



Books are a uniquely portable magic

- Stephen King

Creative economy: Rural Bharat's next big business opportunity



PANDIRI HARSHA BHARGAVI

and cultural storytelling. Bharat's rural creative ecosystem possesses a natural competitive advantage.

A Sector Bigger Than It Appears

The creative economy is often narrowly associated with films, media, or entertainment. In the Bharatiya context, however, it spans a much wider ecosystem:

- handicrafts,
- handlooms,
- folk arts,
- local cuisine,
- wellness traditions,
- heritage tourism,
- eco-friendly products,
- cultural experiences,
- and indigenous knowledge systems.

Its economic footprint is substantial.

According to the Ministry of Textiles, Bharat's handicraft exports touched nearly ₹33,122 crore in 2024-25, compared to ₹20,082 crore in 2014-15. The growth reflects rising global demand for hand-made and ethically sourced products.

At the same time, the MSME sector — where most creative enterprises operate — contributes around 30% of Bharat's GDP and over 45% of exports while generating large-scale employment opportunities at relatively low capital investment.

For policymakers and investors alike, this makes the creative economy particularly relevant for rural development.

Unlike large industries that require heavy infrastructure and urban concentration, creative enterprises are decentralised by nature. They thrive on local skills, local materials, and community participation.



Kutch: Where Craft Became Commerce

Few regions illustrate the business potential of the creative economy better than Kutch in Gujarat.

Once known primarily for drought and migration challenges, Kutch today has become an internationally recognised craft economy powered by embroidery, Ajrakh printing, weaving, Rogan art, and artisan-led tourism.

The turning point came after the 2001 earthquake, when rehabilitation efforts increasingly focused on livelihood restoration through cultural enterprise development.

Over time, artisans began connecting directly with:

- export markets,
- boutique fashion brands,
- tourism networks,
- exhibitions,
- and digital commerce platforms.

Today, many Kutch-based enterprises operate as globally visible brands while continuing to retain their local identity.

The region offers an important lesson for Bharat's rural economy: culture is more than merely heritage — it is commercial capital.

Experience Economy Comes to Rural Bharat

The next phase of growth in the creative economy has a larger share from experiences rather than products.

Consumer behaviour is changing rapidly. Travellers increasingly seek:

- heritage stays,
- craft workshops,
- local food experiences,
- spiritual tourism,
- folk performances,
- and immersive rural experiences.

This shift is creating a powerful "experience economy" where culture itself becomes monetisable.

Odisha's Raghurajpur village provides a compelling example. Famous for Pat-tachitra art and traditional performance practices, the village has evolved into a heritage tourism model where nearly every household participates in cultural enterprise activities.

Visitors do not simply buy products; they buy stories, interactions, and authenticity.

This model creates distributed economic benefits across artisans, guides, transport providers, food vendors, and local youth entrepreneurs.

From handloom clusters to cultural tourism, Bharat's villages are building a new growth economy rooted in creativity, identity and sustainability

Women Entrepreneurs Driving the Shift

One of the strongest growth drivers within the rural creative economy is women-led enterprise.

Across Bharat, women Self Help Groups and micro-enterprises are building businesses around:

- textiles,
- natural wellness products,
- handicrafts,
- food processing,
- eco-products,
- and local cultural services.

Digital commerce has accelerated this transformation dramatically.

Platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp Business, YouTube, and e-commerce marketplaces have reduced dependence on traditional intermediaries. Rural entrepreneurs can now directly access urban and international consumers with minimal infrastructure investment.

For Bharat, where increasing women's workforce participation remains a policy priority, the creative economy offers a scalable and culturally compatible pathway for entrepreneurship.

Sustainability Is Becoming a Market Advantage

Perhaps the most underestimated strength of Rural Bharat's creative economy is sustainability.

Traditional production systems often rely on:

- handmade processes,
- natural fibres,
- low-energy production,
- local sourcing,
- and recycled materials.

At a time when global consumers are shifting towards environmentally responsible products, Bharat's traditional sectors are naturally aligned with the sustainability economy.

Handloom products, bamboo crafts, terracotta items, herbal products, and Panchgavya-based enterprises increasingly appeal to eco-conscious consumers seeking alternatives to mass industrial production.

For exporters and impact investors, this creates significant premium-market opportunities.

The Missing Piece: Business Ecosystem Support

Despite strong demand and cultural depth, the creative economy still faces structural limitations.

- Challenges include:
- weak branding,
 - fragmented supply chains,
 - limited access to finance,
 - inconsistent quality standards,
 - low digital literacy,
 - and insufficient design innovation.

Community connect

Many artisans continue to remain trapped in low-value segments despite producing globally competitive products.

This is where startups,



incubators, design institutions, and investors can play a transformative role, if the local community is a business partner.

The next generation of rural entrepreneurship will require more than preservation. It will require:

- professionalisation,
- market intelligence,
- branding,
- storytelling,
- digital integration,
- and scalable business models.

Beyond Welfare Economics

Historically, rural crafts and cultural sectors were approached mainly through welfare and subsidy frameworks. That approach is no longer sufficient.

The creative economy must now be viewed as a strategic business sector

capable of generating:

- employment,
- exports,
- tourism revenue,
- sustainable enterprise growth,
- and cultural soft power.

As automation and artificial intelligence disrupt conventional employment sectors globally, human creativity, cultural authenticity, and experiential value may become some of Bharat's strongest economic assets. The villages of Bharat are no longer just centres of agriculture. Increasingly, they are becoming centres of creativity-driven enterprise.

And in the coming decade, the creative economy may well emerge as one of Rural Bharat's most important business stories.

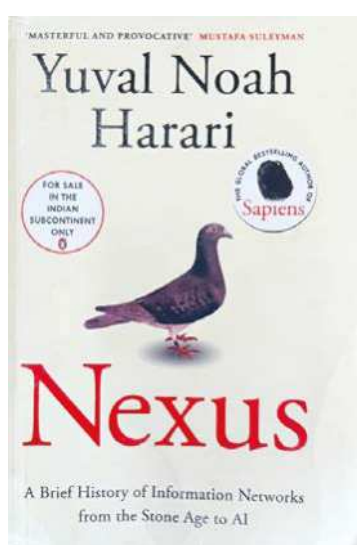
(The writer is a Creative Economy Expert)

Book review

FUTURE OF INFORMATION EXPLOSION



ANANDESI NAGARAJU



and everything else, from the internet to Artificial Intelligence, is a by-product. A computer is capable of making decisions by itself, and it can create new ideas by itself. The decision-making power shifted from man to machine. Algorithms auto-play the same kind of stuff again and again, which reinforces the same tendency in the user rather than checking their biases. Now, computers can analyse, manipulate, and generate language, whether with words, sounds, images, or code symbols, tell stories, compose music, fashion images, produce videos, and even write their own code. He argues that the problem we face is not how to deprive computers of all creative potentialities, but rather how to use them in the right direction.

In feudalism, land was important. In capitalism, machines were important. In the present information era, economic power may be concentrated in a single software hub, as Amazon became the United States's biggest clothing retailer in 2021.

Harari also warns about the misuse of information technology by tech giants like Facebook, Amazon, Baidu, and Alibaba, which not only serve customers and follow government regulations, but also influence and shape the whims of voters and customers. He observes that totalitarian and self-proclaimed religious regimes choose to use modern information technology to centralise the flow of information and to strangle truth to maintain order. What holds human networks together tends to be fictional stories, especially stories about intersubjective things like gods, money, and nations. A politician, a movement, or a country might conceivably get ahead here and there with the help of lies and deception, but in the long term, that would be a self-defeating strategy. He cited Nazism and Marxism in the

garb of Stalinism as examples of mass insanity destroying societies.

He warns about another danger posed by bots, an automated software programme performing repetitive tasks over a network, often imitating human behaviour, to influence public opinion for political purposes by spreading fake news. It is estimated that more than 50% of web traffic is done by bots. Sometimes, the company's algorithm may systematically delete content that is against its political policy. He also warns about data colonialism, in which the control of the data of citizens of a country will be in the hands of a foreign software company, to dominate for political purposes. He gives an example of India, which banned the Chinese apps like TikTok, WeChat, and others, fearing psychological warfare, data colonialism, lack of cyberspace, and loss of privacy of people.

Harari concludes that the challenge posed by new computer networks is not simply technological, but political. He urges the development of democratic systems that help people and prevent concentrated control of information. Harari warns that powerful information technologies may divide humanity into separate cocoons, undermining a shared reality. Thus, the main argument is that the rise of information networks makes it crucial to defend truth and inclusive democratic values against manipulation and fragmentation.

Harari is not above his personal biases despite being an expert in information theory. He naively equates the situation in Palestine and Ukraine with the situation in Kashmir, like other pseudo liberals. He squarely blames Burmese Buddhist monks for the migration of the Rohingyas without analysing the Islamic fundamentalist forces in Burma.

Stories that stay with you

ASKARI JAFFER

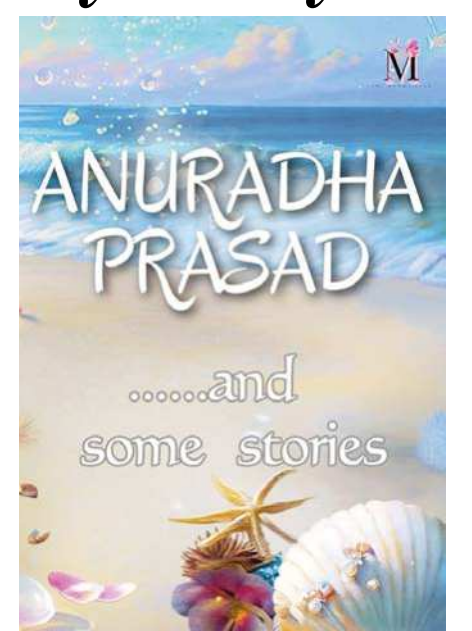
"A short story is a love affair; a novel is a marriage." Following Lorrie Moore's quote, "...and Some Stories" noted by Anuradha Prasad is a new love affair that is quickly garnering attention with a collection of stories that is turning complexities of real life into simple stories about inner and silent healing, discovery of oneself, and talks about the courage to rise above personal limitations. The book tackles deeply emotional and thought-provoking stories which are synonymous with Prasad's previous works that are deeply rooted in sensitive storytelling and realistic characters.

The seamless ability to connect with her readers is once again on show as Prasad presents stories that originate from familiar situations in a human being's life, while successfully tugging on the emotional heartstrings if the stories were to come to life. The book seems to be an intimate conversation with its readers, especially those who are searching for ways to find strength within themselves during the most challenging times in their lives.

Anuradha Prasad's writing style is elegant yet accessible for someone who has not read her previous works.

Similar to how she has spoken about her writing style in the past, the language used in the book follows suit as it flows smoothly, making the book an engaging read for both regular readers and newcomers to literary fiction. The author is not afraid to explore the psychology of her characters, and even gives readers a chance to understand not just their actions but also brings them face to face with their fears, insecurities, and motivations. While many of the themes in the stories have also appeared prominently in her earlier works.

Prasad also layers her stories with subtle social commentary, highlighting how society is often quick to judge individuals without understanding their circumstances and situations for how and why they do things in life. Some narratives explore emotional isolation, while others focus on relationships strained



by expectations and misunderstandings. She also manages to maintain a hopeful tone throughout the stories she tells, despite touching sensitive topics that deal with pain and struggle in an individual's day-to-day life. The stories are a reminder to people facing adversities that healing of one's soul and growth of character can happen in the most challenging and unlikely of times.

"...and Some Stories" is a book that is a rare gem of its time, one that talks about strength and celebrates people who have wanted to come out of their self-conscious shells as the author. Anuradha Prasad continues to find success in creating stories that are simple in structure yet can leave a reader feeling cathartic, truly connecting with her words. While the characters and stories will leave a seed of thought in the reader's mind, the short story collection also caters to people who can move and read on the go. The love affair with Prasad and her book leaves one experiencing a lingering sense of reflection and warmth, while also reminding readers that even ordinary lives hold extraordinary stories.