

JULY 20-26, 2025

SUNDAY POST

HERE . NOW



YOUTUBE'S REVISED MONETISATION POLICY

Clarion call to **creators**

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COVER
STORY



MY SUNDAY



Tripti Satpathy has established herself as one of the most influential producers in the Odia film industry—yet cinema was never part of her original plan. An MBA graduate, she began her career in corporate marketing before pivoting to academia, where she spent nine years as a teacher. After embracing motherhood, she stepped away from teaching, unaware that destiny had far grander designs. In 2023, Tripti founded her own production house—a move that would redefine her life. Her debut film, 'Pabar' (2024), was an instant hit, but it was her second release, 'Bou Buttu Bhuta' (2025), starring her husband Babushaan Mohanty, that rewrote Ollywood history

Clearing backlogs

My Sundays are dedicated to dusting, de-cluttering, and cleaning the house. I also use the day to fix things and complete all my unfinished work.

Cocooned bliss

I don't have friends outside; my family and in-laws are my closest companions. Our Sundays are spent indoors, as we usually avoid outings due to the crowd that surrounds my husband.

Soulful Sunday

My ideal Sunday revolves around spending quality time with my family and loved ones, enjoying cozy get-togethers or indulging in comforting homemade food that brings everyone closer.



With family

Love for art house movies

In my leisure time, I enjoy watching movies of all genres except romantic ones. I have a strong preference for meaningful, thought-provoking art films instead.

Back in gear

I learned driving in my teens but lost touch over the years. Now, whenever I get time, I've started relearning it. I also wish to learn swimming someday soon.



During Bou Buttu Bhuta shoot



WhatsApp This Week

Only on Sunday POST!

Send in your most interesting WhatsApp messages and memes at: features.orissapost@gmail.com And we will publish the best ones

THE BEST MEMES OF THIS ISSUE

- Yes, money cannot buy you happiness, but I'd still feel a lot more comfortable crying in a new BMW than on a bike.
- To the guy who invented the number zero: "Thanks for nothing."
- iPhone8 (X) has facial recognition. It looked at my face and told me that I can't afford it...
- The human brain is a wonderful thing. It starts working the moment you are born, and never stops until you stand up to speak in public.



Invest in youth

Sir, Last week's cover story on Youth Skills Day 2025 gave me a feeling like a pulse-check on the planet's future. All three youths who have featured in the article look promising. It's heartening to learn about their vision and how they aspire to make a difference to people's life in general. Not just in Odisha, in every corner, teenagers are trading textbooks for 3-D printers, turning idle hours into climate-code sprints, and teaching elders to spot deepfakes. Yet opportunity remains uneven: rural bandwidth still decides destiny; girls face whispered "not for you." We must move from slogans to structural change—fund apprenticeships like we fund stadiums, embed green-skills curricula in every syllabus, and make micro-credentials as portable as passports. The most valuable lesson we can offer is not a single trade but the habit of lifelong learning; the skill of unlearning when machines evolve overnight. Today, celebrate the 16-year-old who debugged irrigation sensors at dawn and the barista who studies cloud architecture between lattes. Their agility is our collective safety net. Invest in them now, and 2035 will thank us.

SAMARPITA SAHOO, BHANJANAGAR

LETTERS



A word for readers

Sunday post is serving a platter of delectable fare every week, or so we hope. We want readers to interact with us. Feel free to send in your opinions, queries, comments and contributions to

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Though YouTube's updated monetisation policy is causing anxiety among creators, particularly those who rely on AI-generated content for their channels, many view it not as a barrier but a bridge —leading them back to the essence of their craft

YOUTUBE'S REVISED MONETISATION POLICY

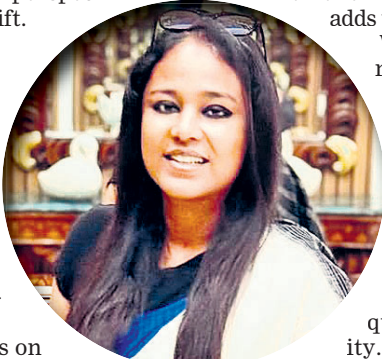
Clarion call to creators

As the realm of digital content unfolds into a magnificent tapestry of expression and imagination, YouTube—once a sanctuary for heartfelt storytelling—has found itself navigating a labyrinth of challenges. The platform, once illuminated by the glow of originality, has gradually dimmed under the shadow of faceless, AI-generated and mechanically repurposed videos that value volume over vision. These soulless creations, devoid of creativity or craftsmanship, not only disrupted the artistic equilibrium but also diluted the sanctity of authentic creators.

rhythms, it is still the human spirit that ignites true connection. With YouTube's revised monetisation policy taking effect, **Sunday POST** sat down with prominent content creators and digital managers to explore the deeper implications of the guidelines and gather their perspectives on this significant shift.

'Keep it real, keep it original'

Joyeeta Roy, a social media expert, film producer and entrepreneur, has carved a niche for herself through her venture Signature 24 Productions, which offers services in celebrity management, digital marketing, advertising, and events.



Sharing her perspectives on the evolving landscape of YouTube monetisation, Roy says, "YouTube is now being much stricter about what kind of content can earn money. If your videos are just copied, AI-generated without much editing, or feel 'lazy,' they probably won't be allowed to make money anymore."

She views this change positively, as it compels creators to focus on producing real, original, and meaningful content. Accord-

ing to her, this shift will encourage both brands and creators to move beyond the pursuit of views and instead concentrate on offering content that truly adds value.

While the basic metrics for joining the YouTube Partner Program — such as subscriber count and watch hours — haven't drastically changed, Joyeeta notes a stronger focus on content quality and originality. "Even if you meet the numbers, your videos need to be original — something that shows your own effort or creativity. Just uploading AI-made videos or copying stuff won't work anymore. You need to actually create and add your own voice to what you post," she says.

This heightened emphasis on authenticity also extends to short-form content creators, especially those who create YouTube Shorts. Joyeeta stresses that

simply remixing trending videos or auto-generating content using AI tools is no longer enough to qualify for monetisation. "You need to bring your own ideas, personality, or storytelling into even short videos. The platform wants quality over quantity. So if your Shorts are creative, relatable, or original, you still have a great shot at growing and earning," explains the social media expert.

For emerging creators looking to succeed under the new rules, Joyeeta offers simple but powerful advice: "Keep it real, keep it original. That's the best advice for anyone starting out. Use your own voice, your experiences, your creativity." She acknowledges that AI tools can be helpful but insists that creators must remain the driving force behind the narrative. "Avoid shortcuts like copying trending stuff or using clickbait without substance. Focus on building connection and trust with your audience — that's what will help you grow and earn steadily in the long run," adds Roy. With her deep understanding of digital content and branding, Joyeeta presents a clear roadmap for creators navigating the changing YouTube ecosystem.



'Glad that YouTube is pushing for more original content'

Satyabrat Mohapatra, stand-up comic and content creator, has welcomed YouTube's updated monetisation policies, calling them a timely and essential step towards restoring authenticity and creative integrity on the platform. According to him, the move directly addresses the recent flood of faceless, AI-driven channels that prioritise quantity over quality. "This move by YouTube comes after a surge in faceless, AI-based channels that produce more volume than value. Thus, the new changes will bring back the era of creators who are authentic, trustworthy, and passion-driven," says Mohapatra.

As a stand-up comedian, Mohapatra feels aligned with the platform's push for originality. "Standup as an art form is 100 per cent original content. So we are unaffected—rather glad YouTube is pushing for more original content," he adds, pointing out that live performance art thrives on real, unfiltered human expression.

For Mohapatra, YouTube's crackdown on low-effort, AI-generated videos isn't just about platform policy—it's about safeguarding the soul of storytelling in the digital era. "An absolute welcome and much-needed step towards preserving authenticity and creativity on the platform. In an era where AI-generated content is rapidly growing, this move sends a strong message in favour of original, human-driven storytelling," he says.

While acknowledging the utility of AI in streamlining content workflows and enhancing productivity, he cautions against its overuse. "AI tools have their place,"



he explains, "but relying solely on mass-produced or repetitive AI content can gradually erode the value of real human interaction and creativity."

He commends YouTube's decision to tighten monetisation eligibility, particularly against content that lacks originality or transformative input. "By tightening its monetisation rules against low-effort, inauthentic videos—especially those generated through AI with little transformation—YouTube is encouraging creators to invest more in quality, originality, and meaningful engagement."

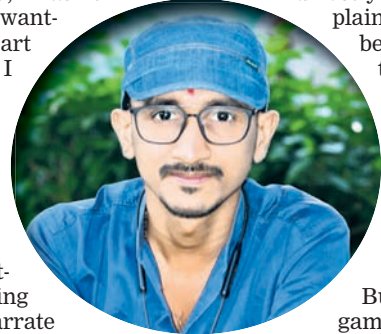
According to Mohapatra, the policy shift is not anti-technology, but rather pro-creativity. "This not only supports genuine content creators but also strengthens trust with viewers and advertisers who seek substance over scale. I believe this policy is not about limiting innovation, but about preserving the human essence of creativity, ensuring that AI remains a tool—not a replacement—for authentic expression."

With a deep-rooted belief in originality

and connection, Mohapatra sees YouTube's new direction as a win for both creators and audiences—and a strong stance in favour of meaningful, human-centered storytelling.

'YouTube's new policy has made things complex'

Subhendu Maharana, a digital artist and content creator from Bhubaneswar says, "When I launched my YouTube channel eight months ago, I wasn't aiming to go viral—I just wanted to showcase my digital art in a more dynamic way. I come from a background in visual design, and with AI tools becoming more accessible, it felt natural to explore animation, voiceovers, and storytelling using generative platforms. It was exciting—suddenly, I could bring my illustrations to life, narrate stories without hiring a team, and produce content at a pace I couldn't have imagined before. But with YouTube's new



monetization policy, things have taken a serious turn. The platform is now demanding greater transparency, especially around AI-generated or synthetic content. While I understand the intent—to protect viewers from misinformation and ensure quality—it's definitely made things more complex for creators like me."

Maharana further shares, "As a digital artist, I often rely on AI to support—not replace—my creativity. I design my characters manually, sketch every frame, but use AI to fill in transitions, clean up audio, or automate repetitive edits. Under the new rules, even this kind of hybrid content needs to be disclosed. And more importantly, to stay eligible for monetization, the content must reflect significant human input. That's a challenge when your workflow has always been a blend of tech and art. I've started reworking how I produce each video. I now record my own voice instead of AI narration. I add a creator note in the description about where AI was used. These may seem small, but they're adding layers of effort and awareness that weren't needed before."

"Still, I don't see this policy as a roadblock—it's a call for responsibility. It's reminding all of us to treat AI as a tool, not a crutch. The policy is nudging creators toward authenticity, and that's not a bad thing. It's also forcing me to connect more directly with my audience, explain my process, and evolve beyond automation. At the end of the day, I believe art—whether traditional or tech-driven—should have soul. And if the new guidelines help preserve that, I'm willing to adapt. I'm still learning, still experimenting. But I'm here for the long game. AI will continue to shape my work—but now, it'll do so with a deeper sense of intention," Subhendu concludes.



INTERNATIONAL MANGO DAY – JULY 22

Elevate your mango moments

Juicy, golden, and irresistibly fragrant—mangoes are the true crown jewels of summer. Beyond the simple pleasure of slicing one open, this versatile fruit can transform everyday dishes into gourmet delights. From elegant salads to rich desserts, mangoes shine in both sweet and savory creations. Here are five elevated mango recipes that blend bold flavours with refined presentation, perfect for impressing guests or indulging in a little culinary luxury at home

Mango burrata salad with basil vinaigrette
 This elegant starter combines creamy burrata with sweet mango. Slice ripe mangoes thinly and layer them with torn burrata cheese on a platter. Drizzle with a vinaigrette made by blending fresh basil, olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and a touch of honey. Garnish with microgreens and crushed pink peppercorns. A refreshing, restaurant-style salad that's both sweet and savory.



Grilled mango & prawn skewers
 A tropical twist on seafood grilling! Marinate prawns in olive oil, garlic, paprika, and lime juice. Thread skewers with alternating pieces of mango and marinated prawns. Grill until the prawns turn pink and slightly charred. Serve with a mango-cilantro dipping sauce made by blending mango pulp, lime, green chili, and fresh coriander. It's light, flavorful, and perfect for summer brunches.

Mango and saffron phirni
 Give the traditional phirni a gourmet makeover. Cook soaked and ground rice in milk until thickened. Stir in sugar, cardamom, and a few strands of saffron soaked in warm milk. Once cooled, fold in fresh mango puree. Pour into earthen bowls, garnish with chopped pistachios, rose petals, and a touch of edible gold leaf for a regal finish. Chill before serving.



Mango mousse with almond tuile
 A silky dessert that looks as good as it tastes. Whip cream and fold it into mango puree mixed with a little gelatin for structure. Chill until set. Serve in glasses or demould for a plated presentation. Pair it with crisp almond tuiles (thin cookies made with sugar, butter, and flaked almonds) for texture. Garnish with fresh mango cubes and mint sprigs.



Spiced mango chicken with coconut rice
 A bold, fusion main course. Sear chicken breasts and cook them in a sauce made from blended mango, ginger, garlic, chili flakes, soy sauce, and a hint of honey. Simmer until the chicken is tender and coated in the sticky glaze. Serve over fragrant basmati in coconut milk with kaffir lime leaves. Finish with toasted cashews and fresh coriander for extra flair.



Shruti's 'beautiful madness'

Actress Shruti Haasan has opened up about her exhilarating experience working on director Lokesh Kanakaraj's upcoming high-octane film *Coolie*, calling it "a beautiful kind of madness."

Known for balancing her edgy music persona with powerful roles on screen, Shruti said the film offered an environment that was both chaotic and deeply focused — a combination she thrived in.

In a candid reflection on her time on set, Shruti shared, "There was always this buzzing energy behind the scenes. We did a lot of night shoots, which I personally like quite a bit. So, that was quite relaxing for me. But yeah, there were a lot of things happening. Everyone was really focused on the work, and overall it was really, really good energy."

Shruti, who seamlessly switches between her punk rock concerts and demanding film sets, found *Coolie* to be a natural fit for her dynamic personality.

With its intense pace and immersive production schedule, the film demanded unwavering focus — something the actor welcomed wholeheartedly.

"For me, this film felt like home turf — raw, real, and relentless," she said. "It was the kind of set where no one slept until the shot was perfect. That kind of drive is rare and energising."

IAN S



Fatima on *Metro* experience

Actress Fatima Sana Shaikh took to social media to give a glimpse into her filming experience with director Anurag Basu by sharing a fun behind-the-scenes video.

Reflecting on their collaboration, the actress described working with him as both 'mad and beautiful,' capturing the unique energy and creative spark he brings to the set. The *Dangal* actress posted a hilarious BTS clip from the sets of *Metro...In Dino*, where Fatima, along with Anurag Basu and the other cast and crew of the film, is seen dancing. The video also features the actress' candid moments with co-actors Aditya Roy Kapur and Ali Fazal.

In one heart-

warming moment, Aditya is seen smiling at the camera as Fatima playfully pulls his leg, capturing their fun camaraderie on set. Sharing this clip, the *Aap Jaisa Koi* actress wrote, "You have to work with dada to know how mad and beautiful it is to work with him.. Kaam toh kar rahe the, par usse zyaada masti! Abhi toh bohut saare photo aur video dumps aane waale hai. #metroindino ke. Abhi ke liye bas itna."

Metro...In Dino, which delved into complex and modern relationships, starred Aditya Roy Kapur, Sara Ali Khan, Ali Fazal, Fatima Sana Shaikh, Pankaj Tripathi, Konkona Sen Sharma, Anupam Kher, and Neena Gupta. In the film, Ali was cast opposite Fatima.

IAN S

Sophie slams glamour shift at Wimbledon



This year's Wimbledon Championships were marked not just by stellar tennis but also by a striking Bollywood presence. A host of Indian celebrities, including Priyanka Chopra, Sonam Kapoor, Anushka Sharma, Janhvi Kapoor, Urvashi Rautela, Jacqueline Fernandez, Neena Gupta, Avneet Kaur, and Masaba Gupta, added a splash of glamour to the stands. However, the rising celebrity visibility at the tournament hasn't gone unnoticed—or uncriticised.

Singer and television personality Sophie Choudry voiced her concern about this growing trend. Taking to Instagram Stories, she urged fans not to let Wimbledon "become the next Cannes." A lifelong tennis enthusiast, Sophie recalled watching matches while preparing for school exams and emotionally investing in icons like Sampras, Agassi, Nadal, and Alcaraz. She expressed disappointment over the increasing number of celebrities and influencers attending Wimbledon seemingly just to post content, many of whom she believes have little genuine interest in the sport.

In contrast, actor Sonam Kapoor responded warmly to the trend. Reacting to a Diet Sabya post celebrating the "desification" of Wimbledon, she commented, "Indians everywhere! So good na?"

As global icons gather at the famed tournament, the intersection of sports, fashion, and celebrity continues to stir both admiration and debate.

AGENCIES

Sonam fulfils her childhood dream

Actress Sonam Bajwa, who is gearing up for the release of her upcoming Hindi film *Baaghi 4*, shared that shooting a song with choreographer Ganesh Acharya has fulfilled her childhood dream.

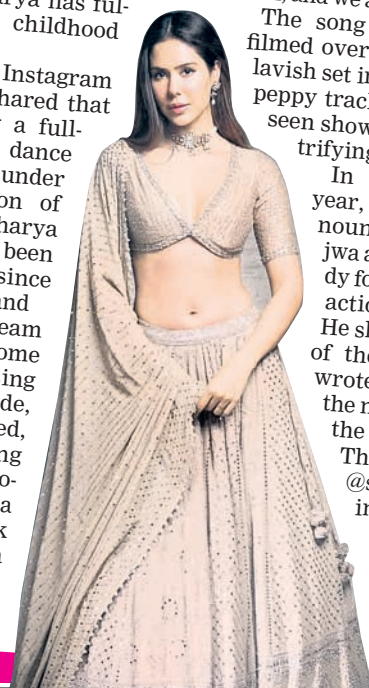
In an Instagram post, she shared that performing a full-fledged dance number under the direction of Ganesh Acharya had always been a dream since childhood—and now, that dream has finally come true. Expressing her gratitude, Sonam shared, "We shot a song for *Baaghi* today, and it was a dream to work with Ganesh sir. And he has choreographed this song; I am

so excited. It was my dream to do a dance song since childhood, and now it's happening. We have been shooting for past few days now, it's going very well, and we are super excited."

The song was reportedly filmed over three days on a lavish set in Mumbai. In the peppy track, Bajwa will be seen showcasing her electrifying moves.

In December last year, Tiger Shroff announced Sonam Bajwa as the leading lady for his upcoming action-packed film. He shared a picture of the actress and wrote, "Welcoming the new member of the Rebel Family! Thrilled to have @sonambajwa in the #Baaghi Universe #Sajid Nadiadwala's #Baaghi4."

IAN S



Little Red Barn



Hidden cost of factory farming

LYDIA MILLET

Growing up in Fort Worth, Will Potter was immersed in cowboy culture. He spent time in stockyards, Wild West shows and barbecue joints; once, in his miniature cowboy boots, he walked through an enormous, supposedly fun Cattlepen Maze built out of the metal, prison-like restraints known as cow chutes.

As a child, Potter writes in his new book, *Little Red Barns*, he played with a toy barn that had a handle on top, which he could click neatly closed and carry around (I flashed back to my own toy, a Fisher Price model with plastic horses, cows and chickens). Even far from the cowtowns, most of us are raised on stories and songs of the family farm, where the barns are rust-red and picturesque, and cute animals gambol happily in a picket-fenced yard.

Though Potter was frightened by the Cattlepen Maze and saw a graceful sadness in the long-

horns on display, he didn't think much about the lives of livestock. But now, as a seasoned journalist based in Colorado, he's done a great deal of thinking about those animals and how we (mis) treat them.

Little Red Barns, his second book, is the reportage of his epic, emotionally and physically draining 10-year investigation into American factory farms — also known as CAFOs, “concentrated animal feeding operations” — and the dedicated activists seeking to expose the mass suffering within. Like his first book, *Green Is the New Red* (2011), an exploration of how agencies such as the FBI target environmental and animal rights activists, it's impassioned and deeply researched.

I approached “Red Barns” gingerly, expecting harrowing descriptions of slaughterhouses and a litany of woes that would flatten me — and possibly, finally, drive me to the veganism I've long resisted because of my fondness for cheese.

Such reluctance to engage with the ongoing tragedy of corporate meat production, after all, is the ugly cross that animal rights activists have to bear. Environmentalists advocating for wild landscapes and creatures have breathtaking panoramas and wildlife charisma to help with their public calls to action. Look at this beauty! they can say. Help us save it! But activists trying to put a stop to the heartbreaking misery of animals being raised for food by large corporate entities have no beauty to sell. All they've got is: Look at this torture!

Most of us prefer not to. Luckily, *Little Red Barns* isn't a depressing litany, though it may well change your mind about buying industrial meat.

The book is a lucid indictment of a food system whose normalization of cruelty on a staggering scale is rivaled only by the tightly controlled, government-sanctioned regime of non-transparency that enables it.

Discussing the history of undercover efforts to expose abuses in farm factories — in which the advent of phone cameras and other concealable, portable video equipment in the 2000s played a key role — Potter describes the subsequent rise of “aggag” laws, passed to stop reporters and activists from filming such private abuses and making them public.

Keep in mind, Potter notes, that the US agriculture lobby spends as much on buying influence with politicians every year as the fossil fuel lobby; in 2023 alone, it spent \$177 million.

Over the past few years, there have been a number of high-profile exposés of factory farm abuses. Potter cites horrifying videos that show hundreds of piglets, held by their legs, having their heads bashed on concrete as workers crack jokes and of sows being beaten and sodomized with metal rods. He writes: “The industry didn't like this story. ... So

Will Potter's book is a searing exposé of how factory farming's cruelty, corporate greed, and systemic secrecy shatter the myth of the wholesome red barn, urging readers to confront the true cost of industrial meat

they started to tell a new story. In this version, the villain wasn't the worker caught beating and sexually assaulting animals. ... It was the activist with a camera. ... Factory farms were being attacked by violent extremists, the industry said.”

In fact, through their ubiquity, the standard practices at US factory farms are more quietly devastating than the incidents of extraordinary viciousness. Responding to concerns about the coffin-size gestation crates that commonly hold pregnant pigs, one executive at the National Pork Producers Council sarcastically remarked: “So our animals can't turn around for the 2.5 years that they are in the stalls producing piglets. ... I don't know who asked the sow if she wanted to turn around.”

The scale of this indifference to the animals we teach our

children to love is mind-boggling. Billions of cows, pigs and chickens are raised globally in a given year — the United States has exported its meat-making economies of scale across the planet, and the biomass of creatures being kept for killing and eating now makes up about 60 per cent of the mammal biomass on Earth. (Humans make up about a third; our remaining wild animals, 4 percent.)

One chapter, titled *Poop Tours*, offers a particularly vivid portrait of the far-reaching and vile pollution produced by mega-farms. Potter visits waste lagoons — enormous lakes of feces, hormones and antibiotics in which workers sometimes perish. Meanwhile outgassing and leakage turn surrounding areas into toxic hellscape.

“The crust of the lagoon isn't enough to protect the air from noxious qualities of ammonia, carbon dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, and methane,” he writes. “The gases aren't just an odor problem — they are so powerful they also damage crops and entire ecosystems.”

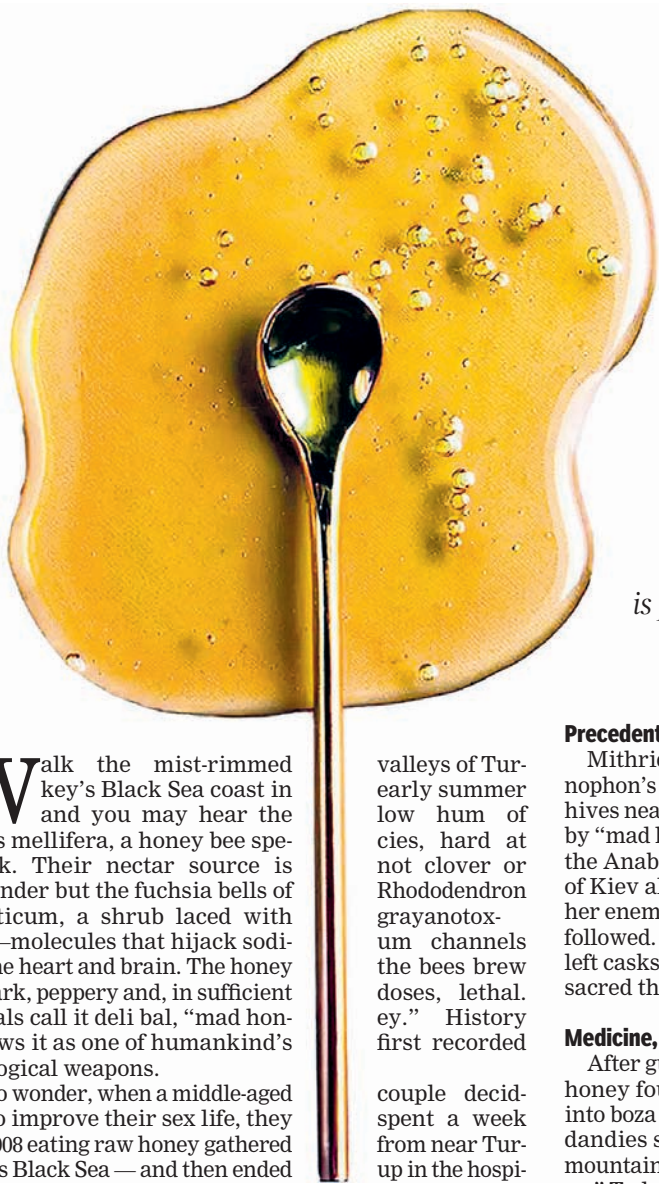
One person whose home has been rendered nearly unlivable by the stench of nearby CAFOs is retired-teacher-turned-activist Helen Reddout. As Potter drives with Reddout through her once-bucolic community, their windshield wipers scrape goblets of waste off the yellowing glass; they watch brown, liquefied feces being sprinkled in great, soaring arcs over croplands.

We tend to take our food for granted, shrugging off the distant unpleasantness of factory farms as the price of a tasty slab of bacon. And yet this food empire isn't an economic inevitability. It is, Potter explains, a result of a concerted, decades-long campaign by the US Department of Agriculture, Congress and their corporate-ag sponsors to consolidate production and squeeze out small farmers (historically, often Black). More recently, it's the work of a few very, very rich companies. Potter reports that “four companies operate about 75 percent of the world's corporate beef packing plants and abattoirs. Another four control about 70 percent of pig slaughter.”

Even if we put humaneness and decency aside, the climate damage and extinctions being wrought by our funneling of resources into meat — when plant-based foods are both healthier and more efficient at delivering nutrients — mean we have to look far deeper than the Old MacDonald song, with its vanished quaintness, and past the illusive images of cowboy cool that still serve to reassure us that our farms and feedlots are fine places.

Let's tell ourselves the story, Potter writes, that's true.

The reviewer's novel 'A Children's Bible' was shortlisted for a National Book Award, and her short-story collection 'Love in Infant Monkeys' was a Pulitzer Prize finalist.



Honey that wiped out Roman legions

Known as one of humankind's first recorded biological weapons, Mad Honey is produced by bees that ingest the nectar of Rhododendron ponticum and other poisonous plants found in Japan, Nepal, Brazil, parts of North America, Europe, and the eastern Black Sea region of Turkey

Walk the mist-rimmed key's Black Sea coast in and you may hear the *Apis mellifera*, a honey bee speck. Their nectar source is lavender but the fuchsia bells of *ponticum*, a shrub laced with ins—molecules that hijack sodium in the heart and brain. The honey is dark, peppery and, in sufficient doses, lethal. History first recorded

valleys of Turkey early summer low hum of bees, hard at not clover or *Rhododendron grayanotoxinum* channels the bees brew doses, lethal. History first recorded

No wonder, when a middle-aged ed to improve their sex life, they in 2008 eating raw honey gathered key's Black Sea — and then ended tal with symptoms that mimicked The culprit? Poisoning by Mad

couple decided to spend a week from near Turkey up in the hospitable heart attacks. Honey,

The naturally toxic syrup reportedly tastes bitter than normal honey, and the toxicity is stronger in fresh honey gathered in the springtime, when *rhododendrons* are among the first plants to bloom. It's a substance that can go from intoxicating to lethal in just a few tablespoons. And because potency varies from hive to hive, there's no sure way to tell when enough is enough. The honey is so potent that ancient armies used it as a weapon, and quite effectively, too.

Sticky trap for Roman warriors

In the spring of 65 BCE, three Roman maniples—between 480 and 1,800 men—pursued King Mithridates VI of Pontus through the rugged hills above Trebizond. Mithridates, nicknamed "the Poisoner King," had spent years immunising himself against toxins; his court pharmacologists understood the power of *rhododendron* nectar all too well. As the Romans advanced, local *Heptacomitae* tribesmen—Mithridates' allies—left clay jars of fresh honeycomb along the route. The legionaries devoured the unexpected bounty. Within hours, staggering dizziness, projectile vomiting and near-total paralysis struck the camp. Heart rates plunged to half their normal rhythm. When the Pontic troops returned, the Romans were "unable even to run away," wrote the geographer Strabo; the slaughter was total.

How Mad Honey works

Grayanotoxins bind to the sodium channels of nerve and muscle cells, keeping them stuck "open." The result is a cascade of cholinergic overstimulation: bradycardia, hypotension, drooling and vivid, sometimes terrifying hallucinations. Victims describe the world tilting sideways and time stretching like taffy. In high enough doses, the heart simply forgets to beat. Modern toxicologists note that as little as one tablespoon can hospitalise an adult; a Roman legionary, dehydrated after a forced march, would have been far more vulnerable.

Precedents and copycats

Mithridates' gambit was not the first. In 401 BCE, Xenophon's retreating Greek mercenaries stumbled on wild hives near Trebizond and spent three days incapacitated by "mad honey" poisoning—an episode immortalised in the *Anabasis*. Centuries later, in 946 CE, Princess Olga of Kiev allegedly gifted five tons of fermented honey to her enemies; 5,000 Drevlians perished in the stupor that followed. The tactic reappeared in 1489 when Muscovites left casks of spiked mead for invading Tatars, then massacred the incapacitated force.

Medicine, myth and money

After gunpowder eclipsed entomological warfare, mad honey found gentler uses. Ottoman sultans blended it into *boza* for a mellow buzz. Eighteenth-century Parisian dandies stirred *miel fou* into absinthe; in New Jersey, mountain-laurel honey spiked rum for a "delightful vertigo." Today, Nepalese Gurung honey-hunters dangle from 300-foot cliffs to harvest *Apis laboriosa* combs, selling the spring crop (highest in *grayanotoxin*) for up to \$200 a pound as an aphrodisiac and hypertension remedy.

Turkish toxicologists still see dozens of cases each year—usually middle-aged men chasing better erections or cheaper highs. Most recover within 24 hours; a few require temporary pacemakers. The honey's danger lies in dosage: a teaspoon may soothe, a tablespoon can kill. Climate change is pushing *rhododendron* blooms higher and earlier, altering toxin levels in unpredictable ways.

Cost of Mad Honey today

Because of its ability to create euphoria and hallucinations, people use it as a way to get high. Some also use it for sexual purposes as a replacement for *Viagra*, as it is supposed to increase sexual performance. According to the



The bee and the Rhododendron

Royal Society of Chemistry, "Mad Honey is mostly used by middle-aged men for enhancing their sexual performance."

As a result, it is the most expensive honey in the world, costing \$166 per pound, according to the Texas A&M Research Center. It has also been used for medicinal purposes. Some prescribe it to relieve hypertension or provide someone with energy bursts if going through periods of exhaustion and struggle.

All that said, it's not well known throughout most of the world, and because of its expensive price and potential dangerous side effects and history, is not something that's sought after.

Legacy in the hive

From Mithridates' ambush to modern emergency rooms, Mad Honey remains a reminder that nature's sweetest gifts can turn lethal in the right—or wrong—context. The next time you drizzle honey on toast, remember the Roman legionaries who once licked it off their swords and never made it home.



A representative image of Roman warriors devouring Mad Honey