

#HEALTH

The “Thin-Fat” Indian Phenotype

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Why do many Indians appear to have relatively thin arms and legs but still struggle with stubborn abdominal fat? For years, this question has puzzled both individuals and scientists. One of the most influential figures in answering it is Chittaranjan Yajnik, a researcher based in Pune, whose work has significantly reshaped our understanding of body composition in Indians.

A Discovery That Challenged Assumptions
In 2003, Dr. Yajnik conducted a groundbreaking study comparing Indian newborns with those from the United Kingdom. Surprisingly, although both groups had similar birth weights, Indian babies showed a distinct difference in body composition. They had thinner limbs but relatively higher levels of central fat, even before their first meal. This meant that the difference could not be attributed to diet, lifestyle, or environmental factors after birth.

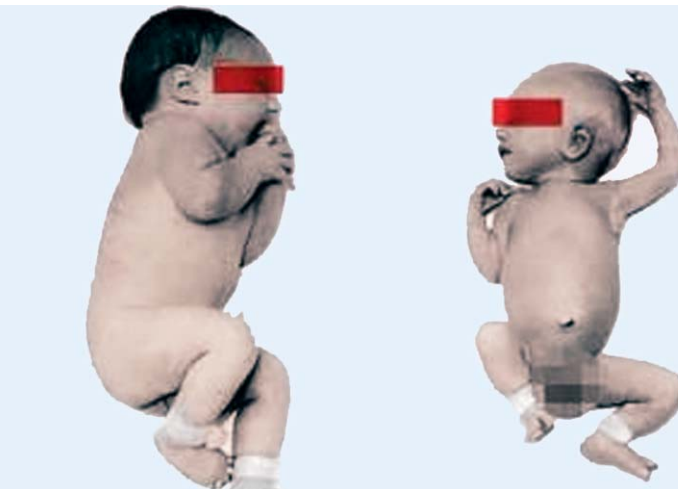
This finding led to the concept now widely known as the *Thin-fat Indian phenotype*. **What Is the Thin-Fat Indian Phenotype?**
The “thin-fat” phenotype refers to a body type characterized by:

- Lower muscle mass
 - Higher fat accumulation around the abdomen (visceral fat)
 - A relatively lean overall appearance despite underlying fat storage
- This explains why many individuals who appear slim may still face metabolic risks such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease.

Evidence Beyond India

Further research expanded on Dr. Yajnik’s findings by studying Indian families living abroad for multiple generations. These populations had entirely different diets, lifestyles, and environments compared to those in India. Yet, the same body composition pattern persisted across generations.

This consistency suggests a strong genetic and developmental basis, rather than being purely the result of modern habits or inactivity.



Rethinking Fitness and Health Approaches

Understanding this phenotype changes how we think about fitness strategies. Traditional advice often emphasizes weight loss or cardio exercise as the primary solution for reducing belly fat. However, for individuals with this body type, the issue is not just excess fat, it is also insufficient muscle mass.

- This shifts the focus towards:
- Strength training to build muscle.
 - Adequate protein intake to support muscle growth.
 - A balanced approach rather than excessive reliance on cardio.

The Protein Debate

A common belief in Indian diets is that foods like dal provide sufficient protein. While lentils are nutritious, research indicates that they may not always meet total protein needs when consumed alone, especially for muscle building. A more diverse protein intake, combining legumes with dairy, eggs, or other protein-rich foods, can be more effective.

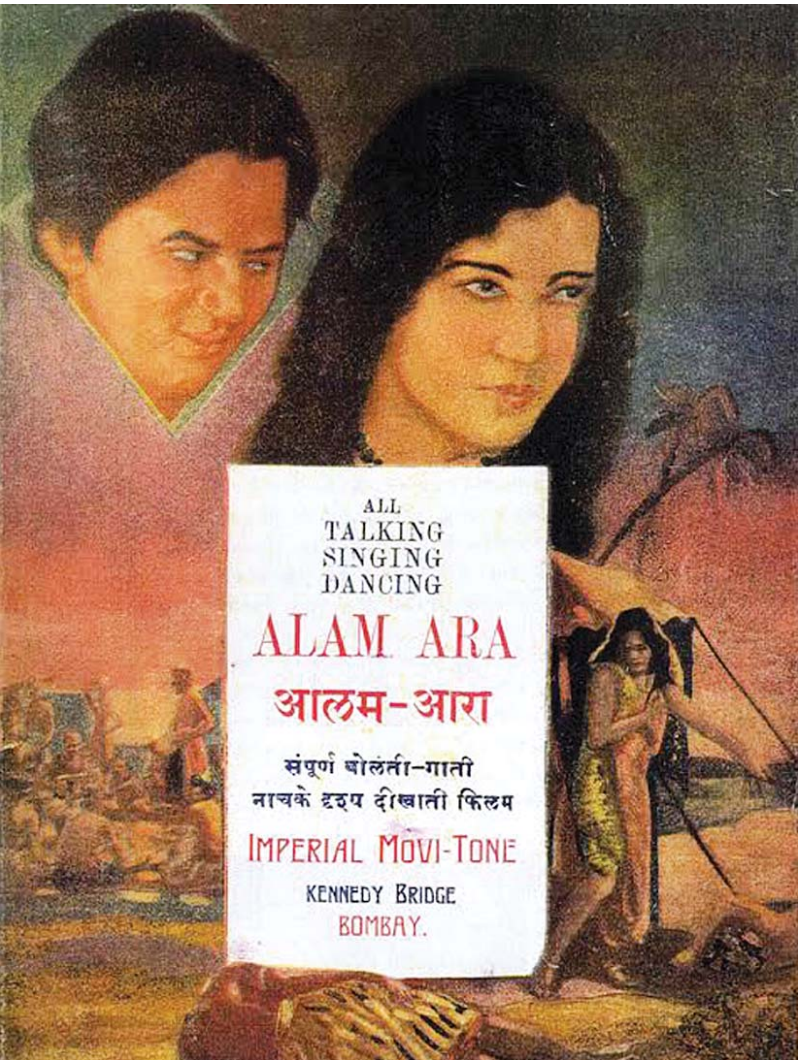
A Balanced Perspective

While the thin-fat phenotype is supported by scientific research, it’s important not to oversimplify. Body composition is influenced by a combination of:

- Genetics
- Early-life nutrition (including maternal health)
- Lifestyle factors such as diet and physical activity

So, while it may not be entirely about “laziness” or poor habits, lifestyle choices still play a crucial role in improving health outcomes.

The idea of the thin-fat Indian phenotype offers a powerful explanation for a common physical pattern seen in many Indians. Thanks to the work of researchers like Dr. Yajnik, we now understand that body composition is not just about how much you weigh, but how your body distributes fat and muscle. Rather than focusing solely on losing weight, the more effective approach may be to build strength, improve nutrition, and adopt sustainable habits. In doing so, individuals can better align their fitness strategies with the realities of their unique physiology.



• Kshema Jatuhkarna

Every great film industry has one defining moment, a single film that changes everything. For Indian cinema, that moment arrived on 14 March 1931 with the release of *Alam Ara*, the country’s first feature-length talking film. Although no complete print of the movie survives today, its legacy continues to shape Indian cinema, where dialogue, music, and song remain central to storytelling.

Behind this cinematic revolution stood a man whose own story was as extraordinary as the film he created.

In the 1920s, in Bombay (now Mumbai), a schoolteacher named Ardeshir Irani dreamed of making films. He had ambition but lacked the money needed to enter the young film industry. Fortune intervened in an unexpected way. Irani won a lottery worth Rs. 14,000, a substantial sum at the time. Instead of spending it on comfort or security, he invested it in his dream of filmmaking.

His early productions belonged to the silent era. Like every Indian film of the time, they were black-and-white and had no recorded dialogue or music. Audiences watched the action while musicians performed live inside the theatre.

Everything changed when Irani watched the Hollywood musical *Show Boat*. The film convinced him that cinema had entered a new age. He resolved that India, too, would have a motion picture in which

audiences could hear the actors speak and sing. It was an ambitious promise, considering that sound recording technology was still in its infancy in India. That promise became *Alam Ara*.

Making India’s first talking film was anything but easy. The equipment available was primitive and highly sensitive to noise. Bombay’s streets were crowded with traffic, making daytime recording almost impossible. To avoid the constant sounds of the city, Irani scheduled much of the filming at night, when the surroundings were quieter.

Recording music posed another challenge. There was no separate playback system, no sophisticated sound mixing, and no post-production dubbing. Every song had to be performed live while the cameras rolled. Musicians were positioned behind trees and hidden from the camera so that their music could be recorded alongside the actors’ performances. It was an ingenious solution that reflected the determination of the filmmakers to overcome technological limitations.

The film featured an impressive cast. The villain was played by the young Prithviraj Kapoor, who would later become one of the most influential figures in Indian theatre and cinema. The hero was Master Vithal, a celebrated silent film star whose participation nearly became impossible.

Master Vithal had left another production to join *Alam Ara*, prompting his former producer to file a legal case against him. Representing the actor in court was none other than the distinguished lawyer Mohammad Ali Jinnah, years before he became one of the

The Film That Gave Bollywood Its Voice

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National Avocado Day!



Avocados, especially when sliced and placed on toast, may have seemed like a fad in the early 2000s. But, happily, they are here to stay. And to make sure they are paid the attention they deserve, they have their own day, National Avocado Day! There are many reasons to celebrate National Avocado Day. For one, avocados target insulin resistance with heart-healthy fats. They also fight Alzheimer’s with its Omega 3 fatty acids. Another avocado superpower is preventing and repairing damage due to its source of Vitamins C, E and K. To celebrate the day, enjoy an avocado and try a new recipe. Share your favourite avocado recipe and use #NationalAvocadoDay to post on social media.

#ALAM ARA



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When *Alam Ara* was finally released in 1931, anticipation had reached extraordinary levels. Posters covered Bombay, announcing India’s first talking picture. Premium tickets reportedly sold for as much as Rs. 5, a considerable amount in those days, yet audiences eagerly paid the price to witness history.

The excitement proved justified. For eight consecutive weeks, theatres were packed with houseful shows. People who had grown accustomed to silent cinema were astonished to hear actors speaking and singing on screen. Indian cinema had found its defining identity.

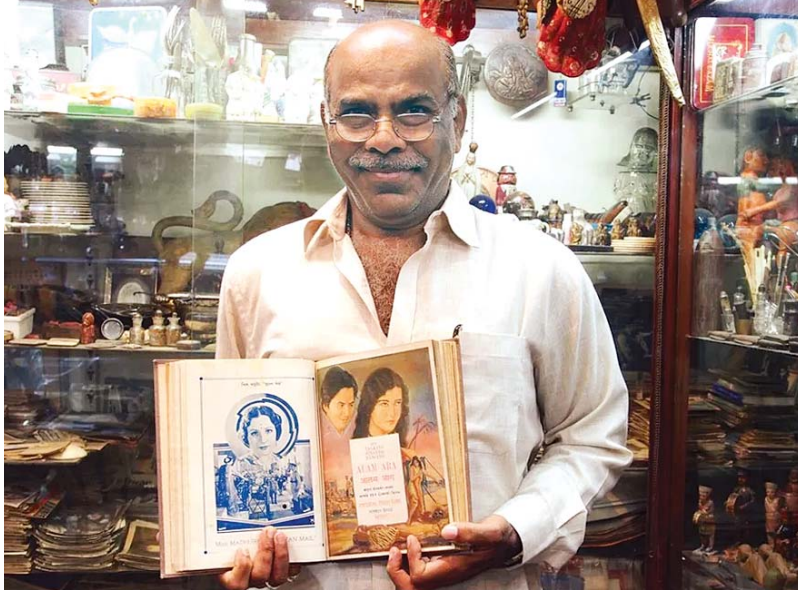
The success of *Alam Ara* transformed the industry overnight. Filmmakers rapidly abandoned silent productions and embraced sound. More importantly, the film established the tradition of integrating songs into storytelling, a hallmark that continues to distinguish Indian cinema across languages.

Ardeshir Irani did not stop there. Ever the innovator, he achieved another milestone in 1937 by producing *Kisan Kanya*, India’s first indigenously made colour feature film. Once again, he demonstrated his willingness to push the boundaries of technology and storytelling. Ironically, *Alam Ara* itself has been lost. No known complete print survives, making it one of the

India has a shoddy record in preserving films. Most of the 1,138 silent films made between 1912 and 1931 do not exist anymore. The state-run film institute in Pune has managed to archive 29 of these films. Prints and negatives have been found dumped in shops, homes, basements, warehouses and even in a cinema hall in Thailand. Filmmaker Mrinal Sen found prints of an old Bengali talkie lying around in an old house where he was shooting a film in 1980. But *Alam Ara* may be the most important film which has been lost. Inspired by the 1929 Hollywood romantic drama *Show Boat* and drawn heavily from theatre as many early talking films were, the film, based in a mythical kingdom, was described as...

World), the 1931 film that has disappeared. The Chicago-made Bell &

Howell film printing machine was lying idle in a rented shop selling



saris. Originally owned by the film’s producer and director Ardeshir Irani, the machine was later purchased by Nalin Sampat, who also owned a film studio and a processing laboratory in Mumbai.

“This is the only surviving artefact of *Alam Ara*. Nothing really survives of the film except this,” says Durgapuri. The Sampats had paid 2,500 rupees in 1962 to buy the machine. Their lab continued to print films, mainly produced by the state-owned Films Division, on it until 2000. “It was just another printing machine but held a lot of emotional value. We stopped using it after cinema went digital,”

Sampat says. For the past decade, Durgapuri, he runs the Film Heritage Foundation, a Mumbai-based non-profit film archive, has been trying to find a copy of *Alam Ara* without success. He even gave out a call on social media. One tip led to enquiries with a film archive in Algeria, which reported that it had a number of old Indian films. But the archive asked him to come and check, which Durgapuri has not been able to.

Another tantalising clue is the film archives in Iran. Around the time Irani was shooting *Alam Ara* in Mumbai, his studio was also making *Lor Girl*, the first talking film in Persian language. “Irani used the same background actors wearing the same costumes for both *Alam Ara* and *Lor Girl*. *Alam Ara* has disappeared. *Lor Girl* is available in the archives in Iran,” says Durgapuri.

India’s most-well known film scholar and archivist P. K. Nair once said that he refused to believe that *Alam Ara* is “permanently lost.” Nair, who died in 2016, himself went hunting for the film and met surviving members of the Irani family.

One member of the family told him that “a couple of reels must be lying around somewhere.” Another said he “had disposed off three reels after extracting silver from it.” *Alam Ara* was shot on nitrate film, which has higher silver content than other film bases. It is possible, says Durgapuri, that the films had been destroyed after stripping them



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The last scene of *Alam Ara* included the film’s entire cast.

for silver to earn money when the family fell upon bad times. “Such was the case with countless other films too,” India has a shoddy record in preserving films. Most of the 1,138 silent films made between 1912 and 1931 do not exist anymore. The state-run film institute in Pune has managed to archive 29 of these films. Prints and negatives have been found dumped in shops, homes, basements, warehouses and even in a cinema hall in Thailand. Filmmaker Mrinal Sen found prints of an old Bengali talkie lying around in an old house where he was shooting a film in 1980.

But *Alam Ara* may be the most important film which has been lost. Inspired by the 1929 Hollywood romantic drama *Show Boat* and drawn heavily from theatre as many early talking films were, the film, based in a mythical kingdom, was described as a “swashbuckling tale of warring queens, palace intrigue, jealousy and romance.” The British Film Institute called it a “romantic drama centered around the love between a prince and a gypsy girl.”

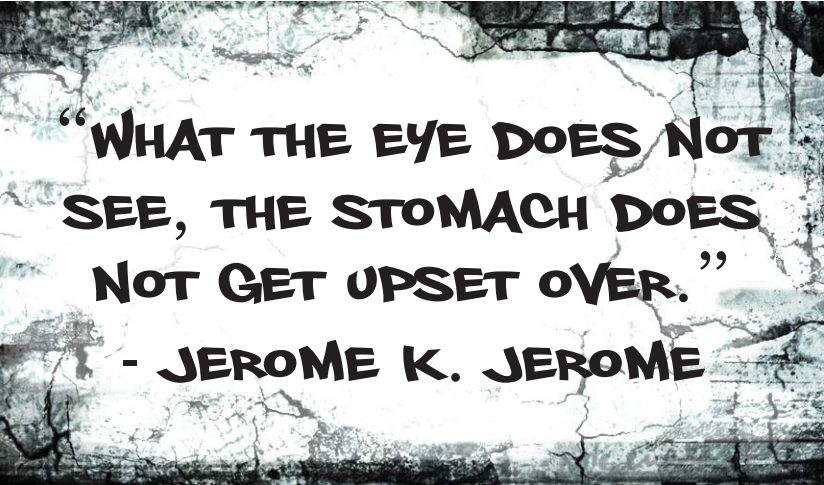
The 124-minute film was shot in a studio which overlooked Mumbai’s railway track, so, the crew shot at night when the trains did not run and the floor did not shudder from the vibrations.

Since there were no boom mikes to record sound, microphones were placed in “incredible spaces” around actors, who spoke in Urdu and Hindi, in a way that they were hidden from the camera. Musicians climbed on or hid behind trees and played their instruments for the soundtrack and songs. Most importantly, the film featured Wazir

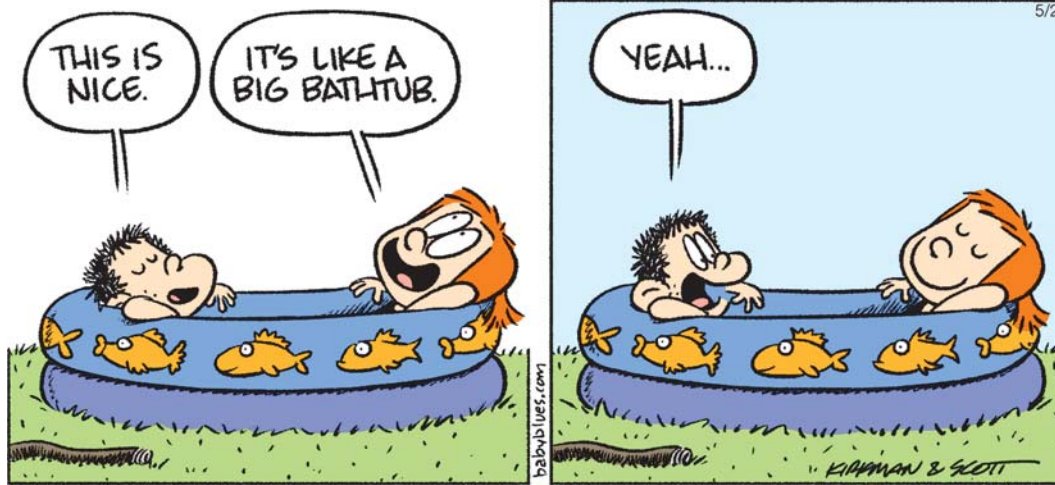
rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com



THE WALL



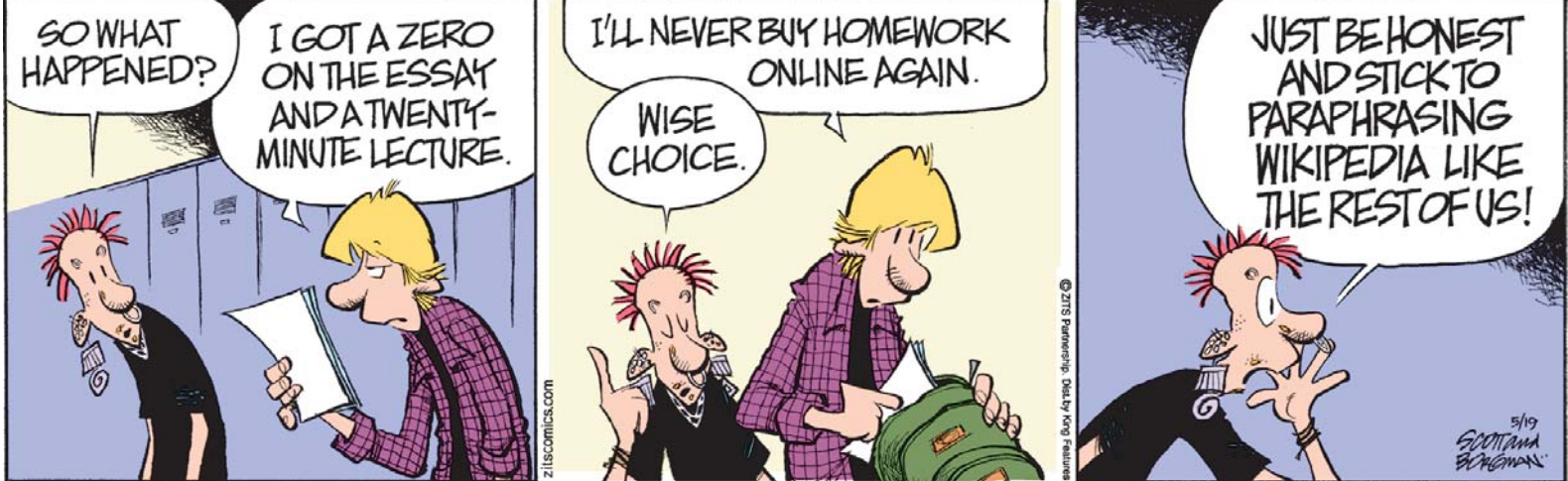
BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman