping a tradition alive means allowing it to change. And indigo is very adaptable to different uses," he says. Some of the work they have done with multi-disciplinary artists at the museum include making building bricks from indigo waste from denim mills, furniture



Image Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven



Image Credit: Indigo Art Museum

stained with indigo dye, 3D printing with natural dyes and using indigo dye on materials like aluminium, which hasn't ever been experimented with before.

"There is also this notion among the younger generation, about consuming a dye that was once denied to the indigenous people by colonial powers," adds Kaul. He believes that while fashion is homogenising, indigo has managed to stand apart. Look at it this way. The customer for Indian indigo largely remains in India, so there isn't this rush to go and export a handcrafted indigo product. People are willing to pay high prices for something that is handcrafted, regional and traceable to its roots, he says.

For Shani, one of the most exciting things underway is developing new IPs for indigo, one of which includes indigo paste. "Indigo was never really painted, as oxidation does not allow it," he says, adding that their paste carries a natural binder that changes that. Now it can be used to paint on walls, wooden surfaces and textiles too. "And that is the point; the potential of indigo is endless." He believes that indigo's reinterpretation is going deeper, not just wider. "People aren't only using the colour, they're learning the vat, the fermentation and the patience underneath it."

Perhaps that is where indigo's future lies: not in preserving it exactly as it was, but in understanding the knowledge that sits beneath it well enough to allow it to change. So, the next time you come across this special shade of blue, know that it carries centuries of history, labour and meaning, even as its possibilities continue to evolve.



Image Credit: Nishant Shukla

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Who, what, where

10 things we noticed this month

Lola Ren



The Indian passport

The darker hues of a passport were picked to mask palm grease and travel scuffs while making gold foil emblems pop. When post-independence India settled on its deep navy cover, it chose a shade reflecting diplomatic neutrality and official sovereignty, distinct from regional trade blocs or religious signifiers. In a poetic coincidence, it also mirrors the navy of the Ashoka Chakra.



Pangong Tso

Sitting at 14,270 feet, Pangong Tso spans 134 kilometres across India and Tibet as a massive endorheic basin: glacial streams continuously feed the lake, but with no outlet to the sea, water escapes through high-altitude evaporation. Its crystalline water scatters sunlight into shifting shades of blue, from bright cyan to deep cobalt and violet.



Monsoon armour

Come June, India's urban horizon undergoes a sudden shift in colour. Before the first storm hits, rooflines, roadside stalls, construction scaffolds, and fish markets are draped in sheets of bright, crinkly blue plastic. It isn't a deliberate aesthetic choice but pure, brutal utility — the cheapest line of defence against relentless monsoon downpours.



India's other uniform

When coloured uniforms replaced traditional whites, India began an enduring relationship with the blue cricket jersey. What began as one sporting colour evolved into a cultural juggernaut. From the deep indigo kits of the 1990s to the electric shades of "Bleed Blue" today, the jersey became a democratic sporting uniform, uniting fans under a single shade.

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Jamini Roy's rebellion

Before painting in bold contours, Jamini Roy was Calcutta's master of European portraiture. But in the 1920s, he staged a radical revolt. Rejecting Western realism, Roy abandoned imported oils and canvas. Looking instead to Bengal's rural patua scroll artists, Blue Boy captures this shift through flat planes, almond eyes, and striking blue skin.



The colour of Krishna

In Indian iconography, blue is less a literal skin tone than a visual shorthand for infinity: the vast cosmos. The Sanskrit Krishna evokes darkness, like rain-bearing monsoon clouds. From Puri's black-timbered idols to later miniature paintings, this cloud-dark nature transformed into a luminous, iconic blue, bridging physical pigment with cosmic metaphor.



India's old ICF train

For any 90s kid, a long journey didn't truly begin until you stepped into that heavy blue box. The navy ICF coaches became the backdrop of Indian distance. Inside was an endless rhythm: chai wallahs chanting down the aisle, samosas handed over in newsprint, and hawkers selling plastic novelties. Today, newer trains are modernising the tracks.



The medicine jar

Long before industrial glass standardised apothecaries, glazed earthenware jars lined the dark timber shelves of India's traditional davakhanas. Hand-thrown by local potters, these cobalt-glazed vessels were tools for Unani hakims across the subcontinent. Adorned with flowing calligraphic labels in Urdu, these vibrant jars anchored community healthcare, leaving behind luminous relics of historic Indian alchemy.



Chhavi Niwas

High on the fifth tier of Jaipur's Chandra Mahal, Chhavi Niwas shatters the city's terracotta monologue. Built as a monsoon retreat, this private salon is saturated in vibrant colour, overlaid with intricate white floral creepers. Through scalloped arches overlooking courtly vistas below, the elevated pavilion appears suspended in lapis-tinted stillness above the desert plains.



The demon's Mask

In the southern highlands of Koraput, Odisha, the ritual papier-mâché mask of Dusana, the demon general of the Janasthana forest, brings epic nocturnal terror to regional Desia Ramleela theatre. In the flare of performance torchlight, its deep indigo surface contrasts against white facial markings and an exaggerated crimson mouth, instantly establishing his supernatural rank.

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The anatomy of a coin

An Indian five-paise coin, the visual language of Bitcoin, Swiss watch-dial precision and an old-school airport display come together in the design of IndiGo BluChip



The IndiGo BluChip coin brings together a series of unexpected design references. Its distinctive rounded-square form takes its cue from the old Indian five-paise coin, while the visual language of Bitcoin lends it the feel of a contemporary digital currency. Look closer and the numerals draw on the precision and typography of Swiss watch dials, giving the design an intricate, engineered quality. In motion, those numbers recall the mechanical rhythm of split-flap departure boards, once synonymous with airports, their digits turning as flights and timings changed. Rendered in IndiGo's signature indigo, these influences create something familiar, precise and distinctly rooted in travel.



Frequent flyer diaries

Stories, insider tips, airport rituals and lessons from seasoned travellers

Lola Ren



For Mr Mohit Gulati, a Blu 1 IndiGo BluChip member who takes to the skies two to three times a week, travel is no longer just about getting from point A to point B. What began as a mandatory routine for work has transformed into a genuine enjoyment of the journey itself.

Small spends, big wins

Mr Gulati's golden rule for earning IndiGo BluChips faster is simple: consistency. "Make sure your IndiGo BluChip membership ID is attached to every single booking," he says. "And don't just look at flying," he advises. "I use my IndiGo Kotak Co-Branded Credit Card for everyday spending, and since Swiggy is also an ecosystem partner, ordering food or dining out earns IndiGo BluChips too. You don't even realise it, but every small spend adds up until you've built up something substantial for a trip."

The experience

"When I used my IndiGo BluChips to take my family to Guwahati, the flight was completely free," he says. But the real game-changer? His 40 annual 6E passes. "Getting Fast Forward, seat selection, and meals as a Blu 1 member is amazing. When travelling with family, you want them super comfortable, and those priority perks make it feel like a truly premium experience." He adds, "What started as frequent flying has become a journey of experiences, rewards, and memories, with IndiGo as a constant part of the voyage."

Even seasoned flyers hit bumps

"I once missed an important flight to Bangalore, late by just 10 minutes at the gate. It was anything but funny then," he recalls. "Luckily, IndiGo's frequency on major routes like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Bangalore is fantastic — you can catch another in an hour! The ground staff stepped in immediately to rebook me, and that supportive response made all the difference."

When it comes to souvenirs, he's strictly a foodie

"I always bring back local flavours. In Lucknow, I'll grab galawati kebabs. Down South, I never forget Mysore pak; my daughter loves it! Food brings the feeling of that city back home with you."

Falling in love with Madrid

Of all his destinations, Spain holds a special place. "I went with my wife to Madrid and Barcelona, expecting a standard European vacation, but Madrid completely blew us away. The vibrant energy, architecture, food, culture, it was so lively and full of character."

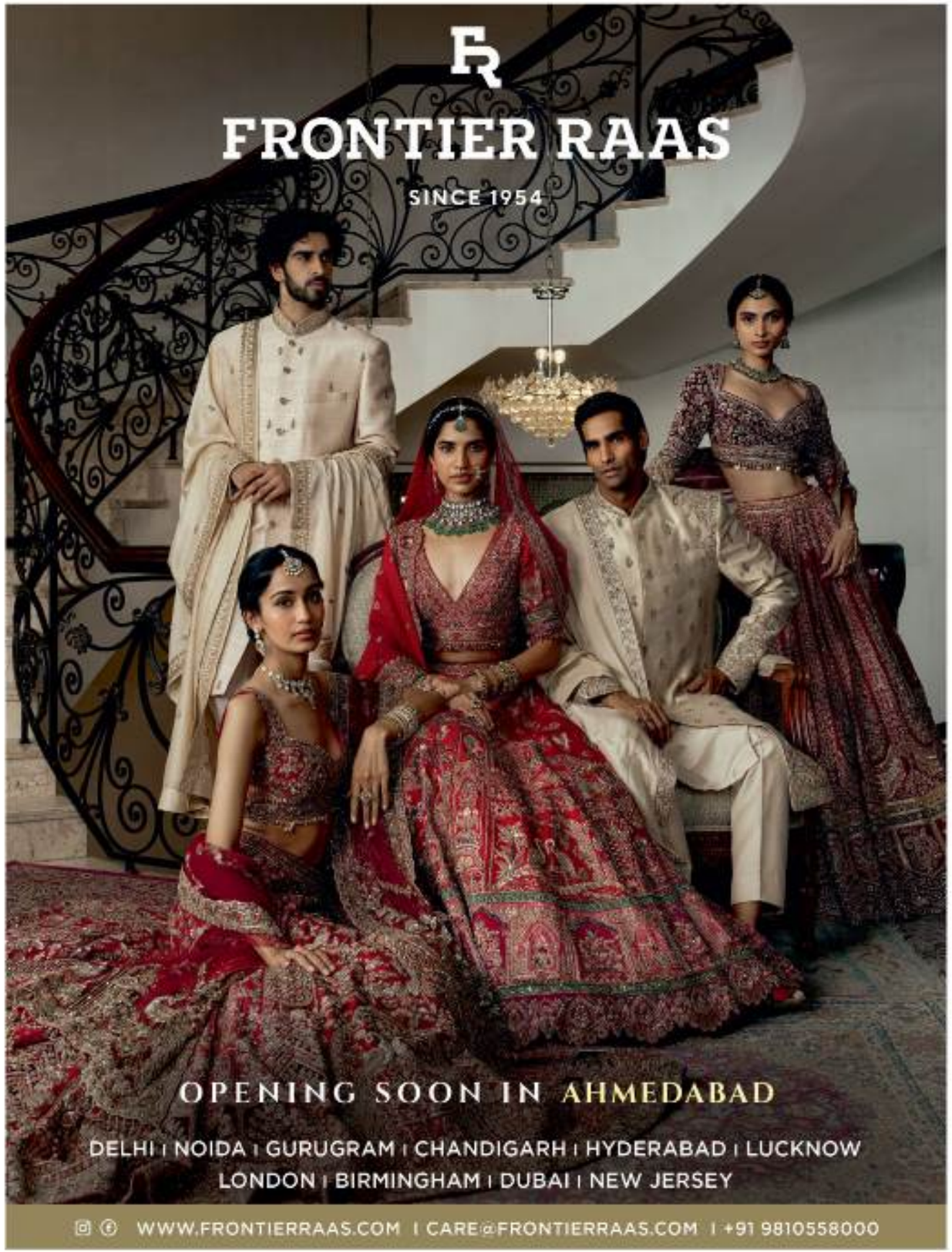
But home is the ultimate destination

No matter how far he travels, his favourite destination remains his front door. "The moment I land, I just want to head straight home to my family, grab a good cup of tea, and catch up on everything I missed," he smiles. "Travel gives me energy, but coming home? That's what gives me balance."

Living life on autopilot (and still earning flights)

"I've used plenty of loyalty programmes, but IndiGo BluChip is fundamentally different — it fits into the rhythm of your day," says Mr Gulati. "Most programmes make you work for rewards, but here, between work trips and spending on Swiggy and my IndiGo Kotak Co-Branded Credit Card, rewards stack up organically. You're just living your life, and your everyday spends turn into free flights and prime passes. That gratification keeps you coming back every single time."





Seat 6E

Celebrating stories from the middle seat

Illustration: Nandini Shukla

About a year ago, Mrinalini Paul boarded a flight to Goa with her parents. Her father ended up three rows back; she and her mother were separated by the aisle. Working a demanding corporate IT job in Gurugram, Mrinalini spent her weekdays buried in code and meetings. This trip was meant to be a sacred pause. "I remember pulling out a copy of Ordinary People, determined to make progress during two hours without deliverables," she recalls. "My social battery was empty, and I was desperate for some quiet. But my mom was already making a friend. The woman sitting next to her, to put it mildly, was an unstoppable force of conversation. She too had been separated from her husband and son but seemed completely unfazed by it."

"Within 20 minutes of takeoff, I heard her recount her family's entire travel itinerary to my mother," Mrinalini laughs. "My mom, never one to back down from a warm chat, matched her energy. By the end of the first hour, they had hit the jackpot of parental common ground."

"Your son teaches music? What a coincidence!" her mother gasped across the aisle. "My daughter teaches music too! She's a software developer by day, but she gives voice lessons on weekends. She even has a fan following on social media!" Mrinalini slumped further down in her seat and held her book higher to hide her face. She decided to put in her earphones to feign sleep. Before long, she actually drifted off. She woke to her mother nudging her as the plane touched down. Beside them, the talkative aunty beamed with a thousand-watt smile. "Wake up," her mother announced. "We're having lunch with aunty and her family." "I was so, so confused!" Mrinalini exclaims. "I went to sleep and woke up to a full lunch plan with complete strangers. Like, how did that happen?"

Their families converged at the gate for a three-hour layover. "The woman's husband and son looked equally confused when they saw us," she says. "My dad, meanwhile, was just happy that lunch was apparently happening soon."

"We all migrated towards a cluster of empty gate chairs, and then came the grand reveal. Talkative aunty



reached into her carry-on and pulled out a massive Tupperware container.

"I packed alu parathas and chhole!" she announced, beaming. She hadn't just packed a snack. She had packed enough to sustain a small village through a harsh winter.

Not to be outdone, Mrinalini's mother produced her own spread: chilli paneer, noodles, and mini chicken samosas. While the two dads hovered on the sidelines with timid smiles, content to just focus on their food, the mothers continued to run the show. "Having checked off music, they dove into trading notes on all our quirks," she laughs. "They were gleefully rattling off maternal grievances — our identical introverted habits, how much we both hated crowds, our wrecked sleep schedules, and how fussy we were about food."

"He and I barely spoke," Mrinalini says. "Every time our eyes met, we just exchanged a look of embarrassed understanding. When he passed her a rolled-up paratha, he noticed the John Mayer graffiti on her tote bag. He leaned in and whispered, "John Mayer fan? I'm actually going to his concert in Mumbai early next year; are you going?" Before she could answer, he gestured to the massive spread between them with an apologetic smile. "I swear I tried to stop her from packing the whole kitchen."

She laughed. It was the first real smile she'd had all day.

"Looking back now, watching him tune his guitar while our moms argue over the phone about our wedding catering, I still laugh," Mrinalini says.



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নীলদর্পণ

A colonial blue, a farmers' revolt and the play that shook an empire

For writer Bula Biswas, the story of indigo farming in Bengal is not merely about a humble household dye, but a haunting legacy of forced labour, human resilience and resistance. Tracing the history of colonial exploitation alongside Dinabandhu Mitra's landmark play Nil Darpan, she explores how a single colour became the catalyst for a historic uprising.

নীলরে অন্তরালে

আপনি কি জানেন বরফের মত উজ্জ্বলতা, সদা কাপড়ে আভিজাত্যের ছোঁয়া তাহলে ব্যবহার করুন 'নীল'। অল্প কটি ফোঁটা বা সামান্য গুঁড়ো জলে মিশিয়ে ব্যবহার করলেই পাবেন, একবোরে ঝকঝকে নীলাভ শুভ্রতা।

হ্যাঁ, মূলত বহুল প্রচারিত, 'নীল' সম্পর্কিত বিজ্ঞাপনের এটি ঐতিহ্যমন্ডিত।

কাপড়ে রঙ সংযোজনের জন্য বহুল ব্যবহৃত এই নীল, ব্রিটিশ শাসিত ভারতে ইংরেজদের সর্ববাধিক লাভজনক পণ্যের তালিকার অন্যতম ছিল।

"ভারতের আর সব কৃষিপণ্য ও শিল্পের তুলনায় নীলশিল্পের কাহিনী ঐতিহাসিকভাবে অনেক কৌতূহল-উদ্দীপক, মর্মন্তুদ ও শিক্ষাপ্রদ" - ব্রিটিশ ভারতের অর্থকরী পণ্যের সরকারী প্রতিবেদক ও পরবর্তীত উদ্ভিদবিজ্ঞানী স্যার জর্জ ওয়াট ভারতের নীলচাষ সম্পর্কিত তার প্রতিবেদনে এভাবেই নীলচাষ সম্পর্কে উল্লেখ করেছেন।

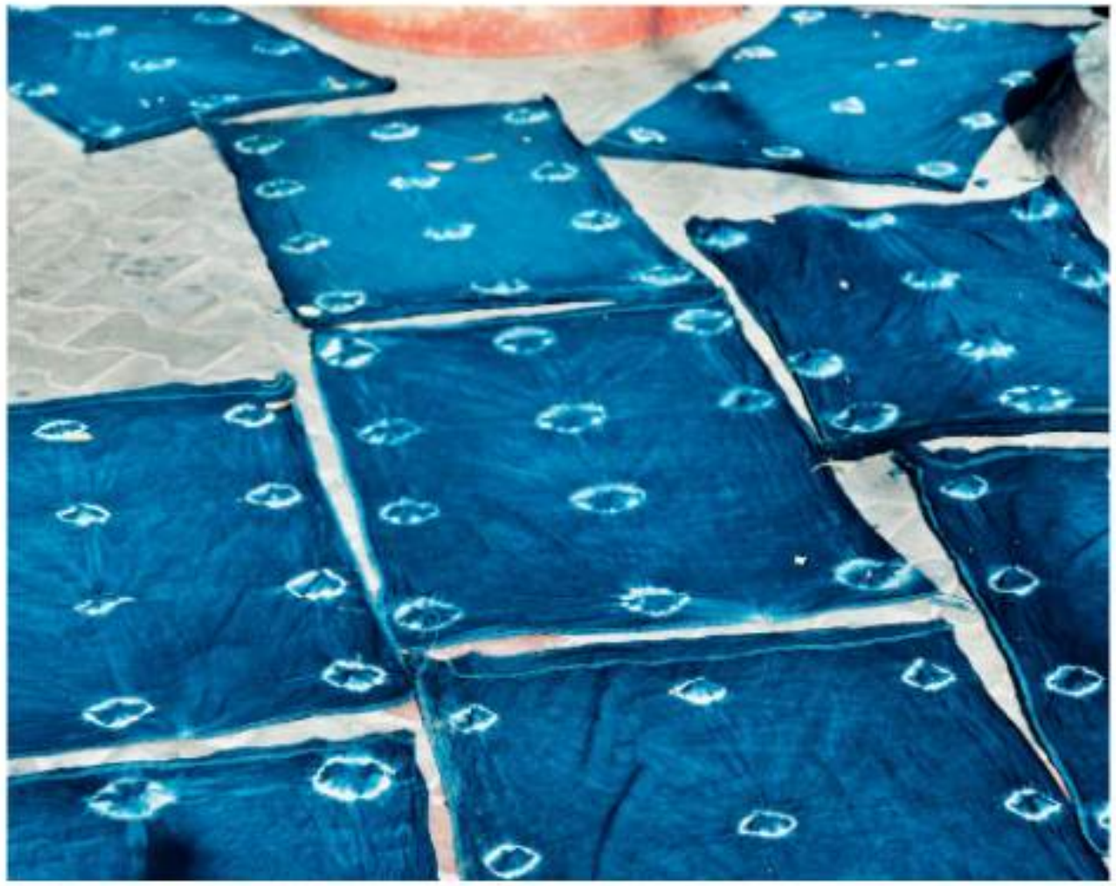
ভারত উপমহাদেশের মাটি নীলচাষের জন্য বিশেষ উপযোগী হওয়ায় ব্রিটিশ শাসকরা নীল চাষে বিপুল পুঁজি বিনিয়োগ করেছিল। ফলত, বাংলার, বিহার, রংপুর সহ বাংলার বহু অঞ্চলে নীল চাষ হত। নীলকররা, চাষের শুরুতেই সামান্য কিছু অগ্রিম টাকা বা লাভ জোর করে কৃষকদের দিয়ে নীল চাষ করাতে বাধ্য করত। লাভ নওয়ার সময় টাগিসই দেখা দুস্তাগিতরে শস্যসাপেক্ষের আর কোনো ফসলের চাষ করতে পারতো না তারা। দুস্তাগিতো কাজ না করলে বা নীল চাষে অস্বীকৃতি জানালে শুরু হতো অত্যাচার। সরকারের কাছে প্রতিকিরের জন্য নালশি জানিয়েও কোনো লাভ হয়নি। বরং সরকারি পৃষ্ঠপোষকতাতেই চলছিল এই নিষ্পেষণ। চরম দারিদ্রে দিন কাটাতে হয় ছেড়ে বাংলার নীলচাষীদের। আর তাই পরবর্তীতে কৃষকরা এক সর্বাত্মক সশস্ত্র বিদ্রোহে অবতীর্ণ হয়, ইতিহাসে যা, 'নীল বিদ্রোহ' নামে পরিচিত।

'নীলচাষ' শব্দটি শুনলেই চোখের সামনে ভেসে ওঠে, কোনো ইংরেজ সাহেবের হাতে চাবুক, অসহায় কৃষকের চোখে জল, নথিপত্রে কবুলতি অঙ্গুষ্ঠনাম ও কবুলতির ঘটনার ধারা, যার প্রতিচ্ছবি খুঁজে পাওয়া যায়, উনবিংশ শতকে বসিত্রিট নাট্যকার দীনবন্ধু মিত্রের 'নীলদর্পণ' নাটকটিতে।

নাটকটি ছিল সৃষ্টিশৈলিতা, নীলবিদ্রোহ ও সেই সময়ের ইতিহাসের এক জীবন্ত দলিল। কীভাবে সম্পন্ন নীলচাষী গোলোকচন্দ্রর বসুর পরিবার নীলকর সাহেবদের অত্যাচারে ধ্বংস হয়ে গেল এবং সমুচ্চারণে কন্যা কবতেরমণির মৃত্যু হল, তার মর্মস্পর্শী চিত্র 'নীলদর্পণ' নাটকটিতে অঙ্কিত হয়েছে। নাটকটি সেই সময়ে তীব্র জনমত যেমন গঠন করেছিল, সাথে ব্রিটিশ সরকারকে বাধ্য করে নীল কমিশন গঠন করতে যা নীল বিদ্রোহকে ত্বরান্বিত করে এক বিদ্রোহের ইতি ঘটে।

এটাই ছিল ব্রিটিশ সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে বাঙালি কৃষকদের একটি সিঙ্গল প্রতিরোধ এবং ঐতিহাসিক বিজয়।





The colour of Brahmapuri

How an annual ritual of lime and indigo gave Jodhpur's oldest neighbourhood its distinctive identity

Undoubtedly the most striking of Jodhpur's neighbourhoods, Brahmapuri, the Colony of the Brahmins, is also among its oldest and most continuously inhabited, its history stretching back to the foundation of the city in 1459. And it is unmistakably blue.

For centuries, the priestly community here has annually washed the walls of its homes with chuna, or lime, mixed with a dash of neel, or indigo. The practice was both ritual and practical: the lime wash cleaned and cooled the houses, while the distinctive tint was also believed to have a calming effect and help keep insects away.

As old as Mehrangarh Fort itself, this longstanding practice would unwittingly create Jodhpur's more recent, 20th-century allure as India's Blue City. What began within the confines of Brahmapuri gradually travelled beyond them. Over the years, as seen and unseen barriers dissolved and the colour spread through the Walled City, an old neighbourhood custom became part of Jodhpur's larger visual identity.

Today, viewed from the ramparts of Mehrangarh, those tightly packed houses create an extraordinary patchwork of indigo, cobalt and powdery azure, a centuries-old practice transformed into the city's dazzling calling card to the world.



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For some, blue is just another shade on a palette. For Dipabali Bandyopadhyay, a Deep Speciality Scuba Diver and IndiGo cabin crew member, it has become something much bigger

Lola Ren



Ironically, blue was never her favourite colour growing up. Yet, somehow, everything she loves today comes wrapped in it. The sky she works in, the ocean she dives into, and even the uniform she wears as cabin crew.

Dive right in

Having spent a significant part of her childhood surrounded by the sea in the Andamans, Dipabali Bandyopadhyay's bond with the ocean took root early. Yet, her underwater journey officially began only in January 2024 with her very first scuba dive. What started as pure curiosity instantly turned into a calling.

"I was genuinely not scared of the water — my mind was just asking, 'Have I started this too late? How much have I missed?'" she recalls. Instead of any fear, an insatiable itch to go further took over. "The moment you go underwater, everything around you becomes quieter. All you really hear is your own breathing and the bubbles coming out of your regulator."

Her first dive took her three to four metres below the surface. It was beautiful, but just not deep enough for her. The next day, she wanted to go deeper.

From Open Water Diver to Advanced Open Water Diver, and eventually a Deep Speciality Diver, every certification took her further into a world she wanted to understand better.

Pressure? She handles it

There's a curious parallel between her two worlds. "At high altitude, I am surrounded by a huge expanse of blue, living through it. Underwater, I am surrounded by blue again, but completely immersed in it," she explains. "Aviation gives me movement, responsibility, and purpose. Diving gives me stillness. The extrovert in me comes out at work, and the introvert comes out underwater."

Diving has also taught her to stay calm under pressure, trust her training and adapt to the unexpected — skills that travel surprisingly well from the ocean floor to the aircraft cabin.

The deep sea filter

One of the most breathtaking things she has witnessed underwater is not a particular creature or a spectacular reef, but a dramatic shift in reality itself. "A clownfish appears vibrant orange in shallower waters," Dipabali shares, "but as you go deeper, it turns almost maroon simply because the sunlight fades. It's fascinating to watch how an entire body changes colour simply because they have changed depth."

And her all-time favourite IndiGo destination to dive in?

"Certainly the Andamans," Dipabali says without missing a beat. Returning to the island waters of her childhood isn't just a trip home — it's where her deep-sea story comes full circle.

She may never have picked blue as her favourite colour. But today, whether she is wearing it, flying through it or diving into it, she has discovered that there is always another shade waiting to be explored.










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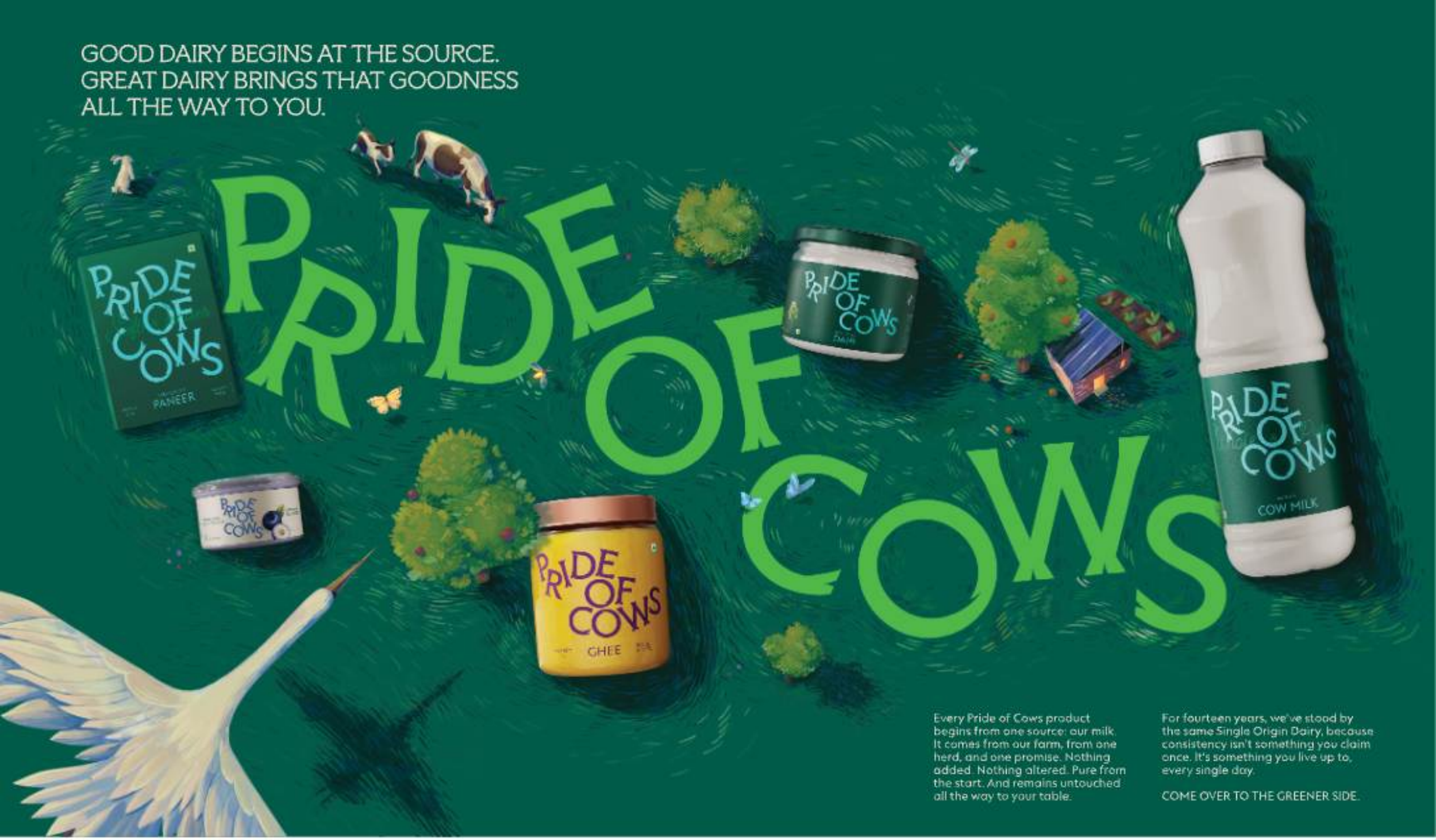
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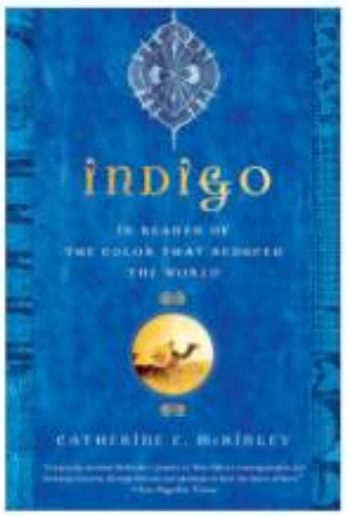
Books about indigo, the colour that changed the world

Anoushka Jain

Old Delhi is famous for many things, among them Katra Neel, a neighbourhood long associated with cloth and textile trade. Its name is often linked to indigo dyers of the Mughal era — a claim that may well hold some truth, given that the locality was historically home to merchants who traded in textiles. But Katra Neel's story extends far beyond the lanes of Old Delhi. The cloth, colours and dyes traded here were part of wider networks that connected Indian markets with Central Asia, Europe, Africa and beyond. In many ways, the history of India is also a history of indigo. And in the narrow lanes of Shahjahanabad, a thread of blue connects Delhi to a much larger history of the world.



Book cover: Minedition Publishing



Book cover: Bloomsbury Publishing

Here are three literary pieces I would recommend to understand the history and impact of indigo and its cultivation around the world.

Indigo: In Search of the Color That Seduced the World

The book by Catherine E Mckinley traces how indigo shaped global economies and human encounters across nearly five millennia. It also weaves in McKinley's personal journey of discovering her own family history through the story of this remarkable blue pigment.

Nil Darpan (The Indigo Mirror)

A famous Bengali play written in 1860 by Dinabandhu Mitra about the human cost of cultivating indigo. The literary piece was written just after the Indigo Revolt in Bengal, where farmers refused to sow indigo due to exploitative rules and conditions under British rule. Through the suffering and resistance of peasant families, it exposes the violence and coercion behind the indigo plantation system.

My Indigo World: A True Story of The Color Blue

Rosa A Chang's book with watercolour paintings celebrates the colour blue and the process of making indigo. The author explores the process of growing indigo and transforming the plant into dye, while tracing its significance across cultures around the world. It comes with an indigo map and practical guides to growing indigo and making blue dye at home.



New palettes for a familiar hue

Across India's autumn-winter cultural calendar, indigo becomes a thread connecting art, craft, music, memory and the reinvention of inherited traditions



Weftscapes: Jamdani Across New Horizons as part of Serendipity Arts Festival 2019

Indigo has never been merely a colour in India. It has been a dye, a commodity, a marker of craft, a record of labour and, increasingly, a material through which contemporary artists are examining memory and change. As the country moves into its autumn-winter cultural season, the colour offers an unexpected thread connecting exhibitions, festivals, textiles and performance.

At the CII Banaras Biennale 2026, from November 27 to December 31, colour emerges through the city's layered relationship with craft and textiles. The inaugural edition, Kashi/Light: City as Sensorium, brings visual art, textiles, craft, music, performance and scholarship into conversation, with historical collections from Bharat Kala Bhavan, a renowned museum in Varanasi.



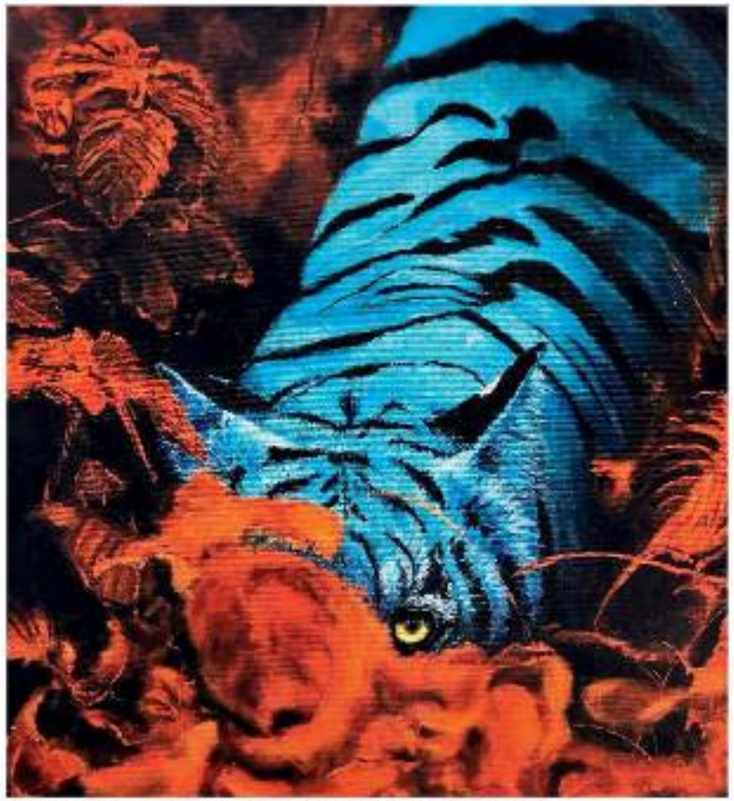


Image: Trish Thakur's work for India Art Festival; filmy.doodle/instagram



Image: JodhpurRIFF

For one of the show's curators, Pramod Kumar KG, blue became an unexpected presence within the textile programme. "The impossible blue of the Ganges under sunlight can never be erased from memory," he says. That memory resurfaces as indigo across historic textiles and contemporary design. More significantly, he points to a growing interest among younger designers in the origins of colour. "Indigo has a particularly loaded history in India, trade, labour and colonial extraction," he says, noting that this history is increasingly entering the design conversation.

That history also surfaces in A Moment in the Monumental, a group exhibition presented by Art Alive Gallery at Bikaner House in New Delhi. The show's curator, Kishore Singh, places indigo within a much longer historical frame. "Indigo has a deep relationship with the Indian subcontinent as the world's primary source of the colour in ancient and medieval times," he says. Once prized as "blue gold", it found its way into manuscripts, miniature paintings and textiles before colonial cultivation transformed its story. The Singh Twins' works for the exhibition draw on that history, connecting the beauty of the pigment with the unequal systems surrounding its production. The exhibition by the gallery, founded by Sunaina Anand, is on till October 6, and looks at the trajectory of Indian art through contemporary practices.

For artist Alaiia Gujral, however, indigo is encountered less as history than as an active material. "Indigo is the material my practice keeps returning to," she says. Its behaviour, how it stains, settles and changes according to the surface, is central to her work. "I've stopped trying to control indigo and started working with its inconsistency."

At the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa, from December 13 to 20, colour becomes part of a wider conversation about crossing boundaries. Returning to Panaji for its 11th edition, the festival brings together disciplines, geographies and artistic practices. Smriti Rajgarhia, director of Serendipity Arts Foundation, observes that artists are increasingly approaching colour "as a material, a language and a subject in its own right". What interests them, she





Image: The Singh Twins



Image: Bharat Kala Bhawan



Image: Arpita Akhanda

says, is not only where a colour comes from, but "what colour can do beyond that history."

At Jodhpur RIFF, October 22 to 26, the conversation moves from visual culture to living musical traditions. Celebrating its 20th year in the iconic blue city, the festival remains anchored in Rajasthan's artists while encouraging collaborations with performers from elsewhere. Festival director Divya Bhatia describes what has been built at RIFF as "a platform, an equal playing field and much more," where Rajasthani artists can "reframe the state's greatest folk traditions for today's audiences" and collaborate across cultures.

In Kolkata, Emami Art's show Under the Moon Across Many Waters (October 9 to December 26) sees multidisciplinary artist Arpita Akhanda approaching indigo through the lens of migration and memory. "Most of the blues in my work come from photographic and cartographic references to water bodies that my family crossed in search of home," she says. For her, indigo evokes both physical and emotional depth. "It allows me to hold two states together without resolving the space between them."

And perhaps, that is indigo's enduring power. It carries history yet leaves enough space for every generation to turn it into something new.



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The pause

Reasons to look up from your phone



Blue economy

As maritime routes face growing pressures from climate change, geopolitics and technological shifts, conversations around their future are becoming increasingly important. Sagarmanthan: The Great Oceans Dialogue 2026, taking place in New Delhi from October 7–9, will bring together policymakers and industry leaders to discuss maritime connectivity, shipping, ports and the wider blue economy.

Image: shutterstock



Crafted traditions

From the workshops of Jaipur, blue pottery is recognised for its distinctive cobalt-blue patterns set against pale, often white surfaces. Unlike conventional pottery, the craft uses a quartz-based material rather than traditional clay, with motifs ranging from florals and foliage to geometric designs. Rooted in Persian and Central Asian influences, Jaipur's blue pottery has become a distinctive part of India's decorative arts tradition.

Image: shutterstock



The many shades of crystal

The interplay of blue-and-white minimalism and extravagance in the showcase by French crystal house Baccarat comes into focus at India Design ID Mumbai this October. Featuring more than 120 Indian and international brands across architecture, interiors, craft, collectible design and culture, the fair unfolds through curated showcases, installations and new launches. It takes place at Jio World Garden, BKC, Mumbai, from October 9 to 11.

Image: baccarat.com





The turquoise crown

Cascading down the back like a jewelled hood, Ladakh's perak is an ornate women's headdress layered with turquoise, coral and silver. Worn at ceremonies and after marriage, it reflects family wealth, status and identity. The headgear is passed from mother to daughter usually. This treasured heirloom preserves memories of lineage and Himalayan heritage.

Image: shutterstock



A 12-year botanical wonder

Every 12 years, the montane grasslands of the Western Ghats, most famously in Munnar's Shola national parks, undergo a dramatic transformation as Neelakurinji bursts into mass synchronous bloom. This rare phenomenon usually occurs from July to October and coats hilltops in purplish-blue carpets. The last major bloom was in 2018, with the next anticipated in 2030.

Image: shutterstock



The dream goal

A dream of meeting football star Lionel Messi propels 52 Blue, Egyptian filmmaker Ali El Arabi's poignant coming-of-age drama. It follows reclusive young Ashish from his sheltered Kerala home to the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Starring Neha Dhupia and Adil Hussain, the film opened the 2026 London Indian Film Festival with its European premiere at BFI Southbank.

Image: IMDb



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Contemporary style comes to life through thoughtful details and easy-to-wear silhouettes. INTUNE brings together fashion, quality and everyday comfort for women, men and kids, with the embroidered waistcoat co-ord and shirt set creating polished looks for coffee catch-ups, city strolls and everything in between.

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The art of azure

From textile workshops to contemporary ateliers, a new cohort of Indian artists are turning to this ancient pigment for craft innovation and storytelling

Shruti Tomar



Image: Hansika Sharma

Indigo's roots in India run deep, especially in regions like Kutch, Telangana and Bengal, where families have cultivated the plant and perfected dyeing techniques for generations. Today, artists are building on this legacy while pushing boundaries.

In West Bengal, textile artist Ajit Kumar Das and his daughter, artist Silpinwita Das, explore indigo as both a traditional material and a contemporary artistic medium. "We grow the plant, extract its dye, and transform it into a luminous blue medium for our works. This process continues to fascinate us, while indigo's depth allows us to explore nature, art and spiritual expression," says Ajit Das. Their journey found wider recognition when Silpinwita's painting, Three Brothers, was acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 2023.

In Udaipur, artist Sharad Bhardwaj, also hailed as the Blue Painter of India, works with natural pigments and their traditional as well as contemporary applications. What began as a childhood experiment with indigo used for washing clothes evolved into an important part of his artistic journey.



Image: blueprainter_of_india/instagram



Slow-fashion innovators

Beyond individual studios, collectives and designer-led initiatives are keeping indigo alive through community practice. In Delhi's Aabharnam Foundation, the aim is to honour the heart, labour and love behind every weave or stroke. It belongs to every artisan whose hands remember what history forgets. Kalamkari artist Kanukurthi Guna Sekhar Sai from Srikalahasti collective of Aabharnam Foundation, has been working with indigo for the past 25 years. "Traditionally, every colour had to be carefully prepared and applied by hand, and indigo was valued for its richness. So, when we use this dye today for our art, we are continuing a tradition that has been passed down through generations," he says.

Paresh Patel, a third-generation weaver entrepreneur from Gujarat, is reviving his grandfather's legacy of handwoven Ashavali brocades through his brand, Royal Brocades. His indigo-specific practice reads as an exploration of memory, materiality and the quiet architectures of everyday Indian life. Patel says he treats indigo as an archive, holding traces of domestic routines, regional craft idioms and the passage of time across surfaces.

Meanwhile, revivalist and entrepreneur Kiran Sandhu has been cultivating indigo in the Terai plains of the Himalayan foothills. She also supports slow-fashion creators and artists who use natural indigo in their craft. "Our indigo dyes have one of the highest tint percentages in the world, and are loved by natural-dyeing enthusiasts across the globe," she says.

Mythology reimagined

Delhi-based artist Sangeeta Gupta extends indigo into the realm of the monumental and the sacred. A former senior government servant in the Income Tax Department, Gupta is an abstract artist, poet and filmmaker. She has created a 606-ft painting on khadi, titled Adiyogi Shiva: A Journey in Cosmic Indigo. Bathed in organic indigo, the work reimagines the Hindu deity as a cosmic axis, tying Rajasthan's traditional hand-block printing style, Bagru, and its native indigo tradition to contemporary minimalistic design.

The many shades of India

Textile artist Hansika Sharma, whose practice centres on indigo, says the colour reflects her true self. "Now that my work has become synonymous with indigo, I feel a personal connection to the shade as well. My love for indigo began as self-expression. It was a colour I could see myself in: deep, dark and enticing. Over the years, that connection has deepened as I have come to understand the pigment better. How does something that begins as green yield the most beautiful blues? How does this alchemy of self-transformation work?"





Image: indigoartmuseum.org



Image: Silpinwita Das

Indigo's revival is not just the restoration of a colour, but a broader shift towards local materials, slow processes and craft as contemporary mediums for Indian art and design.

There is something almost alchemical about indigo: extracted from green leaves, its colour is revealed through fermentation and oxidation. This rare quality gives the colour a philosophical resonance, and is one reason artisans, fine artists and designers continue to collaborate to keep India's "blue gold".



Blue Futures: Reimagining Indigo

At Hampi Art Labs, an exhibition asks what happens when an ancient dye, freighted with history, becomes a material for contemporary experimentation

Fawzia Khan



An indigo vat sits within a pedestal painted with natural indigo pigment, while a honey-like fragrance subtly scents the gallery.



BUAISOU, Banners in 100 Shades of Indigo, 2025. Natural indigo on ramie, 15.7 × 98.4 in. BUAISOU. Photo credit: Kyoko NISHIMOTO/BUAISOU.



Takuma/Slow Fabric, Tapestry, 2024. Natural indigo on linen with mokume shibori, 69 × 33.4 in. Slow Fabric.



BUAISOU, Banners in 100 Shades of Indigo, 2025. Natural indigo on ramie, 15.7 × 98.4 in. BUAISOU. Photo credit: Kyoko NISHIMOTO/BUAISOU.

Walk through Blue Futures: Reimagining Indigo at Hampi Art Labs and indigo refuses to stay where you might expect to find it. It appears on sandstone and resin, in sculptural installations, on Japanese paper and wood, alongside the handwoven cloth and textile traditions more readily associated with it. The exhibition brings together practices from India, Japan and West Africa, creating an unusual conversation between craft, contemporary art and material experimentation.

For Meera Curam, visual artist, curator and Residency Director at Hampi Art Labs, that breadth was important. "We're watching indigo being reclaimed as a medium of resistance and experimentation," she says. Curam conceptualised and curated the exhibition as a journey through the many ways in which indigo can be understood and used. Textile researchers, practitioners, curators, Japanese and Africana masters converged at Hampi Art Labs, alongside an art residency and workshops centred around its uses and practices.

The result is deliberately expansive. Aboubakar Fofana's Midnight in Bamako combines fermented vegetable indigo with mineral mud dye on linen; Alwar Balasubramaniam uses natural pigment on a resin cast from wind; Kavin Mehta works with indigo-dyed sandstone; while Upendra Ram brings it to stoneware. Japanese collective BUAISOU moves between ramie, paper, hemp and wood, showing just how differently a single material can behave in different hands.

But for Curam, the material is also a way of looking at the systems behind the finished object. "It is a colour that asks questions about where our clothes come from, who made them, and what we owe to the land and the people who cultivate it," she notes.

That may be Blue Futures' most interesting proposition. Rather than asking us simply to admire a familiar colour, it asks us to notice everything, and everyone, contained within it.



Takuma/Slow Fabric, Tapestry, 2025. Natural indigo shibori with mokume shibori, 314.9 × 35.4 in. Slow Fabric.



Installation view, Blue Futures: Reimagining Indigo, Hampi Art Labs.



Kavin Mehta, Container, 2019. Indigo dyed sandstone, 28.8 × 3.6 × 48 in. Indigo Art Museum.



Manish Nai, Untitled, 2018. Compressed natural indigo on jute cloth and wood. Size variable. Nature Morte.



Vyom Mehta, Attempt 2 (Rope Knotting for a Muscle Development), 2020. Indigo anodized aluminium wires, 43.2 × 10.8 × 10.8 in. Indigo Art Museum

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For more Information

The stories she kept

Darshan Shah's indigo archive is not only rich in its historic value but also in the stories of how she came to build it

Vinita Makhija



At 30, for most, life has settled into some sort of predictable rhythm. For Shah, after a separation and just a few months postpartum, there were plenty of reasons to give in to the blues and stay in bed. Instead, this iron-willed textile authority bought a one-way ticket to travel the world. Africa, Japan, the Americas, and Europe—she was on a journey with no destination. What she refused to let colour her mood blue, however, she found another outlet for: a life dedicated to indigo.

Of course, being from Bengal and a textile savant meant Shah had been exposed early to the mysteries, magic and troubles of this dye. Even so, it was her repeated trips to Japan (30 and counting) that deepened the curiosity. There, she sought out specialists, eccentrics and deep thinkers who introduced her to shibori, tie-dye and the wonders of naturally dyeing with indigo. Today not only does she own her own vats in Kolkata and continue to make clothes season after season dyed with indigo, but she has also built an indigo archive consisting of pieces from Africa, undivided Bengal including Bangladesh, India and Japan. As an exclusive, she shares six textiles from her private archives.

1. Sari, Baluchari, silk, dyed with natural indigo, brocaded on silk with discontinuous supplementary weft on a jala loom, made in Murshidabad, Bengal, late 19th century, depicting a scene from the Kalighat paintings

"We've had to do a number of restorative stitches on this sari; it was so important to preserve it because it is the truest iteration of a Baluchari for me. First it is natural indigo; if you look closely, you will see parts of indigo dye that has faded to green. There's a floral border; it is woven in an angular 'tirchi' way, a signature of these textiles. Then there's the motif of the mahout sitting on an elephant, smelling a flower in the palanquin. Most Baluchars use a combination of these, but this one has everything. But as a collector, this piece is also academically such a masterpiece. There is perfection in every step of the making. An expert dyer coloured it; only an expert punch card maker (for a jacquard loom) could have calculated the frame so intricately, and only a real expert weaver could have woven it so masterfully."





2. Sari, Jamdani, cotton and metallic yarn (gold zari), dyed with natural indigo, woven with discontinuous supplementary weft, made in Dhaka, Bengal, early 19th century, for domestic market and elite consumption, Collection of Weavers Studio Resource Centre, Kolkata in West Bengal, India

"I had seen a Nilambari Jamdani sari in the National Museum of Dhaka and right after, I saw my late mentor Ruby Ghaznavi (a stalwart of the textile movement in Bangladesh) wear a similar piece at an indigo-focused exhibition. So then to find an extremely similar version with a local vintage dealer was serendipity. I knew I wanted the piece regardless, but its technical finesse is what did it for me. By the time we find most Jamdani pieces that have zari in them, they are destroyed because of the metal; this wasn't. It is entirely geometric in its construction, whereas most pieces from this timeline, whether that is from Benaras, Balucharis or other Jamdanis from Bengal, all follow the rule of the koniya (as in floral or paisley pattern) at the corner of the sari. Here the pallu of the sari seems encased in a box."



3. Sari, Jamdani, cotton and metallic yarn (gold zari), dyed with natural indigo, woven with continuous supplementary weft, made in Dhaka, Bengal, mid-19th century, for elite consumption, also known as the 'hazar buti sari', enamelled with countless butas within the field of the sari, Collection of Weavers Studio Resource Centre, Kolkata, in West Bengal, India

"As we know, Jamdani is a supplementary weft technique that uses a third thread above the warp and weft to make motifs appear embroidered instead of woven. In this sari the sheer number of motifs is startling; we colloquially say 'hazaar buti' to signify a thousand, but in actuality is it 3,000 or 7,000? Who can tell? The sari speaks of an old-world charm and a classic design."



4. Sari, Jamdani, cotton, dyed with natural indigo, woven with discontinuous supplementary weft, made in Dhaka, Bengal, late 19th century, for domestic market and elite consumption, the field of the sari is devoid of any designs reflecting the centrality of the nilambari with striking Jamdani borders, Collection of Weavers Studio Resource Centre, Kolkata in West Bengal, India

"When you observe a naturally dyed long cloth today, despite many efforts, it is patchy. We put it down to handwork, but this sari is almost perfect. You can tell the person who worked on it understood the concepts of depth and minimalism and had confidence to keep the restraint. The deep midnight blue is so well done that it can only be put down to the purity of the oxygenation, the purity of the technique, the purity of the knowledge, the purity of the dye, the purity of the process and the expertise. You can see it all in the sari. This kind of small border is also sometimes referred to as a 'shukho', meaning 'very fine work'. And it deserved a place in our indigo hall of fame."



5. Sari, cotton with metallic yarn (silver), dyed with indigo, plain weave with supplementary warp borders, jhanper naksha, made in Santipur, Bengal, 1910-20, a fabled sari called 'santipuri nilambari' donning a benki paar that was made for everyday wear in Bengal, Collection of Weavers Studio Resource Centre, Kolkata in West Bengal, India

"My vintage dealer Chaturlal's wife, Meena, is always threatening to burn the old saris if I don't buy them all. Which is done to extract the gold and silver from the zari. Which [laughing] always works on me. Do you see the graphic vein-like border? It appears to be like the backbone of an animal. It is the texture play of the sari vis-à-vis the twill weave pallu that gives it such a modern contemporary look. A grandma probably sold it in return for some steel vessels, but here it is, like blue-gold in my archive."



6. Border, cotton with metallic yarn, dyed with indigo, woven with supplementary warp on a jacquard loom, made in Tangail, East Pakistan, 1930-40, depicting the coat of arms of the British Empire, perhaps commissioned for an exhibition, one of the rare examples of weaves by Tangail weavers prior to their migration to West Bengal owing to the Partition of India in 1947, Collection of Weavers Studio Resource Centre, Kolkata in West Bengal, India

"I found this literally at the border. I had seen a four-poster bed that belonged to the Zamindar of Tangail that had this insignia, the court of arms, so when I found this extremely rare scrap, I acquired it. My mentor Ruby Ghaznavi is from Tangail, so it meant something to me. It is clearly torn in half, the other half probably sold to someone else. In natural indigo it is woven with the word 'Tangail' written in English alongside a lion and a unicorn!"

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The many lives of blue

Briana Blasko's photographic archive follows indigo beyond the dye vat, into cloth, ritual, performance and the everyday cultural life of India

My passion for researching fabric, colour, and geography has inspired the direction of my photography over the past 20 years. Blue. Indigo. Or 'Blue Gold', as it used to be called, has traversed my photography throughout the Indian subcontinent. From the harvest, oxidation, and traditional making of indigo cakes in Tindivanam, Tamil Nadu, to the Uttar Kamalabari Satra monastery on the river-island of Majuli in the Brahmaputra in Assam, which teaches Sattriya dance, indigo thrives.

Although much of my work is done as a solo artist, I have also worked with hundreds of artists, weavers, and dancers over the years who continue to revel in the beauty of indigo. From woven textiles in Banaras, Uttar Pradesh, to Kantha embroideries in Amtala, West Bengal, to the blue faces of Krishna in Pichwai paintings in Nathdwara, this play with indigo offers a window into a fast-disappearing world of effort and perfection. Understanding how something is made, and observing the way it is used in its natural context, is a process that lends itself to an appreciation of human creativity at its deepest level.

Briana Blasko is the author of three photography books in India. Her most recent, Spiritual India: A Kaleidoscope of Faith, is now available in bookstores. @brianablasko









The stone that vanished

Born from a Himalayan mine that yielded its treasures for only a few years, the Kashmir sapphire remains one of the world's rarest and most coveted gemstones

Fawzia Khan

In 1881, an avalanche in the snowy Zanskar range in the Himalayas exposed a vein of brilliant blue crystals and set off one of the most storied chapters in gemstone history. The mythic Old Mines, located near Sumjam in the Paddar region of Kashmir, stayed open for a brief window until 1887; within them lay the only supply of the most coveted sapphires the world has ever seen: the Kashmir sapphire.

Once exhausted, no other meaningful deposits were found. "Kashmir sapphires are inherently limited, but demand continues to grow," says Minal Vazirani, co-founder and president of auction house Saffronart. The rarity of these stones drives extraordinary prices and obsession. "There is a sort of madness where somebody picks up a Kashmir sapphire, no questions asked, because of a certification. And there are people like that, but that isn't the way we function," says ninth-generation jeweller Samarth Kasliwal of The Gem Palace.

Blue Velvet

The gemstone is defined by its one-of-a-kind, glowy, almost velvety blue. It has many sobriquets – cornflower blue, royal blue – but really, the name that describes it best is Kashmir blue. It has a distinctive saturation, deeply vivid but not overly dark, and it differs across stones. "The colour appears to come from within the stone rather than simply sit on its surface," explains Tarang Arora, CEO and Creative Director of Amrapali Jewels.

And while Kashmir sapphires are certified through lab reports by Gübelin Gem Lab, the SSEF Swiss Gemmological Institute, and the American Gemological Laboratories (AGL) to trace origins and provenance (and these are vital), the stone exists in a delicious paradox. Its lustre originates from minute, silk inclusions in the stone, making clarity a completely contextual factor in assessing its value, unlike diamonds, where a flawless stone is the most prized. The sapphire, rated 9 on the Mohs hardness Scale, also has a softness to it that can only be witnessed in person. But provenance matters, according to Arora. "If a sapphire has a documented history of royal, aristocratic or distinguished private ownership, it becomes a cultural object. The same is true of craftsmanship."



An Unmounted Natural Kashmir Sapphire, 11.15 carats
Auction of Fine Jewels and Watches, 2015
Image Courtesy of Saffronart

The Price of Beauty

Kasliwal describes Kashmir sapphires' beauty as transcendental. He recalls stumbling upon a pair, 4 carats each, with his brother, Siddharth, while visiting a French antiques dealer. "We couldn't bear to separate them," he confesses. He fashioned them into a Toi et Moi ring with baguette diamonds in a bid to keep intact the visual spectacle of two Kashmir sapphires on a single finger.

The Kashmir sapphire may originate in India, but desire for it is international, according to Kasliwal. From private collectors, UHNIs and Wall Street finance guys, to royal families, and high-end heritage and bespoke jewellers, the Kashmir sapphire has its own fan club. In 2025, the 35.09-carat Regent Kashmir Sapphire broke records with a $9.5 million sale, and an eye-watering $150,000 to $200,000 per carat is standard. Untreated natural Kashmir sapphires are considered the most valuable.

Vazirani has auctioned two notable stones, an 11.15-carat, cushion-shaped, brilliant and modified step-cut Kashmir sapphire in 2012, for Rs 68.14 lakh, and a 6.46-carat, unmounted, natural velvety stone in 2013, for Rs 44.85 lakh. "Finding a Kashmir sapphire is rare; finding one of exceptional gem quality and at these sizes is rarer still," she says.

Ultimately, every jeweller and auctioneer seems to agree on one point: the Kashmir sapphire is, first and foremost, judged by its beauty, beyond what goes on paper. There is no specific colour or clarity chart that makes a phenomenal stone. An eye for beauty does.



Keeping the vat alive

From seed and soil to skilled hands, contemporary design and viable livelihoods, one craft initiative is connecting the many links that allow an ancient material to keep evolving

Bani Sachar



There is a particular problem with indigo: it has too much history. It is impossible to approach the colour without encountering something weighty. Colonial plantations. The Indigo Revolt. Ajrakh and Bagru. Ancient dyeing traditions and disappearing knowledge. Spend enough time reading about it and indigo can begin to feel less like a colour than an artefact and something to be preserved, protected and, eventually, placed behind glass. But perhaps that is the wrong way to look at it.

The most interesting thing happening to indigo in India today is not simply that it is being preserved. It is that it is still moving. At Nila House, the Jaipur-based craft and social design initiative with an outpost in Jodhpur, that movement begins long before a finished textile appears. Its work stretches from supporting the cultivation of Indigofera tinctoria and helping communities understand the processing and extraction of the dye to working with dyers, weavers, printers and embroiderers on natural-dye knowledge, technical skills, design development and contemporary applications. Just as importantly, it works to create pathways to markets that can give those skills economic value.

"At Nila, we see indigo not simply as a dye, but as an ecosystem," says Anuradha Singh of Nila House. "One that begins with the plant and extends all the way to the person who grows it, the practitioner who understands the vat, the artisan who transforms the dyed material, and the market that ultimately gives that skill economic value." It changes the idea of what preservation looks like. The object on the shelf is not the beginning of the story but its endpoint. "The finished textile is therefore really the last expression of a much longer journey," Singh says.





The living chain

That journey is necessarily collaborative. A farmer can grow the plant, but without a dyer who understands the vat, an artisan who can transform the material or a market willing to pay for the finished work, individual skills become increasingly fragile. "Nila functions as a connector rather than as the centre of the ecosystem," Singh explains. "We build relationships across geographies and bring together people who have different kinds of knowledge, skills and capacities."

One example is Malikpur in Rajasthan, where Nila House is working to strengthen an ecosystem around hand spinning, weaving and natural dyes. It has supported the revival of indigo farming while working with local communities on natural dyeing and building capacity among women spinners and weavers. At its spinning centre, women develop hand-spinning skills and produce yarn that can move into the wider textile value chain. Farming, dyeing, spinning and weaving are not treated as isolated interventions but as interconnected parts of a livelihood. As Singh puts it, when those connections work, "a farmer has a reason to continue cultivating the crop; a dyer has a reason to keep the knowledge alive; an artisan has access to material and markets; and designers have an opportunity to bring that knowledge into new contexts." Follow that chain outwards, and an address book to contemporary indigo begins to take shape.

From plant to pigment

At Tarai Blue, Kiran Sandhu grows indigo, extracts its pigment and teaches others how to work with it. "People usually think indigo starts with blue. It doesn't; it starts green," she says. Before becoming the colour on a piece of cloth, indigo has been "a seed, a plant, water, fermentation, sunlight and many pairs of hands." Even then, the transformation isn't complete: fabric lifted from an indigo vat emerges greenish-yellow, turning blue only when it meets the air. "The blue is really the last chapter of the story."

In Rajasthan, head to Bagru, where indigo remains part of the vocabulary of block printing, particularly Dabu, the resist-printing technique. Dheeraj Chhipa, a designer-artisan from a printing family, is among those working to maintain the practice amid the village's industrialisation. Then there is Kutch, where indigo runs through Ajrakh, Bandhani and weaving traditions, carried by generations of practitioners who know its behaviour not from instruction manuals but from repetition: the mood of a vat, the quality of a season, the precise moment something is ready. As Amrita Mukerji, Director, Sutra Textile Studies, puts it, "the most secure archive of natural dyeing is still the practitioner's hand."

Old knowledge, new questions

But the future isn't confined to traditional craft clusters. In Kochi, Bakar Society began with a small indigo vat on a terrace during lockdown and has since developed into a practice spanning natural dyeing, fashion and textile art. In Chennai, artist Kai Murai uses indigo as a medium in its own right, allowing the dye to move and create patterns less controlled than conventional textile processes. It is precisely this willingness to experiment that Singh sees as essential. "I think the future of indigo lies in treating it as a living material rather than a heritage object," she says. Younger designers, artists and practitioners, she notes, are not necessarily interested in recreating the past. Instead, they are asking what else the material can do: how it might work



with different fibres and techniques, enter contemporary design or take entirely new forms.

In Santiniketan, meanwhile, the colour asks a more complicated question. Neel, the Bengali word for both indigo and blue, still carries the memory of colonial exploitation. But, Mukerji says, the violence was political and economic, not inherent to the plant itself. At Sutra Textile Studies, indigo has become a way of reconsidering that relationship: not erasing its history, but separating the crop from the system that once exploited it. "Documentation is essential, but it is not enough," Mukerji says. Natural dyeing is a living knowledge system. Its best form of preservation is "keeping the vats alive because there is a market and a livelihood attached to them."

Learning by doing

This is also why education forms an important part of Nila House's work. Visitors can encounter the material, understand its extraction and experience dyeing with it themselves. The point is not simply to teach a craft technique, but to reveal everything hidden inside the finished object. "When someone learns how an indigo plant becomes a dye and then experiences the process of preparing and working with a vat, the colour becomes more than an aesthetic choice," Singh says. "They begin to understand the time, skill, uncertainty and human knowledge embedded in it."

That understanding matters because appreciation and economics are connected. If consumers understand the labour and knowledge behind a material, there is at least the possibility of creating a market that values them differently. For Nila House, supporting cultivation and strengthening local knowledge are therefore as important as developing the final product. What gives Singh optimism is the meeting of "old knowledge and new curiosity": knowledge that already exists in the hands of farmers, dyers and artisans, encountering designers and practitioners willing to take it somewhere new.

Perhaps that is what indigo means to India now: not a colour frozen in its past, but one still in circulation between fields and workshops, artisans and artists, tradition and experiment. Or, as Singh puts it, "The future of indigo is not only about preserving one particular technique. It is about keeping the entire ecosystem alive, the seed, the soil, the vat, the skilled hand, the imagination and, ultimately, the livelihood. When those connections remain strong, indigo can continue to evolve and find new places to go."



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The powder and the ritual

Morocco's beauty traditions pack a punch of brightening blue

Anjan Sachar



The definition of beauty may differ between cultures, but it's often in their individual rituals that we find common threads. Nila, an indigo-coloured powder made by crushing dried leaves of the Indigofera Tinctoria plant, is to Morocco what haldi is to India. Traditionally used alongside hammam baths as a thorough brightening ritual, the powder has also found its way into packaged skincare brands today, showing up in bright blues on your social media feed.

At a time when everything that appears "exotic" is immediately marketable, it's worth taking a step back to explore what beauty rituals meant much longer than they became SKUs on a shelf. Soundous Moufakir, a Moroccan French actress, financial analyst, and reality TV personality, founded MoroMaa, a skincare brand that brings Moroccan beauty ingredients to India. For Moufakir, sourcing from Morocco is as important as preserving and sharing the ritual. "Moroccan beauty is not about trying to change who you are or changing the colour of your skin. I don't want people to just apply a product and move on. I want them to actually create a little hammam moment for themselves and to understand the story, culture and ritual behind every ingredient."

The origin story

Nila is traditionally associated with the southern parts of Morocco and the Saharan regions. "Nila was used as a fine powder and mixed with other natural ingredients depending on the ritual and the region," says Moufakir. These can range from water to rose water, clays and yoghurt. "Nila was definitely a part of the beauty culture I grew up around, but never as a trend. In Morocco, beauty rituals are something you learn from the women around you, like your mother, grandmother and aunts. You grow up watching them use traditional ingredients. The hammam was never just about getting clean. It was a complete ritual of taking care of yourself."

The ritual

Moroccan nila was traditionally used to treat pigmentation and skin that's dull or damaged due to sun exposure. Unlike clays and mud packs that focus on detoxifying or oil control, gradual skin brightening is the main benefit here. While Moroccan beauty rituals were originally connected to occasions, celebrations and bridal preparation; today they've become part of regular life. "You do not need a wedding or a special occasion to take care of yourself," says Moufakir. "You can create that little moment for yourself on a Sunday evening or after a long week. Something I personally love about Moroccan beauty rituals is that they teach you to slow down. You take time to cleanse, exfoliate, apply your treatment and nourish your skin."

Nila 2.0

Meeoow Club, an Indian beauty brand focused on new-age formats of traditional beauty powders, has its own version of nila. The ingredient was worth betting on because it felt like something an Indian audience would resonate with. "Ingredients such as multani mitti, turmeric and sandalwood have been part of our beauty rituals for generations. For the Indian consumer, tanning, dullness and an uneven-looking skin tone are very relevant concerns, largely because of our climate, sun exposure and lifestyle," says Richa Agarwal, founder of Meeoow Club. She developed a ready-to-use format and blended it with actives like niacinamide and alpha arbutin to amplify the brightening properties. Her goal: a convenient clay mask ritual, while still retaining the authenticity of the Moroccan-inspired experience.

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All the feels

Blue may signal calm and trust, but its emotional associations are far more complex than we think

Tatiana Dias

Colours shape how we feel, often before we consciously register it. Red, anger. Yellow, hope. Green, envy. But only a few colours carry as many emotional contradictions as blue: trust, calmness, and serenity, yet also loneliness and melancholy. Even our language gives the colour a surprisingly expansive emotional vocabulary — we can sing the blues, do things out of the blue, or in the case of Indian cricket, even bleed blue — each phrase conjuring an entirely different feeling, identity or state of mind. Our relationship with the colour, however, is far more complex than these familiar associations suggest, shaped by perception, psychology, culture, memory, and context — there is more to blue than meets the eye.

Running with emotions

Psychologist and founder of The Shift Studio, Yesha Mehta describes blue as a generally low-arousal colour, associated with settling down rather than being energised. Research spanning more than 40,000 people across 64 countries seems to agree — with blue commonly associated with comfort, relaxation, and happiness.

But calm is only part of the story. "Melancholy turns attention inward to memories, thoughts, loss, reflection," she says. Both emotions are low-arousal states, meaning the quietness we associate with blue can create space for very different emotions to surface.

"We usually experience blue in the natural world in expansive spaces, such as the sky or the vast blue sea, which can create a sense of distance." Over time, these experiences may help explain why blue becomes associated with infinity, freedom, and possibility.

There is also a physical explanation for that sense of distance. "This is entirely due to physics and not due to our visual system," explains Professor S.P. Arun, Centre for Neuroscience at IISc Bengaluru, noting that blue light scatters more through the atmosphere than other colours, making the sky and distant landscapes appear bluish.

But somewhere between physics and memory, the visual experience finds emotion. Contemporary Indian artist Parnika Mittal similarly sees blue as an emotional rather than literal representation of the sky and sea. "It can make you feel very small, but can also make you feel free," she says, describing blue as a colour that can evoke vastness, nostalgia, memories, and a connection to places that may no longer be the same.

Then there is blue's alter ego — the emotions we have culturally attached to the colour. Leading global applied colour psychology expert and author of The Little Book of Colour, Karen Haller makes an important distinction. "Melancholy and sadness are cultural associations with blue rather than psychological traits." Language has reinforced these connections through phrases such as feeling blue or singing the blues, making them feel almost innate. "There isn't a psychological pathway that takes us from tranquillity through introspection to sadness," she says.

To top it off, there isn't just one blue. A pale blue can create a sense of openness and mental spaciousness, while navy can feel more contemplative and focused. "They are both blue, but we don't experience them in the same way," says Haller.

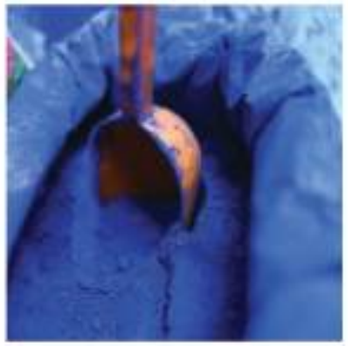
A universal language

So how much of our response to blue is hardwired, and how much have we learned? Professor Arun believes there is a shared human response to colour even though the colour categories vary across cultures. Haller separates the experience into three overlapping layers: psychological response, cultural meaning, and personal association.

Culture can give blue an entirely different vocabulary. In India, it is associated with divinity and spirituality; in parts of the Middle East and Mediterranean, blue has long been connected with protection. And then there is the deeply personal: the blue of a childhood bedroom, a school uniform, a particular holiday, or someone's favourite shirt.

For artist Raghava KK, blue is also inseparable from history. He connects it with Krishna, Shiva, and Ambedkar, as well as Dalit assertion, divinity, melancholy, authority, contemplation, and infinity. Speaking of indigo specifically, the artist cannot separate the colour from India. Its cultivation and trade brought beauty and wealth, but also a history of exploitation and oppression — and ultimately rebellion and resistance.

"The extraordinary thing about blue is that it is everywhere around us, and yet, historically, it has been one of the most difficult colours for us to possess," he says.

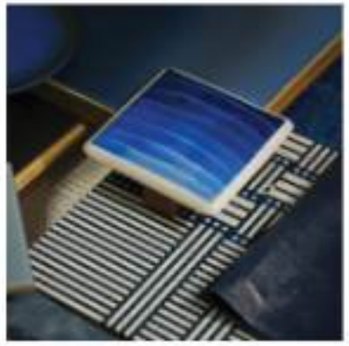


















Modern-day truth

It is why the idea that blue simply equals calm or trust falls apart once we take it out of the natural world and put it into a designed one. Interior architect & designer Kirti Dodeja says colour in hotels, spas, and wellness spaces is only one part of a much larger sensory experience. Light, its temperature, surrounding colours, materials, and even scent can change the way a shade is perceived. "It's a sixth sense experience," she says.

For Dodeja, even the same blue can behave differently depending on its surroundings. "Nothing is absolute or in isolation; emotions are interdependent." A blue paired with red, for instance, will create a very different response from the same blue set against light oak.

This fluidity is precisely what draws Mittal to the hue. "Colour doesn't exist independently within the painting; it is constantly affected by the colours, shapes and spaces around it. I am interested in that instability — the way an emotion can change simply because its surroundings change."

Perhaps that is blue's allure: it doesn't have one meaning. It holds memories, moods, context — changing where we encounter it and what we carry with us.

Before the blue

We know indigo as colour. Before it reaches cloth, it has a surprisingly solid life: pigment is cut into dense cakes and left to dry in the sun, ready for the dye vat. Tamil Nadu, 2010.

Image: Briana Blasko

Love Letter – 6E 1611

Letters written around flights, about the people who take a piece of you when they board

At twenty-eight, Ananya had spent her life playing it safe within familiar boundaries. But needing a break from routine, she took her biggest leap yet: packing a single bag for her very first solo trip across Bali, ready to discover who she was when left entirely to her own devices.

Dear Mrs D'Souza,

I am sitting at a tiny, sun-drenched table in a café perched high on the limestone cliffs of Uluwatu, watching the Indian Ocean crash against the rocks below in a brilliant, terrifying deep navy blue. As I sit here sipping from an enormous coconut, I remembered those standard 10-mark letter-writing questions from our Class 10 board exams – the ones that always started with 'Write a letter to an elder, describing a place you visited.' I was suddenly hit by a wave of nostalgia. Sitting thousands of miles away from home on my very first solo trip, somehow you were the person I wanted to write to.

I can almost hear your voice echoing across the classroom, urging us never to settle for a word as dull as 'nice,' but to reach for 'sublime,' 'resplendent,' 'luminous,' or 'transcendent.' So, here is my attempt.

When I first boarded my flight to Bali, I was so nervous I could barely navigate airport formalities. But this island has become an absolute whirlwind of firsts.

It all began in Ubud, where I found myself navigating a four-wheeled ATV through slick, knee-deep mud, dense equatorial jungle trails, open rice fields, and tropical streams – what a rush!

From there, I headed over to Nusa Penida and made the infamous trek down to Kelingking Beach. For the first time in my life, I was standing right inside one of those iconic desktop wallpapers. The view of the T-Rex cliff framing the turquoise water was unbelievable, but the steep, scorching hike back up had me almost fainting from exhaustion. To top it off, while I was gasping for air, a cheeky little monkey casually sauntered up and stole my orange juice!

But the adventures did not stop there. I even tried my hand at jet skiing, holding my breath as I throttled across open sea spray, feeling the immense weight of the ocean pitching beneath me. Not to mention the sheer volume of mental math I've done... converting Indonesian Rupiah to Indian Rupees every time I bought even a simple cup of coffee!

Yet, for all the adrenaline, the quietest moments touched me most. While visiting an ancient water temple deep in the jungle and joining a sacred cleansing ritual, I was reminded of T.S. Eliot's words:

'We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.'

Sitting beside those moss-draped shrines, far from the familiar noise of home, I felt the truth of those lines. Travel doesn't just show us new landscapes, it forces us to look inward and rediscover who we are when all our safety nets are removed.

Thank you, Mrs D'Souza, for teaching me that literature isn't just something to analyse for an exam, but a lens through which to understand the world. You gave me the vocabulary to appreciate moments like these long before I was brave enough to seek them out.

I hope you are doing well, and I promise to bring back a proper souvenir (and perhaps a few more 'transcendent' stories) when I return!

With love and deepest gratitude,

Ananya Banerjee
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When a billion hearts beat blue

From the whites of Test cricket to the many shades of blue, the India jersey has changed with the game and its times. Each jersey has carried victories and memories that turned blue into a colour of pride and unity, says former cricketer Harbhajan Singh

Blue was not always the colour of the Indian cricket team jersey. Before it became the colour of packed stadiums, street celebrations and television screens, the Indian team played in white in the early 1980s.

Then came light blue.

By the 1985 World Championship of Cricket in Australia, India was already wearing it. Over the years, the shade changed. Sky blue became navy. Yellow, green, orange and the tricolour appeared in different combinations. Some designs were understated, while others came with bold patterns, graphic details and national symbols.

But through all those changes, blue remained the thread connecting them.

By the 1992 World Cup, coloured clothing had become part of the game, and India appeared in a distinctive blue kit. By the time I started playing one-day cricket, blue was already part of India's identity.

We never really discussed why it was blue. We had grown up watching India in blue, so it simply became the colour we associated with the team. What changed constantly was the way that blue looked.



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The 2003 World Cup shirt brought the tricolour into the design. Later versions experimented with different shades, patterns and details. By 2011, the darker blue, saffron lettering and flashes of the national colours had become familiar.

The jerseys became a visual record of their time, but blue remained.

We players always got excited when a new jersey was launched. We wanted to know what it would look like, what had changed and whether it looked good. The fabric became lighter and more breathable, and the jerseys became better at managing sweat. But the most important thing never changed: 11 people wore the same shirt.

I think that is part of what makes a jersey so powerful. The colour may change in shade, the design may change, the fabric may change, but when you put it on, you become part of the same group.

I think the blue jersey really crossed over into popular culture after we won the 2007 T20 World Cup. Winning changes everything. When you win, people join you.

Then came the 2011 World Cup, and that association grew even stronger.

Today, it is unbelievable how far the jersey has travelled. You see people wearing it in stadiums, on the streets, over T-shirts and even to their offices. Whether India is playing in England, Australia or anywhere else, you look into the stands and see blue.

So much blue.

That tells you something. It means that the support of the fans has travelled with the team.

For me, 'Men in Blue' has always meant more than a colour. It means a uniform, and a uniform means a group. When we wear the same jersey, it does not matter where we come from or who we are outside the field. We become one team. We move in one direction. That is unity. It is also the fighting spirit.

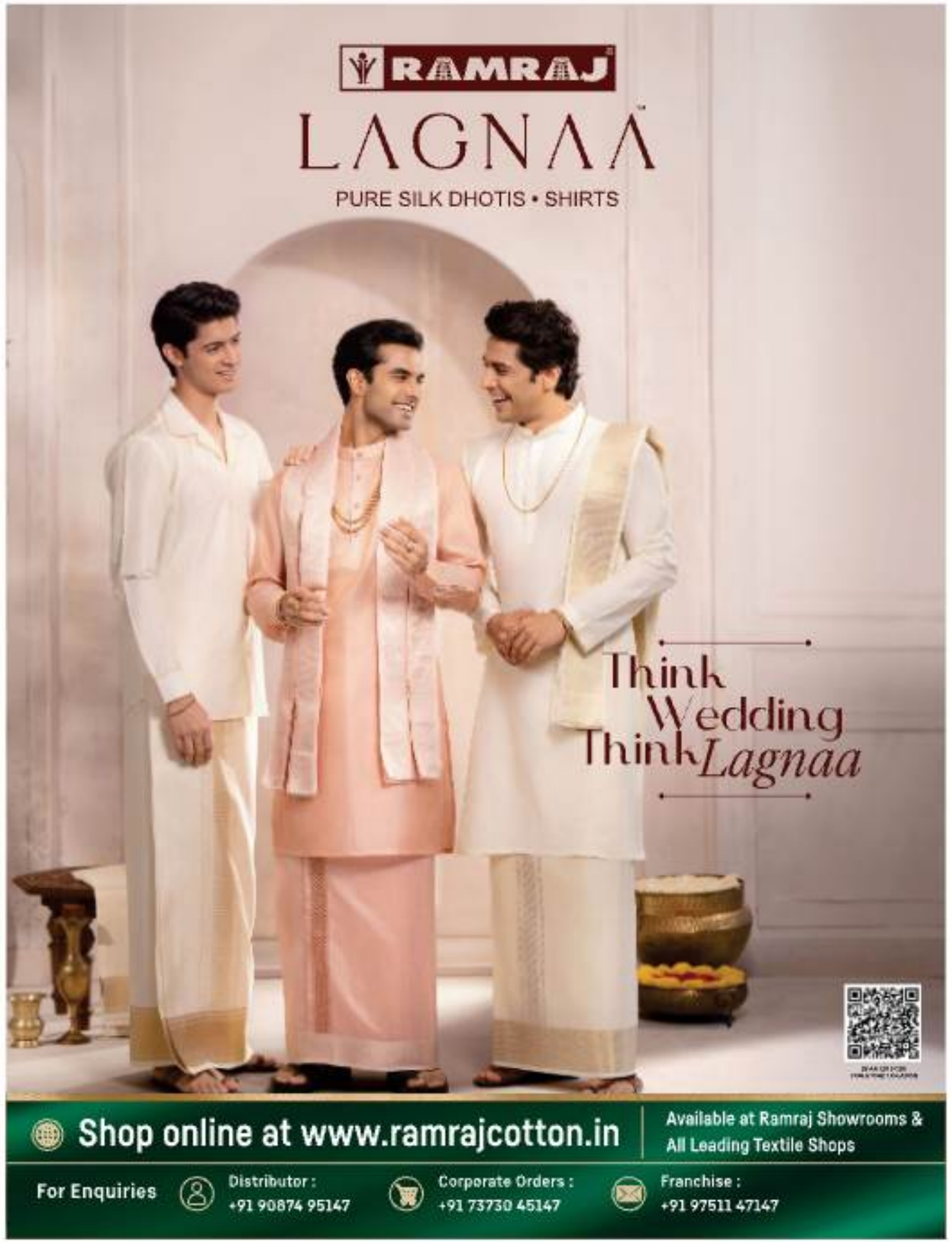
There have been other colours along the way, but I would not want to see another colour replace it. Maybe for one odd series, but India's identity is blue.

I often say it is like a good marriage. Blue and Team India have



had a very successful marriage. And perhaps that is why the jersey still means so much.

You put it on, and suddenly you are no longer just yourself. You are part of something bigger. You are one of the Men in Blue.



Threads of history

From Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh to Odisha and Ladakh, tracing indigo through some of India's rare textiles

Amrita Mukerji with inputs from Jonny Balfour Paul



Image: Paresh Patel

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A traditional kalam, wrapped with cotton to hold the dye, brings an indigo motif to life on Kalamkari fabric (Image for visual representation only)

In Maheshwar, the story begins with the loom. A historic temple town on the north bank of the Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh, best known as the home of the Maheshwari handloom sari and, increasingly, as a hub for natural-dye crafts such as indigo.

The town is synonymous with the lightweight Maheshwari sari, a tradition that dates to the 18th century and was patronised by Rani Ahilyabai Holkar. Traditionally woven in cotton and silk, Maheshwari textiles are known for their distinctive borders, checks and motifs inspired by the town's fort and river. Natural colours have long been part of the weaving vocabulary, including indigo.

Long before its modern revival, indigo was widely used in historic Indian manuscript painting, both for blue and, combined with natural dyes and minerals, for other colours. Unusual among historic natural pigments, indigo comes directly from a plant.

Today, Maheshwar is a hub for indigo craft. Workshops use traditional block-printing and natural dyeing techniques, drawing on indigo's deep blue. Artisans incorporate the river's ripples and temple architecture into their designs, linking handloom weaving with natural colour and local heritage.

A few hours away, Chanderi offers another perspective on India's textile heritage. The town's delicate fabrics combine cotton and silk, with weaving traditions that have evolved over centuries. Most homes still have working looms, while the Chanderi Handloom Park provides a dedicated production space. Artisans use natural indigo dye to introduce deep blues to the classic lightweight fabric, blending meticulous block-printing and resist-dyeing techniques with traditional weaves. This fusion of rich indigo shades and architectural motifs from the region breathes modern life into the ancient craft, making Chanderi a hub of sustainable, plant-based textile artistry.

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Image: gettyimages



Image: Collection of Kutch Arts by owner Arun Parmar

The story of Indian indigo, however, stretches far beyond central India. In Andhra Pradesh, Kalamkari offers one of the country's examples of how natural dyes became integral to textile storytelling. Traditionally practised in centres such as Srikalahasti and Machilipatnam, Kalamkari uses a painstaking sequence of drawing, mordanting, dyeing and washing. Indigo provides shades of blue, while other natural materials such as madder, pomegranate rind and iron-based preparations contribute reds, yellows and blacks.

Indigo also has a place in Odisha's sophisticated ikat tradition. Known locally as Bandha, the technique involves resist-dyeing the yarns before they are woven, so that colours and patterns emerge through the precise alignment of warp and weft. While Odisha ikat is celebrated for its characteristic red, black, yellow and white patterns, indigo can also be used as a natural dye to create blue tones within contemporary and traditional textile work. The process demands extraordinary precision: a pattern conceived on paper must first be translated onto individual yarns and then reconstructed on the loom.

High in the Himalayas, Ladakh offers another, less familiar chapter in India's indigo story. Thigma, a traditional resist-dyeing technique associated with the region, uses tied, stitched or otherwise resisted sections of fabric to create patterns when the textile is immersed in dye. Indigo can produce the deep blue ground against which the undyed areas emerge as motifs. The technique reflects Ladakh's distinctive textile vocabulary, where colour, geometry and the practical demands of life in a high-altitude environment come together. Today, collectives like Kutch Arts, a third-generation, family-owned business specialising in traditional, and folk textiles from the Indian subcontinent, are helping preserve these rare local craft traditions.

From the looms of Maheshwar and Chanderi to Kalamkari, Odisha ikat and Ladakh's resist-dyed textiles, indigo reveals the diversity of India's textile traditions. Adapted to local landscapes, fibres and techniques, its living legacy connects age-old craft with slow fashion and plant-based colour.



A matter of light

A photographer's journey into the science and magic of indigo and shades of blue

Sourabh Roy

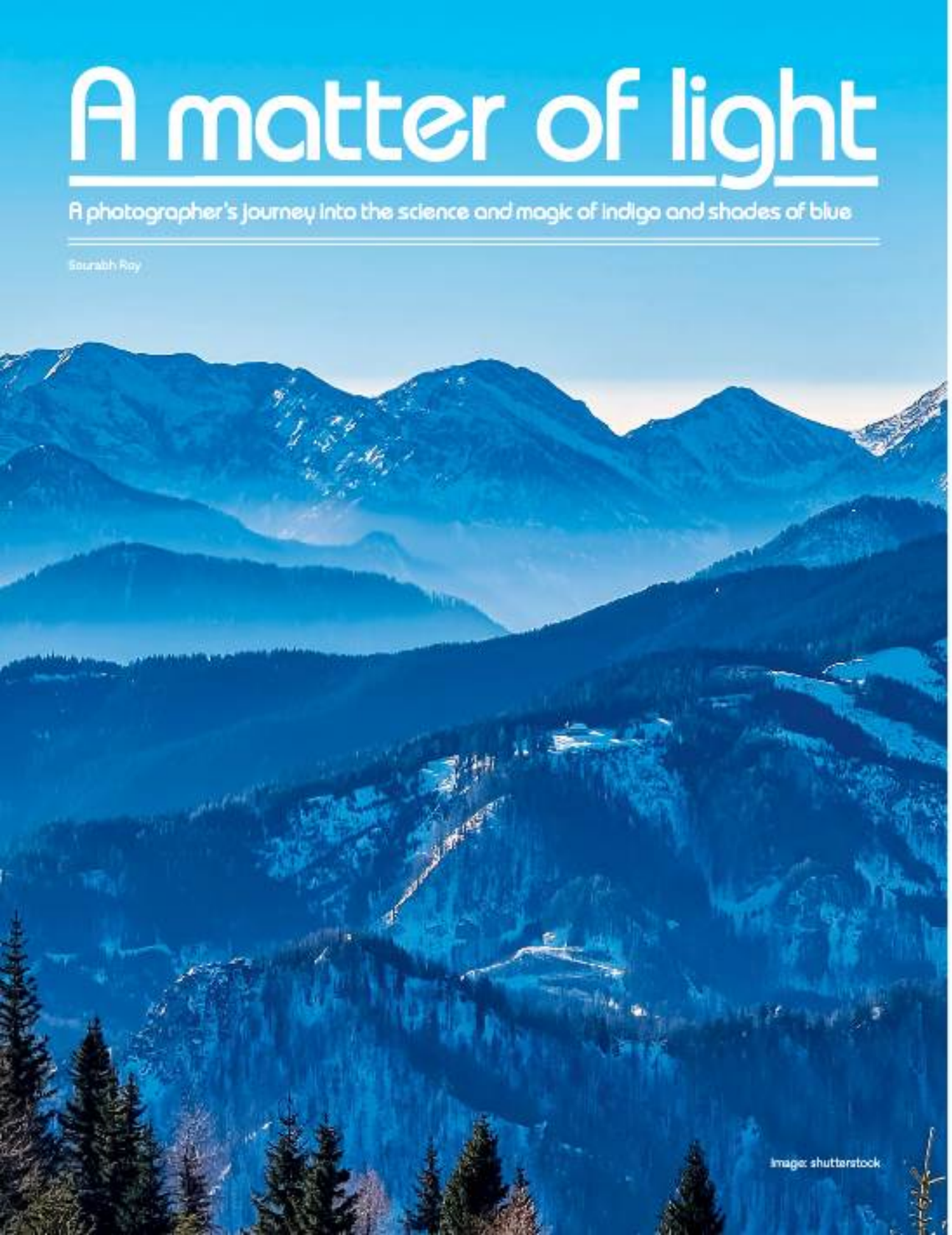
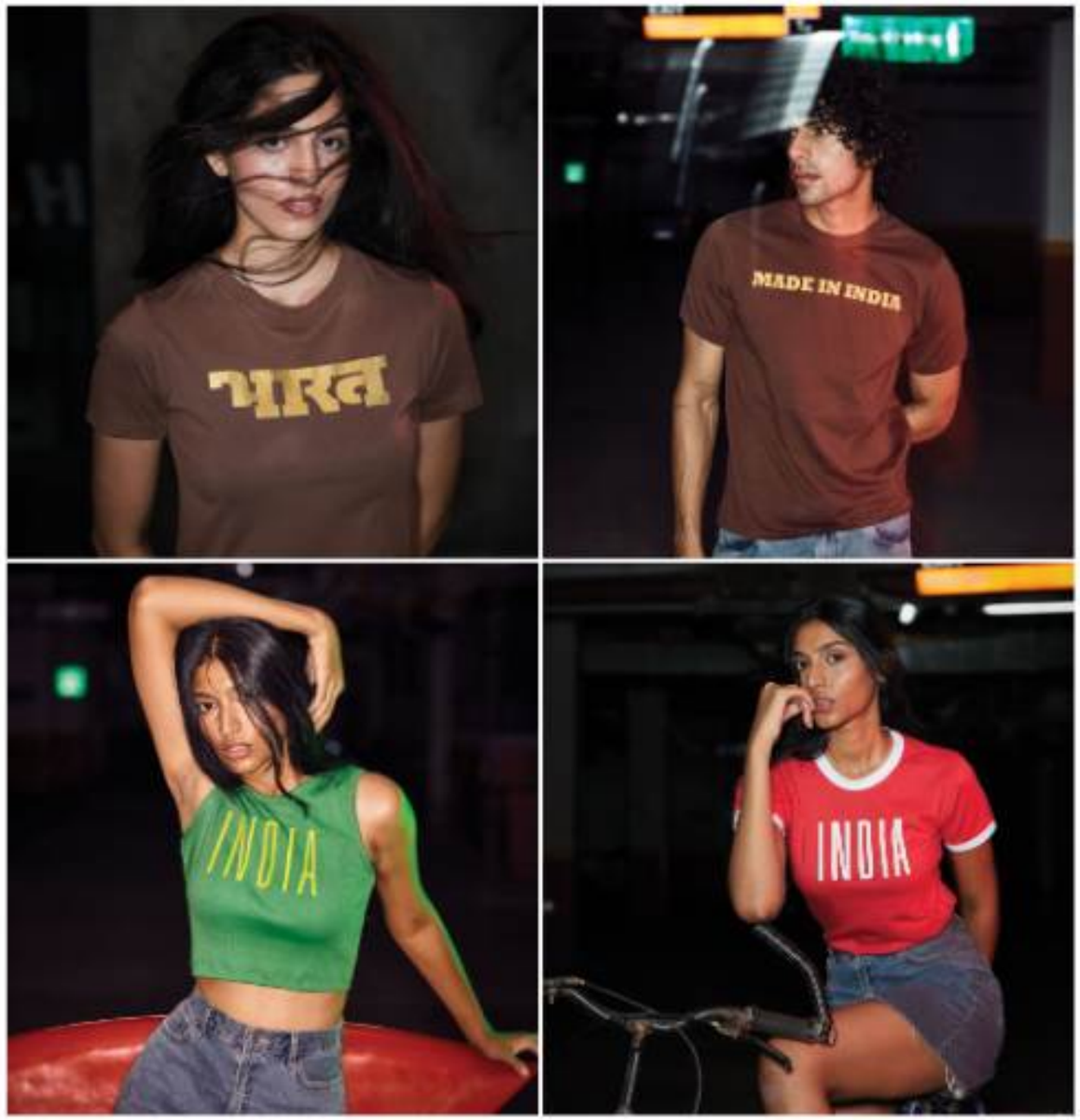


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Why does a mountain look blue when seen from a distance? Why does Leh appear bathed in cobalt twilight just before night falls? And why, on some nights, can a wave manifest as a line of blue sparks?

In India, indigo has been part of our visual landscape for centuries. But nature has its own ways of painting the world blue.

Look at a mountain range from a distance and its peaks often appear washed in shades of blue. This is an example of atmospheric perspective, caused by the scattering of light as it travels through the atmosphere. Air molecules scatter shorter wavelengths, such as blue and violet, more strongly than longer wavelengths, such as red. Over a long distance, this scattered blue light forms a veil between the viewer and the landscape, making distant peaks appear bluer, paler and less distinct.

"The Nilgiris, or the Blue Mountains, are a particularly evocative example," says renowned photographer Amit Pasricha. "The slopes can appear blue-grey when viewed from a distance because of atmospheric scattering. Science tells us this is because the atmosphere scatters blue light. As a panoramist, though, I've always felt that blue is nature's colour of longing. The farther something is, the bluer it becomes. Perhaps that's why I've always loved the blues, both in landscapes and in music. Each carries a touch of distance, mystery and of yearning, an open invitation to draw a little closer."

Then there is the blue hour, the period of twilight that photographers often wait for almost obsessively. It occurs shortly before sunrise or after sunset, when the Sun is below the horizon and indirect blue skylight becomes especially prominent.

"The blue hour in Leh and Ladakh can be otherworldly," explains documentary photographer Arpan Kalita. "I vividly remember the blue of the high-altitude lakes in Ladakh. There were moments when the sky became almost unrealistically deep, while the landscape below turned into a quieter, more muted shade. What stayed with me, beyond the moment and the photographs, was not simply the colour but the feeling of being surrounded by so much space that the blue seemed infinite." The region's unique dry and clear air and dramatic landscape can make this transformation even more spectacular.



Image: gettyimages

Then there is blue that appears to emerge from the water. On certain nights, waves, beaches and lagoons can glow with bioluminescence. This light is produced by living organisms, including some species of marine dinoflagellates. When the water is disturbed, these microscopic organisms can emit brief blue or blue-green flashes through a chemical reaction involving luciferin, oxygen and the enzyme luciferase. The result can look like a scattering of stars beneath the surface or sparks breaking across a wave. One of the most magical settings for this blue is Swaraj Dweep in the Andaman Islands.

In deep-sea photography, indigo, blue and green become more than colours: they become markers of depth. "As sunlight penetrates the water, red, orange and yellow wavelengths are absorbed more quickly, leaving blue and green light to dominate," explains photography enthusiast and urban designer Nandja Chopra. "With increasing depth, the available light becomes weaker and the water often takes on deeper shades of blue. This is why underwater photographs can have a pronounced blue or cyan cast."

"The camera is not necessarily misrepresenting the underwater world; it is recording the spectrum of light that reaches its sensor."

Blue is never just one colour. From a Himalayan mountain veiled in haze to Leh at twilight and a glowing wave in the Andamans, it is the result of pigment, physics, atmosphere and living chemistry. Nature and, on some occasions, human hands play a part in the magic.

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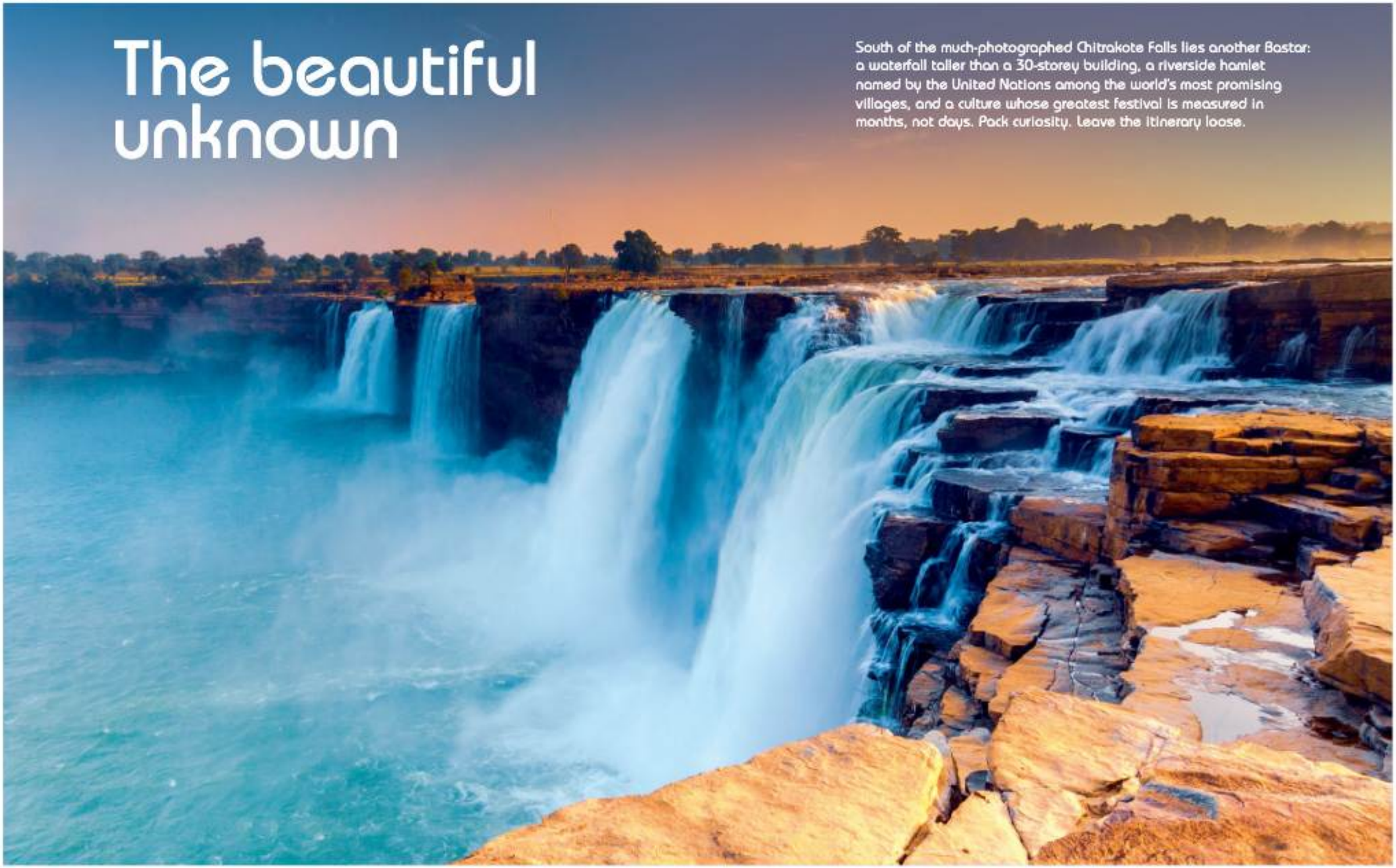
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The beautiful unknown

South of the much-photographed Chitrakote Falls lies another Bastar: a waterfall taller than a 30-storey building, a riverside hamlet named by the United Nations among the world's most promising villages, and a culture whose greatest festival is measured in months, not days. Pack curiosity. Leave the itinerary loose.



There is a place in central India whose name means "the unknown hills". Abujhmad, the forested uplands west of the Indravati, is a vast landscape of sal and teak, crossed by tea-coloured rivers and home to indigenous communities whose cultural traditions have endured for generations. The Hill Maria people call it 'Meta Bhoom', meaning 'the land of hills'.

The unknown invites one to the interior: to a waterfall that kept its secret for centuries, a village that shares its river with those who arrive gently, and the markets and festivals where Bastar is most itself.

The waterfall that waited

You hear Handawada long before you see it. At full flow, its thunder reverberates for kilometres through the sal forest, a low-frequency rumble felt in the chest before the ears fully register it. Then the trees open, and the Goyder stream plunges off the Abujhmad plateau. A single white column drops well over 100 metres down dark rock, making it the tallest waterfall in the Bastar region. After the rains, it splits into four or five braided threads; by late winter, it narrows to one silver line. Locals call it Goyder Ghumar; newer visitors know it as the "Baahubali waterfall". For decades, almost nobody outside these forests saw it.

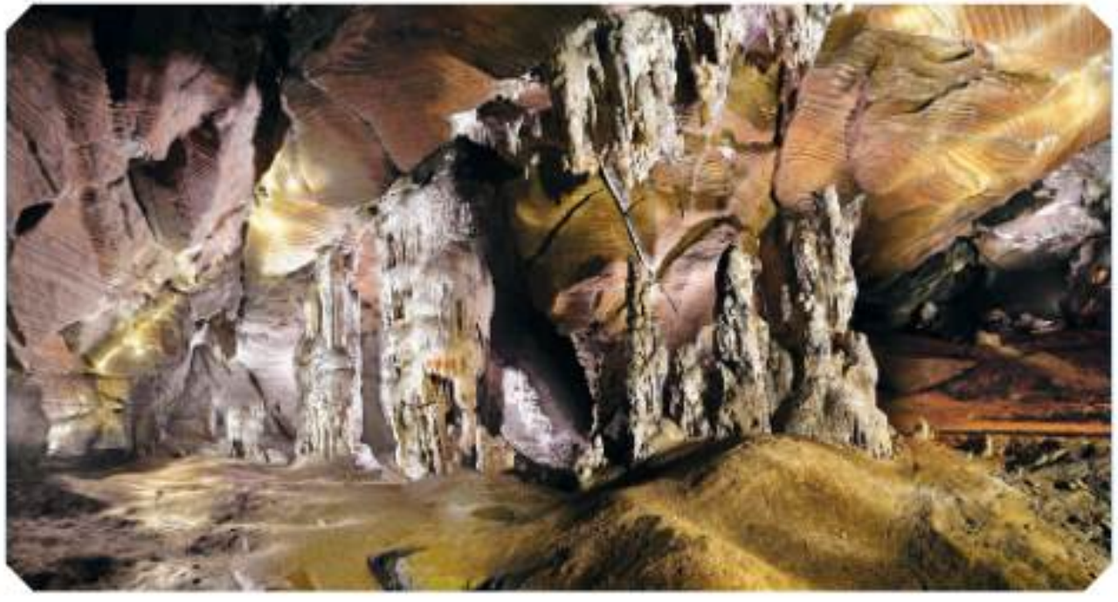
From Jagdalpur, the road runs towards Geedam and Barsur, a former regional capital on the Indravati around 1,000 years ago. Pause here for its ancient temples and two monumental carved Ganesh idols amid the fields. At Muchnar, cross the Indravati and follow about 30 kilometres of forest track into the hills. The final two to three kilometres are on foot, the roar growing louder with every step.

Travel with a local guide, preferably through an arrangement made with the district tourism office. The meadow track opens to vehicles from late January and remains accessible until the rains return.

The village the world noticed

An hour's drive south of Jagdalpur, inside Kanger Valley National Park, the forest folds around a scatter of mud-and-tile homes on the bank of the Kanger River. This is Dhudmaras. In 2024, it was recognised in India's Best Tourism Villages competition for adventure tourism and was also selected by UN Tourism for its Best Tourism Villages Upgrade Programme; one of only 20 villages worldwide chosen that year. Here, mornings begin with mist unspooling off the river while bamboo rafts float through water so clear the pebbles seem within reach. Village youth trained as guides walk you into the sal forest to listen for the Bastar hill myna, the state bird and a gifted mimic, or further on to Tirathgarh, where water cascades down a nearly 90-metre staircase of rock. Underground lies another world: the limestone galleries of Kutumsar Cave, shaped by stalactites and stalagmites over time.

Stay the night. The homestays are simple and spotless, the food is cooked over wood fires, and the long evenings end over friendly conversations.



Kutumsar Cave

Left to right: Tirathgarh Falls; Kayaking in Kanger River in Kanger Valley National Park, Dhudmaras; Handawada Falls







Haat days, festival nights

To understand Bastar, follow the drumbeat of its weekly haats: rotating village markets. Stalls sell wild honey and mahua flowers, red chillies and river fish, along with chapda, a distinctive chutney made from red weaver ants whose citrus-like sting wakes up any meal. Dhokra artefacts created through the centuries-old lost-wax casting tradition, wrought-iron lamps hammered in village forges, terracotta horses and glowing kosa silk are also found here.

Time your visit well, and the markets become the warm-up act for Bastar Dussehra. Every autumn, Jagdalpur hosts Bastar Dussehra, described as the longest festival on Earth: 75 days of rituals honouring goddess Danteshwari, culminating as hundreds of hands haul a massive timber chariot, rebuilt each year by hereditary carpenters, through packed streets.

Field Notes

Getting there
Maa Danteshwari Airport at Jagdalpur (JGB) has direct flights from Hyderabad and Raipur. Alternatively, fly to Raipur and drive six to seven hours south via NH30 through the forested Keshkal Ghats

Getting around
Hire a car and driver in Jagdalpur. For Handawada, book local guides through the district tourism office.

When to go
October–March: Best for weather and festivals.
Post-monsoon: Waterfalls are at their most dramatic.
Late January onwards: Handawada's forest track opens to vehicles.

What the Andamans taught me about blue

It is not just the colour of the sea and the sky but also of distance and grief, says actor Randeep Hooda, who recently won a National Award for direction



Image: randeephooda/instagram



Image: shutterstock

It is the blue of the Bay of Bengal stretching endlessly beyond the horizon. The blue-black of a night spent inside a colonial prison. The blue of skies seen from a forgotten island, of water hiding coral reefs beneath its glassy surface, and of memories that linger long after the journey is over.

I first came to the Andamans not as a tourist, but as an actor and filmmaker attempting to inhabit one of the darkest chapters of India's freedom struggle for my directorial debut, Swatantrya Veer Savarkar (2024). The experience changed the way I saw the islands. For me, the Andamans became less about ticking off attractions and more about surrendering to a landscape where beauty and history exist almost uneasily side by side. I acted, directed and wrote the film and receiving the National Award from the Hon'ble President of India for directing this movie is an incredibly emotional moment. After nearly 25 years of relentless hard work as an actor, transitioning to directing was a massive leap of faith, and this film makes this prestigious honour even more special.

The blue surrender

While shooting the film, I deliberately stepped away from the safety of studio sets, immersing myself in the islands' landscapes. Even the sea became part of the filmmaking.

One sequence required me to shoot around the Cellular Jail in Sri Vijaya Puram, formerly Port Blair or Kaala Paani, in waters known for crocodiles. Five divers were stationed around me, under the assumption that I could not swim. I kept swimming out and back. They said, 'Hey, you can swim, why did you call us?' I told them, 'You were here for the crocs, bro!'

It is an anecdote that sounds almost comical until one remembers the setting. Here, even the most beautiful shade of blue comes with an edge of danger.

When blue turns almost black

The deepest colour in my Andaman memory belongs to the Cellular Jail, where I spent long hours filming the story of prisoners who endured unimaginable physical and psychological suffering.

While researching Veer Savarkar, I tried locking myself inside the freedom fighter's actual solitary cell. I could not even last 20 minutes inside the claustrophobic space. Inside those walls, the island's blue skies and ocean seemed impossibly far away.

Standing inside those prison walls, trying to visually and mentally relive the unimaginable suffering of our freedom fighters, hits you with a profound sense of poignancy.

For me, the islands taught me that beauty does not always erase sorrow. Sometimes, the two exist together.

There is a heavy, sacred silence that wraps around these islands, forcing you to slow down and just reflect. The sea here has this incredible, healing energy. Perhaps that is my particular shade of blue, which is grief softened by distance and memory washed clean by the sea.

The place Instagram hadn't found

Filming a period drama in the Andamans also pushed me away from the predictable tourist trail.

On Ross Island, now officially Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island, the crew had to recreate a grand prisoner-arrival sequence without relying on the original historic entry points, many of which no longer exist. Instead, we worked with the island's extraordinary ruins: old structures tangled in the roots of peepal trees, remnants of a colonial world slowly being reclaimed by nature.

The production challenge became a discovery. We found newer spots where we got picturesque dawns and starlit skies. These were the places that stayed with me.

When I returned to the Andamans with my wife Lin Laishram, the islands looked different yet again.

So the best thing to do in the Andamans is literally nothing except keeping your eyes open. It is perhaps the most useful piece of travel advice I could give. Don't chase the view. Wait for it to come to you.

Penned by Aarti Kapur Singh

A rare bite on the plate

An unexpected culinary colour brings a fresh visual language to the world of food

Susheela Nair



Image: shutterstock

What makes blue, one of nature's rarer colours in food, so alluring? Its relative scarcity on the plate makes it feel unexpected. From the electric blue of blue curaçao to the naturally occurring blues and purples in jamun, butterfly pea, blueberries, blue grapes, black rice and purple cabbage, all share similar tints but different flavours.

India has a long association with one of the few plants that produces an intense natural blue that's edible, the butterfly pea (Clitoria ternatea) flower. Locally known as aparajita and used in traditional medicine as well as for colouring foods and drinks, its vivid hue comes from anthocyanins called ternatins, whose chemistry also explains the flower's theatrical colour change, from blue towards purple and pink as acidity increases. Today, that old botanical colourant is being rediscovered by chefs and bartenders, who are turning blue into an ingredient of surprise, play and visual drama.

One of the most common is blue tea, made by brewing dried butterfly pea flowers. In Ayurveda, aparajita has been valued as a medicinal herb, with its roots, seeds and flowers used in formulations associated with memory, cognition and calming properties.

Today, butterfly pea has become a popular natural colourant for rice, teas, desserts, cocktails and more. Dried flowers are used to make a rich blue infusion and liquid mixed with rice, batters, sauces and drinks. With the addition of an acidic ingredient like lemon, the colour changes to violet or pink. The flower is light and mild, floral in nature and doesn't dominate the taste of a dish.

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Image: Moonjar Bar

At the Bengaluru-based restaurant Foo, butterfly pea lends its dramatic blue colour to a Japanese fried rice, transforming the familiar Asian staple into a signature dish. The flower allows the butter, shiitake mushrooms, fried garlic, carrots and baby corn in the dish to remain at the forefront while the colour provides the element of surprise.

At Yazu, which has outlets in Mumbai and Bengaluru, the Thai herbs quinoa dumpling follows another path to blue-purple, and uses red cabbage as a natural colourant. The dumpling is filled with water chestnut, quinoa, asparagus and celery, and seasoned with fresh herbaceous notes of lemongrass and kaffir lime. In drinks, the blue pea tea adds a touch of brilliance to many tropical servings.

Sibasish Palai, Head of Bar at Moonjar, Bengaluru, says, "Not only the colour; butterfly pea has a rather mild taste. So, it's easy to add to dishes and drinks. But do not over-boil the dried flowers, as then the resultant colour may not be as strong." The flower pairs well with honey. Simply steep dried butterfly pea flowers in hot water, strain and add honey to create a simple and refreshing tea. Cool it, then pour lemon juice on top and see the colour change. Add sparkling water and ice for an easy, naturally coloured cooler.

How to use

Do not boil, but steam: Dry the flowers and steep in hot water to remove the blue anthocyanins. Excessive or extended exposure to heat may lead to less colour.

Don't assume that all blue will remain blue: Colour is pH, light and heat sensitive, which means the colour may change when cooking, during storage or when it is displayed.

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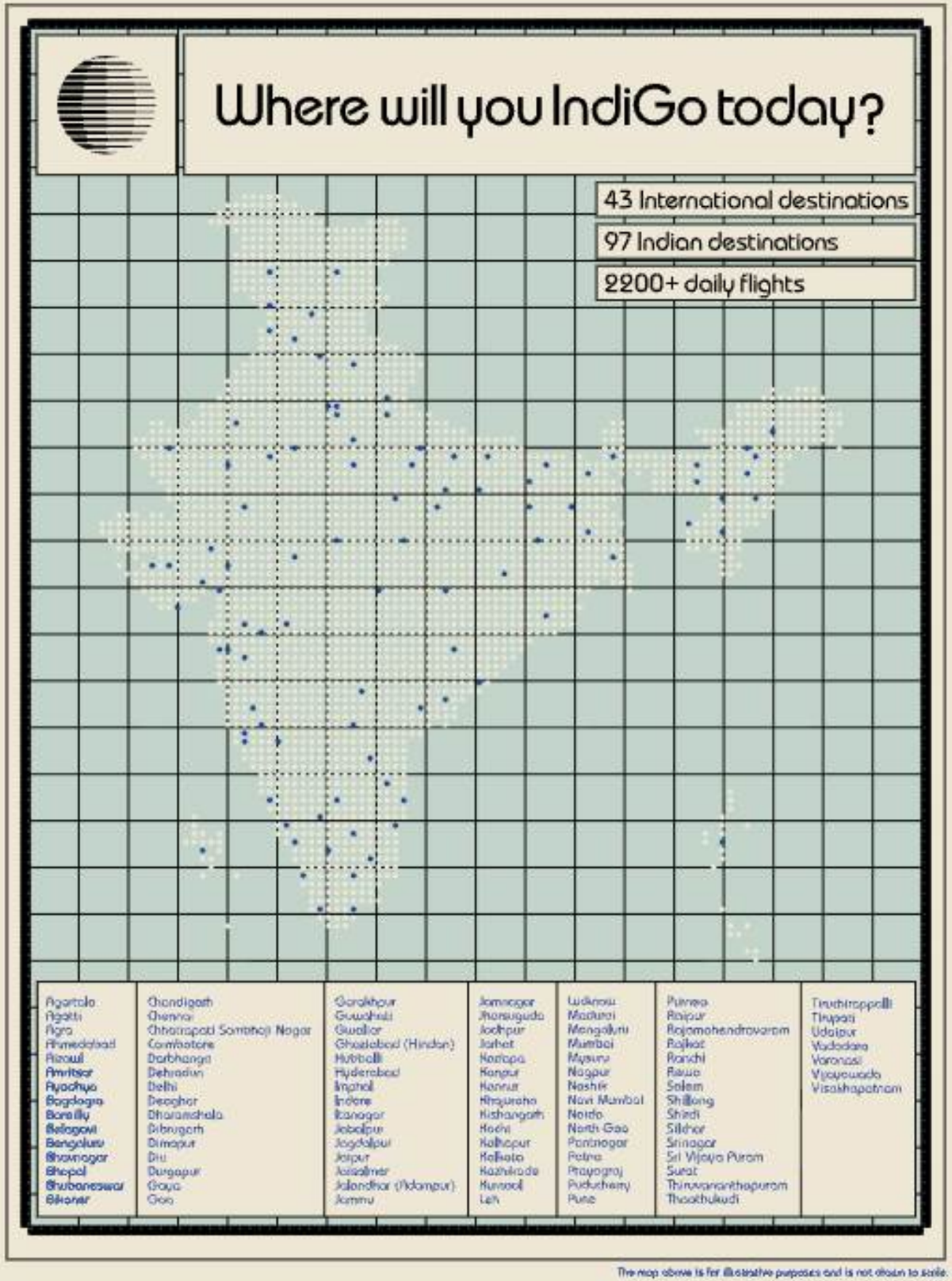
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*Crew favourite
^Ask the crew for today's selection. Packaging may vary depending on the product.

Terms and conditions apply. All payments on international flights to be in INR or USD, as per the printed currency value. USD conversion rates apply for payments in any other acceptable currency. Credit card payments on international flights to be charged in INR, as per USD conversion rates. Items are not sold separately. Instant meals and hot beverages are available exclusively on flights of duration 60 minutes or longer.

Drinks

Hot and cold beverages to sip and stay refreshed.



Masala Tea



Black Tea
Darjeeling



Calming Blue
Masala



Black Coffee
Without sugar



Cappuccino



Hot Chocolate



Masala Tea
Low sugar



Aerated Soft Drink



Aerated Soft Drink
Zero Sugar



Spiced Buttermilk



Beverage of the Day^
Mixed Fruit Juice
Coco Litchi

Bar

Pick your favourite way to unwind onboard. USD 6



Budweiser Beer
350ml



Vodka
60ml



Hardy's Chardonnay Semillon
187ml



Hardy's Merlot Cabernet
187ml



Johnnie Walker Black Label Whiskey
60ml

Water is available upon request.
Bottled Water (500ml) can be purchased separately for INR 100

^Ask the crew for today's selection.

All beverages under the "Bar" section contain alcohol. Served only on select international flights. Alcohol service for in-flight consumption is solely at IndiGo's discretion. Terms and conditions apply. USD conversion rates apply for payments in any other acceptable currency. INR not accepted for purchase of alcohol. Credit card payments on international flights to be charged in INR, as per USD conversion rates.

Terms and Conditions

The prices in the menu will be converted to other acceptable currencies on a round-off basis at the following conversion rate:

1 USD = 95.20 INR / 0.86 EURO / 3.67 AED / 1.27 SGD / 33.09 THB / 0.38 OMR / 0.74 GBP / 3.65 QAR / 0.31 KWD / 4.03 MYR / 7.84 HKD / 3.75 SAR / 6.72 CNY / 48.25 TRY / 0.38 BHD / 17,710 IDR / 26,070 VND / 6.44 DKK

Prices inclusive of all applicable taxes. Cash payment in INR, USD, or in the local currency of the country of origin or destination of the flight will be accepted on all international flights (except NPR, TRY, MVR, and VND), except for alcohol and merchandise, which can be purchased in USD only. Coins, in any currency, will not be accepted.

All items are served at cabin temperature, except beverages and items that are marked as 'Served Hot.' Actual products may differ in appearance from the images displayed here. All items displayed here are subject to availability and may be changed or varied, without the requirement of any notice. We offer a limited selection of food and beverages on certain flights. Please consult with the flight's cabin crew for further information or details.

Food items marked for "Immediate consumption" is meant for consumption on the flight on which it is served. Should you face any concerns relating to the food item during consumption, please bring it to the attention of our crew. They will be happy to assist you.

Snack deal: Pre-book snacks at goIndiGo.in for discounts. Allergens warning: Food may contain nuts, gluten, soy, milk products, and/or egg. Prices are inclusive of all applicable taxes. Food and beverage availability subject to stock. Now our short flights will have a limited menu. It's just another way we make sure you always land on time. On flights under 30 minutes, no food/beverage sales, only pre-booked snacks. Hot food/beverages will be served only on flights above 60 minutes. Both cash and credit card payment options available in-flight.

It may take approximately 45 minutes to serve everyone. We appreciate your patience.

▲ Non-vegetarian ● Vegetarian

Actual products may differ in appearance from the images displayed.

Small bag? Big difference.

Making the best use of space on board helps create a smoother boarding experience for everyone. Here's how.

A smoother boarding experience

With more overhead bin space available for larger bags, customers can settle in more comfortably and boarding can flow more efficiently for everyone on board.



More room where it's needed most

Smaller items such as backpacks, handbags and laptop bags can often be placed under the seat in front, helping keep overhead bin space available for larger cabin baggage.



Please follow your cabin crew's instructions for a safe and comfortable flight.

Transforming Learning Spaces

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