

A Different Time

Running a Home
in a Fast Paced World

a BiteGeist



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& RESHMA TONSE

1001
STORIES

And it
begins.



The Day

Wake up at 6:30 am, stay in bed.
Scroll through phone.
Check the latest news.
Check the clock- it's 7 am already!
Get up. Brush. Shower.

Stare deeply into the milk vessel.
Don't blink, the milk might boil over.
Hit the road before peak hour, but first,
grab a cup of coffee.

Get into your cabin before the boss comes in.
Mail your deliverables for the day before 5 pm.
But make sure you're not missing out on office
gossip.

Get home before evening traffic
sucks the life out of you.
Hit the gym. You've paid for it.

Dinner before 9 pm.

Try and read the book that's been collecting dust
on your bedside table for a while.
You don't.

Set your alarm clock for 6:30 am tomorrow.
Rinse. Repeat. |

HOW DO YOU
KNOW
THAT
TIME
PASSED?





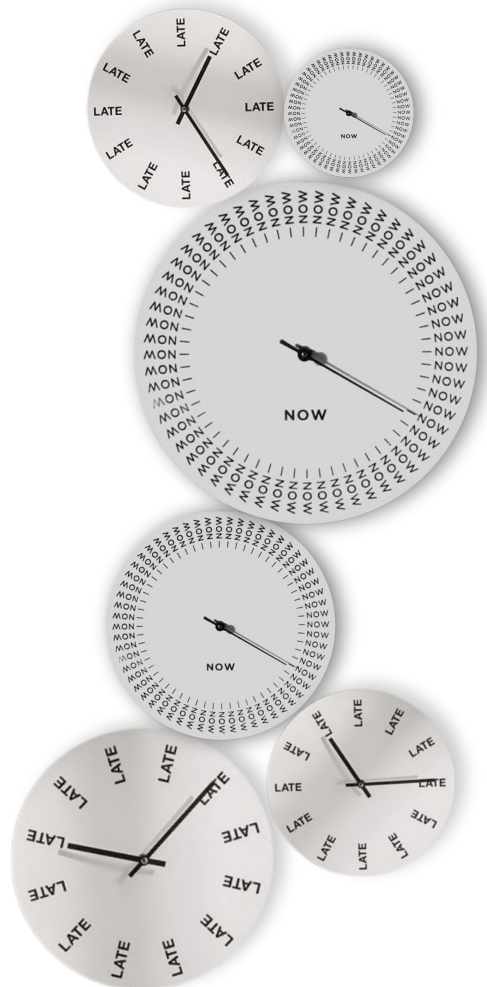
1.

YOUR
60 SECONDS
ARE NOT *MY*
60 SECONDS.

1. YOUR 60 SECONDS ARE NOT MY 60 SECONDS



Our everyday routines are often a race against the clock. Although it is a tool to measure time, clocks have defined how we fit all of our work, leisure, hobbies, time with loved ones, and time with oneself within an arbitrary framework. We are so governed by 'clock time' that we have even attuned ourselves to feel hungry and sleepy at particular hours of the day.



Jeremy Rifkin put it best in his book, 'Time Wars':

“All of our perceptions of self and world are mediated by the way we imagine, explain, use and implement time.”

But our experience of time is more flexible than what a clock measures. Humans do not really have an absolute understanding of time, per se. A clock might suggest that a minute is just 60 seconds. But consider a minute spent doing a plank.

It doesn't feel equal to one minute of scrolling through Instagram.

It seems anecdotal. Like common knowledge. But the subjective experience of time has been a part of several scientific studies.



When in awe, we find ourselves being more in the present and feel time expanding. Joy and excitement makes time go faster, while boredom drags time out for too long. In essence, people perceive time differently, based on their internal state (emotions they experience) and external state (the context they're in).



Time isn't just
relative for
individuals.
Different cultures
view time
differently, too.

1. YOUR 60 SECONDS ARE NOT MY 60 SECONDS

One such widely known difference is Edward Hall's classification of **Monochronic & Polychronic cultures**.

Lets try this little exercise in planning.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Call a friend.

Go to the bank to get your account details in order.

Finish a report due Wednesday.

Plan for meeting for Monday, next week.

Deliver report. Hold meeting.

2 - 3 smaller tasks that need about 45 min - 1 hr of your time.

Avoid ordering out. Cook healthy meals all week.

Plan the week and meet a friend for dinner.

1 **How would you fit these tasks in the week?**

2 **What tasks would you club in one day?
Why?**

3 **What big tasks do the small tasks revolve around?**

4 **Would that make your week feel like an 'accomplishment'?
Or just 'efficient'?**

AND NOW, FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION.

How much time do you have right now?

**COMING
UP NEXT:**

AN
I-SWEAR-IT-
WON'T-TAKE-
TOO-LONG
CRASH
COURSE IN
TIME IN
CULTURE

1. MONO- *CHRONIC* *CULTURES*

Monochronic cultures think of time as linear.
You plan things one after the other, 'in time'.

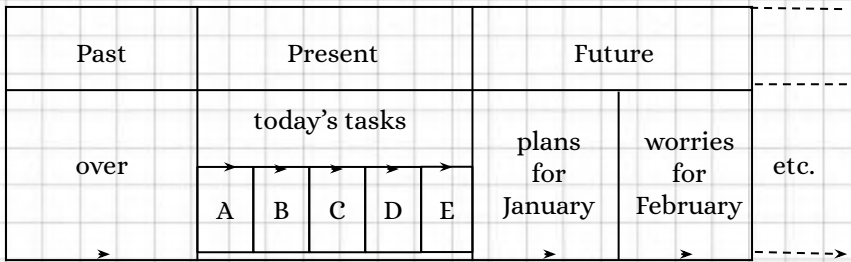
Time is tangible.

Time is precious.

Each unit of time is useful. Valuable.

1. YOUR 60 SECONDS ARE NOT MY 60 SECONDS

Monochronic cultures like USA or Germany believe that time is linear. Time is divided into small units, and each task is done one after the other. Each unit or time slot is allocated to a particular task.



'Carving up Time': Richard Lewis

If a time slot passes by with no task allocated to it, or if a task spills over to the next slot, it feels wasteful. In monochronic cultures, time is related to self-value and the satisfaction of getting things done.

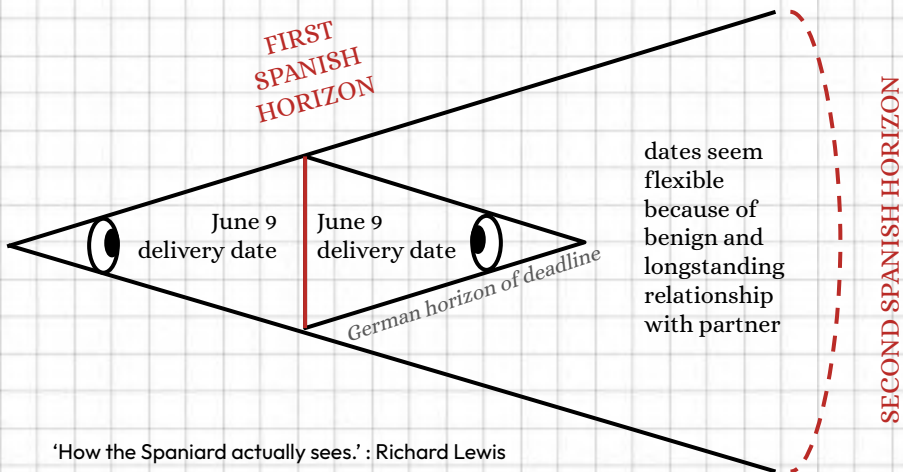
2. POLY- CHRONIC CULTURES

Polychronic cultures treat time as fluid and vast.

It is a space in which multiple things happen. Hence, the need to control and ring fence time is not very strong.

1. YOUR 60 SECONDS ARE NOT MY 60 SECONDS

In Arab and Latin cultures, time is irrelevant - the event it marks or the people who 'use' the time are the heroes of an experience. To get a task done, an event can be molded or stretched, irrespective of a predetermined schedule



This isn't an East vs. West phenomenon as much as a deeply cultural equation between dependence on social dynamics, sense of self and meaning of work.

Examples of monochronic cultures can be USA, Germany, Finland, Sweden and also countries like South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong.

Examples of polychronic cultures are African countries, Turkey, Egypt, Spain, Italy and of course, India.

India is polychronic. For Indians, traditionally, time has always been a space in which interpersonal dynamics and individual values play out.

Tasks happen as a result of these multiple players. They're the consequence - not the focus - of time.



BAS DO
MINUTE

=



WHO
KNOWS HOW
LONG THAT IS?

Beyond this, studies have explored how the pace of life in large cities around the world changes based on the culture's prosperity. Take a look at India, for instance. With steady growth, in mere decades, the everyday experience of India has changed drastically.

As one looks back in time, and recalls India in its early days, it is easy to imagine the passage of time must have been different from today's.

The woes and worries of modern life feel foreign while imagining life in the 1950s.

Rush hour and road blocks would not have dictated schedules.

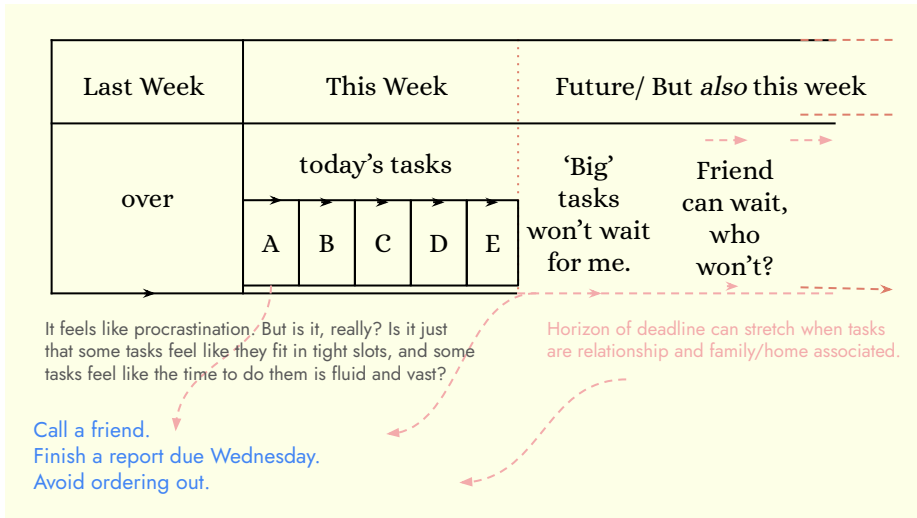
One could not have whipped out a smartphone and bought items at their whims and fancies.

Items reaching one's doorstep before one can blink wouldn't have been a lucrative business opportunity.

1. YOUR 60 SECONDS ARE NOT MY 60 SECONDS

While doing the exercise, it's easy to imagine that small tasks fit between bigger tasks in the day.

But does it really work that way?



In polychronic cultures time stretches to fill tasks that are social. Meetings stretch longer.

Time must be spent between partners to build a feeling of trust and alignment. Without it, even completed tasks feel incomplete.

Calling a friend is a tiny task, and can fit into any day.

However, for polychronic cultures, this friendly call can last anywhere between 15 minutes an hour. It's the same amount of time it could take to prepare for a meeting.

Corporate India learns from monochronic cultures, but operates in a highly polychronic environment.

This has led to a mix of two diverse forces.

We've begun to process one dimension of life linearly, and live in another with fluidity.

As our lenses collide, merge and evolve we're becoming dualist in our approach to time.

Fairly new, for polychronic cultures.

TIME MOVED
SLOWER IN
THE 50s.



2.

**CHANGING
PACE OF
INDIA**



Time is an obvious yet overlooked influence on how we look at the world and make decisions for ourselves.

Consider a different time. In early India. Lives were defined by the seasons, routines and familial roles. People weren't in control of their environment. Their experience of time was languid, slow. Out of their control.

But as we gain more control over these external factors, suddenly we control our routines. We do more. We see more. We want more.

To understand the macro effects of changing perceptions of time, we, at 1001 Stories, travelled to different corners of the country to speak with three generations of women whom have been running their homes in different eras.

Over 3 years, we visited over 70 people's homes, and shadowed them while they shopped in small kirana stores and supermarkets. We spoke with women, their mothers and grandmothers, looked in their kitchens, attics and storage rooms.

Their stories helped us compare and understand how time flowed for each generation, how their identities and routines evolved over each era - and what running a home has been like in the 50s vs. the 90s vs. in the 2020s.

The stories featured here are reconstructed from conversations with these women.

IN 1953,
MALA PLANS TO WATCH ANARKALI.

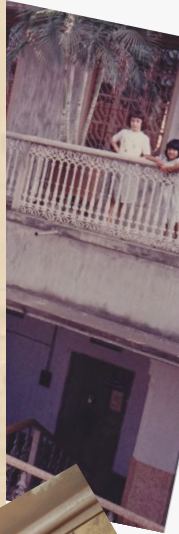
It doesn't matter if Mala wakes up 10 minutes earlier than yesterday. She is always late. She and her husband wake up around the same time daily, before the sun is up. But her day always feels like it began hours ago.

The first complaint of the morning is usually "Why has the servant not filled water in the bath tank yet?" Her husband must bathe and will be late. She rushes, filling water with the panicking maid. It's not his fault, she reasons. He's late.

Mala's husband goes to sleeps as Man of the House, but wakes up as Press Operator. Like her, as soon as he wakes up, his labour has also already begun.

He works at the Press in the city. It is the city's most prestigious newspaper. Everyone in the house is aware of the high status this awards Mala's husband. Thus, it is the mission of every member to ensure that he leaves home on time.

Mala decides to cook pumpkin and roti for breakfast today. It must be flavourful, but with less spice, lesser *masala*. After all, it's not lunch. Breakfast must not fill your stomach. It must just about satisfy. Labourers have heavy breakfasts. *Babus eat differently.*



Mala's husband takes the bus to work. But if the bus has left before he reaches the bus stand, he will take the hand-pulled rickshaw to the city. He does not like the frivolity in indulgence, but somewhere, he knows that he is expected to travel this way. He makes a mental note to tell people at home about how he got to work today. They will find a way to slip it into conversation with neighbours.

The food is cooked. The dry sweets have been bought. After food, a dry sweet can dry the mouth as well, without a feeling of fullness. Mala knows the seller will bring local guava and mangoes. Throughout the day, she will serve them freshly cut, to eat. Dishes will be cooked. Dishes will be washed. New fruit, cut. Tasks go on, almost never ending. One leads to another. The sun on the terrace leaves wet clothes warm and stiff. Winter will be here soon. It means firewood must be rationed.

Mala spends the noon drying grains under the sun. It is also pickling season. There is still a lot to do. No matter. There is still some day left.

Before sunset, Mala's husband comes home. She makes him a cup of tea. She waits for a moment with him alone. There is a new film poster pasted on the side wall of the house announcing a new movie. She can only watch it with him in secret. She waits for a moment in the day to plan. Sometime in the month, an outing is brewing.



In Mala's world, daily routines were fixed for everyone. There were 'x' many things to do, and 'x' much time to do them. It also left moments for one to feel the languid air against their skin, telling them that the summer was ending.

People ceremonially began their day with morning ragas, cleanliness & prayer, adorned their front porches with vibrant rangolis, and grouped in front of tea shops for addebaazi.

Back then, people paused and took in the smaller pleasures in life. But, these 'simpler times' prevailed mainly out of how barren the country was left behind after British rule. Even products and brands couldn't shake their colonial hangover off. Young, newly independent India was still reeling with a new identity, new nation, a new narrative of oneness. There were no expectations of a stable future. Day-to-day savings aside, households would squirrel away for ensuing years.

Consumerism moves from the classes in the 50's

Have you a
TELEPHONE
in your HOME?

If not you are denying yourself the pleasure of communicating with your FRIENDS and running the risk of being unable to call the DOCTOR or the FIRE BRIGADE in time of need.

ASHOK KUMAR says...
BRYLCREEM
is best for your HAIR.

Cooling Health-giver
MORE HANGERS TO GET YOUR SET OTHER HANGERS

The Perfect Hairdressing — now in a smart new jar

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3, 4, maybe 5 times longer than a mini skirt.

Saris are six yards long, 700 years old, and very beautiful. They stop in where mins fear to tread, skimming in exotic silk the hostesses you will find on Air India to London. When mins are folded up and silently tucked away, saris will be around the waist and up over the top of the head. Hence you can see all over the world saris with the gentle hostesses in the top of the head.

FOR THE MONSOON BLUES!

Don't let monsoon weather get you down! You need never feel weary and overcast if you have a tin of Andrews in the cupboard. Andrews makes a sparkling, refreshing drink at any time. It cools and refreshes the mouth and tongue and soothes and settles the stomach — stimulates the working of the liver. Finally, Andrews assists the elimination of waste, acting gently and naturally.

Remember, Andrews for better Cleanliness and sparkling health!

SPARKLING ANDREWS

FLY IT... THEY'LL BUY

CARGO by AIR-INDIA International

2. THE CHANGING PACE OF INDIA

Though conditions improved in the decades that came, Indians were still strongly 'collective first' people.

This continued, until an important turning point in history nudged the country onto the path to the future. Enter the Economic Reforms of 1991.

90's liberalisation popularly ushered in the beginning of a new Indian era. From this moment on, India saw a shift in traditions, values and the way people led their lives.

The dynamics in families, homes and genders, and even how we experienced time, changed.



to the masses in the 90's.

Family vehicle. Bachelor price.

...ity it comes with only one driving seat.

...feur will give
...of chauffeur

ESTEEM
Pure Driving Luxury

...Power steering • River windows • Central locking
...electronic transmission for smooth free driving

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...the TVS Scooty puts the dream of owning a family two-wheeler within your reach. Its advanced in-vehicle performance.

...the TVS Scooty today. Scoortime! It's a matter of your family.

TVS scooty



LAKME
ULTRA

BRIGHTER. CREAMIER.
Ultra Creamer • Available
and durable, with a new 90°
lipstick, and colored but
intense formulation and
color which hold for longer

LAKME
ULTRA
YOU CAN FEEL THE

PREETI SAVES FOR A NEW SCOOTER IN 1993.

Well over an hour past sunrise, the alarm clock rings for a solid minute. Preeti's mornings begin with the sleek 'Trrr... Trrr' of a digital alarm. She taps a button on top of the clock and the day begins. She's 5 months pregnant. She has already applied for leave in 3 months. It will be Dussehra. She will go home to her mother and have her baby there. But until then, there is lot to be done.

Her husband will wake up a good 20-30 min later. So will her son. They both won't need an alarm. In a small flat in the city, there is only so much room for sleep to hide from the cacophony of the pressure cooker, All India Radio, the maid's persistent doorbell, vessels being cleared from their drying stand and other cantankerous bits of morning routine.

The television will be turned on to catch the 8 a.m. news. Until then, the radio shifts from music to chit chat every 10-15 minutes. So precise is the programming, Preeti uses it as a timekeeper. Before the third song, she pulls out a pack of beaten rice. Yesterday it was vermicelli for breakfast. Today, she has planned a batch of *poha*. An old 80's classic plays on, which she hums to, stopping midway to yell aloud for her son to get out of bed. The host comes back on the radio. The onions are done. Just in time.

Lunch & tiffins are packed, tossed in bags and buttoned shut, just as breakfast is done and the children fly out the door to catch the school bus across the street. Now, she can have a cup of tea in peace. Its 8 a.m. The news is on. In 7 1/2 minutes, she will finish her tea, wash her cup and step in to shower. She won't miss a thing. It is the first commercial break after the headlines.

Like clockwork, as her husband steps out to get dressed, Preeti steps in to bathe. His tiffin is packed, so is hers. If she can bathe and get ready by the time he's done with breakfast, she can leave along with him to the local station. She hopes they can buy a scooter some day. Then her husband can drop her to work, on the way to his office. No more morning local. That would make life much nicer.

Preeti is aware that she juggles a lot. Multiple open tasks run in the background. Home, kids, work, aging parents back home - they all seek her attention. She complies.

On the way back, she stops at her local *kirana* (grocery) store. As a regular, her grocery list has no significant change, month on month. Except this time, her favourite tea-time biscuits and 1kg pack of long grained basmati are omitted. Preeti and her husband are saving up for a scooter. Two wheelers are at every respected house these days. Some of his colleagues had also bought them and spoke about the freedom. Tomorrow, even she might consider learning how to drive one.

Preeti opens her purse to pay - well aware that some customers notice her paying herself. She is a pregnant, well groomed, professional woman, dressed for the world. She stands out in the world, and in a good way. There is a soft pride in her independence.

She walks home and immediately starts on dinner preparations, snacks for her son and a cup of tea for herself. It will give her company while she monitors him doing his homework. Soon her husband will be home. There's enough milk for another cup of tea for him.

For dinner, the family gathers at the dining table. Their discussion is a plan for the Dussehra holidays. Preeti has decided already. 10 days in October at her mother Mala's home. Her husband agrees. She usually plans things best.

For Mala, everyday was almost fated, since all **moments of the day were rooted in her role in the house and within the family.** Life regulated time with an iron fist. There was only one instance where she found life unscripted and in her control. It was when she indulged in secrets. Guilty pleasures.

Unlike her mother, for Preeti there was great pride in **managing all her roles, beyond the tasks associated with each role.** She was running her home in a world where white collared jobs and double income households were becoming a growing default, and she was a growing influencer of this change in her time.

IN TIME, CAME
NEW WAYS TO
EXPERIENCE
YOUR ROLES.

NEW ROLES
SHIFTED THE WAYS
IN WHICH THEY
EXPERIENCED
TIME.

Consumers like Preeti could envision a life, manoeuvre it, and *buy* it into existence. India was bringing in new accessibility, new signals of arrival.

Preeti's generation was armed with far more agency in their hearts, disposable income in their pockets and venues to spend their money. This drastically altered spending habits and our values and virtues around money.

INDIA'S CODES OF PROSPERITY HAD CHANGED.

SUDDENLY, SPENDING BECAME THE NEW SAVING.

3.

*AND THEN
CAME
NOW.*



A WALK THROUGH TIME

1

Post liberalisation, people were no longer buying only plain essentials. In 90's India, brands coached earning Indians on what they were supposed to do with their money. Brands were a new lesson in upgradation - the recognition of a better life they were building for themselves.

DISCOVERING BRANDS

BRANDS BECOME BADGES

2

Suddenly, mundane staples for daily living became choices - a reflection of the home you were running. Instead of *atta* from the mill, one could choose between *Annapurna* or *Pillsbury*. Brand loyalty in itself became a badge of prestige, a social signal. The local market and mandi was no longer a boundary. There was exposure to what the rest of the world was buying.

3

AKHANDA URBAN BHARAT

Even NRI relatives brought back global tech, fashion, new culture and lifestyles into Indian homes.

As the millenium ended, India was already looking upwards and outwards, enchanted by globalist exposure and urban values. The big city - small town divide began to further narrow, until urban attitudes eventually became pincode agnostic.

MITOSIS OF THE COLLECTIVE

4

Consumerism had empowered new Individuality in a Collective India. Until now, households controlled consumerism. By the late 2010s, each individual was empowered to express their desires and sense of self-beyond their roles as members of a household. All it needed was a little tipping over.

5

And then came Covid-19.

08:01

5G 60

Wednesday 26 March

08:01



MESSAGES

07:50

Pooja's Story



REMINDERS

08:00

Meeting @ 9:30





12 unread messages. 5 unread work mails.
A sink full of dirty dishes.

A calendar invite pops up on the phone.
It's a reminder for a meeting that's about to
begin in an hour and a half.

Pooja wakes up to the reminder. It's late.
Today, she over-snoozed.

It's a mild annoyance, being late. But worth it.
She went to bed close to 3 A.M.,
binge-watching a new show with Samrat, her husband.
No regrets.
It's the time of the day (night?) to be a couple.

It's 8:20 AM.
No one knows where the first 20 min of the day went.
There was a phone, a 'Born in the 90s' thread and a
bathroom involved, but no other real clues.

Checks the phone for the day's schedule.
Then, steps into the kitchen. |

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

Wednesday 26 March 2025

08:30

The dirty dishes in the sink stare back. Nope. Maid will figure.

Look away. First breakfast.

Husband's on Intermittent Fasting. So *didi* (the cook) only made lunch.

08:45

Box of Muesli on the counter. Instant idli in the fridge. Big nope. Wants eggs.

Orders eggs. And bread. Adds curd to hit free delivery limit. Delivery in 14 min. Browses phone meanwhile.

Adds shampoo to cart on other app to buy later.

08:47

Remembers they're out of detergent. Annoyed with self. Sets reminder for buying it later.

09:04

App says 'Slightly delayed'. Annoyed. No time for breakfast.

Bathes. Dresses. Ready for meeting 3 min ahead.

In 2020, although the world shut down and completely distorted routines, things did not reset to normalcy even after recovering from the pandemic.

Digital payments and e-commerce had already removed a lot of the friction from shopping. But with new quick delivery options and work-from-home schedules, this friction-less shopping led to a new behaviour in homes. Experimentation, brand hopping, smaller pack sampling and frequent shopping. **We are now witnessing the end of long term planning.**

Unlike her mother Preeti, whose daily life in 1993 was in lockstep with the world she moved in, **each day in Pooja's life is seemingly different from the other.**

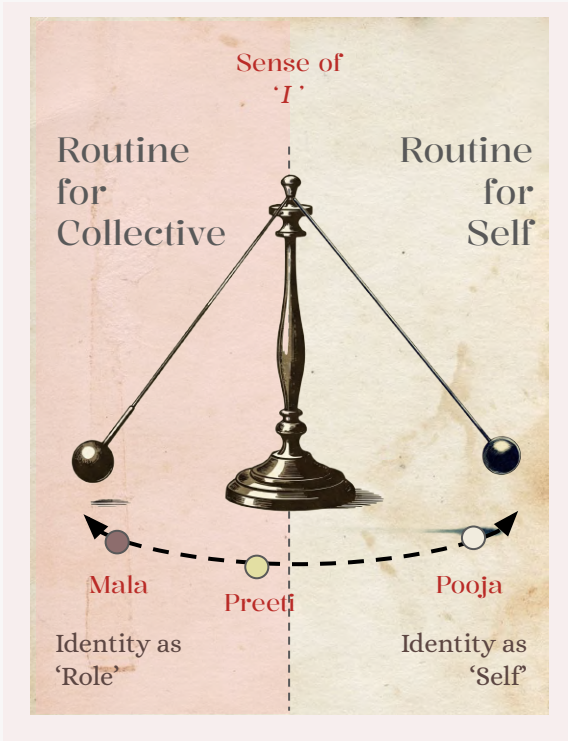
Everything competes for attention in her life, and each competing task is a chain of smaller tasks, all performed at one go. The need for breakfast, the purchase of ingredients, the time it will take to get there and the failsafes if delivery is delayed - everything is acted upon and experienced together.

Every moment is longer, more tedious.



WHEN
PENDULUM
SWINGS HIGH
TOWARDS
A COLLECTIVE
ROUTINE & ROLE

**TIME
MOVES
SLOW**



WHEN
PENDULUM
SWINGS HIGH
TOWARDS
ROUTINE FOR
INDIVIDUAL &
SELF

**TIME
MOVES
FAST**

Identity & Consumption	Life In The 1950's	Life In The 1990's	Life In The 2020's
As Role diminishes. Consumerism increases.	Upgradation is familial, status oriented & collective.	Higher agency is expressed by upgrading home & family's lifestyle.	As self wins over role, upgrades are individualistic, smaller, frequent.
As Sense of Self grows. Brand Love increases.	Brands are elitist, inaccessible and feel like authority figures.	Brands are accessible, signal growth of a home.	Exploration is key. Platforms are brands. Everything is accessible.

THE FASTER THE EXPERIENCE OF TIME, THE MORE THE CONSUMERISM.
THE MORE THE CONSUMERISM, THE LESSER A BRAND'S VALUE.

Note: The 3 stories featured are part of a larger study 1001 Stories conducted in 2023, focusing on how women planned and ran their homes. The above analysis is not representative of a man's experience of changing times.

This change in time perception has most importantly changed the role of the woman running the house. Grocery shopping has become a short-sighted routine, frequent and scattered over the month.

And that's just one of the effects of a changing experience of time.

Mala, Preeti and Pooja are three generations of one narrative: A woman's life through the experience of running her house.

Every day for these women was an experiment in finding their sense of self.

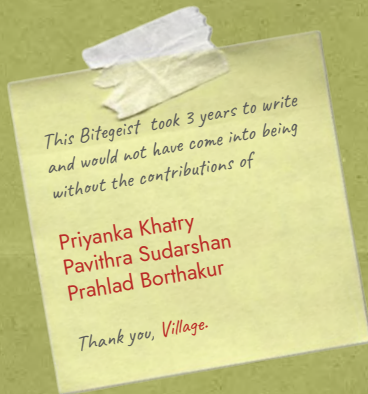
For some, time became unscripted, fluid and sometimes open-ended, but only in private.

For some, time was a tool. In syncing life to flow with time, came victory over it.

For some, time is multilinear. Rigid, yet flexible. It accommodates multiple tasks and splits into multiple streams. However, it comes at the cost of mindfulness.

You can flow in only one stream at a time.

Written by
Poorni Suriyanarayanan
Reshma Tonse



A BiteGeist by



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