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ISSUE 1

THE PHOENIX *flyer*





Jhankaar

Jhankaar is an 11th grader at Neerja Modi, Jaipur, who loves all things art. She is also passionate about public speaking and cares deeply about the rights of minorities.



Vansh

Vansh Mittal, from Nanakmatta, Uttarakhand, cherishes nature and writing, finding joy in life's simplicity. Embracing John Keats' wisdom, he believes 'beautiful things bring joy forever.' Through his words, Vansh invites others to appreciate hidden beauty in every world tale.



Zeenat

Zeenat, an eleventh grader from Pune, believes in the power of stories. Stories are emotions. They have the power to connect and create change. She loves to read especially, historical fiction and finds solace in books. She prefers to express herself in poetry. She is eager to explore and learn new things.



Jaicharan

Jaicharan is a young advocate for change, passionate about human rights and social justice. Armed with a pen, he seeks to use his words to amplify the voices of the marginalized and contribute to a more equitable world.



Priyanka

Born and brought up in Udaipur, Rajasthan, Priyanka has developed an unmatched fascination with everything historical, literary and artistic. She would be the last person alive to reject the given chance of exploring new opportunities, places and gathering valuable experiences. On a relaxed weekend, you can either find her reading Shakespeare or listening to Tchaikovsky.



Ekta

Team Intern Ekta Pathak at Via News Didi aiming to always create an impact through her news coverage.



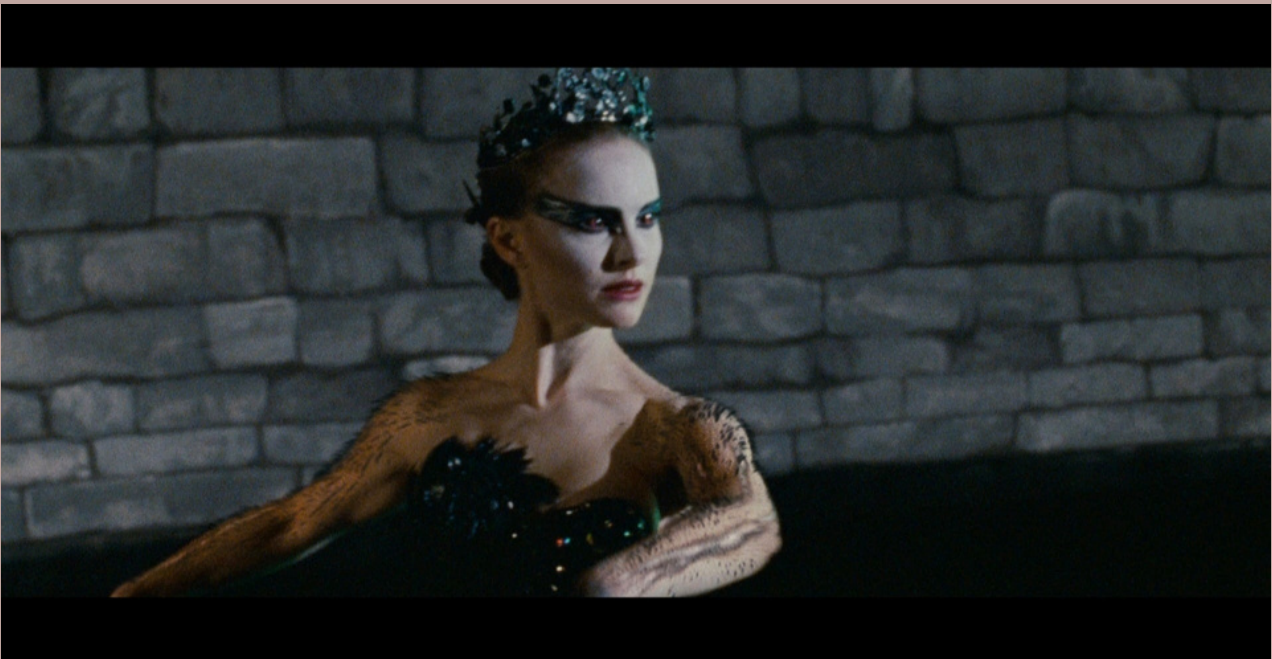
Chintan

Meet Chintan Dalal, our cool Team Facilitator at Via News Didi. He's the wizard behind the knowledge curtain at our low-income private school in Mumbai. Chintan isn't just a teacher; he's the guy who makes learning not boring! Oh, and did you know, he's also a Chartered Accountant? Yep, he adds that extra dash of cool to our educational journey. Get ready for fun and learning! (Yes, Chat GPT)

THE ALLURE OF THE DARK: AESTHETICIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Why is it that some see the beauty in suffering? Can one truly see aesthetics in something as painful as mental illness? We interviewed two teens and a psychologist to better understand this phenomenon.

Shankar Purohit



Still from 'Black Swan' of Nina hallucinating she is turning into the black swan as she dances, overcoming the challenges she faced with the piece before.

You feel exhausted. You haven't left your bed in two days, and you haven't showered in a week. You aren't motivated to do anything, and you find yourself questioning why you even exist. On the flip side, you could be so anxious you haven't taken a full breath the whole day. You bounce your leg as you struggle to read even a single paragraph. You can only focus on your heart's erratic beating. Do you view either of these situations as beautiful? Could you?

Before aiming to understand why it happens, let's explore what this aestheticization is. It is a term that comprises a lot of ideas about mental illness that romanticize it, i.e. make it seem better than it is. Firstly, this can be finding humour in this grim matter. This can often be seen in reels or memes on social media apps like Instagram or TikTok. Examples can include trends like "I can't take my ADHD medication, what if I lose my sparkle?" The sparkle in question is the individual's mental illness and its impact on their personality. This can also look like 'dark humour' or joking about traumatic or painful experiences as a way of coping with them. Secondly, aestheticization can be seen in art. Books like *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath and *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* by Ottessa Moshfegh speak from the perspective of the mentally ill to such an extent that it almost romanticises their experience. This is also true for films and shows like *Black Swan* and *Euphoria*. While the media itself may not glorify being mentally ill, individual characters within it who do that could push people in real life to want to be like them.



Now that we have understood what the aestheticization of mental illness is, why do people do it? The teens have chosen to stay anonymous as they share personal details. One of the big reasons is "If I can't fix it, might as well make it seem like not a big thing or make it pretty." Making light of a situation, especially one that can be as exhausting and controlling as mental illness, can make it appear less terrifying. The teenagers also commented on their peers saying that they too make fun of their struggles "to not give it enough importance to have a great impact in life." They have rightly identified this romanticization or

aestheticization as a means of "coping" with the pain from mental illness. It feels daunting and nearly impossible to 'fix' or cure it, at least in a short time, which leaves them thinking they could glorify the experience to make it seem easier to get through.

However, Ms Himani Joshi, a psychologist and now also a teacher of psychology, sees the long-term effects of this coping mechanism as negative. She states that this comes up due to a "limited availability of knowledge." While it may seem okay "for the time being," it could cause "harm in the future." She shared an anecdote from her time working at a hospital: A person who was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder (BPD) enjoyed the manic episodes that came with the condition. This, according to her, is common in people with BPD, especially during the early stages where symptoms can go unnoticed since people enjoy this high energy "which is contrary to their usual lifestyle." While there is "no harm in seeing the positive" side of a situation like this, the aestheticization "letting it (the mental illness) grow" can have "serious implications" in the future.

Another reason the teens believe they romanticise their mental illnesses is due to help, even after the progress we have made in the sector, being inaccessible. Apart from the issue of therapy being very expensive, mental illness is still seen as a “stigma,” which prevents people from healing so they eventually do not have to rely on aestheticization as a tool for coping. Ms Joshi agrees, saying “mental illness should not be a taboo.”

In response to a parallel drawn between physical and mental illnesses, both the teens and Ms Joshi believed that aestheticization of physical illness does not happen as often, since it is “pretty obvious to others,” and treatment is more accessible. One of the teens shared an experience with a mental health professional encouraging them to not tell their friends or teachers of their mental illness since “you will be vulnerable.” The other talked about being asked, “Do you do this for attention?” in response to sharing their struggle with self-harm. Uncomfortable and painful experiences like this make seeking treatment infinitely harder, increasing the likelihood of the long-term impacts of this aestheticization that Ms Joshi has discussed occurring.

Moreover, the teenagers believe poor media representation of mental illness further propelled these ideas within them, “Media has aestheticized mental illness so so much.” One of the teens said that people their age in shows “have a mental illness but don’t talk about it overtly” making them feel like they’re exaggerating by talking about it. This adds to the idea of mental illness being portrayed as a cute ‘quirk’ or a personality trait that the character’s personality is based on. The other discussed movies like *Black Swan* that romanticise a character falling into psychotic



breaks, “having hallucinations and doing self-destructive things” in the pursuit of “perfect.” This shows that even the aestheticization of issues like perfectionism that are not classified as a ‘mental illness’ can be damaging. Ms Joshi too believes that “media should be responsible in reporting sensitive issues” like this

It can be concluded that a lot of factors come together to encourage people to aestheticize their mental illness. However, what is important to remember is that this is a way for people to cope with their existing mental illness. Therefore, what all of us can do is create a non-judgemental and safe space for people who experience mental illness as well as those who aestheticise it. As Ms Joshi states, the “need of the hour” is to “be more open,” “educate others” about mental illness, and have “acceptance” for everyone.

DIVE INTO A BOOK: LET THE MAGIC BEGIN!

In today's busy world, people read 20% less for fun, and blame it on life's hustle. Abhinav says reading is a golden ticket to the mind's movie theater. E-books are cool (35% love them), but paperbacks have that new book smell. Book clubs celebrate, and reading helps communities flourish. Reading is our anchor, a superpower waiting to be unleashed. Dive into a book – magic begins!

Vansh Mittal



Hey, fellow book enthusiasts! Ever felt the urge to dive into a world of endless possibilities between the pages of a book? Or maybe you've been eyeing those neglected bookshelves, wondering if there's more to reading than meets the eye? Well, get ready for a joyful journey into the enchanting universe of reading, starting with quirky facts and recent data that'll make you curious about some quality time with good books.

The Great Reading Escape: Why We All Need It.

In today's crazy busy world, getting lost in a good book is like finding a calm spot. But surprise! People are reading 20% less for fun than they did ten years ago. What's going on with our reading vibes?

Blame it on the hustle and bustle of life. With work emails, Instagram scrolls, and microwave dinners dominating our days, books sometimes feel like that forgotten friend. But fear not! The bookish adventure we're embarking on might just reignite that friendship!



Reading: Not Just for Wizards.

Abhinav kicked off by saying, "Introduction to Good Literature can also increase the interest of people in the book, and they can live their dreamy world." His words hit home, making me realize that when you close your eyes and open a book, you're not just reading; you're battling dragons, solving mysteries, or just chilling with quirky characters over imaginary tea. The best part? "It's all happening in your head!" Reading isn't merely a hobby; it's like holding a golden ticket to your movie theater of the mind.

Screens vs. Pages: The Battle Royale.

Imagine this: you, snuggled on the couch, torn between a paperback and your glowing pal, the tablet. The data magicians say 35% of book lovers have gone digital. E-books and audiobooks are like the superheroes of reading – they adapt to your modern, techy lifestyle. The battle against digital distractions just got a powerful ally. "And to improve this situation we are trying to enhance reading cultures in different places by being part of these book fairs."

But hey, don't bid farewell to paperbacks just yet! There's something about the smell of a new book that e-readers can't mimic. It's like choosing between a sleek spaceship and a trusty, quirky bicycle – both get you places, but the journey has its flavor.

Book Clubs: Where Reading Becomes a Party.

Now, picture this: You finish an incredible book, and your brain is buzzing with thoughts. Enter the superhero hideout book clubs! They're like secret societies, but with more chit-chat and fewer secret handshakes. Fun fact – joining a book club isn't just about more books; it's like turning reading into a full-on celebration.

Data alert! According to our imaginary Bookish Societies Worldwide Association, book club members are 80% more likely to spread bookish love to a friend. It's like the ripple effect of a fantastic gossip session but with books as the juicy topic.

Reading: Not a Solo Sport, It's a Team Effort.

Hold up the mental movie for a second. Did you know that a society that adores reading is like a garden in full bloom? It's not just about personal growth; it's about the entire community flourishing. Our made-up Global Literacy Wizards insist that countries with loads of book lovers tend to have rocking economies. Reading – it's not just for you; it's for everyone.

Now, let's chat about our little bookworms-in-training. The secret recipe for creating a nation of reading champs is in our schools and homes. According to the not-so-real Super Smart Kids Foundation, exposing tiny humans to books early on makes them little geniuses in the making. Bedtime stories aren't just cute traditions; they're like the magic potion for creating mini-brainiacs. And for seniors "Famous writers can also attract their interest and being attentive book can help them in these things".

So, here's the deal: in a world that sometimes feels like a caffeine-fueled rollercoaster, reading is our anchor. It's not just a hobby; it's a superpower itching to be unleashed. Whether you're team paperback, team ebook, or team audiobook, the adventure kicks off with a simple flip of a page or a tap on a screen. What are you waiting for? Dive into a book and let the magic begin!



CHAIN OF CHANGE

The transformational journey of a community and Jai Mishra the man behind it all



This is for you, Jai Bhaiya, for you are in essence the human I wish to be – Zeenat



If he ever wrote a book he would call it, "Quest for Radiance: A Personal Odyssey" That pretty much sums it up, for he who searches for light along the way paves the path for others to find it.

Jai Mishra, a TFI alumni and the co-founder of Ummeed Community Centre, has started the spark for change here at Vadgaon Budruk. With the ultimate goal of enabling families to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, Ummeed educates and empowers kids. It's the birthplace for revolutionary ideas and leaders. Here's to a decade of teaching, learning, inspiring, evolving, and building a community.

Coming from an underprivileged community Jai wanted to empower kids like himself to rise to their potential. He joined Shevantabai Dangat Patil PMC school in Vadgaon, Pune as a Teach for India fellow in 2013. Jai worked relentlessly towards the shared vision - One day all children will attain an excellent education. In his first year he taught from 7AM to 7PM for 280 days compared to the PMC norm of 7AM to 12PM for 220 days.



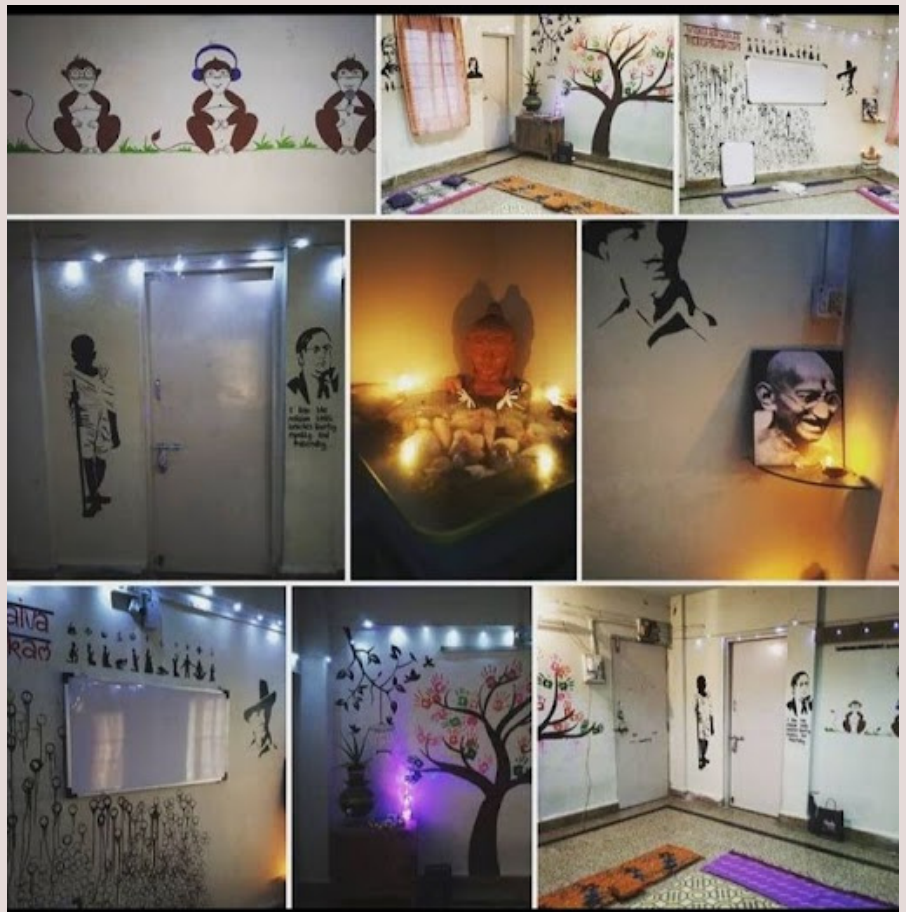
It is his ability to understand and empathize with the students along with his unique approach that helps build the bond of trust. In an interview Jai narrates the story of a kid who would rarely come to school. When asked why he told Jai school is boring and more importantly he feels sleepy in the morning. An agreement was made, the kid would sleep for the first two hours in class and would attend classes after lunch.

This continued for 2 months. After which there was a test and the kid rocked it! He came to Jai and told him, “Bhaiya, I can achieve so much by just concentrating for two hours.” and Jai replied, “Imagine, what you can do with 4.” What next, the kid began attending school regularly.

He also helped form the School Management Committee (SMCs) called ‘SAMVAAD’. They prepared a full fledged school development plan that allowed them to start 7th and 8th grade in the school. He has always been there and continues to be there for the kids in times of need.

After his fellowship, in 2016, Jai started Ummeed as an after learning space. In this one room accommodation, 10th graders would come together and study. As time passed the idea of Ummeed evolved. As Jai puts it, “Ummeed is our KHWAAB-GHAR. A home, a family, built on the foundation of love and passion for change. A family that has grown and become stronger. We envision and work hard to chase our dreams.” Multiple initiatives like Funscool, Akshar, Project Khwaab, Maitri cafe and India in Search of Fraternity have been born out of this place.

Akshar formerly known as Agstak is an after school program to support children academically. This program is entirely run by student volunteers of the community. Jai firmly believes that only a student can think like a student and therefore knows the best way to teach a student. He is absolutely right! Akshar has set a benchmark for its quality education and proven this through the board results of their students.



“In the last 4 years our students have outperformed others,” says Jai. And this is not even the best part. The first batch of students become educators for the next batch, it’s a chain. Ummeed has engraved the value of ‘seva’ amongst its students and they know what it means to give back to their community.



Funscool is a summer program, by the kids for the kids. It is an initiative by teenagers, an attempt to build their dream schools. Funscool provides kids exposure to various extracurricular activities while nurturing values and life skills within them. It all started when Ayush Pandit, the founder of Funscool, expressed his concern about how school had limited his experience and there were little to no opportunities for activities like sports, art and craft, dance, drama, etc, to Jai.

Funscool started in 2018, with 9 student volunteers and Jai as their project mentor, now Funscool 4.0 is a team of 27 volunteers, reaching more than 90 students. Jai doesn't tell his students what to do or how to do it. He equips them with compassion, courage, and strength so they can figure out what needs to be done and how! He lets his students lead. Through his trust and support he shows that kids can create change.



India in Search of Fraternity, an experiment, originated when the country was going through a rough patch of time during the NRC and CAA. “Everyone in the country was talking about justice, liberty and equality. We realized our understanding of Fraternity does not exist and we have limited or almost no idea of it. We decided to explore this idea with the help of the community and hence we designed an experiment to explore what fraternity means to us and to the people around us,” explains Jai. So far 6 such experiments have been conducted and over hundreds of guests have joined. Each time the idea of fraternity and the notion of India as a nation evolves.

Khwaab, the most recent initiative, is a chance for the mothers of the community to fulfill their dreams. dreams lost in the daily chorus of life dreams long forgotten and sacrificed dreams buried alive dreams feeble, that haven't died dreams that survived

Dreams are important and need to be chased. It is a livelihood training program along with other skills. It's a fight, a tension between reality and vision, but here is where **REVOJUTION** begins.



“Ummeed is a space which is purely built with love and empathy. It has been built with the community and not for the community.”

Doing all this has been challenging. Adapting to change has not been easy, in fact mostly difficult. It has been painful and time consuming but the center has evolved. During this time it's our beliefs and values that keep us going. Here is what Jai has to say, ‘It's Love which I believe in and courage which is required to change our current reality. I believe in every kid and feel that if they get the right opportunity, they will be able to break the chain of poverty. Love is important and it's needed.’”



An idea which has helped Jai in his incredible journey:

“Our communities have many problems but remember they are beautiful in their own ways. Try to find out the goodness in people and work from there. Listen, Listen, Listen. Listening is Love and it helps you build bonds with people.”

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SOCIETY

Jaicharan

Introduction:

In the 21st century, the rapid advancement of technology has brought about revolutionary changes, and at the forefront of this transformation is Artificial Intelligence (AI). This cutting-edge technology is not just reshaping industries but is also leaving an indelible mark on the fabric of society. In this article, we'll explore the multifaceted impact of AI and how it is influencing our lives.

The Rise of Artificial Intelligence:

Artificial Intelligence, once a concept relegated to science fiction, has become an integral part of our daily lives. From voice-activated virtual assistants to predictive algorithms that shape our online experiences, AI is no longer a distant future; it's a present reality. The rise of machine learning, deep learning, and neural networks has empowered AI systems to learn from vast datasets, making them increasingly sophisticated and capable.

Transforming Industries:

One of the most significant impacts of AI is its transformative effect on industries. Automation powered by AI is revolutionizing manufacturing processes, enhancing efficiency, and reducing costs. In healthcare, AI is aiding in diagnostics, drug discovery, and personalized medicine, promising breakthroughs that were once thought impossible. The financial sector is leveraging AI for fraud detection, risk management, and algorithmic trading, reshaping the landscape of global finance.

Societal Impact:

While the economic and industrial implications are profound, the societal impact of AI is equally noteworthy. The integration of AI in education is personalizing learning experiences, adapting to individual needs, and bridging educational gaps. In healthcare, AI is contributing to the democratization of medical knowledge, providing diagnostic support in underserved regions. However, the widespread adoption of AI also raises ethical concerns, from job displacement to issues of privacy and bias in algorithms.