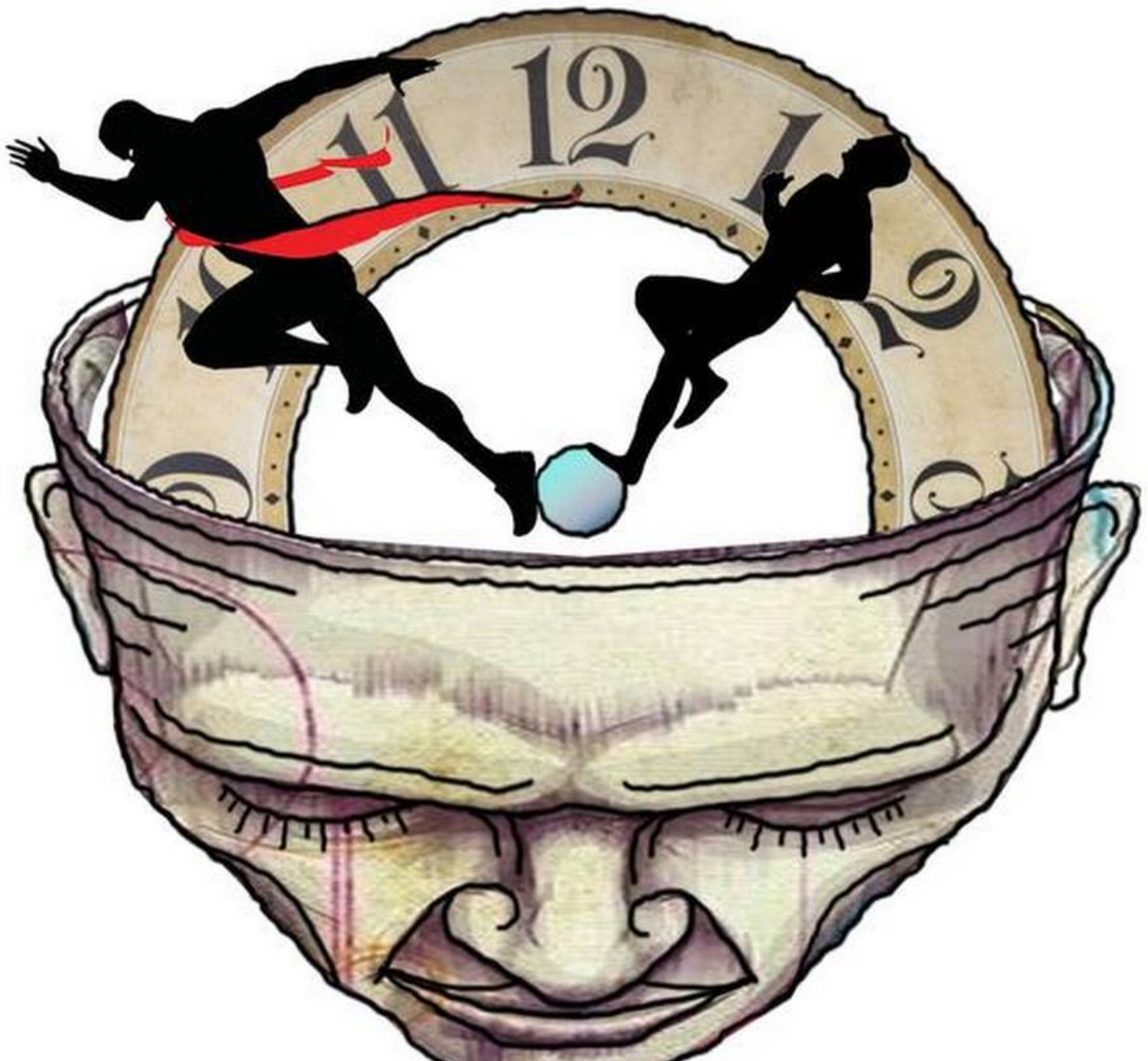


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## A race to nowhere



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**Feeling the heat? You should stop and rethink your choices**



# THE HINDU

Individuals share with me different versions of the same thought. The thought is likely the distinguishing feature of our generation. One where we feel lost trying to find our place in a world that teaches us the importance of chasing our individuality, and in the same breath asks us to quit our passion for conventionality. A world that values uniqueness but enforces homogenisation at every step.

As children, we were free of inhibitions, and were yet to be enslaved by the conditioning of modern-day society. We wanted to achieve great things. Some of us wanted to be astronauts who go on to colonise outer space, others wanted to be scientists making inventions by the minute. I wanted to be an environmentalist for a while and a pilot for the rest of the time. Today, I am a student at a management institute. The worst part is that I never even tried to become a pilot, hell, I didn't even research on how someone becomes a pilot.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not someone who resents my profession. My career has taken me places, provided me with what some may call intellectually stimulating work, and led me to interact with many brilliant individuals. But the more I interacted with these individuals, the more I realised that our system was increasingly creating insecurity amongst a majority of our generation. The answer to the why here was depressingly clear. We have taken our dreams, and hopes and ambitions, churned them into a factory, where we are repeatedly told to compete in a race to our society's definition of a 'settled and successful' life. Before we can even begin to understand what the race is all about, the shots have been fired, and the clock has begun to tick, tick-tock, tick-tock.

So, what do we do? We run. We run without understanding outcomes, but we run to win. As more people join in, the competition gets tougher, so we run even faster. As the finishing point draws closer, pressure builds up and we start to break under it.

We become self-conscious and start doubting ourselves. And in this moment, when we seek someone, to support us, to help us shine again, we are faced with reality. We realise how everyone around us is chasing that same superficial label, without understanding its significance, breaking under it just as we are. How can we then create an atmosphere where we help each other find a spot, when we have been conditioned to believe there is place for only one?

How can we feel happy surviving a world, all alone – a world that doesn't even let us control our own narrative?

Here's the thing with minds. They often wander, and mine keeps wandering around the transience of such labels that we chase – professional success, academic excellence, social media fame or a strong bank balance. Everyone seems to have their own validation poison. I fail to understand how we have warped our value system to the point, that we prioritise these things over what actually brings us joy.

# THE HINDU

moments of affection and love, shared with people we can call home. I have begun to understand that there is no such thing as a game-changing achievement. The real game-changers are the ordinary moments in life – the hot chocolate in winter, books read cuddled inside a blanket, drives on a rainy day, warmth of a mother's hug as she says goodbye at the airport, excitement on seeing a friend a decade later, unexpected kindness from a stranger, and so on. These moments are everywhere, in the smiles we don't return and the conversations we don't make, in the flower shops we ignore and the dessert we don't order, in the phone calls we postpone and the plans we break.

Most of us seem to think that once we have won this race that we are running, we will turn to these more important things in life. The problem, however, is that the race will never be over, and that the winning ribbon is an illusion we will keep chasing until the end of time. Life has to be enjoyed while living it. If we look for simpler times, we will look forever, because our labels will get bigger and the races we run to achieve them tougher.

So, next time you find yourself in a situation where you feel helpless going after something you don't really want, making a choice you'll resent, one that will make you feel slightly hollow on the inside, I hope you stop and rethink. I know I will.

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