

Adman Sinha also runs Harmony House, a day shelter for 500 street kids in Delhi



SPOTLIGHT

A few good men

Whether renewing New York's skyline with new-age farming techniques, melding monastic wisdom with digital charm or bringing heart into the luxury consumption patterns of the Middle East, these three Indian-origin men are set to change the world for the better

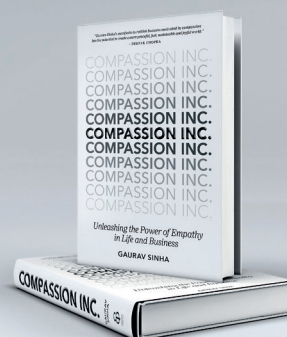
CORPORATE REBEL

Is “monastic materialism” a thing? Dubai-based adman GAURAV SINHA definitely thinks it is. He tells NEHA HIRANANDANI how he’s creating an ethical niche for luxury seekers

From a childhood spent playing on the dusty streets of Delhi to working his way through the glitzy boulevards of Dubai, Gaurav Sinha is the epitome of the successful adman. You know the updated *Mad Men* sort—silver-tongued sophisticates who could sell snow to an Eskimo—but is that who he *really* is? “I didn’t want to be that guy,” says Sinha, who instead opted for what he calls “monastic materialism”, where he has his bets on mindful consumption that relooks luxury. His vision is ambitious—a world where we can live and buy consciously, without selling our souls.

Sinha started off in advertising and soon stepped into the corporate world as the marketing head for Hilton Hotels. At 30, he set up his advertising firm Insignia to focus on luxury hospitality. He was told it would not work, but far from fading into oblivion his agency now represents 200 hotels in 20 countries.

Working in luxury hospitality, Sinha saw firsthand the “tyranny and triumph of capitalism,” realising that while the machinery was working to make great hospitality even better, those at the frontline—bellboys, attendants, servers—would never experience the products that they were helping to create. As a student of Buddhism and a self-proclaimed “lazy philosopher”, this dichotomy soon became bothersome. “I wanted to explore how I could unleash the power of empathy both in life and business,” he says. Serendipitously, his wife Lucy (who runs one of Dubai’s most celebrated nursery schools) wanted to move to Bali for a few months so that their three children could experience the Green School. “I went along for the ride” says Sinha, and in Bali, on the banks of a river, a book was born. Part memoir, part meditation and musings, *Compassion Inc: Unleashing The Power Of Empathy In Life And Business* (Ebury Press) outlines how you can be an “altruistic aesthete”, someone who likes the good stuff but also likes to give back. Sinha is one of those who walks the talk. Insignia, Lucy’s nursery school in Dubai, and Nappa Dori (his brother Gautam Sinha’s venture) are all contributors to Harmony House, a day shelter for street children in Delhi. But his work is far from done; he wants to do more so we can all become more conscious consumers of luxury.



VIRAL CRUSADER

Millennial monk turned motivational guru, New York-based JAY SHETTY has made it his mission to spread the word on how to be human in a digital world, finds SAHAR KHAN



Former monk turned motivational vlogger, Shetty has been on the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 list

Jay Shetty has racked up more than one billion views and 3 million followers since launching his video channel in 2016. His YouTube, Facebook and Instagram pages are advice-filled content platforms that spread his goal of “making wisdom go viral” (his videos are based on scientific studies and range from “Why We Should Invest in Our Passions” to “How I Broke Up With My Ex”). He also runs a video agency and coaches companies like L’Oreal and Coca-Cola on how to create and market viral content for millennials and Gen Z. “If the world’s going to choose entertainment, then I’m going to drop in messages in the most entertaining way so that you’re learning even without knowing,” says the award-winning viral content creator and self-development guru.

But Shetty’s online success comes from an unlikely place—his training as a monk—though the 30-year-old’s stunning green eyes and winning smile help as well! “I was like, there must be more to life than getting good grades, a good job, playing golf and dying,” says Shetty. So at 18, the London-born son of Indian immigrants met a monk who inspired him to redefine what it meant to be successful. Over the next four years, he divided his summers interning at corporations and the other half learning the vedas with a monk in a village four hours south of Mumbai. Upon his return to London, Shetty realised he could apply the insights he learned from his time as a monk to the increasingly digitised corporate environment. “I was coaching them on how to be human in a digital world,” he explains.

His unique blend of monastic wisdom and millennial connectivity caught the eye of Arianna Huffington. She hired him to host #FollowTheReader on HuffPost Lifestyle, where Shetty interviewed leaders like Deepak Chopra and Tim Ferriss. His dizzying success with the show—his first four videos got 100 million combined views, the most HuffPost ever had in a series—led him to start his current agency. Shetty’s focus remains his audience. But given his wide-ranging topics, what’s the main message he wants his viewers to take away? “Don’t let your past define your future,” he says. “Start where you are. Find your passion, turn it into perfection and then use it as a purpose to serve others.” >

GREENHOUSE AVENGER

From one rooftop greenhouse above a bowling alley in New York's hipster central to a global farming powerhouse, entrepreneur VIRAJ PURI tells AARTI VIRANI how he became an urban agriculture standard-setter

About 10 years ago, Viraj Puri, then an intern at a Manhattan-based environmental engineering firm, detected a seismic shift in the eating habits of fellow New Yorkers. "It was a renaissance. People really cared about the food they were eating and wanted to know where it came from," recalls the 37-year-old, harking back to a sudden surge in celebrity chef-dom, farmers markets and the first utterances of the now-ubiquitous catchphrase, "farm-to-table".

Puri, who held degrees in business administration and environmental science, had just returned from a two-year stint of globe-trekking, leading green building projects in India and Malawi. He was looking for a career that would pair his passion for the wilderness with a steadfast commitment to sustainability. Ultimately, it was a small greenhouse project at his internship that sparked his own LED moment. "We're a rapidly growing population, and we're going to have to produce more food using fewer resources," he says, summarising what economists refer to as a Malthusian catastrophe.

"Greenhouse technology has no agricultural pollution, uses less water and land and no pesticides," he says, talking about his company, Gotham Greens, which was New York's first solar-powered, hydroponic rooftop farm, perched over a former bowling alley. Today, his company comprises a quartet of urban rooftop greenhouses (spread across New York City and Chicago). Not to mention 160 employees and a year-round bounty of lettuce, arugula, bok choy, kale, and basil, delivered to some of the region's largest supermarkets and swankiest restaurants. Routinely, Puri's company also tackles causes like food waste, offering hefty discounts on blemished or bruised—though still fresh—lettuce and arugula. "Ugly greens (are beautiful)," as Gotham Greens dubs them.

"When we first started, people assumed we must be a small community garden," Puri reveals. That scepticism, however, translated into a flood of initial financing, regulatory and real estate challenges (their first farm was partially funded by money raised from friends and family). "But this is not gardening, it's agribusiness. We're now producing 20 million heads of lettuce a year," he adds. "Gotham Greens is part of a bigger movement," says Puri, who is determined to grow and deliver his mission-driven harvests internationally. With his company, he's demonstrating how high-tech indoor farming is a viable, profitable and compelling way to grow food more sustainably. ■

Puri's greenhouse farm provides greens to renowned New York restaurants like Gramercy Tavern and ABC Kitchen



COURTESY GOTHAM GREENS. JULIE MCMAHON AND ARI BURLING