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Fake it till you stake it

LATE theoretical physiologist, cosmologist and author Stephen Hawking once said, "Success in creating effective AI [Artificial Intelligence] could be the greatest event in the history of our civilisation. Or the worst." The recent furore over deepfakes was a result of targeted celebrity fakes, starting with actress Rashmika Mandanna whose face was morphed onto a body of another woman wearing a dress with a plunging neckline; followed by Katrina Kaif's edited clips from her recent movie Tiger 3; Kajol's deepfake of Get ready with me, where she undresses herself. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi hasn't been spared either; here, a man looking exactly like him is involved in a garba performance leading to the Prime Minister recently raising a concern about the misuse of AI on public platforms. Amid the rise in contrasting opinions and advice platforms, three experts break down the technological terms, the extent of its misuse, the psychological impact on victims and caregivers, and possible precautionary measures.

Onus on intermediaries

Ritesh Bhatia, cyber-crime investigator and founder of V4WEB Cybersecurity, has been spreading awareness against deepfakes and deepnudes since 2018. He tells us that this is just the beginning. "Deepfakes and deepnudes have been around for a while. Take the recent [July earlier this year] AI scam that involved a man from Kerala, for instance, where his supposed childhood friend video-called him, they spoke about the good old days, and the man transferred ₹40,000 to him on request, only to later realise that it was a deepfake. Such cases are common and will rise. This is now being picked up more by the media because it involves these celebrities and, of course, more recently with the Prime Minister."

While he foresees deepfakes being used the most in defence and politics in the near future, he points out that it will also be a major concern with a generation that is warming up to a tech-savvy lifestyle. "Imagine if someone morphs my son's face and video-called my father to inform him that he is badly bruised. My father would believe him, and transfer any amount of money for treatment for who he thinks is his

As deepfakes continue to make headlines, we speak to experts to decode the unsettling technology, the risk it carries and possible preventions against it



The use of AI and deepfake videos is expected to increase; (right) Katrina Kaif, Rashmika Mandanna and Kajol have had deepfake videos made on them. **PICS COURTESY/INSTAGRAM; REPRESENTATION PIC**

grandson, but is actually an AI creation."

Spot the fake

So, how do we gauge the person (the video caller) to know if it's real and or a deepfake? Bhatia has a warning for all of us. "Many posts are currently doing the rounds on social media, where they suggest looking at the angles, edges and lighting, etc. It is not possible for the common man to tell the difference, especially during times

'Victims of deepfake scams often react in ways similar to people suffering from phobias' Nirali Bhatia

of emergency. Deepfakes are realistically made in a way that they will need an expert with the right training and the tools to verify." The sole way that he thinks one can steer clear of such scams is by asking personal questions.

"The first step is to not react. If it's your son or family, ask them what they ate last night, or what you talked about. Be particularly cautious in cases that involve money and remember to take



A moment from the viral deepfake video of Prime Minister Narendra Modi performing garba.

PIC COURTESY/TWITTER

on social media where the perpetrator sent her a picture in which her face was morphed on a blurred, nude body. They threatened to release her sex tape, and the moment they sent her the link, she did not open it. Instead of blocking them, she deleted the app. And now, she is traumatised and fearful of society. Her deleting the app [and not being able to use it again] is a case of phobia. This is similar to how a person with aqua phobia will react — a belief that they will drown if they step into water, despite it being irrational — or how people who are scared of spiders will spot one from miles away, and feel as though they're crawling all over their body."

Further, comparing cases where someone's real sex tapes or nude pictures are shared online, Bhatia tells us that the victim's recovery in such cases is more likely to be easier than the person who is a victim of deepfakes/nudes. "In the latter case, it's a question of 'Why me?' For those whose [real] sex tapes or nudes go viral, they might know that they were in some way responsible for it. They accept it. For them, the question is 'What next?'" She says, adding that the trauma is greater when the person becomes a victim due to no fault of their own. And that journey from why me to what next takes a long time.

But with the right kind of support and reaction, recovery can be quicker. "In most cases, even if you have one person who tells you they believe you and are unafraid to stand by you in public can make all the difference. These could be parents, caregivers or friends. The shock factor will be there. But in this case, and especially in a generation where we all understand so little about technology, always remember to give people you know the benefit of doubt. React calmly and don't be

'Deepfake cases are common and will rise. They are now being picked up by the media because it involves celebrities'

Ritesh Bhatia



afraid of seeking help, whether it's for the victim, the caregivers or friends," she advises.

Boredom maketh the bully

Despite frequent cases of misuse that Bhatia encounters, she is positive that technology can never be entirely bad. "Boredom is one of the major reasons that creates a bully. In this case, it can either be entertainment or money. But there is no denying that AI or deepfakes have their own advantages as well. Saying that they're only here for the worse will be like the times when people were unsure about the introduction of computers," she says.

Visual/AI designer Manoj Omre offers a peek into the future of the beneficial side of technology, "First, making deepfakes would take a lot of time. Now, you can generate a video of nearly 90% accuracy within 20 minutes, and an image within a few clicks! This can be useful, especially when it comes to filmmaking and editing. If you want to screen test, say Amitabh Bachchan as a lawyer or a Punjabi, you can quickly substitute it using AI. If it doesn't fit right, move on

to the next actor. This will save so much time and effort to manually give him the look. This can also be applied in cases of stunt doubles, where instead of hiring people to do the stunt sequence for an actor, they can simply create deepfakes. It will save money and time."

While there are currently no laws on who can or cannot use the technology, he says that prominent people can opt for copyrights, as Bachchan recently did for his voice. "Copyrighting comes as a good solution till the time law enforcers figure out a way to deal with the misuse. As for those who are experimenting with it, they should be made aware and remember to keep good intentions as priority," he signs off.



Manoj Omre

Why me?

Nirali Bhatia, cyber psychologist and psychotherapist, cites the example of her client who was a victim of deepnude. "She received a message



Jaane anjaane

An upcoming play in a suburban studio will introduce you to the world of diverse women characters and their encounters with strangers

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WHO are the most interesting types of individuals? If there's anything that works by literary greats such as Munshi Premchand or Ruskin Bond have taught this writer, it is that the most interesting people are often strangers; those who you will encounter in the most unexpected of situations and who come equipped with delightful tales. Mahathi Ramesh attempts the same approach with her upcoming play, Stranger Danger.

An anthology of four independent one-act plays, this show tells stories of women who meet each other at the strangest moments in time. "As the play's name indicates there is an inherent wariness towards the unknown in each



character. The situations in which these women meet range from commonplace [an influencer's bedroom or the reception of a career counselling centre] to obscure [a crematorium or the riyaz room of a singer]," shared Ramesh, who is also an actor and a singer. She adds that a core theme stitching the stories together is that nobody is what they seem, and that there are hidden depths to what the strangers think they know.

Produced by The Jeff Goldberg Studio, the play's director, Yashhraj Siingh, calls it

'I kept writing the play till something crystallised'

Mahathi Ramesh



Director Yashhraj Siingh (left) interacts with actors during rehearsals; (right) cast members at the play's rehearsal. PICS/ANURAG AHIRE



a satirical dark comedy. "All the four stories have some level of simplicity and ease that makes the play engaging, without you even realising it — you suddenly find yourself immersed in their reality," says Siingh, who is also a faculty member at the studio. He adds that the great bit about theatre as a medium, is that there's a whole lot of room to improvise and for the characters to grow. It's a collaborative process.

Ramesh has been toying with the concept of the play since the COVID-19 lockdowns. "I had the idea of writing a short story of two

women meeting outside a crematorium. It turned into a one-act play, which turned into four one-act plays. I kept putting pen to paper until something interesting crystallised," explained the debut scriptwriter.

But was writing all-female characters a conscious attempt? The scriptwriter shares that she wanted to tell honest stories with layered and dimensional characters as it was her first-time writing dialogues. She found it easier to do so with female characters. While she had attempted to write a story with two male characters, it didn't sound authentic or well-rounded. "So

instead of doing a disservice to the male experience, I stuck to eight female characters and did my best," said the debutant, who is excited for the show's opening this Saturday.

She has consciously written characters that are a potent mix of attributes that make people chaste as well as wicked. She adds, "I love such characters because they challenge us to find empathy in places we wouldn't have thought to search before."

Siingh says that for the multi-layered characters, the casting process was rather organic. "We held a studio-wide casting of all female actors [past, pres-

ent and alumni] from The Jeff Goldberg Studio, but didn't have anything specific in mind. That's the beauty of theatre [it's not as visual as films], it allows actors to blow you away with their craft," he says. He hopes after all the hard work and team effort, the audience, for the duration of the play, forgets about themselves and is lost in the four stories, "Only then, the art has won," he maintains.

ON November 25 and 26; December 2 and 3; 7:30 pm **AT** The Jeff Goldberg Studio, 3rd floor, Links Building, Linking Road, Khar West. **LOG ON TO** in.bookmyshow.com **COST** ₹399

Window of meditation

A day before the opening of Satish Gupta's new show, we look at the artist behind the works and the philosophy of Zen that drives him

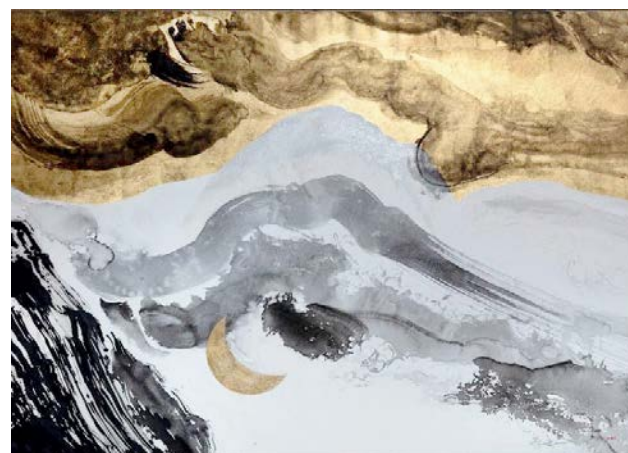


Satish Gupta's work titled Brahmand

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REVISITING a beach in France's Normandy nearly seven years ago, artist Satish Gupta took up a vantage point to paint the rough sea. He had previously visited spots like this in France as a student in 1970. Filling his canvas with the view before him, he noticed his friend, who had driven him to the beach, meditating in the midst of high crashing waves. This moment ushered him along in his journey to understand and embrace Zen. Speaking about his latest show Zen Thunder Zen Silence, a limited edition of works presented in the city at Jehangir Art Gallery after a gap of seven years, Gupta concurs, "The show is about our choice to stay calm, observe, learn from experiences and move forward. It started at Normandy that [the moment] was a turning point to understand how we can deal with such situations."

Gupta's tryst with Zen, however, began nearly 40 years ago, when he came across a book by Paul Reps called Zen Flesh, Zen Bones in a second-hand bookstore around the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris. The book, Gupta shares, answered questions floating around in his mind, posed many others, and set him off on his 'Zen journey', adding, "Zen has kept me alive,



(Above) The Wandering Cloud; (left) Awakening

and moving forward; this perspective of being aware of the moment and the transient nature of everything, seeing that the ultimate reality is much larger than what we perceive."

He carries this philosophy of Zen to the process of art marking. About the moments that led him to the creation of Brahmand, a new sculpture that will be displayed at the show along with other latest works including Zenga, and The Wandering Cloud, he recalls the experience of having his priceless antique sculptures stolen from his Delhi studio. "Soon after that, Brahmand and other works were created from that experience

and journey of forgiveness and letting go," he shares. The large sculpture includes a gold seed or sphere, plated with multiple layers of gold, and surrounded by 'waves of the cosmic ocean of nothingness, capturing the moment of contemplation before the beginning of time. Contemplation and celebration of celestial beauty are reiterated in the copper sculpture The Wandering Clouds which highlights recurring motifs in Gupta's work, clouds and the moon.

The artworks offer a similar experience for viewers, as the process of creation, he shares, "The work can be viewed as windows for meditation; you can get into the work and transcend into another frame of mind."



Satish Gupta

The materials the artist works

with play a visceral role in Gupta's approach to his canvas. He refers to copper, the foundation of many of his works, as a noble metal — tough yet pliable. Instead of the richness of gold and silver, he highlights their intrinsic purity. In the paintings Awakening and Healing Sounds, Gupta's work moves in a new direction with a marriage between gold leaf placed on the canvas treated with ink and calligraphy.

The show will be inaugurated with an invite-only Bharatnatyam performance by legend, Leela Samson. The dance will interpret the artist's showcase on the lawns of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, where his sculpture The Buddhas Within is also on display.

FREE **ON** November 21 to November 27; 11 am to 7 pm **AT** Jehangir Art Gallery, Kala Ghoda, Fort.