

THE OPINION

Children can change the world.

Gitanjali Rao

Children who changed the world.

-Adyasha Aparajita



At an age when most teenagers are figuring out what they want to be, Gitanjali Rao was already making a difference.

Poised beyond her years, with a spark of curiosity, immense eagerness to help others and make the world a better place, she became TIME's first-ever Kid of the Year after inventing Tethys; a device that helps detect lead in drinking water at faster and more affordable rates than existing traditional methods.

Of American-Indian descent, Gitanjali Rao was born to Ram and Bharati Rao, both Indian-born engineers living in the States, who consistently encouraged her interest in science by finding articles, arranging meetings with professors, and helping her access labs for experiments. She grew up in a household that truly treasured science, as seen when, at just four years old, she received a science kit from her uncle which she was determined to



- I. In 2014, the American city of Flint, switched its water supply from Detroit's system to the Flint River as a cost-saving measure. Due to this, the amount of lead in drinking water increased by an alarming rate so much that the tap water was found to be yellow to reddish brown in colour. It wasn't until studies revealed the significantly increased lead levels in children's blood that the crisis gained national attention. At the age of 11, Rao had set her goal on helping the children of her age to access clean drinking water.

She invented a device called "Tethys" named after the Greek goddess of fresh water to detect lead in drinking water. To create Tethys she worked through a lot of different versions and finally settled on a 3D printed, fully wired device. In order to test for lead in the water using Tethys, she attached a disposable lead sensor cartridge specially treated with chloride ions. If the water has lead, it sticks to the chloride ions and causes resistance to the flow of current. The more the

complete in a single day. This she recalls was most definitely a turning point in her life.

Innovation requires empathy. To relate with high end problems and be empathetic enough at such a young age is no ordinary feat. While many aspire to be in Rao's place, not just anyone can look beyond the classroom curriculum, invest time and solve real-life world problems. It's the urge to do something for the betterment of humankind that sets Rao apart from other kids her age.

resistance, the more lead. To display the results, she created an app which connected the device to a mobile phone using Bluetooth, where one could see whether the drinking water is either safe, slightly contaminated or critical.

Gitanjali Rao stands as a reflection of who the world's greatest minds were in their childhood — intelligent, motivated, and willing to work for the world. One of the most lasting things anyone ever told her, came from her second-grade teacher: "You're going to change the world." Today, Gitanjali Rao isn't just hoping to change the world; she is quite evidently doing it.

Rao has been recognized as Forbes "30 Under 30 in Science," TIME's "Top Young Innovator," and TIME's first ever "Kid of the Year" for her innovations and STEM work.

Outside of STEM and innovation, Rao enjoys virtual fencing primarily using pillows as her opponents, going on bike rides to get fresh air after being cooped up in labs, traveling to different counties, baking and her newly added hobby of practicing calligraphy.

Other noteworthy activities of Rao include developing two other apps: Epione, to diagnose early opioid addiction, and Kindly, designed to detect and prevent cyberbullying.

Rao currently pursues a double major in bioengineering and business management at MIT. She is also an advocate of human rights promotion through STEM and innovation. The core of Rao's research remains spreading kindness while making technological advancements.

Gitanjali Rao is proof that children can change the world- not tomorrow, but today.



Patriarchy: A double edged sword.

A system that limits all, not just women
-Amrita Dash

Patriarchy - man's best gift to women. Patriarchy's main purpose is to ensure that every woman in the world knows the taste of discrimination, isn't it so kind of the patriarchy to make sure we aren't left out? Picture it like this, patriarchy is that one friend that stays behind when you stop to tie your shoelaces but the moment you try to get up, it pushes you down, points a finger in your face and laughs at you. That's the patriarchy for you and it does not discriminate on the basis of gender.

A system that's designed to give men all the power doesn't discriminate on the basis of gender? You must think that I've completely lost my mind. Truth be told, patriarchy harms everyone involved in its practices. By definition, a patriarchal society is one in which the father or eldest male is the head of the family, meaning that women are often excluded from holding any sort of power. Sounds like men have all the power, right? Well, it's not quite the case.

In a patriarchy, not every man receives benefits, as only some men get the so-called joy of being in power. If you're a son, then you come second to your father and if you're the youngest son in the family then the chances of you ever having power in the family are slim to none. The patriarchy is more about control and control by nature is selective about who it wants to live with. The patriarchy also harms men by disconnecting them from their emotions and showcases seeking support as a sign of

weakness. A weak man? Scariest thing I've ever thought of. This notion is backed up by the oh so unpopular phrase "boys don't cry" because showing emotions as a young boy is a crime. How dare you as a son try to have proper emotional development? Maintaining strict gender roles is essentially what denies men the full range of human emotions as they are seen as protectors of the family and must remain aggressive to maintain strict control. The emotional aspect may also be one way to exploit working class men as they do not allow themselves to feel the burden of being exploited. So, what happens when half the population is discouraged from getting into their feelings? The result is loneliness and disconnection. And who bears the consequences of that? Women, children, families, everyone.

Moreover, the inability to allow men to be emotional may also be the reason why many believe that raising sons is easier than raising daughters, further harming the developmental

stages of both genders. Daughters often come to be seen as emotional beings who are fragile and need to be protected by their brothers, who must be devoid of all emotion. The only reason why sons are deemed as "easier to raise" is because sons are monitored not nurtured. In simple terms, sons aren't being raised, they're simply being watched to ensure that they're safe from any physical harm but they're

psychologically abandoned.

So, if patriarchy affects not only women but also men and children, how do you dismantle it? Is feminism the answer or Is letting our sons cry the best way to undo its harmful practices? The answer is both. Feminism challenges the power imbalance and being emotionally open helps undo all the psychological damage. Patriarchy's biggest fears include a crying boy and a strong girl. Funny, isn't it?

The very system that exists to oppress women may just be encouraging their empowerment. The patriarchy might just be a girl's girl secretly.



Are VIP Carcades more important than civilians?

-Adidev Panigrahi

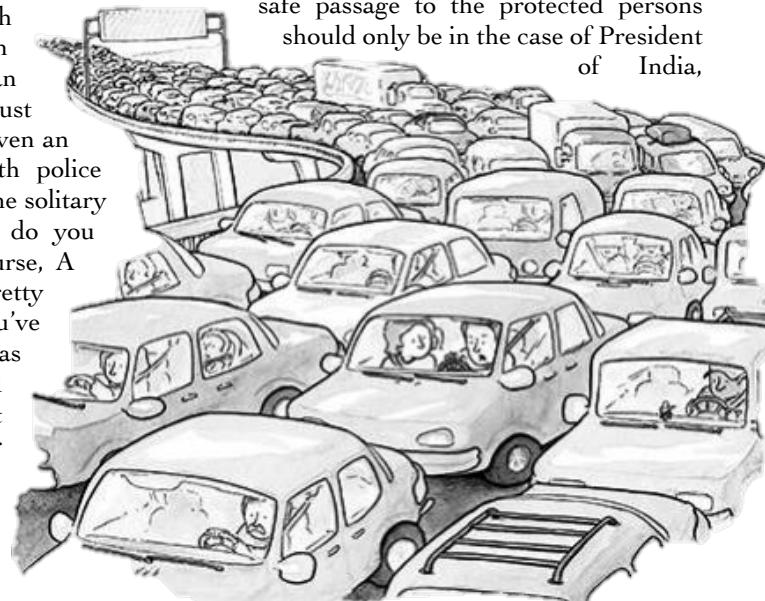
I sat in my car, just a few meters away from the traffic post, highly annoyed at the lights that were simply blinking yellow. Three whole lanes of the square were filled with vehicles as far as the eye could see, in fact, in one of the lanes was an ambulance with wailing sirens just waiting idly, not being able to move even an inch, and the footpaths - lined with police officers every five meters or so. But one solitary lane was empty, completely empty, do you know what that meant? Well, of course, A Minister is visiting the area! I am pretty sure that in your day to day life you've encountered this situation many times as well, wondering - "why the hell should my daily commute be disrupted just because someone who's in power because of people like me is in the vicinity" and to that my answer is - I don't know.

On the 24th of March 2025, the convoy of 2 Ministers was attacked in Mayurbhanj. Agitated Villagers hurled stones at the convoy, claiming that the ministers had not visited their village to assess the damage caused by the hailstorm. Neither of the officials was harmed during this, but a police constable suffered a head injury and was admitted to the Bangiriposi CHC. Now, why am I saying this? Well, maybe this is the reason that we have the stringent safety protocol: to protect the people who serve us and to ensure efficient and flawless

government work, but I don't know. (For a second, let's forget that the police constable was injured.)

This brings me to my next question: What really is the protocol?

According to the guidelines laid by the Ministry of Home Affairs – stoppage of traffic for giving safe passage to the protected persons should only be in the case of President of India,



the Vice-President of India, the Prime Minister of India and the visiting foreign dignitaries who are given President's/PM level security cover. In all other cases, the traffic should not be stopped. Wait...So, the regular traffic halts that we experience in our towns, are they even legal? – I don't know.

In 2022, the then chief minister of Maharashtra issued strict instructions, denouncing special protocol for his convoy to avoid traffic

congestion and distress for the common man on the roads. He instructed the top cops of Maharashtra and the Mumbai Police to withdraw the 'special protocol' for his convoy's movement. Why am I saying this? – I don't know.

All I am trying to ask is this entire nuisance created by these traffic halts really worth it? Is the whole ruckus created by the constant honking of vehicles worth it? Is the time of the regular civilian not as important as the VIPs or ministers?

In this fast-paced world (probably a line you've read almost a million times till now), TIME is the most priceless possession that one has (Another line you've probably heard a million times as well.) So, is it fair to consider one person's time more valuable than the other? Is the time of a regular construction site worker not as important as the time of an MLA? Well, maybe we need to prioritise the work of the leaders of our country so that we can live peacefully. But so many times we've seen the traffic halts happen, just so that the leaders can go to visit a temple or inaugurate a school. But then again with the increasing violence and hostility, it is more important than ever to ensure the safety of our leaders. So, **are VIP Carcades more important than civilians?**

Well, that's for you to answer.



Till Death Do Us Part

A lack of a sleep schedule, a bit of pretending everything's fine, a bucket full of insecurities and constant pressure, with a lot of fun, and there you have it: a teenager.

Boy, does being a teen suck. Do you ever find yourself missing those good ol' days, when life was just simpler? (2019 should just about do it.) Back then you were never right or wrong, you just were. You used to think that getting older would shrink all your fears, but now you're insecure, and you care about what people think. None of us ever really talk about it, we just silently live with it. That uninvited voice in our heads which shows up everytime we think of doing something. *What if you're not good enough?* And slowly, that voice establishes itself and it grows louder and louder until you anymore.

The Mirror

The first place you start experiencing this "insecurity" is in the mirror. You look at your face, only to come up with a list of flaws. A tiny pimple becomes a crisis. Your outfit doesn't seem to match your face, even your social media filters start turning against you. And over time, it becomes harder to separate your real, beautiful self from the idealistic "perfect" version of yourself you feel like you have to be. The short-lasting dopamine burst of external validation makes you forget everything else. And that mirror you stand in front of becomes your worst enemy.

The Report Card

As students, if there is perhaps one thing we all can relate to, it's the absolute dread before an exam. It doesn't matter if you have crammed the entire book into your head or studied every hour for a month. The minute you sit down for the test, there is that familiar anxiety in your head, sometimes you can overcome those ghosts and can walk back out of the hall with a breath of relief, other times, you get stuck in your own head.

And then there's the number game — marks, ranks, cut-offs. A good grade often gets brushed aside under the stress of another exam, but a bad one? It feels like your whole future gave up on you, because of that one piece of paper that somehow became the blueprint of your worth. The biggest lie ever told was that academic pressure comes from parents and teachers — most of the times, it comes from within.

The Crowd

And now perhaps the one thing everyone has gone through in their school lives. I personally, used to go through it every day — the pressure of fitting in, the biggest obsession of any student's life. We want to be cool. We want to belong. We want to be validated. So we try. We laugh a little too loud at some jokes. We change ourselves just so that someone can say, "You're one of us." But even among friends, you can still feel alone. Social insecurity doesn't make you scream, it makes you shrink. And these insecurities often throw us down the FOMO rabbit hole. We want to fit in so bad, we don't fit in with ourselves anymore.

But in the end, all of these perspectives, all of these stories — your stories, they all end the same way. You question your orth, you cry. You think you're not pretty, you cry. You think you're not

smart, you cry. You think you're not up to those unreal standards of yours, you guessed it, you cry.

And about an hour of crying later, you feel bad for having these insecurities. You promise to yourself you'll do better. But three weeks later, it's 3AM, and you're listening to "Creep" by Radiohead and drift off in that same cycle. Well my friend, I want you to listen(well, read) this next part carefully. We've all been there. It's not your fault. We all carry doubts, we're all afraid. And here's the part you've never heard, if anything constantly makes you feel smaller, it doesn't have the right to be a part of your life. Despite popular belief, growth is not just overcoming your challenges. Sometimes it also includes leaving your comfort zone and choosing self-respect over self-doubt. You won't magically stop having insecurities, but you can learn to love yourself. It isn't perfect, nor does it feel natural, but you have to do it, if not for you, then for that kid who wanted to walk on the moon and sing their heart out without a care in the world.

Our insecurities don't have to stay with us *till our death do us part*. No, sometimes the only way out of a toxic relationship is by slamming that door shut and getting outta there. It isn't easy, but it is the only way to find yourself again. And for the next time they show up, be confident in yourself, because the voice isn't you anymore - it's just wearing your face.

Through everyone's eyes but my own,
Anonymous



The Windowsill.

Book Reviews from a middle schooler.



A Good Girl's Guide to Murder

Pippa Fitz-Amobi, a high school student, is introduced in this debut novel. For her final research paper, she chooses to reinvestigate a closed murder case. As Pip discovers buried facts and comes to terms with the possibility that the true killer may still be out there, what starts off as a logical project quickly transforms into a dangerous search for the truth. The novel is praised for its complex narrative, compelling characters, and original structure, which includes Pip's investigative notes.

Good Girl, Bad Blood

In the sequel, Pip, traumatized by her last case, puts her investigative days behind her and starts her own true crime podcast. When a friend's brother disappears, Pip gets entangled in yet another mystery. Pip's reputation and her natural sense of justice force her to investigate the case even if she is determined to stop. In addition to examining the complex nature of truth and the consequences of following it, this book deepens Pip's character.

As Good As Dead

Pip is stalked in the last episode, which takes a darker turn and forces her to face the psychological effects of her earlier research. Pip is also mortified by how her last case ended. Now, she must determine how far she is prepared to go in order to defend herself and investigate this case on her own when the police refuse to investigate. Save herself physically to save herself mentally. If she doesn't solve this case in time, this time, she'll be the dead one. With this pressure, the boundaries between right and wrong become increasingly hazy. This book examines the emotional impact that seeking justice may have, as well as that sometimes, tough choices need to be made.



What Ever Happened to the Monkey?

A tale of growing up.

-Aadesh Mohanty

Today, as I write my last Class Ten board examination, I glance around the room. Many of my friends—some I would lose touch with, a few would drift apart, and others would grow distant. As the clock struck twelve-thirty, I felt a fleeting anxiety. The board exams were over. The Board Exams. And along with them, many friendships I could've kindled.

How does the sun glaze on water? Today, the clouds draped the sky. The sun rested, peeking out occasionally. It was a grey morning. The wind briskly flew across the street. The calm was slowly turning chaotic. I could see the lady picking flowers discreetly from a garden. The men swept across the road in their bikes. The fishmonger lay his shop. One could breathe again. I remember hiding in the little abyss between two sofas. It was simpler back then—when we didn't worry about what we wore, or how courteous our words were. When the skies were bluer, and the sun was brighter. When every day started in a rush, yet we had all the time in the world. When Aai used to see me off at the bus stop. I miss the way she used to hold my hand, her wrinkling firm hands holding me. Often it angered me, the constant attention and pampering. Somehow, I still remember how you would wipe my face with your sari. Days were shorter back then, almost ending before you could tell me whatever happened to the monkey.

It's almost the same routine. Except it's not the same anymore. Now I worry if the shirt compliments my pants, if I spoke out of turn. The skies aren't as blue as they used to be. The sun is faintly extinguishing. Evenings are soothing now. You don't see me off at the bus stop anymore. Although childish, I yearn to know what ever happened to the monkey in your stories. I still wake up and tend to being a student. I forget to drink water somedays. I forget to comb my hair. How I wish you would still hold my hand when I am afraid.

These days I see myself turning into something I always told myself I wouldn't. My heart is reluctant to accept the reality that I never fitted in. I have become wrenched. I have no friend circle. I never thought I would write the former statement, especially on print—but it is what it is. I am absolutely disgusted by the idea of prying my thoughts, scarring my memories—if anything remained. Can I just exemplify the beauty of the sun poking my limpid soul? I lack the vigour to confront my loneliness. It's not like I don't have people I can talk to—I just don't have the right ones. I almost feel like Anne Frank. Does it ever feel like you are drowning? All the voices faintly muffle and in no time, you are left with silence. Perhaps it is just your soul that has withered from all your feelings. Why does it occur in a momentary realization? What are the triggers of my momentary depression? I miss not the people, not the places but missing to be part of them. I want to be invited to birthday parties, I want to have friends I can rant to.

You once knew everything about them—now they're just strangers. Strangers who once carried your deepest sorrows and greatest joys. Losing a friend has called for this scandalous

thought. You knew everything about them but now they are just strangers. Strangers who once knew your deepest sorrow and your greatest joy. Now they emerge as memories that seep across your system. Ruining every effort you have made not to be sad about their departure.

Rumi has said this beautifully,

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some
momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.

He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

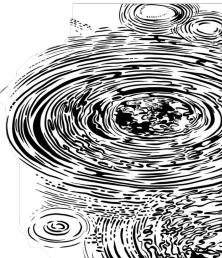
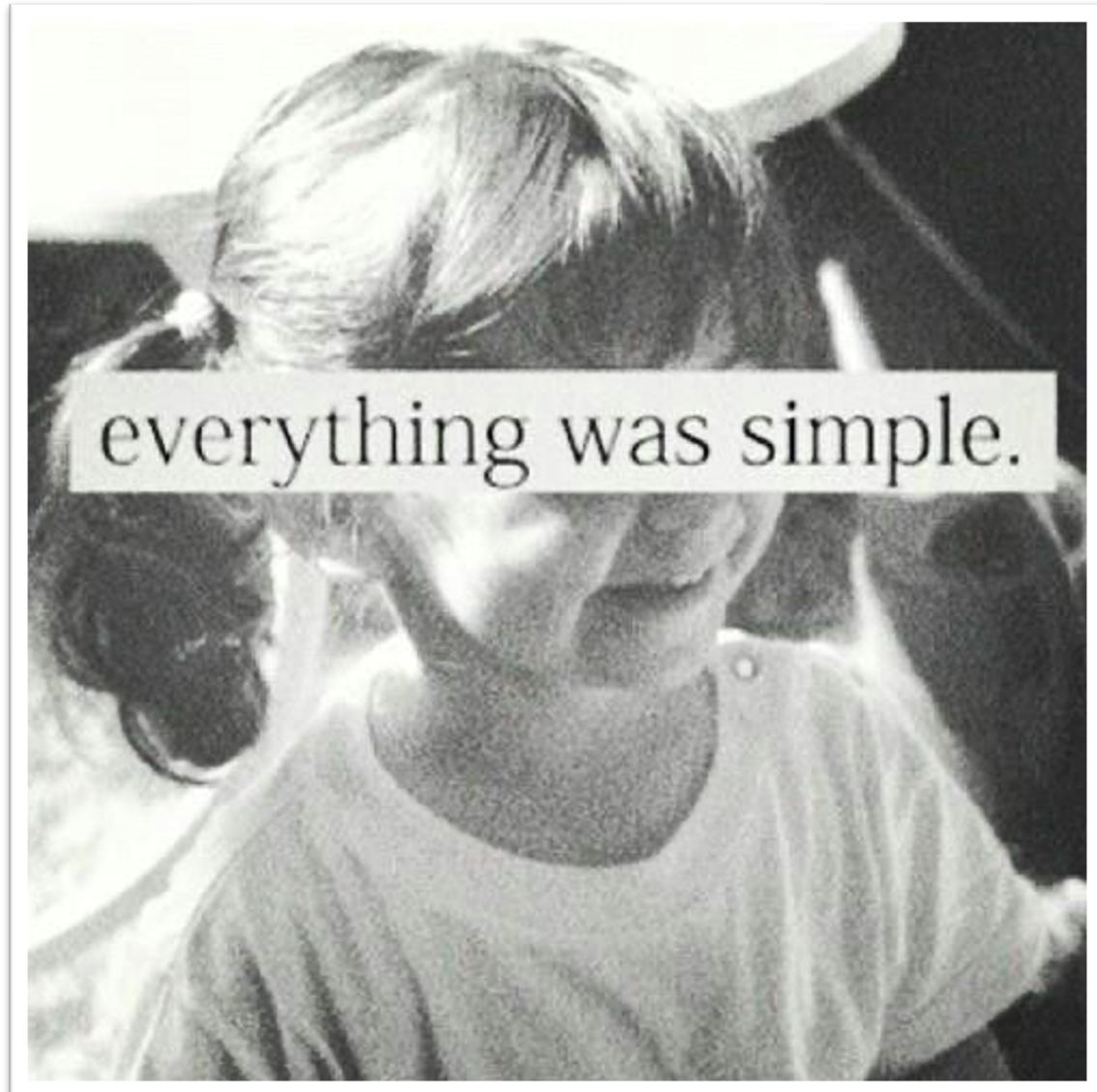
Maybe they were my crowd of sorrows, they did a pretty good job at sweeping my house empty of its furniture. Maybe I was at fault for not treating them honourably enough.



The Opinion

But how did life become so mundane? Why aren't black holes as fascinating as they used to be? Why doesn't Doraemon feel the same anymore? I always wonder if we lost ourselves to time. Maybe we outgrow our fetishes too soon, we turned into irreversible versions of ourselves. I am tired of this uncertainty. Do you ever feel as if your soul is stirring? Is it because you are reminded of the good old days? Can you ever fit into a group or is it just petty belonging. Soon we lose so much that it doesn't matter how you are anymore. It doesn't matter if you liked the same book you did a year back. It really doesn't matter if you somehow lost touch with people because in the end. We are losing ourselves to time. Parts and pieces that shape our personality- lost forever. This reality dawns on you in the end. You become devoted to your career, and you don't talk as often. You become invisible. You slowly start disappearing from your group photographs and now people don't force you or insist that you come to their parties. You have changed my friend. We all have.

With what little is left of love,



Chasing uniform dreams in an asymmetric world

an overwhelming burn over a
petty sun tan.

- Prachi Bismaya

Failures are another name for false hopes. Hopes that were never meant to occur. It just happens that you stumble upon the bedrock, supporting the crust, so you are fooled into thinking that the earth, success, was nearby. But life is not so gentle. It is more of a gruelling burn than a fading sun tan. Brighter days might fade your tanned thoughts, but the scar of a failure stays with you forever.

A lady once told me, 'Time heals everything.' But with the passing time I have only seen my scars leave a lasting impact. She said failures make legends, but tell me, honestly, are you prepared to fail? Are you ready to start from the scratch? Are you ready to begin from the end that left you lonely, shivering, and devastated? Maybe not. But who knows what lies ahead of this. Perhaps another failure, waiting with a cruel eye. Can you change your way?

You ask me, who still fails every day to cut the cucumbers into equal shapes? The first slice of cucumber feels proud of its uniformity, but the third one is also envious as it could never have been born as the first. Is it a question of capability or persistent practice? What matters more is you failed. You drowned yourself in

the sharpness of the knife but could not see what was getting cut. You were grieving, but you forgot that your heart is grieving twice as much as you because you cut it deep with your grief and negativity.

See, the second piece of cucumber never understands the joy of uniformity or the resentment of not being alike. Are they supposed to be equal? How could it be possible? And now, the seven pieces of cucumber scream at you, to look beyond the sheet of obsessive overthinking and allow the burn from a failure, breathe a little relief. So, the cucumbers take 7 deep breaths:

1. Perhaps if you keep trying to get the evenness you will learn to accept the asymmetry.
2. Failure is not the antonym of success but the ladder to achieve it.
3. When you feel like taking a break, rest in the way.
4. Add up new hobbies and make a layer of interests that channelize your energy to avoid frustration.
5. To begin is to partially win.
6. You need to choose the direction while maintaining a steady speed.
7. Several days of consistency is better than one day of intense work.

Each breath makes you feel lighter. The hope that once brought you closer to the illusion of success,

is alive in your heart. Shift and adapt, design and redesign.

A small win deserves your attention and even the smallest of failures need a purpose, plan and action. It is through this cycle of incessant uniformity in asymmetry that you find yourself bearing those proud 'burns and tans' like badges of honour. The newest of cucumbers is waiting for you, so, promise yourself to start a flourishing new beginning.

