

## India's ban on TikTok deprives the country of a favorite pastime

In India, TikTok looks like a **cornucopia** of bright and busy nonsense: an endless, blooming, buzzing confusion of shaky videos and cheap special effects, dispensed free of charge in 15-second doses. But time spent on the app — or on its Chinese-owned peers, all of them abruptly blocked by the government on June 29th — had a way of leading curious users far from the big cities and celebrities that typically define Indian pop culture.

cornucopia 丰饶的象征

Not just TikTok, but also Helo, Likee and Bigo Live, were virtual highways to places no actual highways serve, in small-town and rural India. They revealed a part of the country that is changing rapidly.

TikTok had about 1.2m content creators and 120m monthly viewers. A striking proportion of the creators hailed from marginalised groups. A **scrawny** cloth-seller from a small city could start an overnight dance sensation; rural grannies taught cooking and a girl built a fanbase while lip-synching to a rap in Hmar, a language spoken in the sparsely populated north-east.

scrawny 骨瘦如柴的

Amit Varma, a podcaster from Mumbai who ran an online course about TikTok, puts the app's success down to timing. It arrived in 2017, just after Reliance Industries had launched Jio, a 4G telecoms operation which radically reduced the cost of mobile data.

"This is not content made by **clueless** elites," Mr Varma says. "In Bollywood a few big shots run the whole thing. But they have outdated ideas about what people want." What they really want, if TikTok's algorithms had it right, is weirder, homelier and more varied material than they could find on YouTube, Instagram or any of the English-first apps favoured by wealthy urbanites.

clueless 愚蠢的; 无知的