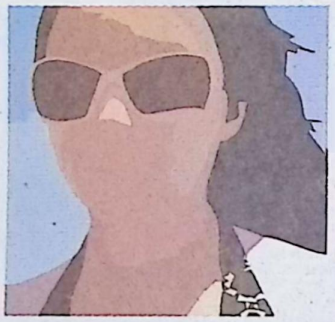





In Praise of the Selfies

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"You are – who you are when nobody is watching" goes the old adage and the reinvented quote. But in this day and age, we can seldom be ourselves. With the rise of social media, constant photographing, posting and oversharing – no one can be themselves anymore. Someone is always watching.

What we have become is a hybrid of what others feel we must be and what society doesn't want us to be. But all under the veneer of individual expression. The result is an array of carefully-constructed, virtual personas that live, think, pray and eat for the world to see: each in its own, grim 'Truman Show'. These personas may feature a general lack of empathy and social consciousness. For us, keeping up appearances have become more important than keeping up relationships, conveying the *impression* of fun more important than actual fun, posting RIP messages more important than grieving and check-ins more important than travels.

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The Millenials – the post-80s, *carpe diem*-er, YOLO-chanting generation – have been on the receiving end of much flak for their endless self-obsession, self-documentation and narcissism. There was a time when successful, prominent individuals produced autobiographies – to impart their wisdom and experiences. Millenials document their lives first and if not entirely consumed by such a mammoth task, focus on succeeding. Even research shows Millenials to be more narcissistic than earlier generations, as measured by grandiose exhibitionism and entitlement. Either way, they are superstars in their own eyes.

But imagine limiting your thoughts to 140 words, your wits to a meme or your life to a square, soft-toned photo. It's an editor's nightmare! Size restrictions – arising out of mass attention-deficit – have driven the individual to focus on himself. There just isn't enough time or space for company, surroundings or context. Thus a heightened regard for the 'Self' and urban youths' bite-sized, online-interactions have sired a phenomenon that is perfectly symptomatic of the Millenials.

The selfie is a self-taken picture of one's self – the evil, entitled twin of the PP-size photo. The age, when people shied away from being photographed, has long ended. Every individual is now a celebrity unto himself. And he gets photographed endlessly – heck, he even takes it himself if necessary. And behold the unparalleled rise of the selfie. Awkward, flushed-out, accidently-cropped selfies, popular in the early-2000s, served as a tool for recording individual lives, times and experiences. Then ubiquity of camera-phones improved aim and exposure. More selfies started to make it out to the Internet. But still 80 percent of selfies were taken in the bathroom, in front of a mirror. And then in 2010, Apple came up with the front-facing camera on the iPhone.

The front-facing camera revolutionized selfies: it meant you could now see yourself on the screen, adjust frame and focus before clicking. It revived the fading practice of selfies. It gave people a way to curate their own stories, determine exactly how they appear to others. Selfies have since become the cornerstone of – and the prime visual tool for – editorialising the average Joe's humdrum chronicles. Once this content is ready – social media is on stand-by to put it out in the world, for less-than-average Janes and Joes to lap it up.

Millenials, also known as the 'selfie-generation', have made selfies into an elaborate affair to arouse admiration, envy and inferiority-complexes in their audiences. Selfies are often taken from above the eyeline, phones tilted at 45 degrees – with backlight and a slightly-startled