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MYSTIC AURA

MAGAZINE

Healthy Travel

NO MAKEUP LOOK
Summer beauty trend

369
Manifestation
Method

Chic Style
Freshness of golden moments

Model: Alina Brooks
Photography: SR Photography

2026

MYSTICAURA

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From Editor's Desk



Summer has a way of making everything feel lighter, even on long, humid days, and it's the season we all crave to slow down and spend outdoors with family and friends.

In this issue, we've tried to capture and reveal that exact feeling in our cover shoot, a chic, fashion story that celebrates ease and joy. This season, let's not chase perfection, but choose what makes us feel fresh, warm, and beautiful. Along with regular different topics by our esteemed writers. We hope you all will enjoy going through every page.

Regards

GITALI PATHAK DEKA
Proprietor & Editor-in-chief

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A POET'S MIND

00 FAITH

By Monali Bhuyan



FLOWER
the
sun

Model: **Alina Brooks**
Photography: **SR Photography**

Summer is the season of sunshine, vacations, outdoor gatherings, and effortless style. When temperatures rise, heavy layers of makeup often feel uncomfortable and unnecessary. This is why the biggest beauty trend dominating the season is the No-Makeup Glam Look—a fresh, radiant, and natural approach to beauty that enhances features without appearing overly made up.

The no-makeup glam look is not about wearing no makeup at all. Instead, it is the art of using makeup strategically to create a flawless appearance while maintaining a natural and skin-like finish. The goal is to look refreshed, healthy, and effortlessly beautiful, as if your skin naturally glows under the summer sun.

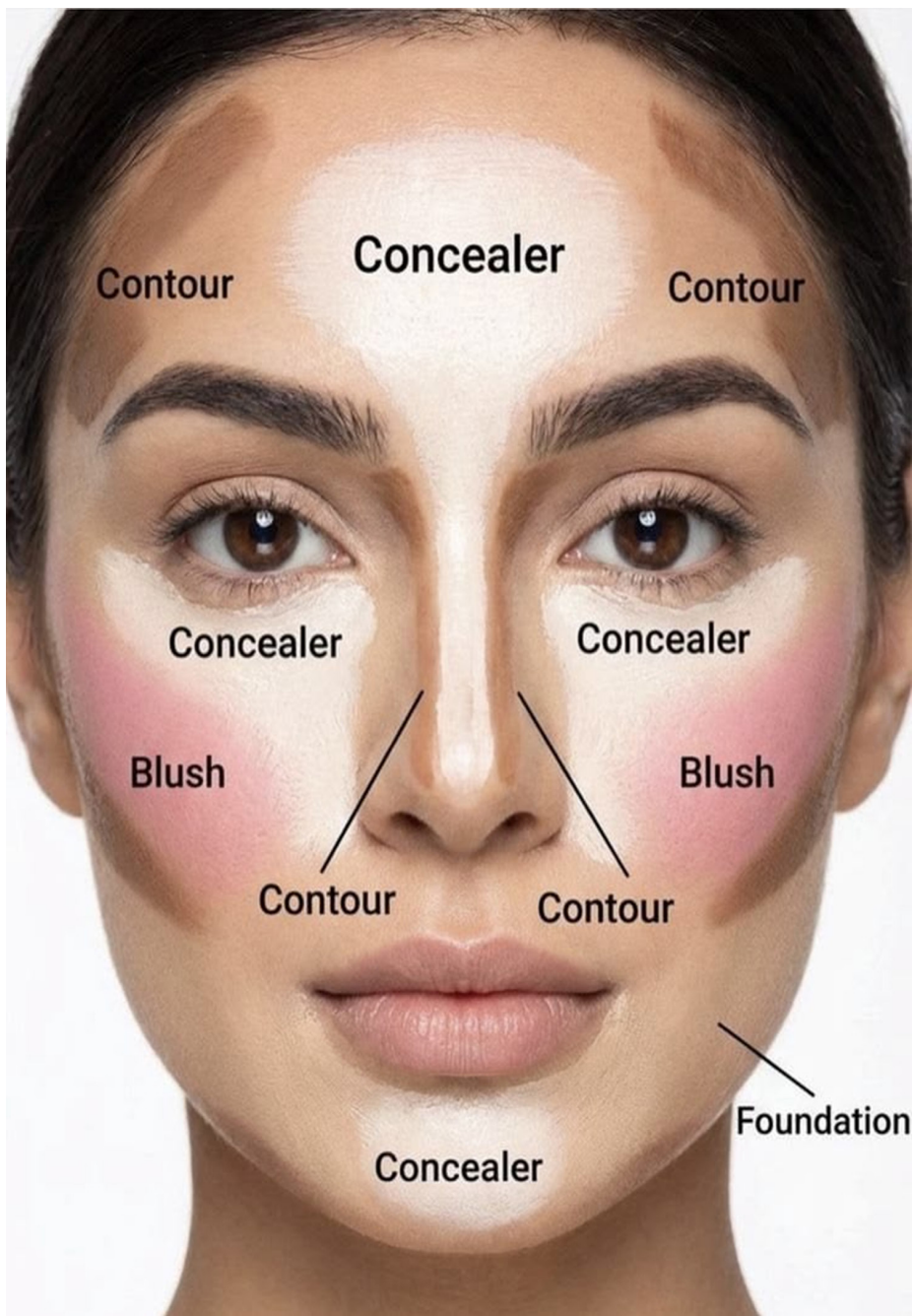
One of the main reasons this trend has become so popular is the growing emphasis on skincare. Beauty enthusiasts today understand that healthy skin forms the foundation of any great makeup look. Instead of covering the skin with heavy foundations and thick powders, the no-makeup glam trend celebrates natural texture, freckles, and individual features. A well-hydrated



No-Makeup GLAM

The Summer Beauty Trend
Everyone Loves

Compiled by:
Rajeshree Roy, Assam



complexion paired with light-weight products creates a youthful and radiant appearance that feels perfect for warm weather.

The key to achieving this look begins with skincare. Cleansed, moisturized skin creates a smooth canvas. Lightweight serums, hydrating moisturizers, and sunscreen are essential steps before applying any makeup. A glowing

complexion starts with proper skin preparation, making the makeup application easier and more natural-looking.

Rather than using full-coverage foundation, many beauty experts recommend tinted moisturizers, skin tints, or lightweight BB creams. These products even out the skin tone while allowing the skin's natural beauty to shine

through. Concealer is used only where needed, such as under the eyes or on minor blemishes, helping maintain a fresh and breathable finish.

Blush plays a significant role in the no-makeup glam aesthetic. Soft shades of peach, coral, and rosy pink mimic the natural flush that appears after spending time outdoors. Cream blushes are particularly popular because they blend seamlessly into the skin and provide a healthy, dewy glow. A touch of cream bronzer can also add warmth and dimension without looking harsh or overly sculpted.

Highlighter is applied with a subtle hand. Instead of dramatic shimmer, beauty lovers prefer a natural luminosity that catches the light beautifully. The focus is on enhancing the high points of the face, such as the cheekbones, bridge of the nose, and cupid's bow, creating a soft sun-kissed effect.

When it comes to eye makeup, simplicity is key. Soft neutral shades, lightly defined lashes, and groomed brows create an elegant yet understated look. Brown mascara often replaces black mascara for a softer finish, while eyebrow gels help shape and define the brows without making them appear overly dramatic. The result is polished, natural beauty that complements every face shape and skin tone.

Lips are kept fresh and effortless as well. Hydrating lip balms, tinted glosses, and sheer lip colors are

preferred over heavy matte lipsticks. Shades inspired by natural lip tones enhance the overall appearance while maintaining the minimalist aesthetic that defines this trend.

Social media platforms and celebrity beauty trends have further fueled the popularity of no-makeup glam. Fashion models, influencers, and celebrities are increasingly embracing looks that highlight authenticity rather than perfection. Their beauty routines focus on glowing skin, natural brows, healthy lips, and minimal makeup techniques, inspiring millions to adopt a more relaxed and confident approach to beauty.

Another reason for the trend's success is its versatility. The no-makeup glam look works equally well for casual daytime outings, office wear, brunch dates, beach vacations, and even formal occasions. With a few adjustments, such as adding a touch more blush or a glossy lip, the look can easily transition from day to evening.

Most importantly, this beauty trend promotes confidence and self-acceptance. Rather than hiding behind layers of makeup, individuals are encouraged



to embrace their unique features and enhance them subtly. It reflects a modern understanding of beauty—one that values authenticity, comfort, and individuality.

As summer continues to inspire lighter fashion and effortless styling,

the no-makeup glam look remains the season's most sought-after beauty trend. Fresh skin, soft colors, natural radiance, and understated elegance define this timeless aesthetic. It is a reminder that sometimes the most glamorous look is the one that appears beautifully natural.



ACADEMIA & Fashion

By **Sukmaya Lama** (PhD),
Asst. Prof. (History), Guwahati,
Assam.

Back in school, I remember my teachers as much by what they wore as by what they taught. Crisp, starched cotton sarees, handwoven mekhela sadors, and neatly pressed salwar-kurta suits were almost a uniform of academia. Their wardrobes reflected simplicity, discipline, and a certain quiet dignity. Colours were muted, prints were understated, and the local shopkeeper would probably describe them as "sober." For a long time, that became my understanding of what fashion in academia looked like—modest, neutral, and almost invisible. Somewhere along the way, I internalized the idea that dressing well and being taken seriously were mutually exclusive. Fashion belonged to runways, magazines, and parties; academia demanded restraint. Looking fashionable seemed almost like a distraction from intellectual pursuits.

But over the years, I have witnessed a quiet shift in the way we dress in our professional

spaces. University corridors are no longer painted only in shades of beige and grey. They are filled with colourful handloom sarees, contemporary silhouettes, statement jewellery, sneakers peeking beneath long skirts, and jackets paired with kurtas. Academicians today are increasingly embracing personal style without compromising professionalism.

This evolution has made me rethink the relationship between fashion and academia. Why should intellectual depth require visual austerity? After all, clothing is also a language. It reflects our personality, culture, creativity, and confidence. It can be expressive without being excessive, elegant without being extravagant.

As someone who enjoys experimenting with clothes, I have discovered that dressing for work can be both comfortable and joyful. Here are a few styles that have become my personal favourites.

Wrap skirts are my personal favourites. Wear a traditional wrap skirt for your classes. Pair it up with a shirt or a lace top and add some nice funky jewellery and boom, you are the DIVA.

Nothing can replace a sari/me-khala sador as an attire for those in academia. Cotton, linen, silk, you name it. Also you can style it with a quirky blouse, or even try a different wrapping style (the front pleats). It is never a dull moment to play around with the loose ends of the saree.

Kurta/Suits feel light and comfortable through all seasons. The



coolest fabrics are the best choices for the summers.

I think one can experiment with androgynous fashion. Wearing a short kurti with trousers and a waistcoat or a blazer, watch and a stud gives you a classy look. More on it in the next issue.

You might as well add colours to your footwear instead of the neutral shades of black, beige and

brown. Boots in winters, summer blazers, trench coats, cotton waistcoats can add that extra fashion element to your dress.

Also never forget to iron your clothes before wearing it. Or maybe I have an OCD about ironing my clothes. Heehee.

Go ahead and win the world with your style and confidence.

Aura
Fashion

Model

Simakshi Baishya

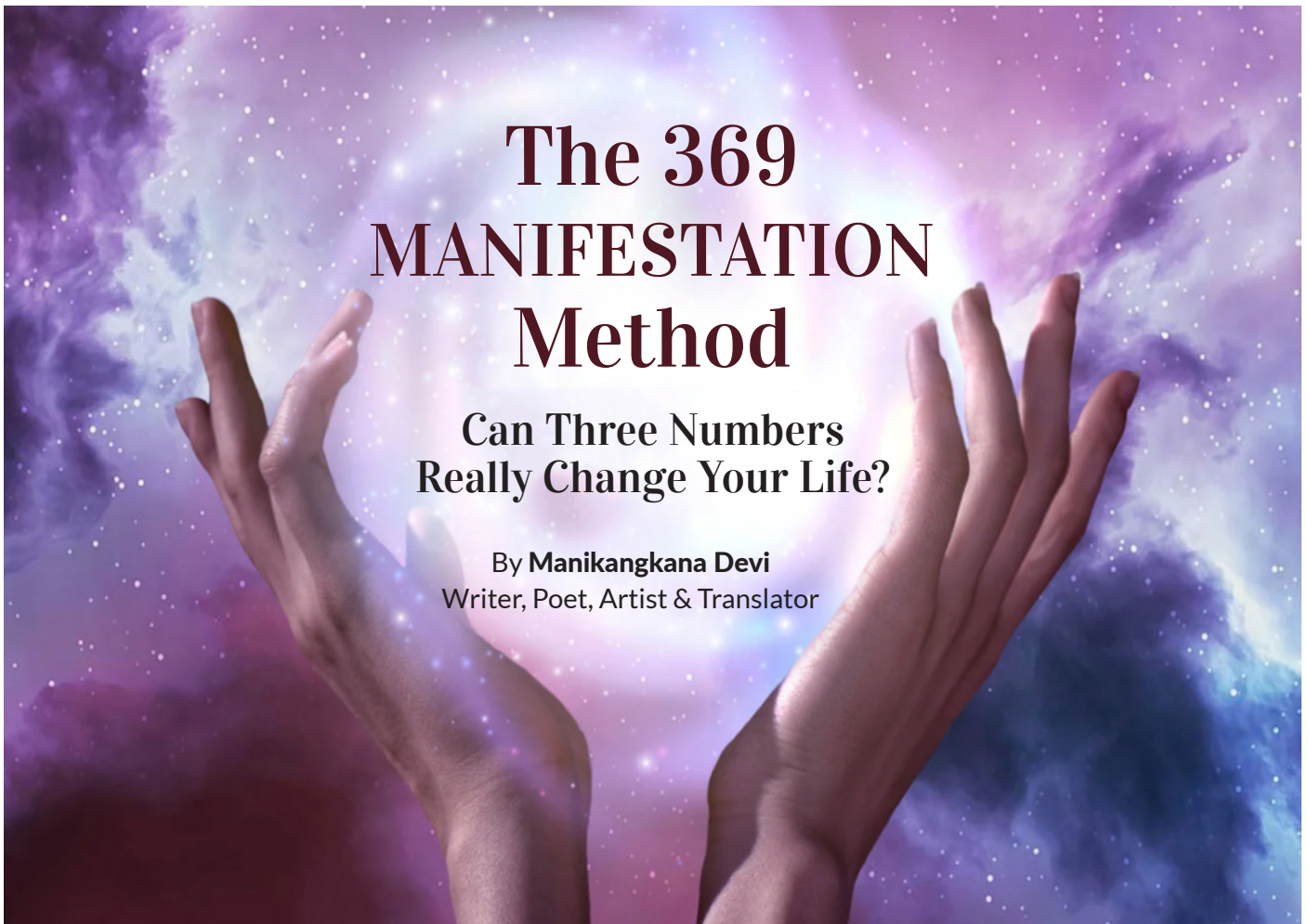
Photography

Swapnajit Borkakoti

Designer

Sikha Gohain Gogoi





The 369 MANIFESTATION Method

Can Three Numbers Really Change Your Life?

By **Manikangkana Devi**
Writer, Poet, Artist & Translator

What if a simple ritual performed with nothing more than a pen, a notebook, and a few minutes of your day could alter the course of your future? It sounds almost too good to be true, yet millions of people across the world are embracing a practice known as the 369 Manifestation Method. Some consider it a spiritual technique, others see it as a psychological tool, while many remain fascinated by the mystery that surrounds it. Whatever one's belief, the method has become one of the most talked-about self-improvement trends of the digital age.

The fascination begins with the numbers themselves. Throughout

history, numbers have carried meanings far beyond mathematics. Ancient cultures associated certain numbers with cosmic order, divine power, and hidden knowledge. Among these, the numbers 3, 6, and 9 have attracted particular attention. Their popularity surged after they became linked to the legendary inventor Nikola Tesla, who was believed to have considered these numbers extraordinarily significant. Whether fact or folklore, the connection added an aura of mystery that continues to captivate people today.

At its core, the 369 Manifestation Method is remarkably simple. A person selects a goal, dream, or

desire and writes it down as a positive affirmation. The affirmation is written three times in the morning, six times during the afternoon, and nine times before going to bed. The statement is written as though the desired outcome has already happened. Instead of saying, "I want financial success," the practitioner writes, "I am grateful for the financial abundance in my life." The idea is to focus not on wanting but on already having, thereby aligning thoughts and emotions with the desired reality.

At first glance, the practice may seem repetitive, even ordinary. Yet its supporters argue that therein lies its power. Human beings are deeply influenced by repetition.

Every belief, habit, and routine is strengthened through repeated action. By writing the same affirmation throughout the day, individuals repeatedly direct their attention toward a specific goal. In a world overflowing with distractions, such focused attention is surprisingly rare.

Consider a simple example. A young woman dreams of becoming a successful civil servant. She often doubts herself and worries that the competition is too intense. After learning about the 369 Method, she begins writing, “I am grateful to be serving my country as a successful civil servant,” three times every morning, six times in the afternoon, and nine times before sleeping. As weeks pass, something begins to shift. She becomes more disciplined in her studies, manages her time better, and approaches examinations with greater confidence. Months later, when she clears a major stage of the selection process, she wonders what truly changed her life—the power of manifestation or the power of believing in herself. Perhaps the answer lies somewhere between the two.

This example highlights an important aspect of the method. Critics often assume manifestation is about magically attracting success without effort. However, most practitioners describe a different experience. They claim the method changes the way they think, and those changes gradually influence their actions. Confidence replaces hesitation. Focus replaces confusion. Motivation replaces procrastination. The external results may be visible only after



the internal transformation has already begun.

Psychologists often point to the brain’s Reticular Activating System, a network that helps determine what information we notice in our surroundings. When a person repeatedly focuses on a particular goal, the brain becomes more attentive to opportunities related to that goal. It is similar to buying a new vehicle and suddenly noticing the same model everywhere. The vehicle was always there, but your attention had changed. Manifestation enthusiasts believe the same principle applies to life goals. The more consistently a person focuses on a desired outcome, the more likely they are to recognize oppor-

tunities that move them closer to achieving it.

Yet the appeal of the 369 Method extends beyond psychology. There is something deeply comforting about having a daily ritual dedicated to one’s dreams. Modern life often feels chaotic and uncertain. News headlines create anxiety. Responsibilities pile up. Goals that once inspired us become buried beneath routine. The act of sitting down each day to write an affirmation creates a moment of clarity amid the noise. It serves as a reminder that our aspirations still matter and that we have not abandoned them.

Social media has amplified the method’s popularity by providing



369 Method encourages people to revisit that dream every day until it becomes impossible to ignore.

Whether one views it as a spiritual ritual, a psychological exercise, or simply a source of motivation, its enduring popularity reveals something important about human nature. Deep down, people want to believe that their future is not fixed, that their circumstances can change, and that their dreams are worth pursuing. In a world that often encourages doubt, the 369 Manifestation Method offers something rare—a daily invitation to believe that tomorrow can be better than today. And for millions around the globe, that possibility alone is reason enough to pick up a pen and start writing.

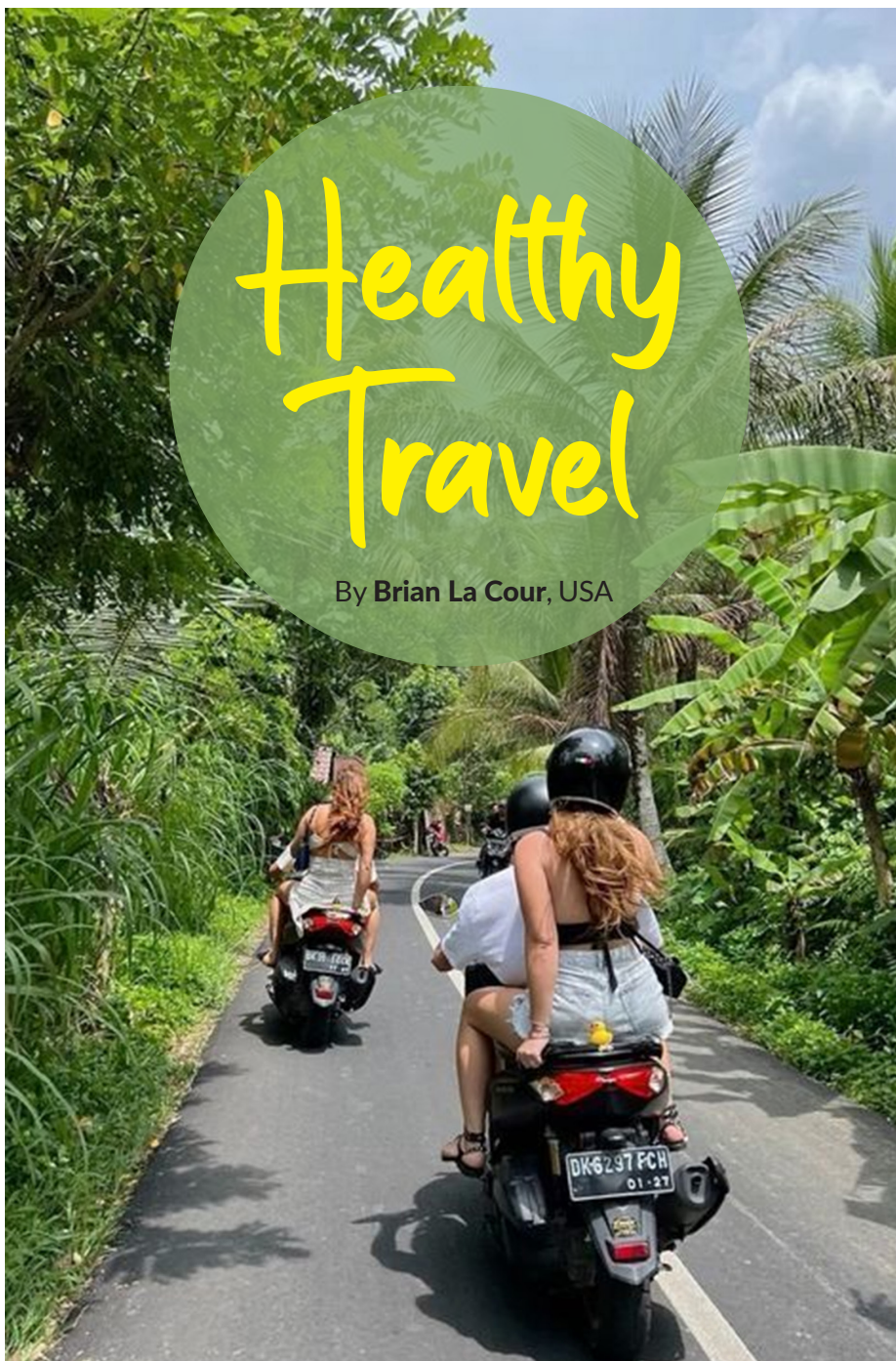
a platform for countless personal stories. Some individuals claim they manifested new careers, healthier relationships, or improved financial situations. Others describe subtle changes such as increased confidence, emotional stability, or a more optimistic outlook on life. Skeptics may argue that these results stem from mindset shifts rather than mystical forces, but even they often acknowledge the value of maintaining a positive focus on meaningful goals.

The mystery surrounding the 369 Method may never be fully resolved. Science can explain some aspects of its effectiveness through attention, belief, and behavioral change. Spiritual traditions may interpret it as an alignment of energy and intention. Both perspectives attempt to understand why so many people report transformative experiences from such a simple practice. Perhaps the true answer lies not in choosing one explanation over another but in recognizing that the human mind possesses extraordinary power when directed with consistency and purpose.

Ultimately, the 369 Manifestation Method is not really about num-

bers. The numbers merely provide structure to a daily habit of intentional thinking. The real magic, if it exists, comes from the repeated act of believing in a possibility before it becomes visible. Every great achievement begins as a thought, an idea, or a dream. The





Healthy Travel

By Brian La Cour, USA

creating a life that allows room for celebration, discovery, and balance. A vacation should never feel like something you need to recover from. Instead, it should leave you feeling renewed, energized, and inspired long after you've unpacked your suitcase.

The beauty of travel is that movement often becomes effortless. Exploring a new destination naturally encourages you to walk a little farther, climb a few more steps, wander through local markets, or spend an afternoon discovering hidden streets that never appear on a map. Every stroll along a waterfront promenade, every hike to a breathtaking overlook, and every leisurely bike ride through a quiet village becomes an opportunity to nourish both body and spirit. These moments remind us that exercise doesn't always require a gym or a schedule. Sometimes, the healthiest movement is simply embracing the journey in front of you.

Food, too, is woven into the fabric of every memorable adventure. A destination is often best understood through its flavors, traditions, and family recipes passed from one generation to the next. Sharing fresh seafood by the coast, savoring fruit picked from a local orchard, or lingering over a meal prepared with regional ingredients becomes part of the story you'll carry home. Eating well while traveling doesn't mean denying yourself those experiences. It means appreciating them fully. Nourishing meals, colorful produce, plenty of water, and the occasional indulgence can exist together beautifully. A scoop of

There is something undeniably restorative about summer travel. Whether you're wandering the cobblestone streets of a charming seaside town, hiking a mountain trail at sunrise, or simply enjoying the gentle rhythm of waves along the shore, a vacation offers more than a change of scenery. It offers an opportunity to reconnect

with loved ones, with nature, and perhaps most importantly, with yourself.

Yet somewhere along the way, many people have come to believe they must choose between enjoying their vacation and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. It's a false choice. Wellness isn't about rigid rules or perfect routines. It's about



handcrafted gelato enjoyed while watching the sunset or a slice of homemade pie at a roadside café isn't a setback, it's part of the experience. Health is built through consistency over time, not by perfection in a single moment.

Hydration is another quiet act of self-care that often goes unnoticed until it's neglected. Warm sunshine, long days outdoors, and hours spent exploring can easily leave you feeling depleted without enough water. Something as simple as carrying a reusable water bottle becomes an investment in your energy, your skin, and your overall well-being, allowing you to fully embrace each adventure from morning until evening.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts of a vacation is the permission to slow down. Our everyday lives are often measured by calendars, deadlines, and endless notifications. Travel invites us to exchange urgency for presence. It encourages lingering over a morning cup of coffee, watching the sunrise without checking the time, reading beneath the shade of an old oak tree, or listening to the sound of waves instead of the constant buzz of technology. In these quiet

moments, rest becomes more than sleep. It becomes restoration.

There is also something deeply freeing about letting go of the pursuit of perfection. Not every meal has to be flawlessly balanced, and not every day needs to include a structured workout. Wellness isn't fragile; it isn't undone by a celebratory dinner, an extra dessert, or an afternoon spent doing absolutely nothing. In fact, joy, laughter, connection, and rest are just as essential to a healthy life as fresh vegetables and morning walks. The healthiest travelers understand that balance isn't found by restricting life's pleasures but by embracing them with intention and gratitude.

When the vacation comes to an end, the greatest measure of

success won't be the number on a scale or whether every healthy habit remained perfectly intact. It will be the memories you've created, the places you've explored, the conversations you've shared, and the way you feel as you return home. If you've moved your body through adventure, nourished yourself with both wholesome meals and meaningful experiences, stayed present in the moments that mattered, and permitted yourself to truly rest, you've accomplished something far more valuable than sticking to a routine.

This summer, let your travels become an extension of your well-being rather than a pause from it. Walk a little farther. Laugh a little louder. Savor every meal without guilt. Watch one more sunset. Drink more water, breathe more deeply, and embrace the simple pleasures that often become our most treasured memories.

Because the richest vacations are not defined by luxury or perfection. They are defined by how fully we experience them, and how beautifully they remind us that living well is not about doing more, but about being fully present for the moments that matter most.





Love as Liberation

Healing from Fear and Shame

By **Vanessa Jacqueline D'cruz** (Loani Chairperson, SINGAPORE)

Fear and shame often teach people to shrink. Fear says the world is dangerous and that vulnerability will lead to hurt. Shame goes further, whispering

that the self is somehow flawed, unworthy, or beyond repair. Together, they create an inner prison in which people hide their needs, silence their voices, and mistake

emotional survival for real living. In this sense, healing is not simply about feeling better. It is about liberation—the slow, courageous movement from self-protection to self-acceptance, and from hiding to love.

Psychological research helps explain why shame is so powerful. Shame is not just a passing emotion; it is a self-conscious experience that can shape how people see their identity, relationships, and value in the world. It is often linked with urges to withdraw, conceal, or disconnect, which makes it especially damaging when it becomes chronic (Sedighi-mornani, 2018). When shame is rooted in painful early relationships, rejection, or criticism, it can become woven into memory and self-perception, increasing vulnerability to depression and emotional distress (Matos et al., 2013).

Fear and shame are closely connected. Fear alerts people to danger, while shame convinces them that they are the danger or the problem. Over time, this combination can produce harsh self-judgment, rumination, and emotional avoidance. A person may appear functional on the outside while internally living under the pressure of never being enough. This is why healing from shame requires more than positive thinking. It requires a new way of relating to the self.

That new way is love—not sentimental love, but compassionate love. Research on self-compassion shows that healing begins when people respond to their pain with kindness instead of contempt.



et al., 2017). This suggests that love is not merely comforting; it is transformative. It changes the inner climate in which healing becomes possible.

To live in love as liberation is to practice a different inner language. It is to say: I am hurting, but I am not broken. I have known fear, but I do not have to live ruled by it. I carry shame, but shame does not tell the truth about my worth. Such love does not erase pain overnight. Instead, it loosens the grip of old stories and creates space for dignity, connection, and hope.

Liberation, then, is not becoming fearless. It is becoming rooted in a love stronger than fear. When shame no longer has the final word, the self is free to emerge—not perfect, not untouched, but whole enough to be seen. And in that moment, healing becomes more than recovery. It becomes a return to one’s humanity.

Kristin Neff’s foundational work describes self-compassion as involving self-kindness, recognition of common humanity, and mindful awareness of suffering rather than over-identification with it (Neff, 2003). In other words, liberation begins when people stop treating their wounds as proof of personal failure.

This shift matters because self-compassion does not make people weak, passive, or indulgent. In fact, studies suggest the opposite. Self-compassion is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). It can also increase motivation for growth, because people are more able to face their shortcomings honestly when they are not crushed by self-hatred (Breines & Chen, 2012). Love, then, is not the denial of truth. It is the condition that makes truth bearable.

Love also interrupts shame at the level of emotional regulation. Research has found that

self-compassion can reduce shame, rumination, and negative affect, helping people move out of threat-based states and into greater emotional steadiness (Johnson & O’Brien, 2013). For trauma survivors in particular, compassion-based approaches have shown promise in reducing trauma-related shame and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Au



Aura
Fashion

Model

Nandita Borsaikia

Photography

Swapnajit Borkakoti

Designer

Sikha Gohain Gogoi

Mua

Payal Dutta & Team





By **Gitika Agrawal**, Beautician, Delhi

Best beauty masks commonly recommended by cosmetologists and skincare professionals for hydration, below given are few among the most trusted and can be used according to the skin type .

Hyaluronic Acid Mask:

Deeply hydrates by attracting and retaining water in the skin.



Ideal for dehydrated, dull, and tired-looking skin.

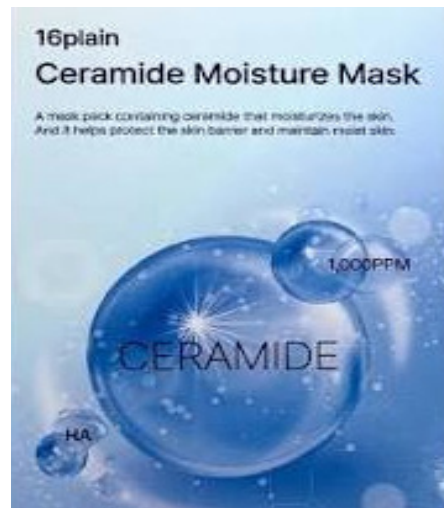
Use: 1-2 times per week.

Ceramide Moisture Mask:

Helps repair and strengthen the skin barrier while reducing moisture loss.

Best for dry, sensitive, or compromised skin.

Use: 1-2 times per week.



Aloe Vera Hydrating Mask:

Soothes irritation, calms redness, and provides lightweight hydration.

Excellent after sun exposure or cosmetic treatments.

Use: 2-3 times per week as needed.



Collagen Hydrogel Mask:

Instantly plumps the skin, im-

proves hydration, and gives a smoother appearance.

Great before events or photo-shoots for a radiant look.

Use: Once a week or before special occasions.



Overnight Sleeping Mask:

Seals in moisture overnight and supports the skin's natural repair process.

Suitable for most skin types, especially dry and dehydrated skin.

Use: 2-3 nights per week as the final step of your evening skincare routine.

Many cosmetologists also emphasize that consistent skincare matters more than any single mask. A simple routine of a gentle cleanser, hydrating serum (such as hyaluronic acid), moisturizer, daily sunscreen, and a hydrating mask once or twice a week usually delivers better long-term results than frequent masking alone.

Simple skincare and forever beautiful and young.



War, hunger and a birthday cake represents Iraqi director Hasan Hadi's remarkable debut film

“THE PRESIDENT’S CAKE” (2025)

Reviewed by film critic **Lalit Rao** (FIPRESCI)

Iraqi filmmaker Hasan Hadi's *The President's Cake* is one of the most remarkable films to emerge from recent Iraqi cinema. Premiering in the prestigious Directors' Fortnight (Quinzaine des Cinéastes) section at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, the film immediately attracted international attention. It went on to win the Audience Award in the section and later received the highly coveted Camera d'Or, awarded to the best first feature film presented at Cannes.

Set during the turbulent period of the American military strikes and wartime sanctions imposed on Iraq in the early 1990s, the film combines humour, tragedy, political satire, and social commentary into a deeply moving coming-of-age story. Writer-director Hasan Hadi has stated that he drew heavily from his own childhood memories of growing up in southern Iraq during those difficult years, lending the film an authenticity that is evident in every scene.

At the centre of the narrative is Lamia, a brave and resourceful young girl living in a society crushed by poverty, fear, and dictatorship. Alongside her friend Said, she navigates a world where survival itself has become a daily struggle. One of the film's most memorable recurring moments shows Said and Lamia staring into each other's eyes, competing to see who blinks first. The innocence of this childhood game stands in sharp contrast to the grim reality surrounding them.

The story revolves around Lamia’s desperate mission to gather ingredients for a birthday cake that must be prepared in honour of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. The irony is devastating: ordinary citizens who can barely feed themselves are forced to celebrate the ruler’s birthday. Lamia’s teacher, who is also a soldier, threatens children who refuse to participate, illustrating how political authority penetrates even the classroom.

Hadi paints a vivid portrait of a morally corrupted society. A barter economy has replaced normal commerce, and food has become more valuable than dignity. One disturbing episode shows a grocery store owner exchanging food for sexual favours from a pregnant woman. Another sequence introduces a predatory cinéophile, exposing how vulnerable people are exploited during times of hardship. The dilapidated hospital and the immense difficulty Lamia faces merely reaching school by boat further emphasize the collapse of social institutions.

Yet despite its bleak subject matter, “The President’s Cake” is surprisingly funny. Hadi fills the film with humor and absurd situations that prevent the narrative from becoming oppressive. The pacing is exceptional, with not a dull moment throughout its 105-minute running time. Lamia herself emerges as the film’s moral center, displaying more maturity, courage, and wisdom than most of the adults around her.

The final act is heart breaking. After countless adventures and sacrifices, the long-awaited cake is finally baked and tasted by the teacher. However, the celebration is interrupted by American bombing. Saddam Hussein survives, but innocent people pay the price. In a cruel twist of fate, children such as Said and Lamia become victims of forces far beyond their control.

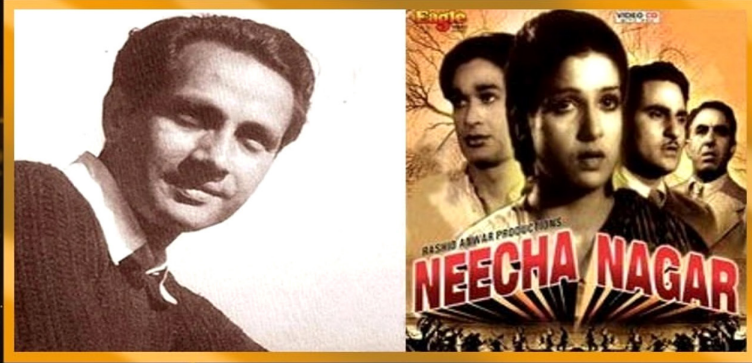
The performances of the young actors are extraordinary. Baneen Ahmad Nayyef as Lamia delivers a portrayal filled with intelligence, resilience, and emotional depth.



Sajad Mohamad Qasem is equally impressive as Said, bringing warmth and sincerity to the role.

Technically, the film is equally accomplished. Editor Andu Radu deserves special mention for maintaining the narrative’s remarkable rhythm and balance between comedy and tragedy. Indian audiences may recall his presence at the 56th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa in 2025, where he introduced the film and answered questions from viewers after the screening. The film was also screened at the International Film Festival of Kerala, further strengthening its connection with Indian cinéphiles.

Released worldwide by Sony Pictures Classics, *The President’s Cake* has reached audiences far beyond Iraq. As of June 2025, audiences in India can watch it on Netflix. Both touching and politically incisive, *The President’s Cake* is a powerful reminder that ordinary people, especially children, suffer most under tyranny, war, economic sanctions, and international conflict. At once deeply personal and universally resonant, Hasan Hadi’s debut feature announces the arrival of a major new talent in world cinema.



First Indian film at Cannes : "**NEECHA NAGAR**" (1946), directed by Chetan Anand, was the first Indian film to win **GRAND PRIX** at the **CANNES FILM FESTIVAL**.

NEECHA NAGAR

Revisiting India's Cannes Darling

Dr Dipsikha Bhagwati

Award-Winning Film Critic | Published Author | Translator

Amid the richly deserved celebration of Indian cinema's long relationship with Cannes, let us take a moment to honour what many believe to be the most extraordinary chapter in its story- one that played out not long ago, not through any of the celebrated auteurs of the New Wave, but in 1946, before Indian independence, before Bollywood as we know it even existed- with a film of staggering moral courage and true aesthetic brilliance. *Neecha Nagar* didn't just go to Cannes; it conquered it by sharing the Grand Prix, what's now known as the Palme d'Or.

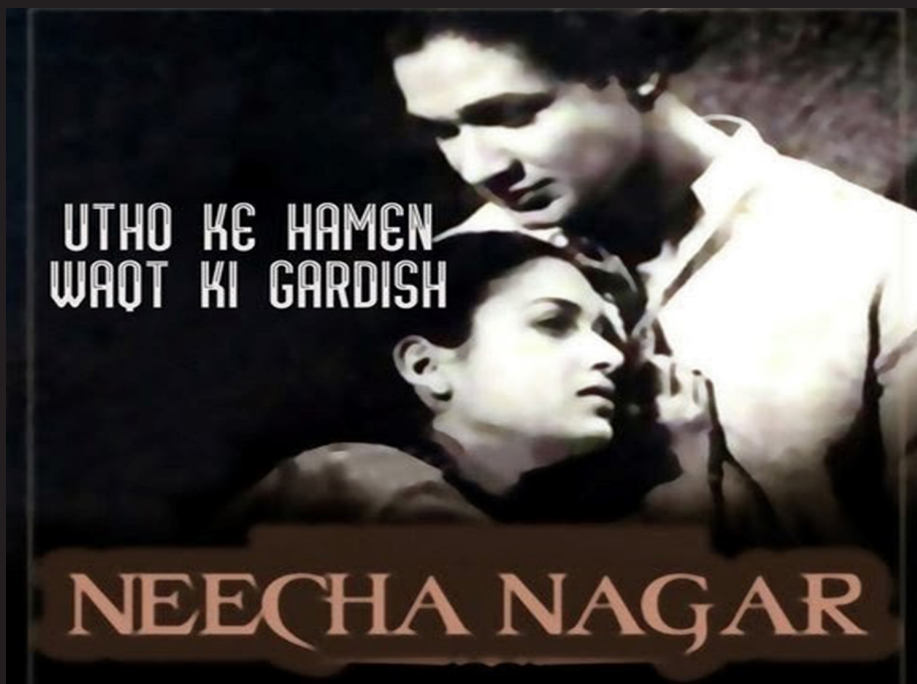
Adapted from Maxim Gorky's 1902 play 'The Lower Depths' and trans-

planted into an Indian social landscape, the film follows a wealthy landlord, Sarkar (Rafi Peer), who schemes to divert sewage through the impoverished village of *Neecha Nagar* to make way for a housing development. Against him rises Balraj (Rafiq Anwar), an earnest and impassioned man of the people, whose resistance ignites a movement of communal solidarity. The moral stakes are clear and the storytelling is direct, and this is not a limitation but a strength. Great political cinema doesn't always require ambiguity; sometimes it requires clarity of conviction, the unwavering gaze of a filmmaker who knows exactly what injustice looks like and refuses to look away.

The script is crisp and taut, unfolding with a narrative economy that keeps the film driving purposefully forward. Crucially, the political storytelling here is handled with remarkable accuracy- a rare achievement in films that tackle power and exploitation. The film never condescends to its poor characters; they are dignified, community-minded, and worthy of our full solidarity. When Sarkar's daughter Maya (Uma Anand) joins the protests against her father's wishes and finds herself drawn toward Balraj's world, the film charts a genuine arc of moral awakening. Her transformation doesn't diminish the structural argument but enriches it, showing that conscience can be kindled across the lines of privilege when injustice becomes undeniable.

Even through the haze of surviving prints, *Neecha Nagar* announces itself as a visually singular work. Chetan Anand draws fluently from an international repertoire of cinematic language- German Expressionism lends the film its shadowed menace and architectural unease; Italian Neorealism anchors it in the grit and texture of lived poverty; Soviet-school associative editing gives it rhythmic power and ideological pulse. The result isn't a confused stylistic jumble but a genuinely eclectic visual voice, the kind that emerges when a filmmaker is reading the whole world and synthesising it into something new. That a debut Indian feature was conversing so confidently with the global film tradition in 1946 is itself a remarkable achievement.

Certain images lodge themselves permanently in memory: a parched child bending towards a muddy



This does not displace the film's class critique- it radicalises it. *Neecha Nagar* suggests that exploitation is never merely local: the poor are dispossessed not only by the landlord's authority, but by the colonial machinery that legitimises and reproduces it. Anand may never have foregrounded this colonial subtext in the film's surface narrative, but the allegory is structurally embedded, waiting to be unlocked by later generations of viewers. That a popular Hindi film of 1946 could sustain such a layered political reading speaks to the depth of its authorial intention.

India has never won another Palme d'Or in the eighty years since *Neecha Nagar* shared the Grand Prix at Cannes- a fact which gives the film an odd historical bitterness. But it would be a shame to reduce the film merely to a nationalist footnote. The 1946 Cannes jury was assessing films made on the brink of a new world, with new eyes and a burning desire to understand what cinema could accomplish in defence of human dignity. To recognise, the film speaks less to its promise than its power, a power which still echoes through decades of India's parallel cinema to follow.

Parallel cinema didn't come out of nowhere. It was seeded, partly, by this film's example: the conviction that Indian stories could be told seriously, that the poor deserved not pity but the full strength of cinema's art, and that a film might aspire both to international prestige and stay rooted in its own social soil. *Neecha Nagar* is the first stone of that foundation- laid deliberately, skilfully, on fire.

puddle, barely distinguishable from the earth around it; lifeless animals drifting downriver in the poisoned current. These are images of quiet, devastating poetry- the kind that achieves its political argument not through rhetoric but through the weight of what the camera simply shows. The climactic sequence at the municipal meeting is a triumph of staging and tension, a scene that demonstrates Anand's full command of the medium when its stakes are at their highest.

Discussing *Neecha Nagar* without engaging with its soundtrack reflects an incomplete reading of the film's artistic and political language. This was Ravi Shankar's debut as a film music composer and the score he made- a sonorous, beautifully crafted backbone to the film, is among the most striking scores in early Indian cinema. Shankar lends an almost classical seriousness to the music that reflects Anand's own aspirations for the film: this isn't just background noise; it's a collaborator to the images, breathing

life and heft into the politics of the story. That two titans like Shankar and Anand found each other here feels, looking back now, like a truly magical moment.

Recent scholarship has deepened our understanding of the film's political architecture. In 'The Quint', Divi Tripathi drew attention to the landlord's name- Sarkar, meaning "government"- and how the film deliberately manipulated the naala/nahar ("dry" / "wet") distinction as an allegory for British colonial administration: the way famine commissions were designed not to solve crises but to manage the fallout of colonial economic policies that had caused them. This transforms the film from a simple class-struggle story into something much deeper, and even subversive. Sarkar is not simply a greedy landlord; he is colonial governance wearing the face of domestic capitalism. Made in the very year of Indian independence, the film was talking back to power at the deepest level.

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Photography

Swapnajit Borkakoti

Designer

Sikha Gohain Gogoi

Mua

Payal Dutta & Team



Faith

Through my lenses you are just an illusion now.
The strength you were is lost.
A distant clouded mountain..
You were powerful once.
Stings the heart
And tears the soul
to think you were my strength and power.
But now slowly decayed.
A wasted feeling.
I am no Angel..
But you are a demon in disguise.
Faith is wisdom
Faith is power
Faith once broken is
hard to build
Bitter truth of life.

- MONALI BHUYAN



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