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silent protest until he got his way. However, he outgrew it and it wasn't a lecture from adults that changed him — it was life, when his mother was hospitalised after an accident. "Seeing her like that made me realise I couldn't behave like a child any more," he says, and he began valuing money, relationships, and responsibility.

Looking back, he says, his parents were quietly firm with him — never saying a flat no or yes, but tying every privilege to effort and accountability, "If I wanted an iPhone, it came with conditions — gym time, school performance, or chores; when I finally got it, I valued it." He adds that if he were a parent today, he'd follow the same empathy-with-boundaries model. "If my 12-year-old wanted an iPhone, I'd give them a regular one first — meet the need halfway, but make them earn the upgrade."

Children are sponges, absorbing what we model, says Vyas. "Trolling a child for mistakes teaches trauma, not lessons. We need to let them experiment, err, and grow, because that's how confidence matures into true social intelligence."

PREETI VYAS

When parents replace indulgence with involvement and instant rewards with earned ones, children learn what truly matters: gratitude, patience, and perspective. For Thane resident Madhuri Patil, mother of Vasant (names changed on request), 14, the challenge was different — managing an only child in a joint family where everyone pampered him. In her absence he would test limits, disobey elders, and break gadgets. Instead of punishment, she channelled his competitiveness; she created a behaviour chart with daily goals that earned points for good behaviour. When he saw the maid outscoring him it triggered change. Missing out on screen time or favourite meals helped him understand consequences, and over months the chart turned into a game of growth. Patil says, "He became responsible, managed his time, and learned to delay gratification. He saved points for two and a half years to 'buy' his PS5 — and that made him proud and careful."

She believes the method works best when the whole family supports it. "If everyone is consistent, the child feels secure — that's when real change happens."

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DR HARISH SHETTY

The boy spoke to Amitabh Bachchan as if he were an uncle in his drawing room, displaying friendliness that purists might call audacious

Dr Harish Shetty, psychiatrist

AI see what you did there

An AI-fuelled plagiarism controversy around the work of a Delhi-based artist has thrown up questions of authenticity, ethics, artistic fulfilment, and vulnerability

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

A FEW weeks ago, artist and illustrator Krishna Bala Shenoi learnt that an artwork he had made in 2021 had turned up on a painting by Delhi-based contemporary artist Abhay Sehgal. Shenoi's Cottonboy was, as the Bengaluru-based artist has noted in a now viral Instagram post, "transplanted pixel for pixel onto [Sehgal's] canvas".

This isn't the first time his cotton candy boy has been used elsewhere without permission, Shenoi tells us. Followers have apprised him in the past of the painting appearing as T-shirt prints and even as a mural in a restaurant. "I'm not litigious and I have let it go," he tells us. "Even with Sehgal's work [titled All for One], I saw that my painting was a small part of his collage and didn't initially feel transgressed upon... What bothered me this time around

was the caption. It had him talking about it as if it was a painting."

It is this deception around the creative process that Sehgal has seemingly embarked upon that has prompted several allegations of plagiarism against the artist in recent weeks with side-by-side comparisons of artworks surfacing online. Many believe that instead of simply disclosing that his collage had been made with art found on the Internet and that he had also used AI to generate patterns, Sehgal has continued to fan a narrative of originality. He publicly accepts compliments on his detail-oriented works, and posts work-in-progress videos, all of which have served to create an illusion of authenticity. "I think he creates confusion around his practice because he wants the credit for having painted the work himself," observes Shenoi.

Earlier this week, a fellow artist on Instagram alerted US-based illustrator and comics artist Stacy LeFevre to the fact that their art —

Artist Krishna Bala Shenoi's Cottonboy. PIC/INSTAGRAM @ KRISHNABALASHENOI; (right) Abhay Sehgal's All for One features Cottonboy as one of the elements

a watercolour illustration made as a birthday gift for a friend in 2012 — had appeared on Sehgal's A 100M Swim. In an email interview with **Sunday mid-day**, LeFevre tells us that this is the first known instance of their artwork being used without permission, but given the vastness of the Internet they wouldn't be surprised if there were others. "... I'm glad on this occasion, the portion of my art that was used was recognisable enough to be traced back to me," they write.

"If you're deriving something from an original piece, logically you need to take consent or you'll be infringing. That's the traditional and conservative view to take," says Shailendra Bhandare, partner with law firm Khaitan & Co who has worked in intellectual property law for over two decades. Moreover, claiming copyright over a work derived from another's, he says, goes beyond the realm of originality "because the requirement for copyright protection is that it should be an original work". "However, the law needs to evolve as there is an argument that if the result/output of the AI works does not substantially reproduce the original work, there may be no infringement of original work."

Artist Stacy LeFevre's watercolour of a froglike creature with a bonsai tree on its back, and Abhay Sehgal's A 100M Swim which uses the same bonsai tree from LeFevre's illustration

"Where is the originality in a work where there is little involvement of skill, labour or effort, which is the backbone of any IP protection? When an artist claims that the work is unique, people pay money for that uniqueness," he adds.

With Sehgal's work [All for One], I saw that my painting was a small part of his collage and didn't initially feel transgressed upon... What bothered me was the caption. It had him talking about it as if it was a painting

Krishna Bala Shenoi, artist

In such cases of copyright infringement, Indian copyright laws, he tells us, provide for civil as well as criminal remedies, from injunctions, damages, costs, search and seizure to even fines and/or imprisonment.
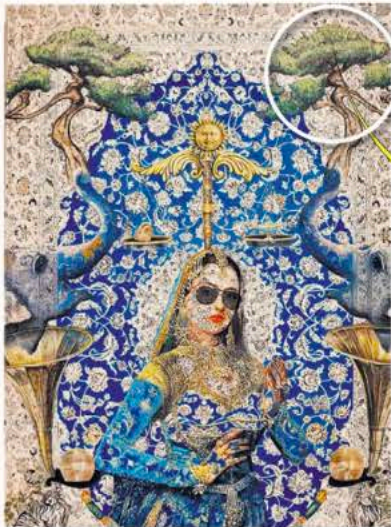
What has added an additional layer of complexity to the authenticity question in the controversy around Sehgal's art are the allegations of covert AI use. Artist Harshit Agrawal, who works with emerging technologies such as AI, sees the issue as two-fold: at one level, there was direct plagiarism for which no heavy technology was required. Using art created by someone else,

without modifying it or crediting the original artist, and instead just putting it out as your own work is what's problematic. "This doesn't necessitate the usage of AI to be called that," he shares.

Plagiarism with AI applies in cases where AI was expressly prompted to generate work in an artist's style, especially if those artists have not given explicit permission for this. The Studio Ghibli AI art trend, for instance, is an example. In Sehgal's case, Agrawal points out that AI was used to fill in the gaps and make his collages look seamless, rather than cut-outs put together.

In the face of growing pressure on social media, Sehgal recently put out a statement that he doesn't paint on blank canvases and instead creates digital collages which he references while painting. Collaging as a technique is an established format, says Agrawal, but "parts of that collage cannot be elements that are other people's works".

Agrawal, who has worked with AI in his artistic practice for over a decade now, trains his AI models with data that is his own or openly available in databases meant for this purpose. "I think you can use AI and still claim authorship of that work as a human artist, because I'm using AI to train the models and do a lot of backend work, like controlling its learning rate or shutting down neurons in its neural network to get different visual outputs. Therefore the usage of AI itself can be a practice in understanding its depths and then be-

ing able to create artistically from it," Agrawal tells us. The process is the same as what a traditional artist does with their material, he explains. "For me, the craft lies in that process just as someone working with ceramics or clay. When training an AI, I experiment with its parameters in a similar way."

What bothers Agrawal is the reductionist way in which people have begun speaking of AI artists. "AI art is equated to just writing a prompt and getting an image but that is not art. It's like saying that everyone who has a cell phone is a lens-based artist."

The path remains precarious for artists dependent on social media for visibility and work, which also makes them vulnerable to such creative violations. LeFevre expresses concern over well-known generative AI models being trained on work from artists who did not consent to their art being used, and points to its impact on opportunities for artists. "I've been approached by others to 'correct' or redo generative AI art for logos or illustrations, and it infuriates me that they would go to an algorithm rather than a human artist."

For commissions, LeFevre has begun including a clause stating that their work cannot be used for AI art generators. Over the past year, they have also begun adding watermarks on their artwork: "I also use Glaze from TheGlazeProject [software that prevents artwork from being mimicked by AI models] to protect my art. I question if that is enough... At the very least, I hope that makes it more inconvenient to be stolen."

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> The path is precarious for artists dependent on social media platforms for visibility and work, which also makes them vulnerable to such creative violations. LeFevre expresses concern over AI models being trained on work from artists who did not consent to their art being used

STACY LEFEVRE

SHAILENDRA BHANDARE

HARSHIT AGRAWAL

Harshit Agrawal's works, such as (Un)Still Life, all use custom AI models

Lali's compassion for Homi is both tender and transactional

Homi's world is a meditation on a community that's fading away

Love in the time of loneliness

The Gujarati-language film Paswaar puts a story about elder care and India's Parsi community front and centre

JUNISHA DAMA

DR HOMI, an ageing Parsi man, waits for his nephew to visit. At his home, where he lives alone, his caretaker, Lali, prepares some fish. Before she leaves for the day, Homi says, "Lali, mane paswaar ne…" She gently strokes his arm and back.

Paswaar (Caress) is filmmaker Shayar Gandhi's debut feature. A 40-minute film in the Gujarati language, it made its world premiere on October 11 in Seattle at the Tasveer Film Festival 2025 — South Asia's only Oscar-qualifying film festival. The film, which stars veteran actor Arvind Vaidya and Mamta Bhavsar, is a story of loneliness, compassion, and the small gestures that hold people together when family ties begin to fray.

"I was very close to my grandfather," Gandhi says, when asked where the story began. "He had lost my grandmother early on and lived without a companion for 15 years. Seeing him long for such basic human wants and eventually wear out because of it opened my eyes to this aspect of the human condition."

That observation of solitude, tenderness, and the human need for care runs through *Paswaar* like a steady heartbeat. While the film centres on the relationship between Homi and Lali, it's also a reflection on the world outside: one where the elderly often outlive their families, their routines shrinking into ritual, and their companionship outsourced to strangers.

"Through Homi and Lali's relationship," Gandhi says, "the film opens up a dialogue about whom we consider as our own and who is a stranger. We reserve our best compassion for those we think of as our own. The film questions this notion of who is 'apna' and who is 'paraya' after all."

Shooting with the Surti dialect was Gandhi's deliberate choice. He says it made the characters come alive for him. "They [the characters]

were not just cardboard cutouts trying to fit into a story structure. Rather, they were enablers for such a tale to be told," he adds.

Homi's world — the red Parsi topi, shelves lined with glass bottles of medicines, the scent of Patra ni Machchi cooking in the kitchen — also becomes a meditation on a community that's fading away. "I was born and raised in the old parts of Surat, which had a significant Parsi influence," Gandhi explains. "The first school I went to was run by the Parsi trust. The neighbourhood where I grew up had a strong Parsi presence. The Parsi way of life is ingrained in my own fond memories of the community. And sadly, it is fading away. I feel a strong sense of loss; a loss which is ethnic, cultural and deeply personal."

In *Paswaar*, the relationship between Homi and Lali also touches on class, gender, and the unspoken hierarchies between the caregiver and the cared-for. Gandhi captures these nuances without sentimentality

> Our socio-cultural and economic values have changed drastically in the last two decades. This will affect the next generation of the old in ways we don't fully understand yet
>
> Shayar Gandhi, director

The film is a wake-up call for the future

or caricature. "It took considerable research and a great deal of imagination to capture the complexities of such a relationship," he says. "I didn't want to fall into clichés." What emerges is an honest portrait of two people bound by circumstance, trying to make sense of each other. Lali's compassion is both tender and transactional, while Homi's loneliness is tinged with yearning.

For Gandhi, though, the film isn't just about one man's solitude; it's a glimpse into a larger societal shift. "While the film addresses emotional isolation in the present, it is a wake-up call for the future," he says. "Our socio-cultural and economic values have changed drastically in the last two decades. This will affect the next generation of the old in ways we don't fully understand yet."

As India urbanises and families shrink, more elderly people are living alone, and their care is outsourced to part-time help. Gandhi is frank about this changing reality.

"Families do tend to their elderly, but often it's not out of care. It's because of the societal stigma associated with abandoning them that forces their attention."

A modest production, *Paswaar* also pushed Gandhi to wear multiple hats — writer, lyricist, costume designer — out of both necessity and conviction. "There is no other way for independent filmmaking to happen. Sad but true. But I did enjoy my debut as a songwriter," he says.

He found his perfect Homi in Arvind Vaidya, a veteran of Gujarati theatre and cinema. "I had my heart on him from day one," Gandhi recalls. "Once he read the script, and the maverick that he is, it did not take much time for him to transition into a Parsi." The chemistry between Vaidya and Mamta Bhavsar, who plays Lali, carried much of the film's emotional weight.

For Gandhi, premiering at Tasveer Film Festival — a major platform for South Asian cinema — is both a milestone and a validation. "The most challenging part," he says, "was keeping one's head when all about you are losing theirs. The most rewarding part is seeing the emotions on the faces of my audience."

SHAYAR GANDHI

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