EDUCATIONPLUS

A. Joseph Dorairaj

Marks are not enough

We need to re-visit and re-define excellence in terms of students' ability to navigate the complex challenges of life

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During admission season, marks, grades and percentiles are the talk of the town. A staggering number of students have scored very high marks and outstanding grades. Some have managed to score centum even in arts subjects. But this raises a question: is there a strong correlation between marks and competencies? Sadly, the answer is no.

Problems

Where is the gap and how should it be addressed? Most teachers, including those in colleges and universities, are generous in awarding marks and grades so that they do not invite criticism that their students have not performed well in exams. The assessment pattern itself also subtly promotes high grades. Most questions are remember-recall questions that only test rote memory. There are hardly any higher order questions that test the ability to think, analyse, evaluate and apply concepts and theories learnt in classrooms to real life. In many institutions, the Continuous Formative or Internal Assessment, which accounts for close to 40% of the total marks, is not rigorous. Teachers generously award anywhere between 70-90% on the argument that students need to be helped to come out in flying colours.

The key question, therefore, is: do CGPAs help students progress to higher studies or in their employment prospects? Many students who score excellent marks are unable to secure admission in premier institutions for their Master's and research programmes or crack job interviews. This is a reflection of their cognitive capabilities and the educational system. Their CGPAs have given them a false sense of excellence.

Strategies

How can this be set right? By creating and promoting an ecosystem with a decent correlation between student competencies and grades. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy talks about six levels of knowledge and question papers should deal with all of them. Higher order questions that talk about analysis, critiques and evaluation and the translation of concepts and theories into realities are crucial. When confronted regularly with challenging questions that are not memory-based, students will be forced to think and sharpen their cognitive capabilities. Certain key education outcomes such as multiculturalism and adaptability cannot be quantified and assessed using traditional benchmarks of excellence but they are vital to one's growth and societal development.

Students should be helped to think beyond CGPAs and transition to the real world where skills and competencies, both cognitive and meta-cognitive, matter. They should realise that critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills and emotional intelligence are crucial to navigate the complexities of life. They should be encouraged to go beyond textbooks, exams, and grades and step into the real world where they will be assessed not by their marks and grades but by their cognitive capabilities and humane qualities.

This requires student-centric classrooms that promote thinking skills with an emphasis on analysis, interpretation and application and offer adequate space to raise questions and express diverse points of view on academic and non-academic topics. The obsession with marks and grades should be replaced by a focus on life-skills that will prepare future-ready citizens who can contribute to making the world a better place to live in.

In the final analysis, higher educational institutions should promote an ecosystem that weans students away from a memory-based educational system and nurtures their thinking capacities. Administrators, teachers and parents should realise that there should be a transition from classrooms to the real world fraught with multiple challenges. The whole exercise calls for a re-think on the notion of excellence. Traditionally, excellence in academic circles was equated with enviable CGPAs where students were graded on the basis of predetermined criteria. We need to re-visit and re-define excellence not so much in terms of marks and grades but in terms of students' ability to navigate the complex challenges of life. This obviously calls for going beyond marks, grades and percentiles.

The writer is an Emeritus Professor, Gandhigram Rural Institute Deemed-to-be University. Email josephdorairaj@gmail.com

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TVS Indus Design Honours

The TVS Motor Company has launched the 'TVS Indus' Design Honours, a new annual challenge to nurture design talent and redefine the future of mobility by tapping into blend India's rich design heritage.

The 2025 edition of the challenge is theme-based and draws inspiration from four distinctive regions of the country — Thar, Sahyadri, Kutch, and Mumbai.

Participants must propose mobility concepts spanning mono-wheel, two-wheeler, and three-wheeler formats, while incorporating environmental, social, and cultural relevance.

Submissions will be evaluated by an expert jury comprising leading names from the world of design and mobility. Judging criteria include originality, contextual relevance, user-centricity, and feasibility.

Eligibility: Design students (UG or PG) and non-design students between 14 and 20 years.

Deadline: October 06.

The top three winners will receive cash prizes up to ₹500,000, with additional recognition through a Viewers' Choice award and opportunities for internship with the TVSM Design Team. Registration is free.

For more details about the challenge and how to enter, visit www.tvsindus.com

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Identify potential roles

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help

OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I am a school teacher with a PG and B.Ed. I would like to appear for two government exams: sub-inspector and school assistant. How can I study and work? Should I opt for one exam? Anil

Dear Anil,

Managing exam prep with your job is challenging but achievable with discipline and a well-structured plan. Be honest with yourself about the time you can dedicate and your capacity to handle the workload. If the syllabus overlap is significant and the exam dates allow, attempting both is possible. However, if you feel overwhelmed, focusing on one exam might increase your chances of success.

Work on a pros and cons list to identify which job you would prefer and prioritise that exam. Create a realistic study schedule. Identify pockets of time to study (e.g., before/after school, during breaks, weekends). Assign dedicated slots for each subject for both exams, considering their weightage and your proficiency. Focus on common subjects first if you are preparing for both. For subjects unique to each exam, allocate time based on the exam date. Break the syllabus down into smaller, achievable weekly and monthly goals to track progress. Review your schedule and adjust it based on your progress. Analyse past papers to identify important topics and strengthen weak areas. Ensure your study space is free from distractions. Take regular mock tests with past question papers. Do not neglect your health. Sleep and eat well, exercise regularly, and maintain a positive attitude.

I finished ECE in 2021 and began preparing for the UPSC. I couldn't crack it and am still trying. I don't have a backup and am not interested in coding. How can I find a job? Shaikh

Dear Shaikh,

Your ECE degree is valuable, and the skills that you have gained during your UPSC preparation are also an asset.

Why is there no backup? Be open to opportunities and consider roles that might not be your ideal but can provide experience and income. Build your network and be open to starting at entry-level positions. Try internships to gain experience and get your foot into the door.

Update your resume and LinkedIn profile and highlight the skills and knowledge relevant to the specific job roles you have applied for.

Search for jobs on online platforms and specialised engineering job sites. Visit the career pages of companies you are interested in and apply directly. Connect with alumni from your college as they may have leads or insights. Prepare well for the interviews and be ready to answer questions about your technical knowledge, problem-solving approach, and motivation for the specific role and to explain the career gap due to UPSC preparation. Highlight the transferable skills you gained.

Explore technical positions in government organisations related to telecommunications, defence, railways, and public sector undertakings (PSUs) that recruit ECE graduates. Keep an eye on notifications from SSC, state PSCs (for technical roles), and specific PSU recruitments.

After my B.Com., I took the UPSC exam twice but couldn't clear it. I cleared the UGC-NET in 2023. I am currently doing an M.A. in Public Administration and a Diploma in Labour Law through correspondence. I want a career that will allow me to balance my preparation for the UPSC exams and support myself. Lakshmi

Dear Lakshmi,

Why don't you try teaching, tutoring or part-time administrative roles that provide a steady income and allow time to prepare for the UPSC exams? As you progress in your preparation, you can re-evaluate and potentially transition to a career that aligns with your Public Administration and Labour Law qualifications.

Leverage your qualifications for immediate income and flexibility. You could be contract or guest faculty in colleges with your UGC-NET qualification. These roles offer flexible hours and can provide a decent income. You can also consider coaching institutes for UPSC exams, or for commerce and public administration.

Consider freelance content writing or creation for educational websites, online learning platforms, or publishing houses or platforms like Upwork or Fiverr. Part-time data entry or administrative roles usually have fixed hours but provide a steady income with potentially less demanding mental effort. Once you complete your Diploma in Labour Law, you could also conduct small paid workshops or seminars for small businesses or individuals on basic labour laws.

I am from Kashmir. I have a B.Sc. (Hons) and M.Sc. Physics, and am doing a B.Ed. I wish to do my Ph.D. at a foreign university while also maintaining a professional career. How can I do this? Musabiah

Dear Musabiah,

Do you want to do a Ph.D. as distance learning from a foreign university or move abroad to study? Either way, research and identify universities in countries that interest you and understand the structure of their programmes. What is the time commitment? Are there any mandatory on-campus residencies? What is the mode of communication with faculty? Evaluate the programme reputation and faculty and check eligibility requirements and admission criteria. Once you shortlist the programme, identify professors whose research interest aligns with yours and who will support your ideas.

What about funding? If you plan to self-fund through a career, then a part-time or online Ph.D. may be more feasible. Check for scholarships for international students on FindAPhD.com and university websites. Your employer may sponsor a part of your research especially if it aligns with the company's interests.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

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Prabhu Aggarwal

Green gains

How student-run ESG funds teach sustainable investing

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

In business school, reading Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) case studies may introduce the concepts, but it does not replicate the real-world pressures of active investing. In today's classrooms, however, students are no longer passive learners but active investors, taking the reins of student-managed ESG funds. At many MBA programmes, students are deciding whether to back a promising energy start-up despite its murky supply chain or divest from a once-stable company now facing climate-related lawsuits. Simulated through student-run ESG funds, these choices are making sustainable investing a lived experience rather than an abstract concept.

These initiatives immerse students in live decision-making with donor-backed capital or mock portfolios where every buy and sell carries reputational stakes. Students are placed squarely at the intersection of ethics, analytics, and risk, resulting in an education that's high-stakes while being hands-on at the same time.

Experiential learning

Starting out as extracurricular CSR clubs, experiential ESG has matured into a cornerstone of business education. A decade ago, sustainable investing was often a single elective or a guest lecture within traditional finance modules. Today, the process of building and managing ESG portfolios that rival professional standards is undertaken by entire cohorts. It reflects both corporate priorities and growing student demand. Programmes like NYU's Impact Investment Fund entrust students with actual donor capital and allow them to vet opportunities, perform due diligence, and track long-term performance. Competitions like the Turner Impact Portfolio Challenge have added a dynamic, competitive edge to ESG literacy.

At the heart of these initiatives is a simple but powerful idea: learning by doing. MBA cohorts typically begin by allocating a simulated or real portfolio across sectors. They then apply ESG ratings from agencies such as MSCI and Sustainalytics. Thorough stakeholder mapping and an understanding of corporate net-zero targets is required for each investment decision. Regular reviews mimic real-world portfolio management, where teams must rebalance holdings in response to market shifts and ESG controversies. Faculty advisors push them to defend positions, manage compliance considerations, and consider risk-adjusted returns. Such immersive setups simulate the complex tensions between profit, ethics, and long-term impact.

Informal incubators

The results can be seen beyond the classroom. Many studies have reported improved job prospects for students involved in such programmes. The ripple effects also move into industry and society. Student-run funds influence asset managers and even corporate boards as their visibility increases. Companies are increasingly aware that tomorrow's leaders – trained through these ESG initiatives – will demand higher transparency and responsibility. These funds also serve as informal incubators for innovative ESG strategies, which often find their way into mainstream investment frameworks.

The demonstrated success of student-run ESG funds shows that immersive learning can close the divide between theory and practice in powerful ways. But these programmes must scale – becoming more accessible across campuses and integrating interdisciplinary expertise from climate science to ethics – to truly prepare leaders for a decarbonising world. As ESG investing becomes more sophisticated, so too must the curricula that shape its stewards. The next frontier is clear: to empower every MBA student to understand sustainable finance and drive it forward with confidence, precision, and purpose.

The writer is Dean at Badruka School of Management (BSM), Hyderabad.

Speak up

Language learning must move beyond test-based preparation towards immersive engagement

Kunal Malik

Mastering a language involves more than just learning vocabulary or being good at grammar exercises. It is about confidently navigating dynamic conversations, understanding cultural nuances, and expressing thoughts in real-time. Yet, for many English learners, proficiency on paper doesn't translate to fluency in practice, despite standardised assessments that certify competence.

Unexpected shifts

Traditional language tests evaluate distinct linguistic components: reading comprehension, listening accuracy, structured writing, and controlled speaking tasks. However, these assessments often fail to replicate the unpredictability of live communication, which involve unexpected shifts in tone, real-time adjustments, and the ability to manage misunderstandings. For instance, a test may require a candidate to deliver a pre-rehearsed response to a prompt, but it doesn't measure their ability to navigate a sudden shift in topic or adjust their language to match social context.

Even proficient speakers may hesitate in unscripted conversations, largely due to psychological obstacles. The fear of making mistakes discourages learners from speaking openly. Obsession with grammar rather than following natural speech patterns leads to self-consciousness, and performance pressure in social or professional settings heightens anxiety.

Overcoming these challenges requires the creation of conversation settings that encourage learners to navigate unpredictability without the fear of failure. Language learning must shift from accuracy-focused evaluation to resilience-building exercises that help build confidence.

Immersive practice

Bridging the gap between structured learning and confident speaking requires immersive practice in realistic environments.

Scenario-based simulations offer a practical approach, allowing learners to engage in everyday interactions within controlled settings. Instead of rehearsing isolated phrases, they participate in exercises that mimic real-world situations, such as ordering food at a restaurant, negotiating deadlines at work, or handling customer inquiries. This allows them to develop instincts to manage conversations in diverse contexts, navigate unexpected shifts, respond spontaneously, and build resilience in high-pressure situations.

Independent practice is valuable but structured coaching accelerates the transition from proficiency to practical fluency. Hybrid digital platforms combine immersive simulations with expert-led instruction, creating a well-rounded approach to language learning. AI-powered language tools analyse speech patterns, suggest refinements, and provide real-time corrections, helping learners fine-tune their delivery.

Live feedback

Live coaching further enhances this process, offering direct feedback, contextual adjustments, and interactive discussions. Small-group sessions provide learners with opportunities to practise conversations in supportive settings, reducing the fear of judgment and encouraging natural dialogue. By integrating adaptive technology with human-led guidance, learners develop both technical accuracy and communicative ease.

Moving beyond test-based preparation toward immersive engagement transforms language learning into a dynamic process. By prioritising confidence over perfection, learners cultivate the ability to built true fluency, which emerges not from tests but from dynamic engagement in unpredictable, real-world interactions.

The writer is the founder of PlanetSpark, an ed-tech company.

FUTURE PERFECT

Targeted treatments

Aridni Shah, co-founder and CEO of immunitoAI, on using GenAI to create novel therapeutic antibodies

FUTURE PERFECT
Ananya Ganapathy

The next in the series featuring conversations with entrepreneurs, technologists and researchers about emerging technologies and what students need to know about these fields.

What do you do?

I am the co-founder and CEO of immunitoAI, a generative AI platform that can create novel therapeutic antibodies entirely from scratch. It is built to be universal so that once trained, it does not need any re-training or finetuning for each target. The same platform can create antibodies for diverse diseases from viral to cancer to autoimmune disorders.

Why is your work important?

Antibodies have great potential for targeted therapy, ensuring that diseases are treated without causing major side-effects. However, traditional methods on antibody discovery rely heavily on animals, causing not just ethical concerns but also challenges of inefficiency, long timelines and, overall, a poor success rate. Therefore, we have developed an AI-based platform that can generate antibodies more efficiently to increase the success rates of approval for drug purposes and ensure that we have better therapies for many unmet medical needs.

What is exciting about your work?

Adoption of AI in the biotech and pharma industries is relatively recent. There are many challenges that need to be overcome before we start seeing the translation of AI into real-world biology. This requires innovation. Moreover, rapid innovation in AI/ML has made it possible to solve complex problems in Biology, which were considered to be impossible to solve in the past. All this makes our journey extremely exciting.

Any experiences in college that led you to become an entrepreneur?

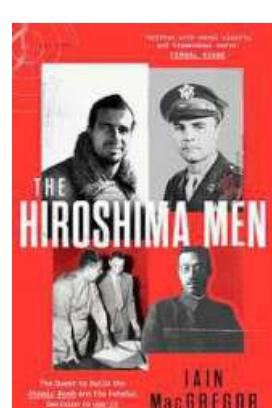I pursued a Bachelor's degree in Biomedical Sciences from Acharya Narendra Dev College, University of Delhi, where I was exposed to translational research. It made me realise that I loved problem-solving, especially relating to human diseases. I was selected for the Integrated PhD programme at NCBS in Bengaluru where the problems I went after were much larger. The greater the challenge, the more the excitement. Towards the end of my PhD, I decided to quit academia and become an entrepreneur to pursue my passion of solving difficult challenges in healthcare.

What should students specifically know about your field?

First, there are many challenges yet to be solved. But it is a tough journey. Second, becoming an entrepreneur or joining a VC as a subject-matter expert is definitely a career path that students should think about and actively pursue. There is a dearth of both and, in the start-up world, we always talk about the need for more students to seriously consider them as a career, especially in biotech.

The writer is an avid follower of emerging technologies and their applications.

Minal Somany

When people hear the word "ceramics", they often picture elegant tiles or intricate pottery. What they may not immediately see is the incredible world behind it: the convergence of design, technology, and craftsmanship. Ceramics are everywhere, from our homes and hospitals to art studios to aerospace labs.

In India, the ceramics industry is seeing a quiet transformation. Rapid urbanisation, growing design consciousness, and heightened focus on sustainability are reshaping the way people build, live, and express themselves. Tiles have moved from function to fashion; from being a finishing touch to becoming the starting point of design thinking. That's why the future of ceramics lies not merely in material innovation but also in the minds that shape its aesthetics.

Education

In the tile and ceramics sector, it all begins with design. Before a slab of clay meets a kiln, a designer imagines how it should look, feel, and live within a space: whether it's a matte finish or a glossy surface. If you're drawn to ceramics, your first step could well be a degree in design. Institutes like the National Institute of Design (NID) offer specialised undergraduate and postgraduate courses such as Bachelor of Design (B.Des) or Master of Design (M.Des) in Ceramics and Glass Design that explore everything from material science to surface ornamentation. Courses in Furniture and Interior Design also intersect with ceramics, helping designers understand how surfaces interact with spaces, and how to create cohesive visual narratives.

Beyond design, the ceramic industry is deeply rooted in material innovation. For those more inclined towards Science and Engineering, there are strong academic pathways. Several polytechnics and the Indian Institute of Ceramics offer short-term diplomas and certifications in ceramic technology for those seeking hands-

From function to fashion

The future of the ceramics industry lies not merely in material innovation but also in the minds that shape its aesthetics.

on experience in manufacturing and production. At the undergraduate level, B.Tech in Ceramic Engineering, B.Sc in Ceramic Technology, and even Materials Science provide a solid technical foundation. Institutes such as IIT-BHU, NIT Rourkela, and CGCRI Kolkata offer programmes in this field.

For those aiming for research, quality control, or global roles, postgraduate degrees like M.Tech or M.Sc in Ceramics or Advanced Materials open up significant opportunities. Many pursue Ph.D.s or collaborate with international research centres to explore fields like nanotechnology and smart surfaces.

Skills

Understanding how materials behave and how they react to heat, pressure, or environmental change is key. A blend of analytical ability and creative vision helps professionals innovate meaningfully. Designers and engineers today work with digital printing, surface texture development, AI-assisted modelling, and even 3D printing. So, digital proficiency, along with a strong grasp of material behaviour, is increasingly important. Adaptability, collaboration, visual storytelling, and, above all, empathy, are also distinguishing elements.

Opportunities

Designers can specialise in tile aesthetics, sanitaryware, bathware, or even interior styling. Engineers and technologists find roles in production, R&D, quality assurance, and advanced material design. Creative professionals enter the world of branding, consumer experience, and digital design. Those who enjoy working with people can thrive in sales and marketing. The demand for professionals is not limited to India. Countries like Italy, Spain, Germany, Japan, and the U.S. are global hubs for ceramic innovation.

Sustainability is rewriting the industry's playbook. Architects and designers are pushing for formats that reduce wastage and textures that draw from Nature. From antibacterial coatings to water-repellent surfaces, innovation is moving fast. At the same time, there's a resurgence in craftsmanship. We're seeing a return to textures, imperfections, and earthy palettes.

So, if you're someone who dreams in shapes and colours, who's curious about how things are made, who believes in the intersection of tradition and technology, then ceramics has a space for you.

The writer is the Brand Custodian of Somany Ceramics.

Connect with the real world

How the hospitality curriculum should be reshaped to include practical insights

Sukhbir Singh

Post-COVID 19, the hospitality industry has faced significant setbacks, leading to a critical talent shortage and low enrollments in hospitality institutes. While traditional hospitality education emphasised operational efficiency, guest satisfaction, and culinary expertise, there is a pressing need to rethink how we train the next generation of professionals.

To address current challenges in the industry, it is essential to reintroduce industry-relevant and timely subjects and invite heads of departments and subject matter experts as guest lecturers to share critical and non-negotiable aspects, which will allow students to connect their curriculum to the actual industry. Here are a few other crucial aspects that hospitality institutes must pay attention to.

Mastering communication: Hospitality is a PE-

OPLE business. We deal with people all the time; whether they are guests, the travel intermediaries or our own staff. Students need to understand and embrace the multiple facets of communication such as proper vocabulary, tonality, and body language and have a nuanced understanding of articulation, modulation and emphatic speech capability.

Consumer psychology: Guests have expectations and behave different-ly. Students need to understand guest behaviour and expectations. This is where industry experts are important as they will offer realistic and relevant information. Students must learn to anticipate, empathise and deliver. Given the diverse nature of generations that the industry caters to, this is extremely important.

Brand storytelling: A hotel is more than just a building. It is a brand with a story. To help students clearly communicate the ethos and brand identity, institutes must explain the marketplace reality and industry expectations and offer familiarisation programmes with various brands. This will also help students understand where they fit and make it easier for hotels to hire those who resonate with their expectations.

Beyond core operations: While the core of hospitality is to offer a good night's sleep in a safe environment and great culinary experience, there are other important areas such as sales and marketing, revenue management, and human capital management. Most institutes offer industrial training in the four core operational departments but an understanding of other allied areas of operation will help students get an overall perspective of the industry as a whole.

Sustainable and ethical luxury: This industry is one of the largest consumers of resources such as water, food, electricity, diesel and gas. Sustainability and ethical hospitality is now a key performance matrix and integrating this aspect into the core curriculum will prepare students to innovate and reduce environmental impact.

Culinary legacy: Rigorous academic training must be paired with field trips to heritage culinary hubs or hotels during unique food promotions to get insights into niche of offerings and learn from master chefs. With new generation areas such as molecular gastronomy, veganism, plant-based proteins and so on coming up, the new generation of chefs have to understand and deliver on demand to a clientele that is willing to pay for and indulge in new experiences.

The future of the hospitality industry rests on how effectively we prepare the next generation of hoteliers. Let's bring industry leaders into classrooms, enrich curriculums with practical insights, and equip students with the skills, values, and vision required to lead with confidence and compassion. It is time to reshape hospitality education to reflect the dynamic needs of the real world.

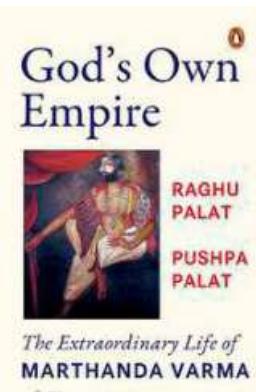*The writer is the General Manager, Novotel Hyderabad Airport.*

ON THE SHELF

■ **The Hiroshima Men**
On August 6, 1945, the Japanese port city of Hiroshima was struck by the world's first atomic bomb, destroying large swathes of the city and instantly killing tens of thousands. The world would never be the same again. *The Hiroshima Men* recounts the decade-long journey towards this first atomic attack. It charts the race for nuclear technology before and during World War II through the experiences of General Leslie Groves, leader of the Manhattan Project alongside Robert Oppenheimer; Army Air Force bomber pilot Colonel Paul Tibbets II; Senkichi Awaya, mayor of Hiroshima; and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist John Hersey, who detailed the devastation and the dangers posed by radiation poisoning.
Author: Iain MacGregor
Publisher: Hachette
Price: ₹799

■ **God's Own Empire**
Marthanda Varma secured his empire through military conquest and political cunning and laid the foundations for the prosperity that Kerala would enjoy. But, at the height of his power, he surrendered his entire kingdom to Lord Padmanabhaswamy of Thiruvananthapuram and ruled as custodian of a divine empire. *God's Own Empire* tells the story of this king through information gleaned from palace records, temple documents and Dutch archives.
Authors: Raghu and Pushpa Palat
Publisher: Penguin
Price: ₹499