

the perfect man

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One day, at the age of sixteen, Dr. Ashok Aswani chose to enter a cinema instead of going to work. He watched a Charlie Chaplin film four times in a row and left the theatre convinced that this character could inspire an entirely new generation of Indian men. He lost his job that day, but began what would later become the largest parade in the world dedicated to the Tramp.

Dr. Aswani could not be considered a perfect man. The perfect man works. He contributes to the nation's progress. He wakes up early, leaves home on time, waves goodbye to his wife from the car, and spends eight hours at the office, navigating daily traffic jams in order to provide for his family. Charlie Chaplin could not be the perfect man either.

In India, the industrial revolution never fully began—and never entirely stopped. Yet a Western model of the “perfect man” was imposed and widely embraced, layered over an already rigid and hierarchical social structure. The result is a deeply ambivalent and often contradictory idea of masculinity.

Using the first ten minutes of Modern Times as a script, this series reflects on India's particular understanding of masculinity, as well as on the traditional representations of labour, productivity, and the ideal male citizen.

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