

THE NEHRU CENTRE NEWSLETTER



Artwork by Amartya

The Nehru Centre (TNC), New Delhi is an independent think tank, dedicated to research and critical analysis in the fields of history, policy, law, and governance in India. We strive to provide well-researched insights that contribute to informed discussions and policy decisions. Our work aims to foster dialogue, challenge perspectives, and promote a deeper understanding of India's evolving social and political landscape, as well as its economy.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

We're excited to share with you the third issue of our newsletter! It's been an incredible journey, and we're so grateful for all the support and interest we've received.

This time, we invited guest writers to contribute, and we're thrilled with the insightful and diverse pieces we've received. A big thank you to all our writers for sharing their thoughts, and to our hardworking editors and designers who have brought everything together to make this issue what it is.

We also want to express our gratitude to you, our readers. Your continued support means the world to us, and we're thankful for your engagement and feedback, which help shape this publication.

We look forward to your continued engagement and contributions in future editions!

Warm regards,
Divya Singh Chauhan
The Nehru Centre, New Delhi



Researching Truth, Reimagining Democracy

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CALL FOR GUEST WRITERS

The Nehru Centre (TNC) is now accepting submissions from guest writers on a rolling basis for our upcoming newsletter. Please read our editorial guidelines carefully before sending us your submission.

We invite submissions in the following formats:

1. Opinion pieces – Arguments backed by facts and figures (not rants) (700-900 words)
2. Socio-political, law & policy, and historical articles – National or international scope (600-800 words)
3. News reports – Curated or original reporting based on primary field research (500-600 words)

How to Submit ?

1. Email your submissions (doc) to thenehrucentre.india@gmail.com with a short author bio & your social media handles.
2. Mention the title of your piece in the subject line and specify if it is time-sensitive.
3. For the write-ups, please use English (UK), Times New Roman, 12pt, and line spacing 1.15.
4. If selected, the editor will review your work and request edits, if necessary.
5. You will be informed about the expected publishing date & receive a link once the newsletter goes live.
6. Your article will be shared on TNC's multiple social media platforms and you will be tagged (depending on social media accounts provided by you).
7. We retain the final say over headlines, publishing dates, and images used.

AI & Plagiarism Policy

We value original thought and authentic writing. While AI tools can assist in proofreading, structuring, or shortening content, all AI usage must be disclosed to the editor. AI-generated content without human oversight will not be accepted.

Terms & Conditions

1. Indicate if your article is exclusive to The Nehru Centre or has been published elsewhere. We prioritize original content and typically do not republish blog posts.
2. Copyright for material that is published exclusively is held jointly by The Nehru Centre, New Delhi and the authors.
3. If others request to republish your article, you must seek TNC's informed consent before granting permission.
4. Once an article is published, it cannot be removed/ taken down except in legal, copyright, or safety-related cases.
5. With the exception of trans writers, we do not allow any writer to change their name or write under a pseudonym for The Nehru Centre to ensure complete transparency and to avoid any legal hassles going forward. However, writers wishing to publish personal narratives can choose to write anonymously for us (editorial records will still require full author details).

EXPLAINER

WAQF: HISTORY & LEGAL CHANGES

By Midhat Samra

What is Waqf?

Islam stands on five pillars, one of which is charity. The value of charity increases if the donation continues to benefit people for years. It is believed that as long as almsgiving provides benefits to the needy, the reward continues to flow into the person who gives it, also known as the waqif. The act of almsgiving, whose reward continues to flow even when the person who gives alms passes away, is known as "jariyah". Waqf comes under Jariyah alms.

Derived from the Arabic word "waqafa", which means "to hold", Waqf denotes the act of withholding a property from any ownership transfer while dedicating its benefits to the community. Waqf in muslim law is defined as a permanent dedication of a property by a person professing any faith or having Islamic values, for religious or charitable purposes. Once the land is donated, ownership is transferred to God. Although not directly mentioned in the Quran, Waqf is deeply rooted in Islamic values. A *Mutawalli* (supervisor) takes care of the waqf property. It is a religious concept which is protected under Articles 25 and 26 of the Indian constitution.

Waqf Act 1995

Waqf administration in India has a long history, dating back to 1192 when Muhammad Ghori donated land for a jama masjid in Multan. Today, however, waqfs in India are governed by the Waqf Act of 1995. This legislation was introduced by the Indian government to regulate and improve the management of waqf properties. The Waqf Act of 1995 created the Central Waqf Council and State Waqf Boards, which oversee the administration of waqf properties.



These bodies are responsible for distributing powers and responsibilities, including appointing Chief Executive Officers and managing the activities of the Waqf Boards.



The act also regulates judicial proceedings related to waqfs, ensuring that the duties of Mutawallis are clearly defined, and makes it difficult to sell or transfer waqf properties. The Waqf Act of 1995 provides a comprehensive framework for the administration of waqf properties in India, ensuring that these properties are managed efficiently and transparently for the benefit of the community.

In addition, the Waqf Act mandates regular surveys to identify waqf properties, ensuring better financial management and accountability. It requires the registration of all waqfs with the Waqf Board and maintains a central register of these properties. The act also empowers Waqf Boards to address issues like encroachments on waqf properties, prepare annual maintenance budgets, and maintain records and inspections to ensure the proper management of waqf assets.

Waqf Board

A Waqf Board is a legal organisation that has the authority to acquire, hold, and transfer property. It serves as a centralised body responsible for overseeing and managing waqf properties. In India, there are two main types of Waqf Boards: the *Sunni Waqf Board* and the *Shia Waqf Board*, each representing the respective sects of Islam.

The members of a Waqf Board can include parliamentarians, members of the bar council, and individuals with a significant understanding of Islam and its legal principles. While the state government nominates the members of the state-level Waqf Boards, the members of the Central Waqf Council are appointed by the central government. This structure ensures that the management of waqf properties is guided by both local and central governance, providing a framework for their proper administration.

Waqf Amendment Act 2025

The Waqf Amendment Bill of 2025 proposes replacing the term "Waqf" with the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development Act, 1995 (UMEED). The bill exempts certain types of trusts created by Muslims for purposes similar to a waqf from the provisions of this Act, regardless of whether the trusts were created before or after the law came into effect, or whether there are court orders related to them.

Section 3 of the bill introduces "Bohra" and "Aghakhani" waqfs, which could create further division within the Muslim community. The amendment also removes the possibility of verbal donations for waqf. It establishes that a "portal and database" must be set up by the Central Government for managing waqf assets, including the registration, accounts, auditing, and other details related to waqf properties and the waqf board.

New Requirements for Donating Property as Waqf include:

- The person donating the property must have been practicing Islam for at least five years.
- The person must also show ownership of the property they are dedicating.

A new provision ensures that existing waqf properties (registered before the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 will still be recognised as waqf properties.

However, there are exceptions:

- If the property is disputed (i.e., there are legal or ownership conflicts), or
- If it is classified as government property, then those properties may not be treated as waqf properties, even though they were previously registered as such.

The amendment allows non-muslims to be appointed as key Waqf institutions, including the central waqf council, state waqf board, and waqf tribunal. It mandates that the central waqf council and the state waqf board appoint two non-muslims. It also removes the requirement for the chairperson to be a muslim. The State government's representative on the Waqf Board must be a Joint Secretary-level officer specifically handling Waqf matters. Additionally, the Waqf Tribunals will now have three members instead of two. This includes a district judge, a Joint Secretary-level officer from the State government, and an expert in Muslim law and jurisprudence. The bill also takes away the rights of the waqf board to declare any property as waqf. Opposition has argued that the new provisions encroach upon the rights of muslims on their religious matters.

Section 107 of the 1995 Act, which allowed Waqf boards to reclaim encroached properties without being subject to the 12-year time limit set by the Limitation Act, has been removed from the new bill. The new Bill allows judicial intervention in Waqf disputes by removing the finality of Waqf tribunal decisions. Aggrieved parties can appeal directly to the High Court within 90 days of the tribunal's order. This aims to increase judicial oversight and prevent arbitrary actions by Waqf Boards or tribunals.

Additionally, the Bill prohibits courts from hearing suits about enforcing rights on Waqf properties unless the property is registered within six months of the law's start. An exception is allowed if the court finds a "sufficient cause" for the delay.

OPINION

REIMAGINING NON-ALIGNMENT: INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AMID SHIFTING POWER ARRANGEMENTS

By Amartya Mishra

On April 2, US President Donald Trump announced reciprocal tariffs with a baseline tariff on all imported goods at 10 per cent. At least there is some 'liberation' in the degree of uncertainty underlying the global markets. Between January and April this year, the world has witnessed heightened tensions in geopolitics and markets alike. Global power alignments are shifting, and it will have a significant bearing on the current world order. Indian foreign policy, under such generational change, needs to revisit its founding ideal: non-alignment. Reimagining the policy's importance in the present context will allow India to manage complex challenges.

With the coming of President Trump, the present world order – fundamentally liberal international – is beginning to show signs of change on economic and geopolitical fronts. The global power alignment has remained roughly similar since WWII. Power alignment broadly reflects the grouping of nation-states depending upon their international standing and core principles. This way, power in the international system is divided into three main groups: The US and its allies, rival powers like Russia and China, and neutral middle powers like India and Brazil. The first group, i.e., the US and its allies, are closely aligned on the economic and geopolitical fronts – free trade, international institutions, democracy, and human rights. The domination of the liberal international order can be attributed to the long-term sustenance of shared interests among developed nations under the United States.

On the other hand, the second group consists of nuclear powers like Russia and China which have challenged the hegemony of the LIO on both fronts.

Russia and China, along with Iran, have projected their economic and military heft enough to be viewed as the primary threats to the current order. The third group of nations are the neutral middle powers like India and Brazil, which play a balancing role in navigating the international system. The group has broadly remained supportive of the current system while challenging the prevailing norms wherever necessary. These groups have formed a relatively stable global power arrangement through the years. However, this arrangement has started showing early signs of change.



The US is retreating from its traditional role as the leader of the first group under the new administration. On the economic front, Trump is targeting its closest allies, such as Canada, Mexico, and the EU, through tariffs. US partners have scrutinised the move given their deeply integrated and interdependent economies. Trump has also imposed high tariffs on Chinese goods imported to the US, leading China to retaliate with reciprocal tariffs. India's auto and textile sectors will likely be hit the most, while IT and electronics might face indirect ripple effects. On the geopolitical front, the US is moving away from the security arrangements it had once championed.

On numerous occasions, the president has called for the disbandment of NATO – the primary security guarantor in Europe. More recently, the US administration's willingness to re-establish its diplomatic channel with Russia and fast-track the peace deal with Ukraine has come at the cost of European interests. These shifts reflect a significant departure from the post-war power arrangement with the potential to change the present order radically. Whether the developed nations stick together under the liberal international banner remains to be seen. Still, it is already clear that they can no longer rely on the US as a stable ally. Under such circumstances, the role of middle powers has become more crucial than ever. For starters, countries like India and Brazil will be pivotal in strengthening multilateral institutions such as WTO and BRICS. Today's foreign policy must carefully manoeuvre the multi-front challenges while securing its national interest.

During the Cold War, India's non-alignment policy drew much support in the Global South, which had newly gained independence and desired peace. Non-aligned policy meant support for international cooperation through institutions, refusing to be a part of either bloc, and solidarity on common principles of sovereignty, freedom, and development. The Non-Alignment Movement, or NAM, gained prominence as an effective tool in tackling the Cold War competition. As was made clear at the outset by Nehru, the policy was not one of neutrality but of refusing allegiance to either bloc. During much of the Cold War, India's position in the international system grew because of the strategic autonomy it gained due to non-alignment. More importantly, the ideas – world peace, international cooperation, and anti-colonialism – underlining the policy have provided the bedrock of Indian foreign policy till now. However, the contemporary international system differs significantly from the Cold War years.

India is strategically closer to the US and the fifth largest economy in the world. At the same time, it faces critical challenges in building up capabilities vis-à-vis its neighbour, China. Additionally, South Asia has been a region of constant instability, as shown by the recent example of Bangladesh. India's two largest trading partners, the US and China, are on the verge of a full-blown trade war, while India is facing reciprocal tariffs from President Trump. Furthermore, India also relies heavily on Russian oil imports to meet its domestic needs. The possible restructuring of the existing power arrangements means India will increasingly face a complex and volatile international system. To deal with such a scenario requires India to strengthen its room for manoeuvre.

While India faces such complex challenges, the present situation also holds essential opportunities to enhance its strategic autonomy further. With a potential reshuffling of the global supply chain, India can better integrate into the international trade network, particularly with ASEAN and the EU. Moreover, it is a good time for India to rethink its neighbourhood policy. The recent developments in BIMSTEC are a welcome sign. India should strengthen cooperation in international institutions and norms consistent with its non-alignment ideals. Amid the genocide in Gaza and war in Ukraine, India needs to reaffirm its core commitment to world peace and anti-colonialism. Given India's present stature, it has a chance to contribute positively to global peace and security. More importantly, for India to achieve all the above goals, it needs to establish itself as a stable and reliable partner, which can only be achieved by keeping its democratic and pluralistic traditions alive.

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WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

O L Z P A R T I T I O N K L H
U D H D F X J K C Q V B N J T
I N D E P E N D E N C E O Q H
E Q D A N D I M A R C H N U E
W H T U H D L M J J Q G V I P
L A L B A L P A L H Z A I T C
J S Y A X S A Z U W Y N O I N
A R Q T F W A M U S Q D L N E
M E O K P A Z P A K L H E D H
A X Y Q G R L L K C V I N I R
R B H A G A T S I N G H C A U
T Z N D C J Q I P W O O E T L
Y Q W J N D N A O N F Q H V H
R K Q L V C A H B H B A E W A
W Q H S A T Y A G R A H A O W

Theme: All words are related to the Indian Freedom Struggle

Find the following hidden words horizontally or vertically:

INDEPENDENCE
SATYAGRAHA
MARTYR
GANDHI

BHAGATSINGH
DANDIMARCH
QUITINDIA
SWARAJ

NONVIOLENCE
LALBALPAL
PARTITION
NEHRU

GUEST COLUMN

DEBATING THE RATIONALISATION OF THE YOUNG MINDS

By Dr. Amit Kumar*

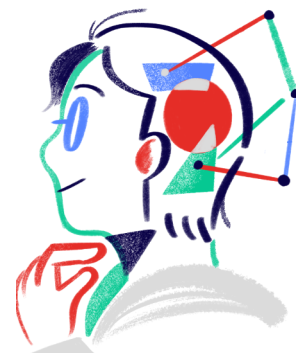
Recently, the National Council of Educational Research and Training has been under attack, as alleged for the communal rewriting of the textbooks, such as the exclusion of content related to Islamic land, clash of cultures, the Mughals, the Industrial Revolution, the content on the Gujarat Riots, former PM A.B. Vajpayee's Raj-Dharma remark, poem on Dalit movements, the era of the Congress Party, the rise of socialist and communists' movements, democracy and diversity from the history and political science textbooks.

In defence of rationalisation, NCERT chief D.K. Saklani denied the allegations and justified the amendments as a rationalisation process of books, not the syllabus, as only the content overlapping is being discarded, considering overburdened students- a learning outcome of the COVID-19 epidemic. Regarding the selective approach, the NCERT chief termed the allegations political opportunism as the revision is done across all the subjects.

Historical and Political Appropriateness

Nonetheless, the rationalisation process has triggered a debate among academicians, intellectuals, political leaders and scholars. However, it is not a novelty, as countries have been targeted before for a selective approach to textbook rationalisation. For instance, UK schools and education ministers have been targeted for brushing off the role of the British Empire on colonised nations, Black history and Slavery. A lot can be credited to the standardisation of the national curriculum by then-PM Margaret Thatcher, attempting to bring back the idea of British pride in the 1980s. Inevitably, it resulted in a conflict between historians and Thatcher, which was later negotiated by preparing a national curriculum in chronological order, along with teachers having the liberty to teach anything within chronological order.

Moreover, former colonial nations, local educators, and political parties have made statements from time to time to include the alternative side of the British Empire's history in the UK school curriculum. history remains hidden.



Considering UK school's vast range of migrant diaspora, the demands have been made that every student have the right to know about their history, especially the students from the former colonies of the British empire. As per the 2013 revised national curriculum, the teachers have the liberty to choose the content to teach, but despite that, the colonial

Locating India in a Global Context

India, too, has opposed this rationalisation process in the past. For instance, Shashi Tharoor, while making a case about how the UK owes reparations to India, mentioned 'historical amnesia about what the British empire entailed', questioning why the British do not teach their colonial history in schools. Additionally, it is not likely that all countries followed this rationalisation. For example, France, a former imperial power itself, follows a centralised education curriculum teaching different European empire regimes such as Belgian, Dutch, British, or Portuguese comparatively. Similarly, German schools teach their young what their predecessors did without whitewashing it or pretending it did not happen. It is a part of the curriculum that to have a German nationality is to accept German history irrespective of individual racial or ethnic beliefs and identity. In other words, to adopt not its glory alone but its doomed historicity too and bear the responsibility not to repeat the mistakes its predecessor did. Taking the initiative, Germany has engraved the names of the victim Jewish families on the pavements as a permanent mark to seek redemption, whereas India is on a spree renaming sites, roads, cities or anything that sounds Mughal.

Advancement or Setback?

Rather than being an archetype to be followed, the NCERT's stand on rationalisation echoes more with a setback. On the one hand, Indian society associates itself with the opposite of whatever Pakistan adheres to, whereas down the lane, it is doomed to replicate it. For example, Pakistan rationalised textbooks by elevating Islamic subjects and content and portrayed Hindu subjects in a derogatory manner. NCERT's attempt to rationalise textbooks and justify the same in the name of students' welfare is nothing but limiting the knowledge of historical truth by only providing the facts that are significant to the board/committee rather than leaving it to the students and scholars to distinguish what was acceptable then and what is now. The young minds are culturally socialised under a specific ideology of a particular community, and they perceive the world and its surroundings accordingly. Educational institutions as secondary agents of socialisation are expected to neutralise the children's cognitive and cultural biases learned during the first phase of socialisation, i.e., prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour learnt through parents, neighbours, relatives' social identity and their different social positionings.



An institutionalised body like educational institutes is determined to develop these young minds by offering a multitude of ideological alternatives through the content being taught to challenge their rigid preconceived notions about the world, people, and the place in society they associate themselves. It offers a space to develop these preconceived notions in both positive and negative aspects. One might positively develop these preconceived notions by bringing in objective change and enhancing its subjective form. The nudge point here is that a mind, from one phase of socialisation to another, is introduced to many forms of cognitive biases without indulging itself in an in-depth evaluation of the subject matter.

These biases might range from stereotype to bandwagon bias, confirmation to conservatism bias, or information to outcome bias. Moreover, here comes the role of plurality and alternatives available to neutralise these biases or rigidities of the mind. The availability of educational content (bereft of any socio-political agendas or organisational prejudices) delivers the right kind of philosophical approaches to re-evaluating the self and the biased opinions. On the other aspect, it tends to look somewhat hypocritical for a former colonial nation to demand that former colonist empires owe reparations and must acknowledge their history in schools for today's generations while simultaneously alleged for rationalising theirs.

They Read and Write. Therefore, They Exist.

To conclude, the process of upgradation, modification, and renewal of the content is necessary to advance progressively, but the prejudiced, restrictive or manipulative availability of the knowledge cannot define advancement. NCERT's attempts at rationalising the textbooks can be comprehended along with subjects such as economics, geography, and science, as the subjects are heavily dependent upon facts or essentially free from individual opinions. However, history, political science, literature, and any other branch concerned with social aspects require both imagination and interpretation. The Nehruvian idea of developing scientific temperament among young minds necessitates alternative thoughts to persist. To borrow the quote from historian E.H. Carr, the morality of the present cannot be used to judge the past rightfully. History stands to progress, providing stronger links to be formed between the past, present, and future, whereas the rationalisation process restricts facts to speak for them, making it subjective.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE VEGETARIAN

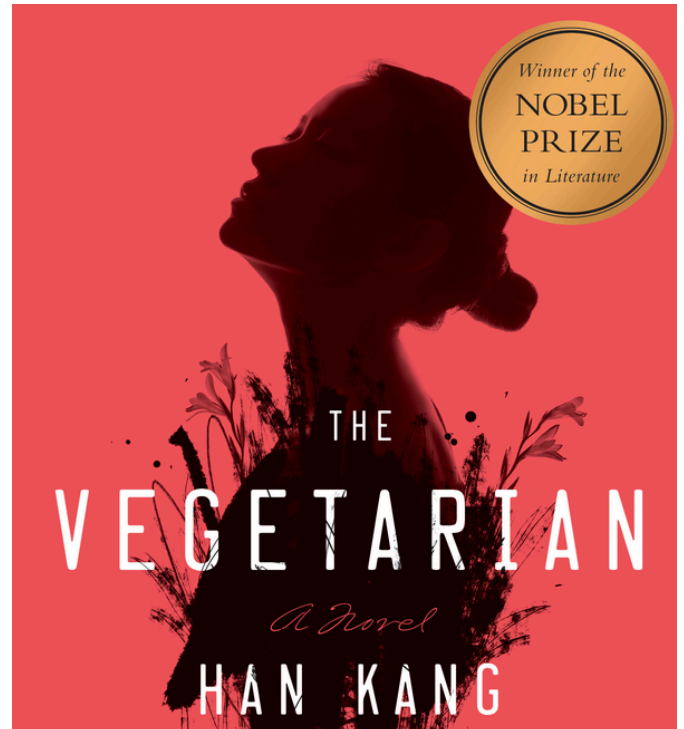
By Mihika Singh

Originally published in 2007 in South Korea and translated to English by Deborah Smith in 2015, *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang is the winner of the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature. The novel follows an unsettling narrative of the life of the protagonist, Yeong-hye, who decides to become a vegetarian after having disturbing dreams. The book explores various themes such as autonomy, societal expectations, mental illness, and what it means to be "normal". *The Vegetarian* is a complex and multi-layered novel told in three parts, through the perspectives of Yeong-hye's husband, her brother-in-law, and her sister.

The novel gradually reveals how Yeong-hye's decision, which seems irrational to those around her, leads to a series of events that impact her family and her own life. It highlights the inability of her family to comprehend her decision, and more importantly to respect her autonomy.

The first two parts, from the husband's perspective and the brother-in-law's perspective, provide the reader with an introduction to the life of Yeong-hye and how her decisions make her husband, family and the people around her behave. As her behaviour becomes increasingly unconventional, her family attempts to force her back into conformity, seeing her refusal to eat meat as an act of rebellion. Both men project their desires onto Yeong-hye. Her husband treats her as an object meant to serve a role, whereas her brother-in-law fetishises her and uses her for his artistic fantasies. Neither see her as a full human being. It highlights various themes like deviation from societal norms, loss of autonomy and the patriarchal expectations imposed on women.

In contrast, the third part told by In-hye, Yeong-hye's sister, feels more introspective and emotionally layered. It provides a more sympathetic perspective on Yeong-hye and also reveals In-hye's own repressed traumas.



A significant theme in the novel that is never directly acknowledged – at least in the first part – is mental illness. Yeong-hye's decision is seen as deviance rather than a cry for help. Her husband doesn't attempt to understand her; instead, he views her behaviour as an inconvenience. The emotional neglect and lack of empathy towards Yeong-hye in the novel reflect how mental health is often misunderstood and ignored by society.

The writing in *The Vegetarian* can be dark and deeply unsettling at times, with grotesque imagery and surreal dream sequences. While the absence of Yeong-hye's perspective sometimes feels missing, it also leaves space for interpretation and introspection for the reader. With many intersecting themes, one of the most striking features of the writing is that it can be interpreted differently by the reader, shifting its meaning depending on which theme they find themselves most drawn to.

The Vegetarian is neither an easy nor a straightforward read – but it's the ambiguity and discomfort that challenges the reader and provokes self-reflection.

TNC PLAYLIST: MUSIC YOU NEED TO HEAR

Recommendations by Divya Singh Chauhan



INTERNATIONAL CLASSICS & CONTEMPORARY ALTERNATIVE

Philosophia by The Guggenheim Grotto
 Stairway to Heaven by Led Zeppelin
 Fifth of Beethoven by Walter Murphy
 In a Manner of Speaking by Nouvelle Vague, Camille
 Another Brick in the Wall Part Two by Pink Floyd
 Preparedness by The Bird and the Bee
 Labour by Paris Paloma

INDIE ROCK, FOLK & SUFI

Farda by Bayan
 Patang by Umer Farooq
 Khoya Khoya Chand by Swanand Kirkire, Ajay Jhingaran
 Duniya by Piyush Mishra
 Aaqa by Abida Parveen, Ali Sethi

ARTISTS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Nadi by Wolf.cryman
 Gulaab by Suryansh Chauhan
 Ishq by Faheem Abdullah
 Kashmir ki Kali by Deepak Peace
 Sarfaroshi by Shadaj



GET IN TOUCH



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