

# THE WORD

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**BURDEN ON WOMEN**  
Despite the government's efforts, vasectomy has few takers and it's the women who have to shoulder the burden of sterilisation

P4



**WINDS OF CHANGE**  
Amlid widespread scepticism, women's cricket is finally getting its due with the Inauguration of the WPL this year

P5



**LEFT OUT OF HOUSE**  
The newly elected Parliament in Nepal fails to give proper representation to minorities, marginalised communities

P6

## Coaching centres go for the kill Hard facts that take the fizz off soft drinks

Students unable to withstand pressure in Kota career institutes, suicides rise

Anjali Singh

**Chennai:** The first two months of 2023 saw four young people die by suicide and one student attempting self-immolation at coaching centres in Kota, Rajasthan. Go back a few years, and the numbers are disturbing: A total of 22 students have killed themselves in Kota since 2022, and 121 since 2011.

As per a report in The Quint, many students left behind notes in which they talked about trying to study but "failing", not being a "good" daughter or son, or about being a disappointment.

One of the reasons these students feel such pressure is that they worry about the money their parents have spent on these coaching centres.

"My father is a farmer. He couldn't afford to teach me in such a high-class coaching centre, somehow he took a loan to send me there. So, I had a lot to lose," said Archana Patidar, who studied at Allen Career Institute in 2020-21.

Archana was the first girl from her village in Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh, to pursue higher



**ASSEMBLY LINE:** Kota is home to a Rs 6,000-crore coaching industry

education outside. When she went to Kota she was a girl with dreams but once there, she felt as if she was controlled. "I used to love reading but due to this stress, I feel suffocated."

Kota is home to a Rs 6,000-

crore coaching industry. According to a report in The Economic Times, every year roughly 2 lakh teenagers from neighbouring states flock to Kota's coaching institutes, paying between Rs 50,000 and

even over Rs 1 lakh. Hostel fees cost anywhere between Rs 10,000 and Rs 15,000 a month. In all, parents pay around Rs 3 lakh or more for one year.

Hostel owners claim there is no pressure on students to study. "Where the problem lies is students fall in love and get into relationships," said Manoj Mehta, owner of hostel Ghokul D h a m .

However, students say that hostel officials and others often try to create an impression that students are constantly in relationships so that they can shift the blame on to students.

"In 2019 I was anxious for about two months and I went to the happiness zone in our coaching centre which looks after our mental health. I told them my problem and they started asking me if I have a boyfriend," said Parul Saxena, who also studied at Allen centre in 2018-19.

I tried contacting the happiness zone concerned, but there was no response. I also tried contacting Parijat Mishra, a person who identifies himself as a career counsellor, and who often

appears on Instagram and YouTube in the colours of Allen. He too did not respond to questions. When students die by suicide, it also impacts the mental health of their friends.

An Ayurveda graduate student who was studying for MBBS at Allen in 2018-19 was one such student. "When I was living in Kota in 2019, there was a girl in Class 11 who was my hostelmate. We were close. One day, she came to my room and told me that one of her friends at Allen had died by suicide. For a couple of days after she told me this, I couldn't meet her. When I went to check in on her, I found her crying in her room. She said that her dead friend was living in her room and that she couldn't leave her room. Her parents took her home and she didn't come back. A teacher at Allen Career Institute defended the institution. "It's the people (outsiders) who have created this havoc. Which job does not have pressure? It all depends upon how students take it," said Kamal Jawani.

## Studies suggest medical bias hampered research on women's bone health

Ravina Warkad

**Chennai:** An estimated 46 million women in India and many more around the world suffer from osteoporosis. Yet another overwhelming disregard in society and in the medical establishment for women's health has meant that there is little research and few resources dedicated to the diagnosis and treatment of the disease. Osteoporosis is a health condition in which bone density deteriorates and can lead to fractures and is a major health concern in postmenopausal women.

Causes for the disease range from calcium deficiency due to poor diet, lack of targeted exercises to strengthen bones to biological factors such as menopause and hysterectomy.

While the World Health Organisation recommends a daily calcium intake of 1,000 mg, according to a recent map of

dietary calcium intake released by the International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF), Indians consume only 400-500 mg a day.

Calcium intake alone is not sufficient to ensure that the body obtains adequate amounts -- Vitamin D is vital to calcium absorption. According to a 2022 survey by SRL across five metropolitan cities, Vitamin D was low in 72 per cent of women while 21 per cent women were deficient in calcium.

Along with gender, an individual's socio-economic location also affects diet and nutrition. Data from the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) shows that only 53 per cent of women from the lowest wealth quintile consume milk or curd at least once a week as compared to 86.2 per cent from the highest quintile. Dairy is a richer source of calcium compared to plant-based foods. These factors mean that poorer women are worse-

affected, says Veena Shatrugna, former Deputy Director of the National Institute of Nutrition. "The lower socio-economic groups get osteoporosis much earlier as their calcium intake is very low. Upper socio-economic group fares a little better as their food intake and lifestyle is better," she says.

However, lifestyle too can affect bone strength indirectly. According to a research paper titled Backpain, the Feminine Affliction published in the Economic and Political Weekly in 1990, repetitive work in the same posture for everyday activities results in movements of selective muscles. Exercise is necessary to increase blood supply to the concerned bone, resulting in better bone nutrition and tensile strength, the paper says.

"If women are taught how to strengthen their back, they will never have a fracture," says Shatrugna, who is one of the co-



**PAIN POINTS:** Indians consume 400-500 mg calcium daily as against 1,000 mg recommended by WHO

authors of the paper.

The hormones estrogen and progesterone too affect bone and joint health in women, says Dr. Ashish Phadnis, head of orthopedics department at Jupiter Hospital, Thane. However, at

around 40-50 years of age when women hit menopause, levels of these hormones drop, leading to a decrease in bone density. Women tend to outlive men, and so, live without these hormones for a much longer time than men.

## Eyebrows raised over targeted raids by ED and CBI

Upasika Singhal

**Chennai:** After a spate of raids and arrests by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recently, representatives from opposition parties have moved the Delhi High Court alleging misuse of government agencies.

The ED and the CBI have had a rather busy week. The ED raided a sundry of properties across India, including those of Tejashwi Yadav, ex-TMC leaders in Bengal, and NCP leaders in Maharashtra. The CBI arrested AAP's seniormost leaders Manish Sisodia and Satyendra Jain and attempted to interrogate BRS' K. Kavitha over the Delhi liquor case.



**DISTURBING TREND:** The ED has conducted 3,010 raids since 2015, of which 95% were against the opposition

While the usage of government agencies has been a known tool for the government, the past few

months have seen an unusual upswing in their employment.

In its party mouthpiece

People's Democracy, the CPI(M) claimed that the central government has been weaponising government agencies against any dissent and opposition.

Calling the ED's invocation of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) as the government's modus operandi, the leftist party accused the government of using draconian laws to suppress opposition.

When Congress leaders' properties were raided in Chhattisgarh days before the party's annual plenary, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel surmised that the motivation behind the raids was to interrupt the meeting. The party was supposed to discuss and draw up the road map for the 2024 Lok

Sabha elections during that meeting.

In the same press conference, senior leaders from the Congress pointed out some worrying data. Pawan Khera, the All India Congress Committee spokesman,

### News Analysis

said the ED has conducted 3010 raids since 2015, out of which 95% were against the opposition.

Congress leaders have been raided 24 times, TMC 19 times, NCP 11, Shiv Sena 8, DMK 6, RJD 5, BSP 5, TDP 5, INLD 3, YSRP 3, CPI-M 2, NC 2, PDP 2, AIADMK and MNS once each. A

report in The Wire noted that raids have increased by 27 times since 2014.

Not just political parties, even civil society organisations, NGOs, media houses, activists, academicians and intellectuals have also come under the scanner of the central agencies.

In September last year, several independent organisations such as Centre for Policy Research, Independent and Public Spirited Media Foundation, and Oxfam India were raided by the Income Tax department seemingly out of nowhere. Similar was the case with the BBC last month.

The central government often justifies its actions by claiming that it's throwing the book at those who engage in illegal operations.

However, this same rigour and adherence to the law is not observed against BJP leaders or BJP-ruled states, point out opposition leaders and political observers.

Moreover, these raids are enabled by a judiciary that often appears to have faltered to ensure that the agencies are impartial in the cases they investigate. It has refused to order the agencies to overcome the reluctance to investigate allegations against the regime - the courts also have been less than stringent in ensuring fair means are adopted during investigations.

Therefore, the Opposition and others ask whether the law is being "selectively" applied, and whether some are above the law.

# Missing in India's degree colleges: student diversity

Enrollment among marginalised communities is lower than their population

Annie Louis

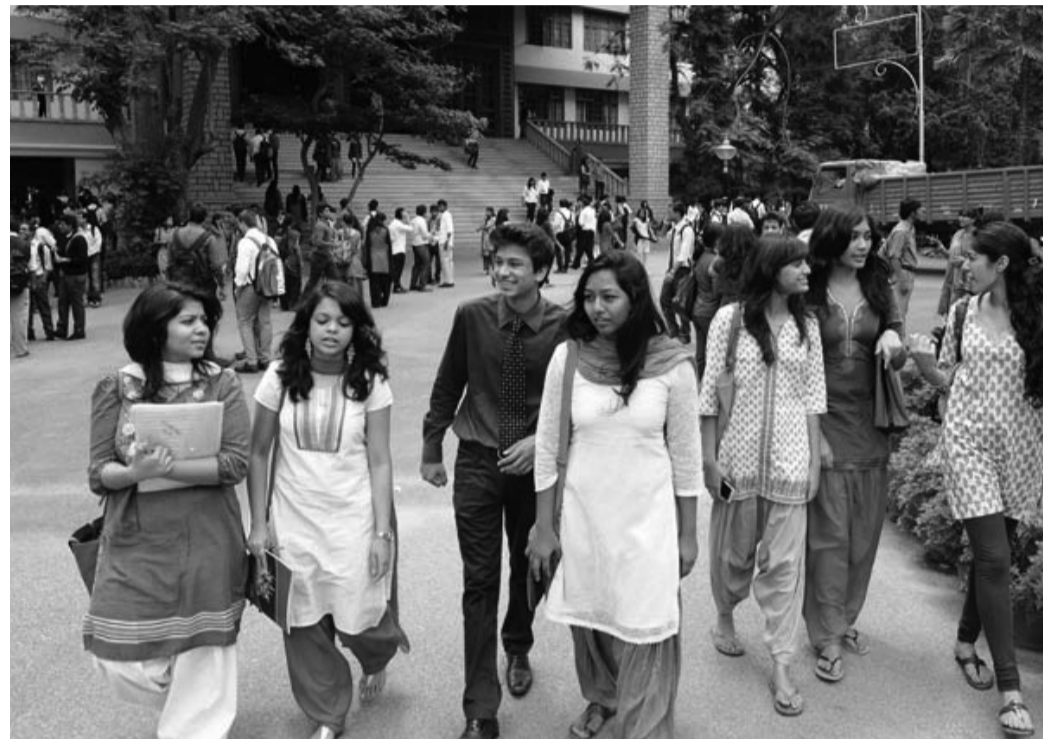
**Chennai:** The enrolment of students from SC, ST, and OBC communities in higher educational institutions has gone up in the last five years, according to the All India Survey of Higher Education 2020-21 (AISHE). However, the report does not track drop outs. This assumes significance against the backdrop of numerous suicides by students from SC and ST communities in premier educational institutes.

The data revealed that the student enrollment in the SC, ST and OBC categories has seen a substantial increase over the last five years. The ST category saw a 47 percent increase in enrollment from 2014-15 to 2020-21 and while the SC category saw a 27.9 percent increase for the same period.

However, focusing merely on the enrolment increase gives a skewed version of the reality on ground because enrolment does not always translate to degree completion, and the AISHE report does not track this.

"We need comprehensive data on how many students from the marginalised communities survive public and private institutions, obtain their degree and come back for a masters," said Dr Arul Mani, head of the English Department at St Joseph's University in Bengaluru.

The report also found that the student enrollment in the SC category was 14.2 percent, 5.8 percent under ST, 35.8 percent under OBC and 44.2 percent under the general category in 2020-21. The gross enrollment ratio (GER) for SC and ST students still stands at 23.1 percent and 18.9 percent respectively, lower than the 27.3 percent GER



at an all-India level. GER refers to the percentage of the total population between 18-23 enrolled in higher education institutes.

The AISHE report does not allow for proportionate measurement of student enrollment, retention and degree completion in each batch. The report defines students enrolment as the "total students on roll in a Programme as on 31st December of the academic year", which means enrolment numbers signify the total number of students studying in all the years of a particular programme. It does not give a break-up of the number of students studying in each year of the course.

The report does not have a total all-India figure for total number of students who pass out, but it gives

state-wise numbers for each category of students. For example, in UP, 14,04,561 under all categories of students, 1,81,544 SC students and 6,038 ST students passed out from the state. But since it simply states the number of students that passed out from each state under all categories, SC and ST, these individual numbers do not allow for measuring student retention ratio.

Based on figures from the report, this reporter calculated that the social-group wise distribution of STEM enrolment during the last five years and found that the enrolment of SC students in engineering and technology courses has decreased by 12.03 percent whereas the enrolment in science increased 7.96 percent.

The number of ST students saw a rise of 28.5 percent over the last

five years in the science streams and a 0.1 percent dip in engineering and technology. This points to stream-wise enrollment patterns.

In a paper titled 'Measuring Access to Higher Education' published in the Economic and Political Weekly, Malish CM, cites an empirical study demonstrating that students from the lower class, rural locations and non-English medium schooling backgrounds are less likely to get admission in India's elite engineering colleges. These findings support the observation by Sabharwal and Malish (2018) that disadvantaged students are over-concentrated in non-elite colleges and disciplines.

"The issue of institutional stratification and under-representation of certain

socio-economic groups in elite colleges and disciplines which offer better occupational mobility are emerging concerns with respect to equity in higher education," said the EPW paper.

To measure impact or influence of social justice policies in education, certain information gaps need to be filled in the AISHE report.

There are multiple factors that play a role once a student is enrolled and to understand the larger picture, there needs to be a system in place to track the journey from enrolment to course completion, figure out who pursues higher education and critically look at indicators that helped in boosting or decreasing these numbers.

"Increasing the GER without making any concerted efforts to improve quality is the issue that requires urgent attention," said the EPW paper.

The data on the distribution of teaching staff in colleges across India points that an overwhelming number-- 56.1 percent come under the Others category and 32.2 percent from OBCs. Merely 9.1 percent and 2.5 percent of teachers belong to the SC and ST categories, which is disproportionately lower than their overall populations.

The distribution of non-teaching staff fares marginally better than teaching staff percentage: 14.4 percent are from SC and 4.4 percent from ST categories.

"To understand why there are fewer teachers from the SC and ST categories, we need to trace the journey from the enrolment of students from marginalised communities to the end point, that is recruitment in this case," said Dr Mani.

## Sania Mirza confirms she is retiring



Arnav Deo

**Chennai:** Sania Mirza has been one of the prolific tennis players of India. She started playing tennis at the age of six and at 17 she represented India in tennis for the first time on the International platform and won the ITF circuit Championships.

Over the years, Mirza represented India in various grand slams such as Australian Open, French Open (Roland Garros), US Open, WTA and Wimbledon in which she has won six doubles matches and three mixed doubles.

Mirza announced her retirement in February after she finishes playing WTA IN Dubai which is ongoing at the present moment.

She wants to leave on her own terms. "I want people to ask me why I'm retiring, rather than when. It is very important for me to do things on my own terms. That's how I've lived my life, and whether that's on the court or off it," she told ESPN in an interview.

After her retirement, reports say that she plans to start her own academy of Indian tennis for training young athletes for international tennis.

She is one of the gifted tennis

players with 36-years of tennis career.

Mirza has won many achievements such as three Grand slams in Woman's Doubles, medals in various Sports events, and is the only Indian woman to win a WTA event, Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan.

"It was the last time I was going to compete in a Grand Slam and I was just so grateful that I was going to finish my Grand Slam journey by playing in a final, we tried our level best but the victory proved too much for us."

She further explains, "I don't really show too much emotion, even when I play, win, or lose. I am usually quite in control of my emotions. That day it was all raw and real. It was just so emotional, the last couple of weeks just playing there."

Mirza is quite excited as she is ready to mentor the woman's IPL for Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) to work with young talented players such as Smriti Mandhana, Ellyse Perry, Megan Schutt, Sophie Devine, Dane van Niekerk and Richa Ghosh.

She said, "It will be a challenge for me to take such a big opportunity but I am ready to work for it".

## UP's chikankari workers face health issues

Kashvi Raj Singh

**Chennai:** "If you spend almost ten hours a day doing a job, then it is not a job -- it is a love affair, and I have been in love with fabrics all my life," said Farukh Khan, a 60-year-old washerman of chikankari fabric.

Khan grew up in Chinhat in Lucknow -- an area populated by chikankari workers -- and dropped out of school as a 10-year-old to learn "the art of washing fabrics" from his father and grandfather. "This is what I was born to do, so why waste time? This is my family's legacy and only expert washermen like us can do this job," he said.

Khan belongs to the Scheduled Dhobi community whose occupations are washing and ironing. According to Census 2011, the community has a population of 24.32 lakhs in Uttar Pradesh. It is unclear how many of them are solely involved in washing chikankari fabric. While the men are responsible for collecting, sorting and washing the fabric, the women handle its ironing.

Sana Aisha, a PhD scholar from the University of Lucknow, spoke to 30 washermen at Kuriya Ghat in 2020 and found that all washermen between the ages of 29 and 75 have some form of an occupation-related medical issue.

In the summer, the workload increases and every washerman washes nearly 100 clothes a day.

Every piece of fabric passes through many tailors, printers, artisans, and agents over many months. By the time it is ready for finishing, the white threads turn brown from dirt. The washermen use hydrochloric acid to remove stains from ink and sometimes rust marks from old equipment also. As a last step, the washerwomen use traditional coal-based irons to iron the clothes before final packaging.

According to Aisha's research, 60 per cent of washermen reported

that their hands and feet have turned pinkish after working in this profession for more than 20 years. Only eight of the respondents said that they wore gloves and boots at work. Only four thought that the bleach and acid they use pollute the Gomti river.

"They have developed skin diseases because of everyday over-exposure to chemicals, insects, and sewage in the river. They work in all seasons with only a little respite during monsoon," Aisha said, "In extremely hot weather, they suffer from sunburn, dehydration, and heatstroke; and in extremely cold weather, they suffer from hypothermia."

Moreover, the men are exposed to burning firewood when they boil the fabric in clay pots and the women are exposed to burning coal because they use traditional coal-based irons. This causes chest pain and respiratory problems.

## Elliot's Beach monument in a shambles

One can see graffiti and cracks on the KAJ Schmidt Memorial after restoration in 2014

Devanshi Srivastava

**Chennai:** Almost a decade after it was renovated, the Schmidt Memorial on Elliot's beach is falling into disrepair again.

The Karl AJ Schmidt Memorial was built in memory of a Danish soldier of the same name who lost his life on the beach while trying to save the life of some drowning European girls. The gallantry of the soldier posted in the Madras Office of the East Asiatic Company was recognised by then Governor of Madras, Sir George Frederick Stanley, who built this structure.

Built in 1930, the structure features in the Justice E. Padmanabhan Committee's list of

heritage structures in Chennai.

In response to calls for repair by the area's residents, the memorial, covered in graffiti and with a gaping crack, was restored in 2014. The Greater Chennai Corporation completed the work with the help of IIT Madras and Reach Foundation.

A metal boundary and plaques in English and Tamil were added. However, one can see now that graffiti is back along with some cracks and the plaques are missing. The condition is not as bad as in 2013, but if left unchecked it could get worse.

A lock hangs from a rusty chain securing the gate. Names of lovers are scribbled on the structure. There are dark patches on the

white wall and a crack is forming on its left side. Paint is chipping and falling, exposing patches of cement.

The boundary of the memorial is littered with birthday streamers, cardboard boxes, matches and plastic bottles.

There is no information board in sight. Only 'KAJ Memorial' is written across the centre where crows are perched. It almost seems like the sea washed this anonymous monument ashore. "I do not know what this is but it is beautiful at sunset," said Rinky who was visiting the beach for leisure.

A couple was getting a wedding photoshoot done with the monument in the backdrop. After



The Karl AJ Schmidt Memorial was built in memory of a Danish soldier

some attempts, the photographer took them to a different location. "It would have been nice if the memorial was open. I cannot get any good angles from outside,"

said Ranjeet.

There had been a proposal to place a security guard around the memorial but that has not been done yet.

## Jasmine brings fragrance to their lives

Nidhi Vashistha

**Chennai:** Flowers in India are used for various purposes, assimilating different roles, from ritualistic to aesthetic. Jasmine out of all the flowers stands out in Tamil Nadu, once planted the flowering duration is eight months.

Jasmine which is most commonly used as garlands for hair by the women in Tamil Nadu. The garland is made with intricate details, mostly by women.

Dipa K, 44, who sits at the junction of Besant Nagar and Kasturba Nagar, has been making garlands for the last 12 years.

She started off to save her family through financially hard times. She said "This flower business has helped me through really tough times." She wakes up early in the morning at four, takes



A jasmine seller in Chennai

a bus and goes to Parry's Broadway flower market. She buys a variety of flowers fresh from the market. But jasmine, she buys a day old in the morning, as it is cheaper than fresh ones.

She buys flowers worth Rs 1,200 for two days. She makes Rs 200 profit on normal days whereas some days she does not make any profit and she just has to let go of the flowers. "After two days these

flowers start to smell," said Dipa. "Some days are good and some days are bad, that's how life is."

But it is the monsoon season that takes a toll on her flower business. Jasmine flower is a seasonal shrub and can be planted only between March-September. Covid was really hard on Dipa's family, to meet the gap in finances, Dipa's husband started a fruit shop. "At that time only fruits were selling and we also had put something on the table, so we started selling fruits."

Girja, 55, has been making garlands for the last 20 years in Neelankarai. "I don't wear these garlands because I am a widow, I became a widow when I was 34", she said. "I never made garlands when my husband was alive. After his death I stopped wearing these garlands and my hair stopped smelling of jasmine."

She too buys flowers early in

the morning from Parry's Broadway flower market. The flowers come from Tiruvallur district, there are a variety of flowers that can be seen in the market from roses, jasmine, lotus, marigold etc.

Rama Moorthy, a flower seller at Parry's Broadway, says, "Lotus is the only flower that comes from Kanyakumari, Madurai." Some flowers reach their destination after ten hours of journey. Jasmine flowers have different timings, as fresh jasmine only comes to the market at 1 PM.

There are many shopkeepers that can be seen making huge garlands of lotus flowers. These are mostly expensive and made for Tirupati Temple.

One lotus garland costs Rs 3000. And these Lotus buds can survive up to two-four days unlike roses and jasmine flowers, as they don't survive more than a day.

# What after pregnancy?

Pregnancy changes a woman's body with some adverse outcomes

Elisha Vermani

**Chennai:** Asha Mahtta was pregnant with her second child in 1997 when she developed diabetes. Mahtta now suspects she may have had it since her first pregnancy three years earlier. "There was simply no information or awareness about gestational diabetes at the time. The doctors neither told us what tests they were conducting, nor their results," she said.

She has been living with diabetes for the last 26 years, a condition she didn't know was in any way associated with pregnancy. Then in 2013, another shock came her way: diabetic retinopathy.

"I was getting tested regularly for any complications since my diabetes was diagnosed. When we relocated from Aligarh to Jammu in 2013, the doctors were surprised that I was unaware of



**OVERLOOKED:** In India more than 40 lakh women are affected by gestational diabetes

my retinopathy. This came as a shock to me also because I'd done everything right and yet the doctors in Aligarh didn't detect it," Mahtta said.

Hundreds of women are taking to social media to post about permanent changes to their body after pregnancy and childbirth. Their changes range from gestational diabetes (GD), separation of abdominal muscles, a permanently enlarged ribcage, and loss of bladder control to undiagnosed thyroid problems wrongly attributed to postpartum depression. These problems are usually temporary and resolve themselves within six weeks after childbirth but they can also turn out to be lifelong conditions. However, other than anecdotal evidence and a few articles calling these conditions medical mysteries, there is hardly any dedicated research available on the permanent after-effects of pregnancy. "Postnatal or post-pregnancy care is not something

that people are aware of and not much research has gone into this. From the family's point of view, pregnancy is very important. But once the baby is born, it's usually the baby who gets the importance," explained Dr Anne Cherian, community health obstetrician at Christian Medical College (CMC) in Vellore.

According to a 2015 study published in the Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism, about 40 lakh women are said to be affected by GD in India today.

#### Access to vital information

Women often develop urinary incontinence or loss of bladder control during pregnancy. According to Mumbai-based Dr Sylvia Noronha, who specialises in high risk pregnancies, incontinence can be attributed to pelvic floor dysfunction or weakening of the pelvic muscles. While the incidence of incontinence is quite high, it is hard to put a number to how many

women experience it because of the lack of data on this, she added.

"The constant dribbling of urine due to incontinence can lead to skin rashes and vaginal changes. You can also develop a persistent unpleasant smell. It can also lead to social ostracisation and affect their overall wellbeing," Dr Tanaya Narendra, the author of 'Everything Nobody Tells You About Your Body' explained.

Pelvic floor dysfunction can also lead to organ prolapse where a woman's uterus or rectum may sag from its position and get exposed outside the vagina, leading to severe discomfort and chronic pain.

"We are not told about these issues or given any training on how to help women if they come to us with this problem, said Pinky, an ASHA worker in Delhi's Dhansa village.

#### 'Normal' deliveries

According to National Family Health Survey (NFHS) Data,

caesarean section deliveries in India have been increasing. The percentage of such deliveries rose from 9 per cent in NFHS-3 to 17 per cent in NFHS-4, and 4.5 per cent rise in NFHS-5. Despite this, there is still a high demand for 'normal' deliveries in India, according to Prayagraj-based Dr Narendra. "Women are still often pressured to not opt for c-sections even if that's medically not the best choice for them," she said.

A 'routine' procedure in vaginal deliveries in India—known as an episiotomy—involves making a 3-4 cm long cut below the vagina to allow the baby to emerge. Dr Cherian said, "The function of an episiotomy is to speed up the delivery. So we try to deliver the babies faster by reducing the duration of labour."

There is a growing international consensus on why episiotomies shouldn't be a routine procedure but only be administered on a case-to-case basis. "In situations like fluctuation in the foetal heart rate an episiotomy becomes important but it should definitely not be used like a catch-all procedure for everyone," Dr Cherian said.

#### Why the science on this is missing?

Dr Cherian pointed out that chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes and thyroid issues begin during pregnancy. Identifying and dealing with them at the right time will definitely have implications on the long term health of a woman," she explained. However, the only time Dr Cherian sees women, especially those from rural background, back in the hospital after childbirth is for the immunisation schedules of their newborns, not for themselves.

# Animation in India lagging

Industry facing constraints



**A long way to go**

Avijit Gupta

**Chennai :** Animated features like Spirited away from Japan to stop motion animation like Pinocchio (2022) by Guillermo Del Toro have made waves internationally. But if we talk about Indian animation, there aren't any significant animated shows or movies that had such an impact. The only exception to this is however Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama which was directed by a Japanese animator Yugo Sako and legendary Indian animator Ram Mohan.

While animation is often associated with children's entertainment, it is not exclusively catered to kids.

Mr. Azad Shekh (31), graphic designer in 2D and 3D, shared his thoughts with us.

Psychological horror like Perfect Blue which is a story of an idol turned actress and her stalker is definitely not for kids.

The fierce competition since animation can be learnt online nowadays along with Big studios outsourcing the work to low-wage countries. "While they do hire

locally, it is almost impossible to get a job with them because of the time constraints," Shekh said.

"DIY animation tools like Powtoon have made it extremely easy for non-animators to create animated videos. Customer budgets are getting smaller and smaller. So you have to constantly find new customers," he added.

Low pay is very prevalent in this industry. He said the animation industry can grow by little experimentation like combining 2D with 3D.

He also said that there is a problem with the lack of demand for animation courses.

Another animator Mr. Manish Sharma (32) who is working as a video editor and animation executive also shares his thoughts on the current state of the medium.

Visualisation is very important so that you can express your ideas. It is actually difficult to do in animation when compared to live action. "Even I have great ideas and stories to visualise my work in the form of animation. This is the main reason that I want to be an animator and I love this job," he said.

# Gender-neutral toilets need of the hour

Nikhila Vellore

**Chennai:** LGBTQ+ activist Fred Rogers has filed a petition in the Madras High Court for gender neutral bathrooms in public spaces. After hearing the petition, the court requested the government to respond in a week.

According to The News Minute, the petition was filed on a number of grounds, "including that a lack of gender-neutral toilets was violative of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, as well as Article 14 of the Constitution that grants equality before law".

Thilothama, the in-charge at the Thozhi organization, the only transgender shelter in Chennai, said, "When we use a bathroom assigned for women, the other women seem uncomfortable or

shy. So, that makes us feel guilty about using the bathroom. On the other hand if we use the men's toilet we get abused."

Although she had not heard about the petition, she was sure that most people from the community would agree.

The acceptance of transwomen is the main issue. "If a transwoman uses the toilet, ciswomen should be able to accept it. They should be aware that transwomen are also women," she said.

Shwetha Shri, spokesperson of the transgender Sahodaran collective, said that the scheme will help increase the confidence of trans people, especially for the people who have just started social and medical transition.

It will also help in curbing the everyday judgment the community faces. "We won't need

to worry about a woman shouting "why are you coming here" and "get out of here", Shwetha said. "It will improve their mental and general health. It will reduce gender dysphoria and they need not hold their natural calls, so it won't affect their internal organs and health."

In a gender neutral washroom, they also wouldn't have to worry about people trying to peek at them to "make sure they are from the correct gender". Shwetha talked about the possibility of sexual abuse against the community as anybody can use the gender-neutral bathroom.

On the government's proposal to convert bathrooms for persons with disabilities into gender-neutral bathrooms, Shwetha said, "Instead of converting those toilets, it will be better to have separate restrooms."

# Kardyl left to the elements

The LIC-owned structure is now on the verge of collapse

Ravina Warkad

**Chennai:** Listed as an A-grade heritage building by the Indian National Trust for Architectural and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), the Kardyl building on Mount Road stands unattended and dilapidated. Built between 1894 and 1897, it housed one of the leading pharmacies of the time.

Three large hoardings put up by the LIC, its current owner, cover part of the crumbling facade of the building. In 2006, the LIC planned to demolish the structure, but in 2010 the Madras High Court ruled against it considering the provisions of Rule 22 of the Development Control Rules for Chennai metropolitan area, 2004.

The court ruled that the Heritage Conservation Committee shall assess the value and the feasibility of retaining the Bharath Insurance Building. As far as possible, the building must be saved. It said efforts must be made to save as much of the building as possible.

W.E. Smith, a pharmacist, arrived in Madras in 1868. But he found that there were enough



**TOTAL NEGLECT:** The state of Kardyl building on Mount Road | PHOTO: Ravina Warkad

pharmacies in the city, so he proceeded to Ooty. His success in Ooty made him look at Madras again. As business grew, he wanted a building to project his stature. The Kardyl building, a fine example of Indo-Saracenic architecture, was designed by J.H. Stephens. The building housed a

showroom, a beer bar and an aerated water factory. In 1925 Smith sold the building to its largest competitor, Spencer's, a pharmacy right across the street. Spencer's rented out the building until Bharat Insurance bought it in 1934. When life insurance was nationalised, various insurance

buildings went to LIC and it became one of the biggest property owners in the country.

Noori, who has a purse stall beside Higginbothams, India's oldest surviving bookstore, opposite the Kardyl building, claimed that the building once had a church, a temple and a mosque.

# Victoria Public Hall's maintenance woes laid bare

Preetika Parashuraman

**Chennai:** Sandwiched between the Chennai Central and the Greater Chennai Corporation building is the Victoria Public Hall, built in 1888 and named after Queen Victoria. Earlier this month, the GCC said it will implement seismic retrofitting, including conservation and revitalisation of old heritage buildings, starting with the Victoria Public Hall. Seismic retrofitting includes the reinforcement of the structure to withstand earthquakes.

A 2022 Detailed Project Report (DPR) revealed that several DMK leaders including Chief Minister MK Stalin were keen on renovating the heritage structure because of its connection with the Justice Party, which paved the way for the Dravidian movement. It was originally a town hall for

public gatherings, social events, concerts, political meetings and public speeches.

In 2010, the Victoria Public Hall was closed for renovations after a fire. The restoration work took years and was completed in 2018. Despite several renovation projects, the structure still is in need for an uplift.

As part of the beautification project 'Singara Chennai' initiated by the Chennai corporation in 2019, an initiative was taken to restore and beautify the historic building. The creation of a landscaped garden in front of the hall was another important aspect of the project.

The red brick heritage structure, which was once a grand and imposing building, is losing its beauty due to years of wear and tear. The brickwork has become dull and discoloured, and many of the bricks on the façade are



**TOWERING LEGACY:** The Victorial Public Hall is one of Chennai's iconic heritage buildings | PHOTO: Preetika Parashuraman

cracked or missing.

Furthermore, the age of the building can also be a contributing factor to the discoloration of the

brick walls. As the building ages, the mortar holding the bricks together can deteriorate, causing cracks and gaps to form between

the bricks. This can allow moisture and dirt to penetrate the surface of the walls, further darkening the bricks.

Chennai's hot and humid climate, combined with rains, can cause the bricks to absorb moisture, which can lead to the growth of mould and mildew. This can also cause the bricks to discolour and darken over time.

The windows, which were once grand and ornate, are now dirty and cracked. The glass panes are missing in some places. The facade of the building has also deteriorated, with the carvings and sculptures being eroded by pollution, weathering, and neglect.

The building is located in a bustling area, and people carelessly discard alcohol bottles on the premises, which accumulate over time and create a mess. Moreover, people often relieve themselves outside the building, leaving behind urine stains and a stench. The historical site has now become a drinking spot for some.

Kamala, who sells peanuts near the historical structure, says the stench outside the heritage structure has become unbearable. The urine has caused damage to the building's exterior, as it has corroded the walls and eroded the brickwork. "The stains and odour are a stark contrast to the building's elegant architecture and historical significance," she said.

Most local people say the building has been closed for visitors for a long time.

Manalan K M, an engineering student, said the building is owned by the Chennai corporation, but renovation projects have been slow to materialise. To address these challenges, "there is a need for better coordination, allocation of adequate resources, and political will to preserve the country's rich heritage and cultural legacy," he said.

# Women continue to bear burden of sterilisation

Male sterilisation has few takers despite government's promotional efforts

Annapurna Roy

**Chennai:** The burden of family planning in India remains on women, with female sterilisation as the dominant contraceptive method across regions over time. While condom use among men has risen, male sterilisation remains negligible.

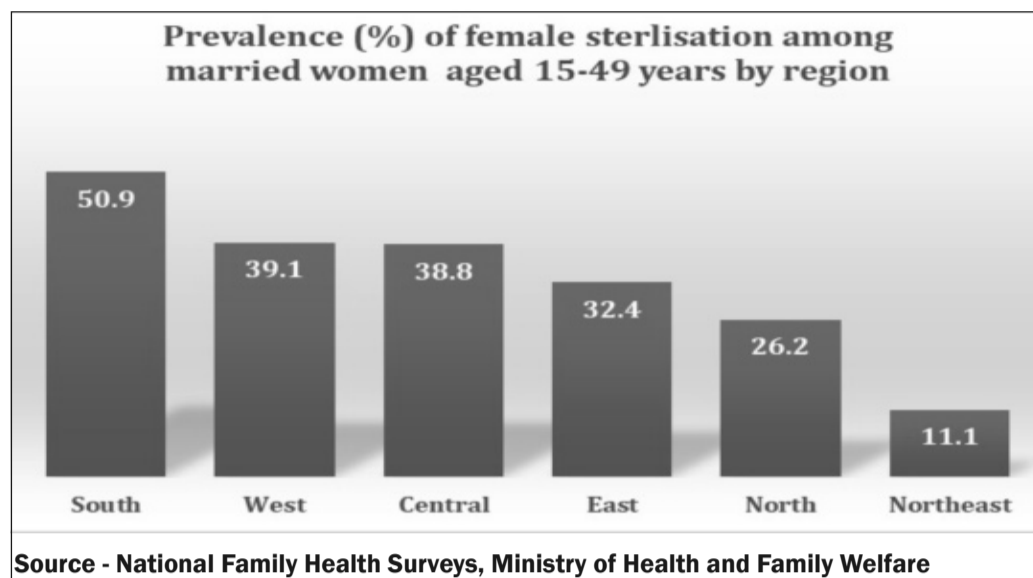
The 2021 National Family Health Survey shows that 66.7 percent of people use some kind of contraceptive. Modern methods include permanent or "terminal" methods such as male sterilisation (vasectomy) and female sterilisation (tubectomy, also called tubal ligation) and non-permanent or "spacing" methods such as male condoms, intra-uterine devices (IUDs), birth control pills etc.

Female sterilisation accounts for 37.9 percent of contraceptive use nation-wide. The second is condoms at 9.5 percent from 5.6 percent in 2015-16.

However, vasectomy has shown a downward trend over time. Regionally, the south has the highest rate of female sterilisation while the northeast has the lowest. In no region does male sterilisation average more than one percent.

Himachal Pradesh records the highest prevalence of male sterilisation at 3.3 percent, while several states such as Karnataka, Goa, Meghalaya and Tripura recorded zero percent.

Andhra Pradesh recorded the highest prevalence of female sterilisation, at 69.9 percent, followed by Telangana and Tamil Nadu. Manipur recorded the lowest prevalence, at 3.3 percent.



The Union government's family planning policy has changed over time as fertility rates have gone down, with a shift from a population control approach to a "target-free" approach-on paper at least.

"The performance of the health staff in family planning was determined by the number of women they could round up for the sterilisation camps. Health workers were pressurised to achieve targets for female sterilisation while the inability to do so resulted in threats for stopping salaries and increments. Targets for sterilisation also resulted in lack of contraceptive choice being available to people," said Poonam Muttreja, Executive Director of the Population Foundation of India.

In 2016, the Supreme Court in a judgment called for an end to sterilisation camps, and directed

states to ensure that family planning targets are not fixed. Muttreja said, "so that health workers and others do not indulge in what would amount to a forced or non-consensual sterilisation merely to achieve the target."

At the Family Planning 2020 Summit in London in 2017, India made the commitment to shift the focus to spacing methods and the government has been expanding the options available to couples for contraception, Muttreja said. "But other methods of contraception have not been promoted as much."

The public health system offers higher incentives to both the service-provider and the client for sterilisation compared with other methods," she said.

The 2021-22 annual report of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare states that the National Family Planning Programme

focuses on reproductive health, "access to reproductive rights and services" and enabling "women and men to make individual reproductive choices." Despite the use of such gender-equal language, in practice, the onus is on women.

The government has provided no explanation for the overwhelmingly female skew in sterilisation numbers.

In 2018, then Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare) Anupriya Patel stated in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, "The Government has not commissioned any study on the reasons for this disparity as the Family Planning Programme in India is voluntary in nature and the Government promotes all family planning choices including female sterilization equally. It is the prerogative of the clients to choose a family planning method

as per their reproductive rights and the Government provides the services free of cost in all public health and accredited private/NGO facilities as per the demand."

However, the government tried to promote greater male engagement in family planning. According to the National Health Portal, the National Programme for Family Planning includes the promotion of non-scalpel vasectomies as a "key strategy" under Mission Parivar Vikas.

Incentive packages for sterilisation offer a larger amount for male than female sterilisation. In "high focus states" such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, men who undergo vasectomies receive Rs 2,000, while women receive Rs 1,400 for undergoing a tubectomy.

Despite such interventions, vasectomy does not have many takers. As per Dr V Gopinath, urologist at Chennai's Voluntary Health Services Hospital, vasectomy is a generally painless procedure that is less invasive than tubectomy, and has little to no side-effects.

Social attitudes may account for the gender gap. "Men feel that their masculinity will be lost," Dr Gopinath added. "Both male and female sterilisation are safe procedures, but India is a male-dominated society."

According to Muttreja, there is a need for mass media campaigns to promote the adoption of vasectomy "which includes strategies to break gender stereotypes and positioning men as responsible partners."

## Being bullish on jallikattu



Asmita Ravi Shankar & Upasika Singhal

**Chennai:** A massive state-wide protest in 2016 brought back Jallikattu, the bull-taming rural sport of Tamil Nadu, two years after it was banned by the Supreme Court citing cruelty to animals. The sport is seen as part of the socio-cultural ethos of the people and an essential aspect of their identity.

Jallikattu is conducted as part of Pongal celebrations on Maatu Pongal, the third day of the four-day festival.

Drowned in the euphoria that followed the resumption of the sport was the grim reality of deaths of young participants. Several lives have been lost over the years in attacks by the raging bulls.

Injuries and deaths of participants and spectators still occur in high numbers. This year the sport has claimed five lives, including that of a teenager. The number of injuries range in the hundreds.

According to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India, in January and February 2020, at least 13 men and six bulls died during Jallikattu events and 570 people were injured. In 2020, PETA ran an investigation from January 15 to 19 at seven Jallikattu events and confirmed that the sport is deadly. The bulls are physically and mentally tortured and as a result, prove harmful to not just the animals but to humans as well.

Pro-Jallikattu groups cite high injury sports such as football, boxing and wrestling as equally dangerous. They say these sports have not been banned despite their rates of injury and harm and therefore neither should Jallikattu. They cite the traditional and cultural value of the sport - it has been practised in Tamil Nadu for

nearly 1500 years.

Those rooting for this sport say banning it might cost the survival of indigenous bull breeds that produce A2 type milk, which is healthier than the A1 type of milk. The A1 type of milk is produced by exotic breeds and contains a compound that causes Type 1 diabetes.

However, the arguments of pro-Jallikattu groups are inherently flawed.

The Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations, quoting a recent study by eight researchers titled Legacy of draught cattle breeds of sought India, said many of the so-called indigenous species are highly

cross-bred with taurine cattle such as Jersey, Holstein-Friesian or Brown-Swiss.

Beside, high contact sports such as American football, rugby, boxing and even kabaddi follow strict rules and regulations.

Each match is supervised and closely followed by experts with emergency medical aid on the sidelines waiting to rush in at any point of injury.

Even the grounds where the events are held are carefully cordoned off and reserved only for players. Jallikattu events are often chaotic and poorly managed events with spectators crowding the grounds, putting lives at risk.

It's clear that the Tamil Nadu government will never ban such an age-old sport since it has such deep cultural sensitivities attached to it. Therefore it must ensure that proper regulations are set and implemented to reduce, if not vanquish, human and animal casualties.

The government can make insurance for all participants mandatory. In case of deaths of participants, a fund can be created to ensure the welfare of families who lose their breadwinner.

# Bangladesh govt weaponising laws, killing free speech of nation's media

Rabiul Alam

**Dhaka:** The Bangladesh government banned the publication of Dainik Dinkal - the only national newspaper of the main opposition party, bringing press freedom under scrutiny in the South Asian country.

The government order said it cancelled the printing permit of the newspaper as it violated the country's printing and publication laws by retaining a convicted person as its publisher.

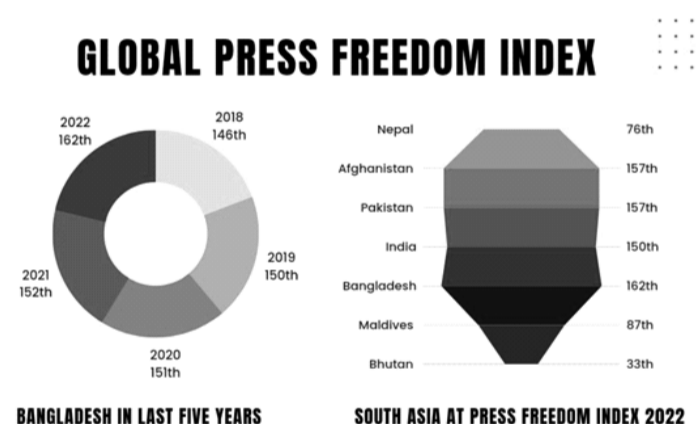
However, the newspaper authorities said its publisher Tareq Rahaman, the acting vice-chairman of the main opposition party, submitted resignation letter soon after the verdict. They appointed a new publisher but the government didn't take that into account, making the country a hell for dissident voices.

This is not an isolated incident in the Sheikh Hasina government

which has been in power for the last 15 years. Before that, the government cancelled the permits of many more newspapers and TV channels including, Islamic TV, Diganta TV and the daily Bengali newspaper Amar Desh.

According to the 2022 World Press Freedom Index, Bangladesh has been ranked 162 out of 180 countries, a drop of 10 places from the previous year. Its neighbours Afghanistan and Pakistani are 156 and 157 respectively.

The country's newspapers, mostly pro-government, journalists and journalist organisations have been largely silent with regard to the declining media freedom as they fear speaking out against the situation could result in denial of government advertisements for respective newspapers and the weaponisation of the Digital Security Act to suppress free



media organisations.

After coming to power for the third consecutive time, the ruling Awami League party led by Sheikh Hasina enacted The Digital Security Act, 2018, to prevent so-called cyber crimes on online platforms. Experts, however, have said that it was an unnecessary law enacted to

suppress dissidents.

The law was opposed by many stakeholders including the opposition party, human rights organizations and journalists. According to the law, any content that is considered inappropriate by the government could be punished in different terms and it permits police officers to detain people

without a warrant. Four years after the law was passed, a significant number of journalists, cartoonists, and activists have been sued. The government has been accused of shutting down newspapers and media outlets that are critical of the government or its policies.

Under these laws, individuals can face arrest, detention, and imprisonment for publishing or sharing information that is deemed to be "defamatory," "antistate," or "fake news".

When newspapers are barred from publishing in Bangladesh, civil society organizations and journalists' organizations defend the rights of media workers. When Daily Dinkal newspaper stopped its publication, only a journalist organisation which is known as close to the opposition party formed a human chain protesting it while most other journalist organisations were for the most part silent spectators.

## Mughal-era tomb in Agra in need of restoration

Krishna Yadav

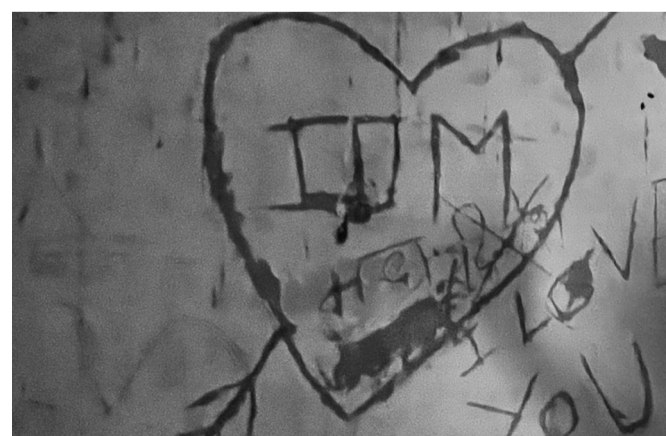
**Agra:** The magnificent Tomb of Mariam-uz-Zamani in Agra, which is the final resting place of the wife of Mughal emperor Akbar and mother of emperor Jahangir, is not being maintained properly. Despite the extensive damage caused by visitors, little is being done to rectify it.

The 16th century tomb is a fine example of Mughal architecture. Made of red sandstone, it is adorned with intricate marble inlay work. A beautiful garden surrounds the monument.

Despite being such a significant key monument, the tomb is unkempt. The walls are being defaced by visitors who scribble graffiti, names, and messages on them, ruining the beauty of the tomb. The defacement is also seen



**SHEEN LOST:** (From left) Maraim's tomb on the outskirts of Agra; paint peeling off the walls; graffiti defacing the interiors | PHOTOS: Krishna Yadav



on the inside walls.

The graffiti on the walls is not only unsightly but also poses a

risk to the monument's structural integrity. The sandstone used to build the tomb is a porous material

that absorbs moisture. When graffiti is scribbled onto the walls, it can trap moisture in the walls,

leading to cracks and deterioration. This is why it is important to remove the graffiti

from the walls as soon as possible to prevent any further damage to the tomb.

Himmat Kumar, who is responsible for the monument's care, said this place does not attract as many tourists as other popular destinations such as the Taj Mahal or Sikandra do. It is on the outskirts of the city, and situated off the main road, which is why not many people are aware of it. On an average, perhaps 30 to 40 people visit here daily.

He said renovation work is long overdue, and is likely to begin soon. Most of the graffiti scribbled on the walls inside the monument had been done long ago.

Visitors are no longer allowed to carry keys and pens inside. The authorities have banned these items to prevent people from defacing the monument. Anyone caught violating this rule will be immediately escorted out of the premises.

# A diamond just might be for everyone

Krishna Yadav

**Chennai:** Recently, the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT-M) was given a Rs 242 crore grant to conduct research on lab-grown diamonds (LGD) over the next five years. While traditional jewellery designers have been hesitant to use them, this research grant could change things.

Lab-grown diamonds are a sustainable alternative to natural diamonds. Research and development will focus on driving manufacturing towards domestic firms which will help develop and improve production infrastructure and also create jobs. The Union government has also reduced import duty on LGD by 5 percent.

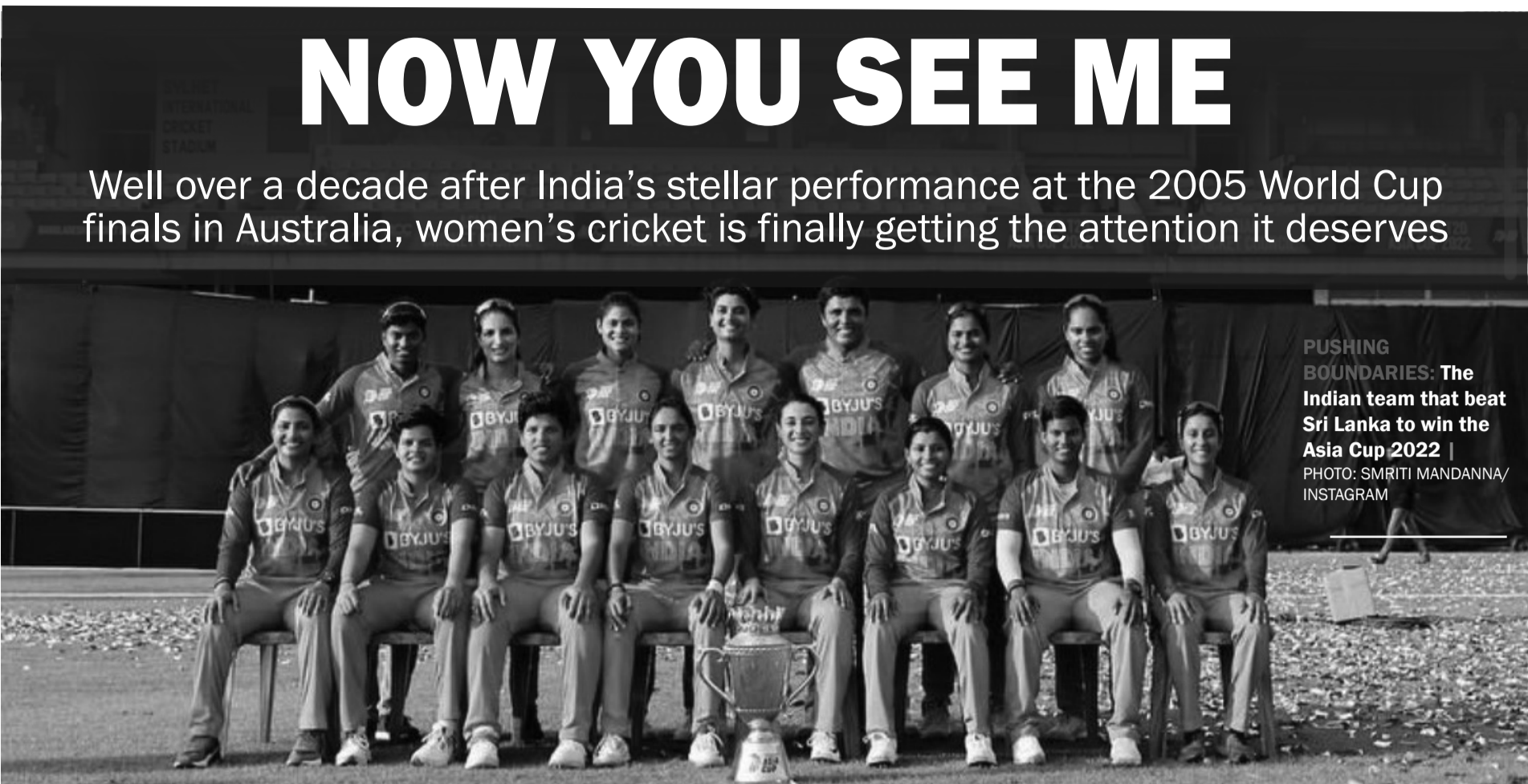
According to Dr Srinivasa Rao Baskhi, Assistant Professor at the Department of Metallurgical and Material Engineering at IIT Madras, “One of the biggest advantages of lab-grown diamonds is their cost which is much lower than that of natural diamonds. This means that lab-grown diamonds can be sold at a much higher price than natural ones.

They are also more environmentally friendly as the production process does not involve mining or other destructive practices.” The cost of LGDs is around 30 percent lower than natural ones.

Prof Baskhi said, “The funds we are getting will be used to research LGD production using advanced materials and techniques. Researchers will study ways to improve the quality of LGDs, and find possibilities to make them more similar to natural diamonds in terms of their physical and chemical properties. We are also going to explore the potential for lab-grown diamonds in various industries, including electronics, healthcare and aerospace.”

There are two ways to make diamonds in labs: Chemical Vapor Deposition (CVD) and High-Pressure High-Temperature (HPHT), with carbon seed being an essential raw material in both methods. The LGD market accounts for 10 percent of the diamond industry.

Approximately 80 percent of cut and polished LGDs are exported, while the rest are sold domestically. LGDs are primarily exported to the United States, Hong Kong, and the United Arab Emirates.



**PUSHING BOUNDARIES: The Indian team that beat Sri Lanka to win the Asia Cup 2022 |**  
PHOTO: SMRITI MANDANNA/INSTAGRAM

Sahil Mathur

**Chennai:** In 2005, the Indian Women's Cricket team played Australia in the World Cup finals in South Africa. Then, they were governed by the Women's Cricket Association of India and had made it so far without the enormous resources at the disposal of the BCCI. The team and its coach Sudha Shah were on the bus heading to the ground when she got a call from a journalist asking about the game. And Shah replied, “Where were you all this time?”

This has pretty much been the story of women's cricket – or of any sport which women in India have played for that matter. On Wednesday, the bidding of five teams saw Rs. 4669.9 crore being put on the table. The WPL outbid the 2008 Men's IPL.

However, things did not get to this point easily. There was always a disquiet about whether the WPL would pull enough viewers and advertising, but with the successful auction of the Women's Premier League, winds of change are perhaps in the air.

According to Shah, people are going to follow the game much more closely when the team wins. “Everybody likes a winner, isn't it?” Shah, who played 21 tests and 13 ODIs for India after making her debut in 1976, said.

For Krithika, founder of Penbugs - a news website, it is more about the

promotion and marketing of the game which is the problem rather than the team's performance. “India always produced almost good number of crowd. Be it 1997 or 2017. We did see a good number but again, the numbers came in when there is a good marketing/promotion for the series,” she said.

In November 2022, India hosted Australia for a five-match T20I series. All the matches were played in and around Mumbai and each game saw crowds filling up the entire stadium. Over 45,000 people came to watch the 2nd T20I at DY Patil Stadium - the highest attendance for a women's game in India.

“People are ready to turn up for matches but it depends on good promotion and most importantly, letting people know. Take the same Australia series for example. We lost it badly. Still, there were a good number of people in the crowd,” Krithika added.

2017 is a significant year in women's cricket. India reached the final of the ODI world cup in some fashion - Harmanpreet Kaur scored 171 not out in the semi-finals to knock Australia out. According to International Cricket Council (ICC), the tournament saw more than 180 million global views. The report mentioned nearly 156 million views from India of which 126 million was from the World Cup final alone.

“After 2017 World Cup, that was televised, I think the viewership grew.

A lot more people started watching and appreciating,” Shah said. The event not only made people take a look at the potential of women's cricket but also gave boards the best way to promote the sport - T20s.

In 2001, Stuart Robertson, the then England Cricket Board's marketing manager, did a consumer research and found that most people can only watch the game for three hours. The 20-over format was the brainchild of Robertson. It was the format to attract

played only 13. The 2011 to 2016 period saw a rise in the matches to 288. Since the beginning of 2017, 965 T20Is have been played.

“Nowadays people like the attacking type of cricket,” Shah said. “Crowds like fours and sixes being hit,” she added.

One of the reasons why T20 is the best format to get the crowds is to keep them entertained - where things keep happening quickly. Why Harmanpreet's semi-final knock is

“One of the reasons why men's team got so good was because of the Indian Premier League (IPL),” Shah opined. “I'm sure that women's IPL will also benefit the players like that,” she added.

Following the success of 2017, BCCI, in 2018, did try to test the waters by playing four editions of Women's T20 Challenge - a three-team exhibition tournament that was played in the off days of men's IPL. Despite being poorly hosted and scheduled, the tournament attracted a lot of viewership.

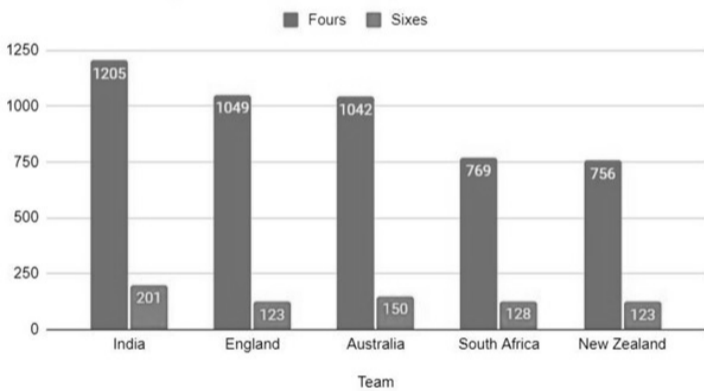
According to ESPNcricinfo's report, the tournament logged 5.34 billion minutes in viewership in India in 2020 with 105 million unique viewers tuning in - a 147% increase in viewing minutes from 2019 edition and 47% rise in unique viewers.

It was only a matter of time that a proper tournament had to take place. In March 2023, the BCCI is set to inaugurate the first season of the WPL - a five-team tournament that has already got a valuation of Rs. 7.09 crores per match after the media rights were sold to Viacom18 for the next five years for Rs 951 crores.

“Better late than never,” Krithika, who was of the opinion that it should've started definitely after 2017, said.

“Women's cricket has come of age and a lot more people will watch in the coming years. Things will change for good now. It has reached that level,” Sudha Shah concluded.

Boundaries hit post 2017 World Cup Final



India has hit the most boundaries in T20Is after the 2017 World Cup Final

the crowds and that's exactly what the cricket boards decided in 2017.

England and New Zealand played the first T20 match in 2004. However, till the end of 2010, only 92 games were conducted in which India

remembered is because of the attacking cricket she played that had 20 fours and seven sixes. With a steady rise in the viewership, there is a case of boundary hitting percentage being a significant factor in it.

# 1,600-year-old Valmiki temple under repair



Asmita Ravi Shankar

**Chennai:** The ancient Valmiki temple, located on the bustling East Coast Road, has been shut for refurbishment for the last two months, said A Karupaswamy, a local vendor who has been running a shop in North Mada street for the last 35 years.

The temple, which is about 1,600 years old, had not been touched by government authorities until the ECR was built around 1988. Before that, only the Old Mahabalipuram Road was there on one side of the temple.

“The temple is looked after by the state government. It is a part of the Marundeeswarar temple. The Marundeeswarar temple priest himself performs pooja here. Now, since it is shut, devotees light diyas and offer flowers



**HUMAN INTERVENTION: A view of the temple from the entrance (left); the temple building is crumbling and needs extensive repairs |** PHOTO: Asmita Ravi Shankar

outside,” added the North Mada Street vendor.

Maharishi Valmiki, the great poet who wrote the Ramayana, is believed to have rested here when he was heading along the seashore. Local people say that it is the jeeva samadhi of Valmiki. It is believed that he was the one who built the Marundeeswarar temple about 200 metres away.

The Marundeeswarar temple is nearly 1,500 years old, built during the Chola reign, and has Shiva as the main deity. Balaji, a madapayyan (temple boy), said the lingam faces the merkku (west) unlike the usual kilakku (east). The lingam is a ‘swayambhu’ i.e., a self-manifested one. “It's named Marundeeswarar because anything that touches the lingam becomes marundhu (medicine),”

added Balaji.

Kamala, 80, a local person, said, “This is under the government's purview. They refurbished the temple only about 3-4 months ago, they will do it again after five years.”

Ramachandran, 60, a painter, who lost his job during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown has been sticking to the temple since. “Before Covid, the temple used to be open till 8-9 pm. After the restrictions were lifted, a new system was introduced where the temple closed once at noon and reopened at 4 pm,” said Ramachandran.

Balaji said that the temple cleaners regularly dust, sweep and mop the entire space when it is closed. “Other than that, it is up to the devotees and visitors to keep the premises clean,” he added.

# Covid: Coping with the mental health pandemic

Don Tomslee

**Chennai:** The pandemic has caused a serious upheaval in wellbeing, with people finding it difficult to get jobs, facing isolation, and coping with the deaths of loved ones.

Dr. Sunil Kumar, a clinical psychologist at Mind Zone in Adyar, says, “During the first wave of the pandemic, we used to get lots of clients who lost dear ones. That causes major problems like complicated grief. However, the second wave caused unemployment, financial setbacks, relationship issues, work from home, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence.”

For example, for Jessica D'Souza (26), a student in Chennai, got Covid thrice during the pandemic, while already having been diagnosed with chronic anxiety in 2013. She says, “My anxiety and depression worsened during the lockdown. I was also working at that point and had several instances of burnout... I noticed how I would completely zone out of conversations and during the first 3 months in the course I am currently pursuing, I had severe mood swings.”

Roshini Hamsa, a mental health professional working at HAMSA Rehab, in Royapettah, says “In my experience, females were working 365 days a year and kept themselves occupied, but males and children showed serious signs of slowing and consequently accumulated depression. First of all, depression was not existing among people, only when they started to realize that we were not



able to handle the situations, did they seek help. Hence, my only piece of advice to people who feel like they were depressed post-Covid was to please take help and try to not handle situations by themselves.”

Rhea (22), a student from Bengaluru, says that she had to suddenly cope up with the fast-paced of life and having gone through three lockdowns, she became weary and tired in general. “I had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder before the pandemic, but post-pandemic, the symptoms have become severe. My symptoms started to worsen as every 15 days I noticed a drastic mood change,” she says.

However, the implications of mental well-being have rarely been discussed or dealt with. These include the psycho-social implications of depression be it post-covid or from isolation. Depressive tendencies manifest in many forms like brain fog, fatigue, tiredness. However, with Covid-related depression, studies show how Covid-19 can affect the brain physically in addition to its

psychological side effects.

Hamsa also says, “The mind is not separate from the body. If there is inflammation in the brain, the neurons are interconnected all the way upto one's feet. Hence, there is clear evidence as to how the physical well-being is majorly dependant on the mind”.

According to a recent study, people who recovered from Covid-19 had higher levels of brain inflammation than those who had not been exposed to the virus. This suggests that the virus may have a direct impact on the brain, which may result in psychological difficulties including general sadness and anxiety as well as other concerns related to mental health.

World Mental Health Day of 2021's theme was ‘Mental Health in an Unequal World’ which again emphasized on how mental health impacts everyone differently.

From immediate discomfort brought on by the infection itself to long-term psychological repercussions of social isolation policies and other pandemic-related stressors, the pandemic has

had a profound negative influence on mental health.

Hamsa adds, “The pandemic made us look within ourselves and that is what I teach my patients. There are several terminologies fed by media to them and come with a preconceived notion on what they might have. But in most conversations, I see that they have all the solutions and after the pandemic, all they needed was someone who listened to them.”

The National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) and the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare carried out the National Mental Health Survey of India (NMHSI) 2020. A total of 34,802 persons, 18 years of age or older, nationally representative sample was included in the survey.

According to the report, one in 20 people in India suffer from depression, and one in fifty experience anxiety. The poll also revealed that depression is more common in urban than in rural areas and is more common in women than in males. The survey also discovered that people who had experienced mental illness had a much greater prevalence of both depression and anxiety.

Ms. Manju Saravana, who works at Mind Essentials, a private mental health service in the city says most patients diagnosed with depression come because of witnessing deaths and environmental changes. “Counselling helps. Especially when you counsel with your own style which helps accommodate their problems with a personal touch.”

# NEPAL'S PARLIAMENT HAS A DIVERSITY PROBLEM

Dominant communities use the law in their favour to keep minorities out

Ishwar K Dahal

**Chennai:** The representation of marginalized people from Muslim, Dalit, Janajati, Madheshi and Tharu communities in the newly elected House of Representatives (HoR) of Nepal has been extremely low. Nearly half of the seats of HoR are represented by the Khas Arya, a dominant ethnic community in Nepal.

According to the Election Commission, 47.64 percent of lawmakers are from the Khas Arya community followed by 24 percent from the Adivasi Janajati community, 15.64 percent from Madheshi, 5.82 percent from Dalit, 4.73 percent from Tharu and 2.18 percent from the Muslim community.

The status of representation in the previous parliament from 2017 to 2022 was almost the same. The representation of Khas Arya community was 42.18 percent, followed by 24 percent from the Adivasi Janajati community, 18.18 percent from Madheshi, 3.30 percent from Muslim, 5.28 percent from Tharu, and 7.27 percent from the Dalit community.

Khas Arya representation is now nearly half of the total seats in Parliament, even though their population is only 31.2 percent according to the census of 2011. This has meant that other marginalized communities of the country are cornered for another five years. Another example is of Muslims in Nepal who constitute 4.4 percent of total population but they hold only 2.18 percent of seats in the parliament. Dalits are 13.6 percent of the population but their representation is poor with just 8.82 percent seats.

The Constitution of Nepal has embraced inclusion to empower backward communities. Article 42 of the Constitution says, "Socially



**POWER PLAY:** According to Nepal's Election Commission, 47.64 per cent of the lawmakers are from the dominant Khas Arya community

backward women, Dalits, Adivasi, Janajati, Madheshi, Tharu, minority groups, persons with disability, marginalized groups, Muslim, backward classes, gender and sexual minority groups, youths, peasants, laborers, the oppressed and the citizens of backward regions, and economically poor Khas Arya shall have the right to employment in state structures on the basis of the principle of inclusion."

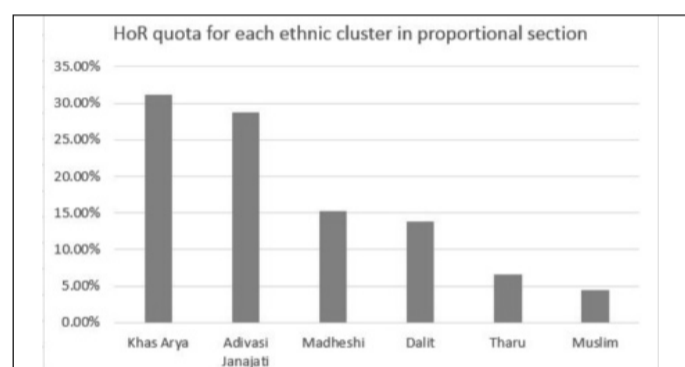
Nepal has two methods for electing 275 members of the HoR: direct elections as per first-past-the-post system for 165 out of the total 275 seats and proportional representation for the remaining 110 members.

The Election Commission selects them according to the Close List submitted by political parties before the election. Political parties have to include candidates' names from various communities categorically in the Close List; they can't amend it later. After the election, on the basis of the parties' vote, EC chooses the names from the list. In the HoR election, people vote for

the party candidate and party separately.

Ujjwal Prasai, a political analyst and columnist of Kathmandu-based Katipur Daily, said that political parties were always reluctant even in the past, to

participate in the lawmaking process before 2008. With the proportional representation system in place after 2008, things have obviously changed. Due to reluctance among parties, and, most significantly, their prowess



ensure fair representation of all communities in the HoR. He remarked, "Though the marginalization of different ethnic, caste, and gender groups was acknowledged by parties after 1990, they did almost nothing for their fair representation. For example, almost none from Dalit communities would be able to

in using loopholes in the existing constitutional provisions, laws, and policies, the representation hasn't increased much."

Prasai added that the restructuring process to ensure fair representation of marginalized and minority hijacked by the dominant section (Khas Arya) of major political parties. He said,

"The new system - defined by the new constitution - that came into place in 2015 had several loopholes for the dominant players to use in their favor, and against the marginalized communities."

Prasai sees that political parties seldom take contestants from marginalized communities for a first-past-the-post system, even in the areas they are likely to win. Moreover, political parties have made the law in such a way that the Khas Arya candidates can also come from the proportional system to make the HoR inclusive. That has reduced the size of marginalized communities candidates who can enter the HoR.

Parbati Bisunke, former member of parliament (MP) from the Dalit community, also says that political parties have been giving less priority to marginalized communities. She said, "Dalit, Adivasi Janajati, and Muslim people have been deprived of the basic necessities and resources of the state for years. Therefore, the proportional system was adopted 2008 onward. But, things remained the same."

Bisunke stated that the problems of marginalized people would be audible in the HoR if the representation was significant. "Parliament is a prominent place to make the government responsible at every step. We can make justifiable law. Their problems would be audible."

Social activist Manoj Lohar, based in Kathmandu, said, "Only a few people from marginalized communities can be seen in the HoR. Political parties didn't prioritize these communities while choosing the contestants for the first-past-the-post system. On the other hand, they didn't bring more marginalized people from the proportional system," Lohar said.

# Tech cos lay off staff in droves

V Anisha Rao

**Chennai:** It has not been quite a good start for the technology industry in 2023. There is an underlying economic uncertainty which is causing these industries to respond with a string of lay-offs. In continuation of the preceding year there have been thousands of them by far.

Spotify is laying off approximately 600 employees, or 6 percent of its workforce. Other tech companies like Amazon, Microsoft, Meta and others have laid off thousands of employees since the end of 2022.

Spotify CEO, Daniel Ek, confirmed the lay-off in a recent letter to employees suggesting the need for Spotify to "become more efficient". He also announced that the affected employees would get five months of severance pay.

In mid-January 2023, Microsoft came up with its announcement of letting go of 10,000 employees, in effect reducing the company's total workforce by less than five percent. CEO Satya Nadella said the lay-offs would conclude by the end of March.

Similarly Google's parent company Alphabet Inc. plans on cutting about 12,000 jobs as

it faces "a different economic reality."

According to the website 'layoffs.fyi', more people have been laid off in tech in the first 20 days of January 2023 than the first six months of 2022.

Microsoft's mass lay-offs followed a similar process by another tech company, Amazon which announced its first round of downsizing. The tech giant laid off around 8,000 employees, that is 2 percent of its workforce, in the first week of January. CEO Andy Jassy

earlier announced a staff elimination drive of over 18,000. This will be Amazon's single largest workforce reduction in its 28-year history. Among all the mass downsizing, the only company which does not aim to eliminate its workforce till September

this year is Apple. The lay-off wave has not hit most of the Indian tech companies yet. The only affected sector is Ed-tech. More than 15,700 employees were laid off in 2022, according to Inc42, an Indian startup lay-off tracker. According to an article in The Hindu, start-ups such as Byju's, Chargebee, Cars24, Ola, Unacademy and Vedantu are some names which held layoffs last year, but the situation may soon change.

**More people have been laid off in tech in the first 20 days of January 2023 than in the first six months of 2022**

# Cancer care often ignores mental toll on patients

Priyamedha Dutta

**Chennai:** Eight years ago, Jayshree was diagnosed with oral cancer. "I try to live every day of my life to the fullest," says the now-24-year-old cancer survivor. Jayshree is a social worker who aims to help people from the marginalised communities.

Cancer is a major health problem in India and is one of the leading causes of death in the country. However, its impact on the mental health of patients and their families does not get enough attention or care.

When Jayshree started treatment, she suffered from anxiety and depression. "When I first got to know about the disease the first thought that came to mind was that I am going to die soon, I even thought of committing suicide," she says.

Poulomi Ghosh, 22, a resident of Kolkata whose mother underwent breast cancer surgery last year, says that cancer changed her mother completely. Poulomi herself went through a depressive phase throughout her mother's treatment.

"During the chemo, my mother had a lot of hair loss, after a few sittings she was almost bald, she hated looking at herself in the mirror, she barely came out of her room and completely isolated herself. There was a time she would not talk to us for days."

Poulomi a college student then, says it was hard for her to manage everything on her own. "As a single child I was the primary caregiver of my mother. From doctor visits to the chemo sessions, I had to accompany my mother as my father would be in

his office most days."

She says that even though their oncologist asked them to see a psychologist they did not pay much heed. "We were so concerned about the physical healing that we completely ignored the mental healing."

Tiyash Mallick, 26, an IT consultant by profession from Kolkata whose father was also treated for cancer last December says, "Cancer not just affects you

we first came to know about my father's cancer, mental health was not the first thing that came to our mind. Eventually, now we realise that not just my father, we as caregivers also need to think about these feelings."

Dr. B Elayaraja, a psychologist who runs the Kavithalaya Counseling Centre in Chennai, says, "These people drastically go on through a transition called clinical depression, where they completely lose interest in living their life. So some people develop suicidal tendencies. If you have a psychologist taking care of your emotional aspect, over a period of time it can help improve your self-esteem."

Elayaraja, who as worked with cancer patients for 15 years, says "We as psychologists encourage them to do any sort of activity which makes them feel good about themselves. This is called the behavioral activation method. This is done slowly on a regular basis to have a significant change."

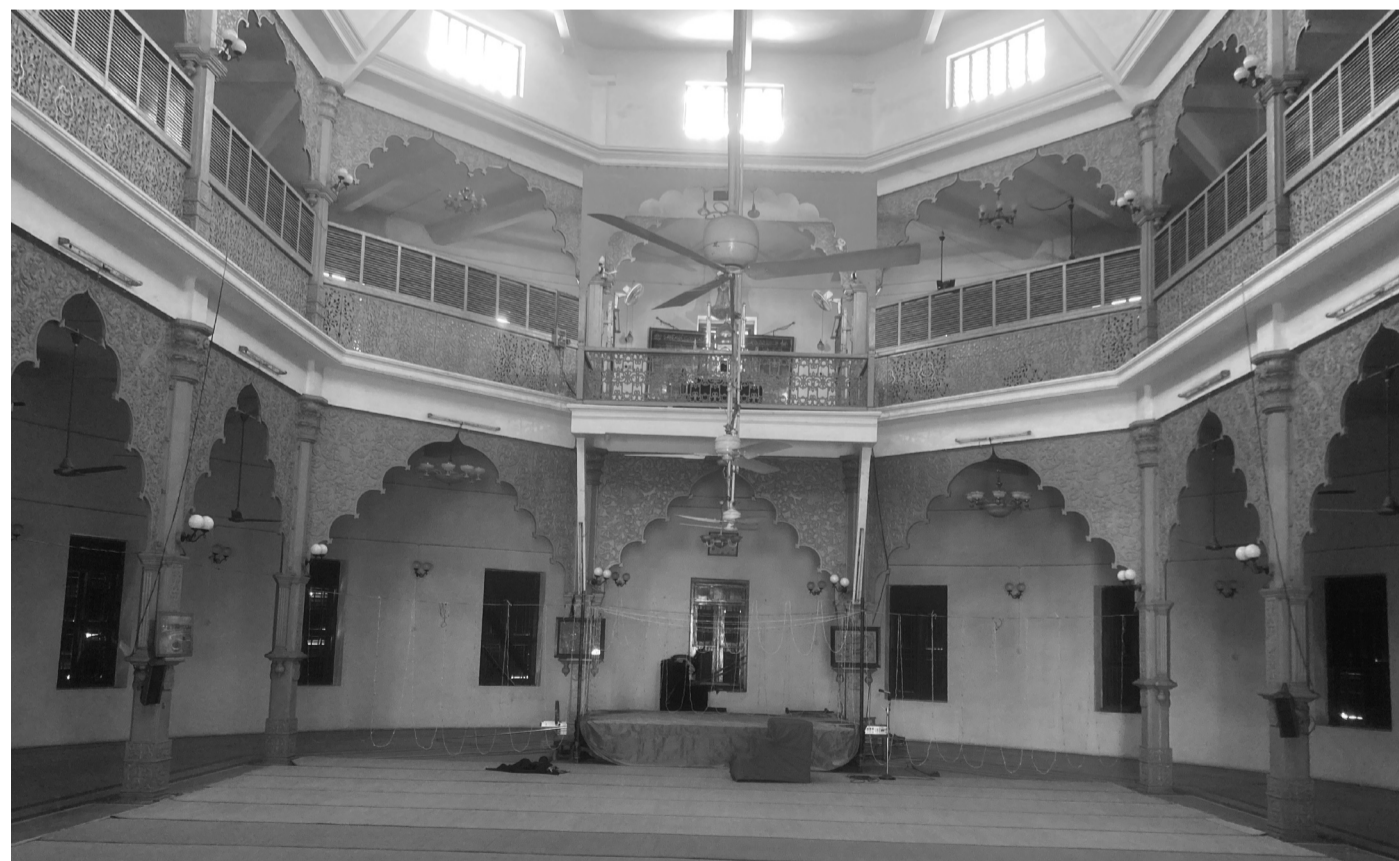
Psycho-oncology has emerged as a relatively new field in psychology. It is concerned with physical, psychological, social, and behavioural aspects of cancer to improve the overall quality of life of patients and caregivers. However, awareness regarding psycho-oncology is hugely lacking in India.

Dr. Dhayanandan a practicing psycho-oncologist for eight years at the Voluntary Health Services, Chennai says, "Only when the patient is extremely depressed that they will be referred to a psychiatrist or psycho oncologist. That is the fundamental problem in this field."

**Now we realise that not just my father, we as caregivers also need to think about these feelings**

- Tiyash Mallick

# Chennai's Ashurkhana welcomes all with open arms



**ONE FOR ALL:** A view of the hall of the Ashurkhana (above); the building as seen from the outside (right) | PHOTO: Jayant Kumar Pankaj

Jayant Kumar Pankaj

**Chennai:** The 101-year-old Ashurkhana in front of the Thousand Lights Shia mosque in Chennai undergoes renovation from time to time, using contribution from devotees. The structure had been constructed in memory of the martyrdom of Husyan Ibn Ali, grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

Mir Ali Naqi, 48, who works as mujahabir (staff), said the Ashurkhana was primarily funded and constructed by traders Khilaf Shirazi and Mahutarma Shirazi.

The Ashurkhana is usually known as the Imam Khana or Dargah for Shia Muslims. This place is open to everybody, unlike the Thousand Lights mosque that is primarily meant for Muslims.

"We celebrate festivals also, discourses are

common in the Ashurkhana; however, the mosques are usually meant for namaaz," he said.

"This Ashurkhana is made of wood and iron, and everything you see here is totally handcrafted, which makes this architecture beautiful," he said.

Naqi reminisced: "It is an interesting story. As per my forefathers, the Shirazis wished to be buried right in front of the Ashurkhana, where people keep their footwear. Although it would have been disrespectful, my ancestors buried them on the right side of the Ashurkhana."

He explained it is being called Thousand Lights mosque because a long time ago, before electricity was invented, people used to light 1,000 oil lamps every night.

There was a time when there was not much



crowding, now the Ashurkhana is sadly lost in the sounds and lights of the day-to-day traffic of Anna Salai.

# Marvel Universe stuck in a time-loop

Fans are wondering if the franchise peaked in 2019

Manjiri Patil

**Chennai:** Marvel's newest release, *Antman and the Wasp: Quantumania*, joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) on February 17. The story revolves around Scott Lang (Antman), who lost the childhood of his daughter when he was stuck in the quantum realm during the five-year blip caused by Thanos, the mighty supervillain of the Avengers series, exterminating half of the population of the universe.

This movie is part of phase five of the MCU, which started with the first *Iron Man* movie in 2008. Over the past four phases, we saw the superheroes being created; them assembling as a group called Avengers to fight against Ultron; trying to destroy the whole world; the superheroes then fighting amongst them due to differing ethics; and lastly the Avengers once again reuniting to fight and defeat Thanos, a threat to the entire universe. The next phase is supposed to be a test of the new Avengers against time and the multiverse.

*Iron Man* in 2008 was followed by *Captain America*, *Hulk* and *Thor*. They were mostly geeks — sometimes very privileged and talented geeks — who would fight the bad guys. It was an outstretched hand for all the nerds to belong somewhere in a fantasy world. I guess that made it a huge connection between the millennials and Gen Z.

One of my favourite memories associated with the Marvel movies is of my much younger sibling asking me questions about the films; we spoke about Marvel for hours and I could just see him being in awe of the extensive information I had about the genre. We did plan on watching *Avengers: Endgame* together, but I moved to Germany for studies. I ended up watching it with 10 of my friends there — shelling out 11 Euros for a Marvel movie seemed a no-brainer. Although *Endgame* was a three-hour-long symphony that left many teary-eyed, the question that haunted most Marvel fans was: how are



A NEW TIMEZONE: The cast of *Antman and the Wasp: Quantumania*

they going to one up on this one?

Phase four, which followed *Endgame*, introduced a lot of TV series in the Marvel Comic Universe (MCU), with origin stories of some of the superheroes and also introducing a few new ones.

These new series, like *Loki* and *Wanda Vision*, were widely praised but everyone was eager for the next MCU movie, especially because (spoiler alert) we had to bid adieu to most of our beloved Avengers. *Spiderman: Far from Home* (2019) was hence received with a bittersweet feeling. The movie was a thorough fan service that featured all three Spider-man actors, Toby Maguire, Andrew Garfield and Tom Holland, the dialogues a million call-backs to the old movies.

The movie honestly felt like a breather after the huge, hard-hitting *Endgame*; like the

audience, the superheroes too were just dealing with their losses. But this trope can only go so far.

*Doctor Strange: The Multiverse of Madness* (2022) came as another disappointment with the story of the heartbroken Doctor Strange dealing with the consequences of messing with timelines in *Spiderman: Far from Home*, with only five minutes of multiverse madness that the title promised.

By the time *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022) released, it was as though the producers Anthony and Joe Russo had given up on making a spectacular storyline and plunged into sheer lunacy with the forcefully funny plot points and use of trendy music. Watching the movie was akin to watching any late 90s Govinda movie — trashy music and cued audience laughter.

I am a true Marvel fan — you can quiz me if you want — so it

broke my heart when I fell asleep during *Thor: Love and Thunder*. The next release, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022) played as a real saviour for the sinking ship of the Marvel clan.

Marvel non-fans have always complained that watching any Marvel movie came with a humongous homework and I always defend it with a *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) or even an *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), a lesser applauded movie but still with a good standalone storyline. Well, there is finally good news for the non-Marvels — these few new movies are as forgettable as *Thor: The Dark World*, so you may as well turn up at the next Marvel movie and have missed nothing.

That being said, like the true Marvel-bloods, I will still watch all of the phase five, six and seven movies in theatres regardless of these loopholes because you don't turn your back on family. For us Marvels (really pushing for this to stick), MCU was a way to belong and be part of a larger group, a way of being the cool ones. So we may still give it a few misses and await the hits a little longer.

**For us Marvels, MCU was a way to belong and be part of a larger group, a way of being the cool ones**

# Shukto, a culinary gem

The Bengali staple is loaded with flavours

Anindita Sengupta

Nostalgia comes in different shapes and sizes. Wrapped in layers of memory, sautéed with tidbits of imagination and relished with a satisfying after-taste — one that you can conjure up only in your gastronomic mind space.

Shukto is a popular Bengali curry. It is a plethora of vegetables cooked in unique spices with creamy, milky gravy with the slightest hint of sweetness and a core taste of bitterness — even describing the dish is a pleasure. Shukto is served with steamed rice at the beginning of a traditional Bengali meal.

In Bengal, one's ability as a cook is judged by their ability to prepare shukto. It is

mandatorily cooked on traditional occasions like marriages, birthdays and different religious festivals as part of lunch.

It's a purely vegetarian dish that comprises several veggies like bitter melon, eggplant, green banana, potato, sweet potato, drumsticks, white radish and hyacinth beans. Radhuni (a superior cousin of celery seeds) is an exclusive spice that Bengalis prefer to use while preparing shukto. Most of the dishes in Bengali cuisine have radhuni in it.

Another distinct characteristic of shukto is that the recipe does not feature chillies. There is a phrase from a famous Bengali song that translates to "Rani does not know how to cook; she has added chilli to shukto and ghee to chutney!"

"What is a Bengali cook if shukto is missing from the repertoire?" says Supriya Dasgupta, 93, who has been cooking this dish for 80 years now. Shukto happens to be her first step towards the world of cooking.

Shukto is considered to be a true-blue Bengali dish, a talisman of the plethora of vegetarian recipes that abound in the Gangetic plains. Bengali cuisine is often dubbed as a collection of endless fish recipes and delectable sweets. A hefty lot of these have been introduced by the ancient settlers in the Vedic period that weren't keen on consuming any animals or even high-protein foods like mutton dal as they were believed to increase libido. The use of onion and garlic, when it



Shukto comprises a plethora of vegetables found in the Gangetic plains

**There is a phrase from a famous Bengali song that translates to "Rani does not know how to cook; she has added chilli to shukto and ghee to chutney!"**

first appeared in these regions, was prohibited for the same reason.

Shukto is prepared using vegetables and leaves. Another characteristic of the recipe is the use of bitter elements.

Bengalis might be known for their legendary sweet tooth, but it is their curious penchant for bitters that truly sets them apart. Trust a Bengali to polish off a mound of rice with ruthlessly bitter neem leaves fried to a crisp, all the while drawing parallels with amrito (divine nectar).

Ayurveda, the choice of medicine during that period, also governed eating habits. Bitter food was prescribed to be eaten at the start of a meal. In the hot and humid climates of Anga-Banga-Kalinga (erstwhile undivided Bengal), they provided a sort of relief to the stomach. It was also considered to be a palate teaser.

Interestingly, some of the early versions of shukto mentioned in

medieval Bengali literature do not feature a dominant bitter element. Khullana, one of the central characters, cooks shukto with eggplants, pumpkin, raw bananas and banana blossoms in ghee tempered with cumin, fenugreek and asafoetida, for her husband, Dhanapati. To thicken the gravy, she adds pithali or pituli—rice flour slurry.

Another 16th-century text, Krishnadasa Kaviraja's *Chaitanya Charitamrita* mentions shukuta—dried bitter leaves, particularly of jute. Shukuta is perhaps the early predecessors of shukto as we know it today.

In her autobiography, *Jeebankatha*, Rabindranath Tagore's niece Indira Devi Chaudhurani writes about Janakinath Ghoshal, one of her uncles: "His claim for being a good housewife is supported by the fact that while in England he used a quinine tablet to cook sukutuni (shukto) since the usual spices were not available."

Another important ingredient is bori, these little lentil dumplings dried in the sun. It is shallow fried in oil and added to the curry.

"I always asked my mother for extra bori, which made my shukto experience more delightful. Although most kids generally tend to stack aside and avoid eating the slices of bitter melon in shukto, I felt these bitter karaela slices actually constitute the heart of this delicious dish."

A common thread that runs through is that the dish is constructed to cool the body and stimulate the digestive fire.

# Vital voices set the tone

Ekta Sonawane

Shantabai Krushnaji Kamble, the first Dalit woman to write a biography in Marathi literature, passed away on January 25 at the age of 100. Shantabai became a ray of hope for many aspiring Dalit women writers in the late 80s. Her work *Majhya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*, or *The Kaleidoscopic Story of My Life*, (1983) was published in Marathi and then translated into many Indian and foreign languages. Her work gave a spark to the Dalit feminist discourse in the Indian feminist movement.

In the memory of Shantabai Krushnaji Kamble, it feels necessary to look back at the journey of the Dalit women writers who made it to history.

Following Shantabai, Dalit women started documenting their lives and became an important element of Dalit literature in Maharashtra. Urmila Pawar, Babytai Kamble, Shantabai Kale and many more told their own struggles to the world through their autobiographies.

Contemporary male writers like Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Laxman Mane, Baburao Bagul, and Daya Pawar have written on a wide range of Dalit issues, creating an etymology of Dalit literature in Maharashtra. As these writers had emerged from the Dalit Panther movement, they were more inclined towards Ambedkarism and Buddhism. Women and gender were hardly a part of their academic or theatrical writings. Among them, only Namdeo Dhasal touched upon the subject of women; he is credited with writing on the pain of prostitutes in his famous



Cover of the Marathi version of *The Kaleidoscopic Story, of My Life* (left) by Shantabai Krushnaji Kamble (right)

poetry collection *Golpitha*.

When Urmila Pawar wrote her autobiography she was accused of demeaning the name of the Ambedkarite movement because she wrote about her domestic violence experienced at the hands of her husband, who was a well known Ambedkarite activist. But, Pawar's autobiography, *Aaidan! Weave of My Life* (1988), talks about much deeper issues of caste-class and the gender axis. During the same period, Babytai Kamble published her work *Jine Amuche/ Prisons We Broke* (1987), about unrecognized reproductive and domestic labor.

**If you want to start your journey in Dalit literature, start with the writings of Dalit women**



Dalit women were subjected to double exploitation because of their gender and caste, according to Kumud Pawade. She was adamant that caste could be disregarded in order to comprehend the humiliation and oppression of a particular society in her book *Anthaspot/ Thoughtful Outburst* (1981).

Dalit literature was a genre formed consciously to mark the presence of communities. In its earlier period it was criticized for its nature. It deals with the local dialects and language and was therefore accused of not being pure. This was a notion of purity that came from a Brahmanical chain of thought. To change this notion and to validate one's own culture, to set a non-Brahmanical aesthetic of beauty Dalit was where literature has played an important role.

If you want to start your journey in Dalit literature, start with the writings of Dalit women.

# Another one bites the dust

*Terrace House*, which claimed to eschew the toxic tropes of reality shows in the genre, soon went the predictable route

Pranay Inbaraj

At its core, the Japanese reality television show *Terrace House* on Netflix was supposed to be above its competitors. Free from the forced drama, betrayals, competition and high stakes, the "reality show where there is no script" was a hit because of its wholesome mundaneness. So how did something so tragic end up happening?

Tired of the Bachelors and Big Brothers, the endless fights of *Jersey Shore*, the competitions and forced dramas that pit people against each other, *Terrace House* was a reality show with seemingly none of that.

The concept of the show was that three guys and three girls live in a sort-of posh house equipped with two cars. The contestants are free to leave the house as they please, go to work, meet friends and even leave the show of their own accord, at which point a new member would join.

The tagline "The show has no script" is reproduced every episode by a commentary panel filled with actors, comedians and celebrities who come in halfway through the episode to give their own little takes on each member, acting as a guide for viewers' opinions.

What set *Terrace House* apart was not only this unique format but also in a way, its banality. Since "there is no script" and members just go on about their daily lives it lulls the viewer into thinking that all of this is real.



What initially set *Terrace House* apart was its banality

The height of drama in *Terrace House* can be considered very ordinary. An incident that stands out is 'The meat incident' from *Terrace House: Boys and Girls in the City*, where a member, Minoru, eats her boyfriend Uchi's special 200-dollar meat with the other members and without Uchi, leaving him in tears and the viewers questioning the strength of their relationship.

This normalcy made it the antithesis of the popular reality shows of recent times. An 'anti-reality-television' show, so to speak.

However, Hana Kimura's death in May 2020 dispelled the illusion that *Terrace House* wasn't just another drama-driven toxic reality show. Starring in *Terrace House: Tokyo 2019-2020*, Kimura was a pro-wrestler signed with

STARDOM who ended up taking her own life after being subject to incessant harassment and death threats on social media.

On the last episode of the show aired in Japan, Kimura had an argument with another member when he washed her title-winning wrestling costumes, which ended up shrinking. In a fit of understandable rage Kimura shouted at him and knocked his cap off his head. Then the show had to pause due to Covid-19 and they all went back to their homes.

From her rented flat in Tokyo, Kimura tweeted hours before her death, "Every day, I receive nearly 100 honest opinions and I cannot deny that I get hurt." Her death sparked national anti-cyberbullying campaigns, while Netflix and Fuji-TV cancelled the rest of the season.

According to texts shared to *The New York Times* by Kimura's mother, Kyoko Kimura, the scene may have been played up or staged by the producers. According to the texts, staff instructed Kimura to slap the roommate, Kai Kobayashi, and to lose her temper. "It's not real," she wrote. "I really feel terrible about it."

Ultimately, the show ended up displaying the same old, ugly traits that plague reality television. Although it did a good job keeping up the illusion, it is, after all, a reality-TV show.

With the commentators charging up the viewers or forcing contestants to watch the show as it airs, all while trying to participate in the show and live their daily lives, may have been a recipe for disaster after all.

# A home away from home

From snacks to snuggles, Abhishak Mathiazagan shows the rewards and challenges of caring for children

Preetika Parashuraman

**Chennai:** "It is never quiet here. That's why I come an hour early to start my day," says Abhishak Mathiazagan, who is one of the caretakers in the daycare facility Kanchana Patti - My Grandma's Place in Kandanchavadi, Chennai.

On a bookshelf in the corner of a large room is a book titled 'Hyperactive Child'. One would typically find books on dinosaurs and magicians in a daycare centre, not a parent's guide to dealing with hyperactive children. Today, at 8 am on a Tuesday, after setting up the room for the children to come in, she goes to a cosy corner with her cup of tea and reads the book before chaos unfolds.

Kanchana Paati is a professionally managed, multi-location child care centre in Chennai,

operational since 2006 for children aged between 91 days to 14 years.

She says children need constant care. She feeds them every couple of hours. She engages with them to complete tasks, stop crying or even fall asleep and then there is the "endless supply of stained clothes, dirty diapers, and bodily fluids they bestow upon her regularly," she said.

Mathiazagan graduated with a degree in Psychology and reading books about children helps her understand them better. After her graduation, she worked with children with developmental disorders in a clinic in Chennai and helped them with schoolwork. "If you want to learn forever, you need to be with children. Moreover, if you want to learn patience, be with children," she said.

As the youngest out of seven caretakers, she relies on other older caretakers, because dealing with 20 children is not an easy task. As they wait for the children to come, the oldest woman, whom they dearly



**ART WITH TODDLERS:** It's art time for twins Varsha and Mithra as they learn how to draw an ant with crayons, ignoring the chaos behind them | PHOTO: Preetika Parashuraman

call Patti (grandmother), prepares breakfast for her "little monsters." The women announce to Abhishak about a parent sending off their daughter at the facility's entrance. She welcomes Ana Paul with a cheerful demeanour, contrary to her calm state of being a while ago.

In no time, the room is filled with children. Some head straight to the playroom and some run to hug Patti. And with Abhishak leading the colony, they followed her into the arts and crafts area. While she turns her back on them, the children begin goofing around.

They shed their mischievous smiles as soon as she faces them. After an hour of exercising their brains, they head to the playroom. "It is like fireworks; we are used to this chaos by now," she says.

One-year-old Ana walks to her with dewy eyes. Abhishak notices that something is unusual. When she tries to console Ana by caressing her face, she realises that she might be down with a fever. Without any panic, Abhishak manages the situation like a doctor. "Ana's parents are doctors, but I am the one she comes to when she feels low. I

think that is reassuring," she adds.

According to her, you are never free. You can see the exhaustion on her face. She could feel a terrible headache coming on. She closes her eyes and leans against the wall while three children keep running around her. Like the relentless buzz of a fly in her ear, the screams drill into her head. To silence the children, she banged the table with a block only to be met with their indifference. Instead of losing her calm, she chose to console herself with a mumble under her breath: "I love these children."

When they sleep, silence fills the room. That's when it seems like she has time for herself, for her to listen to her thoughts. She zones out — almost like she is pausing for a while to recoup before she has to tend to them again. However, not all kids sleep at the same time. After putting a few kids to sleep, she joins three-year-old Brendan to play board games. Playing with fluffy bears for hours is not the most stimulating activity for an adult, but she still does it. "It's easy to beat oneself up for not feeling mentally present 100 per cent of the time, but these are feelings that most of us grapple with from time to time," she says.

Before they wake up, she quickly eats her lunch. "For some reason, I am always with children. Maybe they are my calling," she says. She wants to start a school for children with developmental disorders as she has herself seen the challenges that people with autism face in educational settings.

In her free time, she does research on best educational practices for those with autism and has a clear vision of what the school will look like and how it will operate. "The only roadblock is my fiancé and his family. I don't think he will be supportive of my idea," she says as her smile changes to a frown. After her wedding in 2024, she has to move to Dubai and that might leave her dreams unfulfilled.

“

**If you want to learn forever, you need to be with children**

- Abhishak Mathiazagan

”

A two-year-old interrupts her lunch, asking her to read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. With her hands still soaked in her food, she walks with the child to wash her hands. She closes her unfinished food box to read to the child. She then cleans up the mess from the day. Before leaving, she checks in with the parents to update them on the day.

After a busy day, she is ready to head home. It's already dark outside, and the streetlights illuminate the path ahead. She walks to the bus stop that's located a few blocks away from the building. After a 20-minute bus ride, she arrives at her stop. She walks the remaining blocks to her apartment, feeling tired but relieved. She thinks about the events of the day, feeling proud of her relationships with the children.

## The trouble with Taarak Mehta

Ruchira Kagita

Running for over 14 years now, *Taarak Mehta ka Ooltah Chashmah* is probably the most famous sitcom in India. Woven around families belonging to different states living in an apartment complex, the show is known for being a humorous family entertainer.

The sitcom is a typical kitchen-sink drama. Set in Mumbai, the show portrays the everyday lives of middle-class families living in Gokuldham Society. The character of Jethalal Gada, played by Dilip Joshi, is central to the show. Besides the Gada family, there are other characters who take precedence, such as Taarak Mehta, who was initially played by Shailesh Lodhia but now by Sachin Shroff, Aatmaram Tukaram Bhide played by Mandar Chandwadkar, and Mumun Dutta's Babita Iyer.

Since the beginning, the show has claimed to be inclusive. In fact, there are myriad instances where the residents of the society have called themselves a "mini-India", which is unrealistic at best. The show ends up creating a caricature of the Roshan family. Roshan Singh Sodhi is reminiscent of the stereotypical Punjabi man — he is too loud, too passionate, a little too romantic, loves eating parathas and drinking lassi, and, if this is not enough, he enjoys alcohol. The makers have conveniently managed to boil down 'Punjabiness' to a few



**PROBLEMATIC LENS:** *Taarak Mehta ka Ooltah Chashmah* is replete with gender stereotypes

Maharashtra's famous thalipeeth, kothimbir vadi, poha, etc. Babita, however, cooks shukto and rasgullas; let alone cooking a fish delicacy, she doesn't even talk about it. The sitcom leaves a deliberate void by creating an absence of meat. In a country where the majority eats meat, this exclusion is distressing. The Hathi family's love for food does not include the mention of a single non-vegetarian dish. The fact that meat is an important element of Roshan's Parsi culture is also conveniently ignored.

The bigger problem is the not-so-subtle misogyny the show portrays. Several times, the characters are seen to be appreciating women for their efforts in doing household chores. The families also claim to be progressive and emphasise the need to adapt to changing times.

society compound to purchase vegetables when Jethalal casually comes and greets the women, or as they call themselves, "mahila mandal", which loosely translates to mean a 'women's group'. When Poptatlal protests that he is also present, Jethalal says, "You are, in a manner, a part of the mahila mandal. Like them, you also buy vegetables, cook food at home. In a way, you are part of the women's and the gents' group." Comments like this are frequent in the show, and, though intended to be humorous, they are all but regressive.

The show toes the line of political incorrectness when discussion about Poptatlal's misfortune on finding a bride ensues. Poptatlal, played by Shyam Pathak, complains to his male friends saying things like, "I don't have the fortune of having a wife like you. I don't have anyone to cook for me or take care of me." They promote the notion that men are incapable of successfully looking after themselves.

The show tends to promote measures taken by the state, without much criticism. For example, demonetisation was praised for reducing black money. Jethalal's obvious admiration for Babita is severely problematic. The Gujarati businessman is shown as a loyal husband, but him wanting unnecessary attention from Babita questions not only his loyalty, but also raises problems about the male gaze.

India's longest-running sitcom is far from being representative. While the show is a family entertainer, it is not above subtly emboldening existing patriarchal values.

Kashvi Raj Singh

The 1891-published short story, 'Cathedral', written by Raymond Carver (inset), is a portrayal of an ordinary American man that leaves the reader uneasy. The beauty of this feeling is that it is brought up by Carver's usage of 'simple words' to describe the seemingly simple lives of seemingly simple people. Nothing much happens to the characters, but this 'nothingness' highlights their quiet struggles.

The story is narrated by a man whose wife is old friends with a blind man, Robert, who is coming to visit them after the death of his wife. The narrator's limited view of blindness causes him to develop a sense of distaste toward Robert. He also seems jealous of the connection that Robert shares with his wife. In the end, in a moment of 'joint' creativity, the men bond over what a cathedral looks like.

The narrator is an average American man living in New York who spends his free time drinking alcohol and watching television.

Before every significant action, at least one of the characters makes a drink or sips from an already-prepared glass. When the

wife attempted to kill herself, she downed the pills with a bottle of gin. Before the narrator begins listening to one of Robert's tapes, he makes drinks. Drinking whiskey becomes an ice-breaker between the two men, who spend the night drinking Scotch with only a splash of water.

The influence of alcohol becomes evident when the narrator says that "drinking is one of their pastimes." The first-person narration itself seems like a confessional of sorts.

The unnamed narrator initially says that his "idea of blindness came from the movies." This idea that blind people move slowly and never laugh creates a substantial prejudice in his mind against a man that he has never met before. Interestingly, the act of watching television together brings them close to each other. Television programming not only becomes a talking point for them but also brings a cathartic moment for the narrator.

The narrator's pop-culture-influenced idea of blindness

shows his shallow take on life and his isolation from reality. When he tries to imagine the life of Robert's wife, he calls it "pitiful" because she could never see herself as she was seen in the eyes of whom she loved. He talks about how "pathetic" it is to be left with only an insurance policy and half a Mexican coin.

As a result of this shallow worldview, the narrator forgets the difference between 'looking' and 'seeing.' The narrator is a master at 'looking' and assumes superiority over Robert — who he thinks cannot make a woman happy because he cannot look at her.

He doesn't care for her poetry and calls her tapes a means of "recreation" when she's talking to someone who listens to her and understands her. The only description he gives of her is that of her "juicy thigh." He puts no effort into 'seeing' and thus doesn't know his wife all that well.

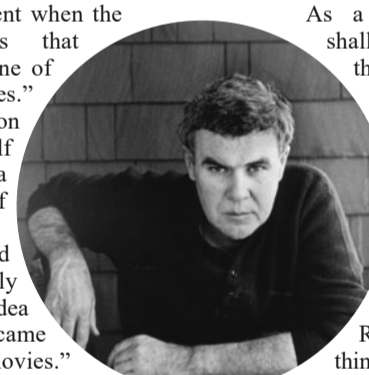
Robert, however, has this

ability. Even though he cannot physically see the narrator's wife, he understands her on a deeper level. The wife has confided in Robert for ten years and speaks to him in a sweet tone, while the only interaction we see between her and the narrator are snippy exchanges in which she is mainly annoyed at him.

This conflict between looking and seeing makes the narrator jealous of his wife's connection with Robert. Perhaps he also longs for the kind of intimacy that they share. When his wife and Robert sit on the sofa and engage in a long conversation, he waits, expecting to hear his name being mentioned, though it never happens.

The narrator only sees Robert as his equal towards the end of the story when Robert guides him to an insight that Carver does not define. The cathedral that the men draw with their eyes closed becomes a symbol of connection and deeper understanding.

The 'Cathedral' seems like the story of a jealous, shallow man and his distaste and ignorance toward a blind man. However, it is a commentary on the worldview of average American men of that era and their misunderstanding of intimacy.



**The Heritage Committee headed by Justice E. Padmanabhan listed the Royapuram Railway station among the 800 other heritage structures identified in Chennai. The first train was carrying the then Governor General Lord Harris and 300 European delegates**

## The delayed revamp

Annie Louis

**Chennai:** The Royapuram railway station, which is the country's second oldest functioning station cries for attention and now sees fewer trains and passengers. Station manager R Palanivel said the station sees a mere 300-400 footfalls a day.

In the recent years, the station has seen a few changes — two more track lines were added, a foot over bridge was constructed and two lifts are under construction.

Commenting on the maintenance of the heritage building, the station manager said only temporary plaster works have been undertaken. Officers from the Public Relations Office, Southern Railways, visited the place last year and discussed inviting quotations to redevelop



**MAIDEN JOURNEY:** The station has been functioning since it was first flagged off in 1865 | PHOTO: Annie Louis

this place. The contractor is yet to be finalised; things move slowly in the Rail department, he added.

"This is a heritage building, we should be ideally taking better care of it," said Palanivel. He added that the refurbishment will be done while retaining the original structure of the station.

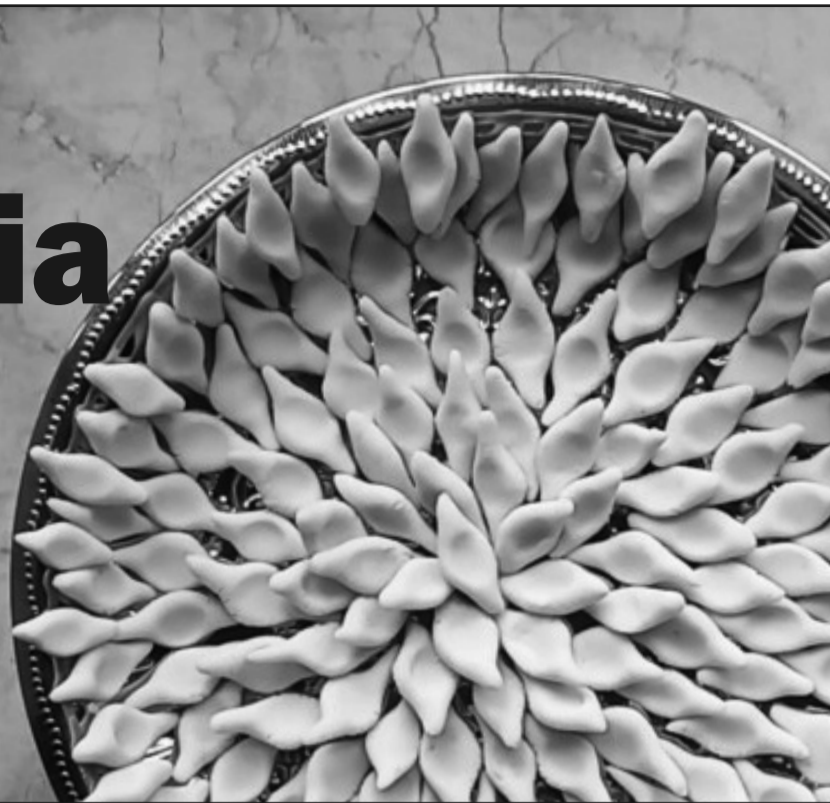
Kuppammal, the station

pointsman, recalls the station being shown in old MGR films. She sees it as a quiet place away from the city's commotion.

Now people from suburbs like Arakkonam use the station as a mode of commute to the city's Parry's corner. The station also has a loco shed, health units and a machine work shed.

# Tasting nostalgia

Winter brings with it several seasonal delicacies, but the most special one is bagiya



Anjali Singh

Maa would cook while entertaining us with several anecdotes and short stories about how much people love bagiya. One of the stories I can recall went like this: There was a girl who used to love bagiya and asked her mother to cook it, but because it was not the season her mother suggested that she cook it herself. The girl waited till the time came for her mother to cook bagiya again, and this time she took one and sowed it inside the soil so that she could have bagiya anytime.

Bagiya is a dish that has its origins in Mithila and Nepal. It also has a certain influence of West Bengal. It is known as pitha in many regions of West Bengal and Bihar, while in Nepal and Mithila it is called bagiya. Bagiya is a signature delicacy of the Tharu community during festivals and special occasions. They make them in different shapes like

cylinderin an artistic way. Depending on the social customs, lifestyle and settlement, bagiya comes in different shapes and is also called khajan chirai (khajan chirai is a bird, small but playful in nature), among others.

"In *poush* (the period between January to December) when the first harvest of rice arrived, we, women, cook bagiya and feed our children to maintain prosperity.

and show our devotion towards goddess Laxmi," said maa. It's a time-consuming dish to make that requires a lot of hard work. First, maa rinses the rice and grinds it. Previously, she would undertake this process using a mortar and pestle, but now she prefers an electric mixer grinder. Once the flour is prepared, she makes dough using hot water and shapes it into shapes like mortar and pestle, pots, and little cylinders.

The ones with filling, however, are shaped like gujiya—crescent-

shaped. Once the dough is fashioned into shapes, she dunks them in water to cook them. They can even be steamed.

Maa has been cooking this dish since 1991 but at that time she used to cook it without stuffing. But in 2001, when she was visiting her maternal grandmother, she saw her stuffing it with khoa (thickened milk) and streaming it on a large earthen pot with the help of a muslin cloth. Maa had it for the first time and she loved it.

"I thought to imitate the same recipe but my grandmother's place was equipped with lots of vessels and people. So I thought of coming up with my own innovation."

"I boiled milk in place of water and a good amount of sugar in to make a milk *chasni* (syrup) out of it and put all my bagiya into it. I served it to my neighbours and my husband's colleagues and everybody loved it," she added.

She couldn't continue the same

recipe for long because of her financial constraint and limited resources. So, she again innovated and started mixing grated coconut in the khoa in equal proportions.

This year when I went home to Purnia for my rural field trips as part of my college project. I asked her to cook some. While cooking we started talking. Maa said, "When you were kids, I couldn't afford to serve you the purest form. Today, though I have everything, I feel bad."

Then I suggested that she mix some nuts and keep the coconut because now we are so acquainted with this taste that we don't even remember how the "pure" version tastes like.

Next morning I had my flight to Delhi and from Delhi to Bangalore the next day. My brother lives in Bangalore. When he saw me he said, "Bagiya". I handed the package to him, and he, shaking his head, continued to work while eating.

# Miso soup for the soul

*Midnight Diner's* rich umami cuisine acts as a window to Japanese culture and tradition

Priyamedha Dutta

At a time when Netflix brings to you a plethora of food shows from around the world, shows like *Street Food Asia* and *Midnight Asia* have brought Asian cuisine to a global audience. Telling stories through food delves deep into the history behind the dish or an ingredient, taking the audience through the streets and dimly lit lanes of Asian countries that hide the most flavourful cuisines.

TV for a large part was dominated by food shows showcasing British and American food. Shows like *The Great British Bake Off* and Gordon Ramsay's cult classic *Hell's Kitchen*. All of these shows, despite having participants from different cultural and ethnic

backgrounds, seemed restricted to the Western idea of how food should be eaten or presented.

This has largely changed thanks to Netflix bringing stories that pay homage to South Asian cuisine. One such show is *Midnight Diner*. Sprawling over three seasons, the simple storytelling with characters who almost seems like your next-door neighbours.

*Midnight Diner*, which streams on Netflix, is a Japanese series based on a best-selling manga by Yaro Abe called *Shin'ya Shokudo* ('midnight diner' in English). The story revolves around the chef, whom the customers fondly call "Master" (Kaoru Kobayashi), or the Japanese pronunciation "Masta", and his diner. The series is set in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo.

The title credits roll in with slow neon-lit shots of Tokyo at night, and a folk singer belting a tune, the Master introducing the audience to his diner: "When people finish their day and hurry home, my day starts."

The Master has a minimal menu — pork-miso soup, beer, sake, and soju. Even though the menu is fairly simple, Master has a policy: "I make whatever customers request as long as I have ingredients for it."

Each story begins with people bonding over a specific dish. Though the diner has regulars, each episode showcases a particular customer and their favourite dish that Master prepares with a smile on his face. Whatever be the turmoil outside, there is always a seat in the warm diner.



Every episode of *Midnight Diner* introduces us to a new set of characters

# TVF vs AIB: the blueprint for India's comedians today

Sahil Mathur

Scrolling through Instagram's 'explore' section is now an intrinsic part of our day. Anywhere we get some free time, we start scrolling through the endless Reels on Instagram — mostly around humor — and consume "relatable" content. Relatability has become such a common denominator that people have started making content on how everyone comments "us" on any Reel they watch — maybe that's why Meta bought Instagram?

The Reel culture has caught on in the last three years, especially once TikTok got banned in India in 2020 and content creators had to shift platforms. However, each Reel we view bears echoes of what we've seen a moment ago; only the characters are different.

Way before Reels, however, two web-based production startups — All India Bakchod (AIB) and The Viral Fever (TVF)



— were the ones who set the tone for relatable online content, on YouTube, that drew from our everyday lives.

AIB came into existence as a YouTube channel in 2012, while TVF was launched in 2010. The two channels got a lot of attention in 2013 when they began to make

short five-minute sketches on everyday things people do. AIB's *Shit Indians Say* at the Cinema became viral. TVF started making Q-tiyapa videos about everyday life on themes ranging from what engineers do to how students procrastinate a day before the exam.



The Viral Fever (left) and All India Bakchod

TVF's *Gangs of Social Media: Valentine's Day Q-tiyapa* was a spoof on the Bollywood film *Gangs of Wasseypur*. In *Breaking Bad with Tarla Dalal*, AIB used pop culture references and spoofs to gather the audience and make them relate to what they were doing in those sketches. The TVF

series *Chai-Sutta Chronicles* is about all the random short conversations people have while having a cigarette and tea.

Doing satire in India is like walking on a tightrope — one day you'll be loved and next you'll be thrashed. But Indians love satire. For those who lived in the 90s,

Jaspal Bhati's *Full Tension* and Pankaj Kapoor's *Office Office* struck a chord. And for those who could access international content in those times, *Seinfeld* and *Yes Minister* are also among the most loved — or hated — shows.

AIB and TVF didn't just use satire to showcase a situation, they also brought in an informal way of discussing serious topics like rape, net neutrality, and demonetisation. The idea of explaining things in easy, everyday language made them a hit. AIB's *My Friend Revisor* sketch touched upon coming out as gay but through the shadow of a friend who revises the syllabus before an Engineering exam. It is one of the most powerful scripts that AIB has produced.

TVF's *Barely Speaking with Arnab* is also an acclaimed satirical sketch, which showed how a prime-time TV debate is conducted in India while referencing Arnab Goswami's stint as an anchor on the Times

Now news channel.

Remember that Reel you saw of a person sitting idle in a house party and thought that was you? In AIB's *Honest House Parties* series, which came out in 2017, there were two characters — a school friend and an "office rando" — sitting together to share the awkwardness. For almost every Reel you watch, you'll find a corresponding character made either by TVF or AIB or both.

Analysing today's Reels — be it a funny one or an explainer — one can see the influence of what AIB and TVF were doing conceptually back in 2012. While AIB has now been dissolved, TVF is more of a full-time production company focusing on web-series than short sketches — since that job is now taken by the Instagram content creators. Yet, one still goes back to search for the Honest series or the Q-tiyapa videos just for the all time's sake and to take a bow before the OGs of Indian content creation.

# The mortifying ordeal of being perceived

Upasika Singhal

Have you ever done something wrong— shamefully wrong—and then been caught? How do you reckon that feels? In her short story *Found Objects*, Jennifer Egan delves into this very feeling. The thrill of doing something you know is wrong, the glee in getting away with it and the absolute horror of being caught red-handed.

Egan's main character, Sasha, is a young woman living in New York and dealing with some issues. She goes to her therapist, talks to him endlessly about her past, her father, her now-estranged best friend. But she cannot seem to kick a bad habit of hers. She steals, almost pathologically.

Sasha is, at her core, a heartbreaking character. She feels disconnected from the world around her, claustrophobic in her own home, and struggling, but in vain, to feel better. The only happiness and excitement she derives is from stealing things from people. Egan's description of Sasha's wealth of stolen items is achingly poignant. She gives Sasha not one, but two tables of pinched

souvenirs — a child's bright yellow scarf with pink stripes, an orange screwdriver that gleams like a lollipop, an old softened, faded note of encouragement...

Sasha likes to live on the precipice of stealing and getting caught. The exhilaration she feels, followed by nothingness is what drives her. When she finally does get caught, the fear and embarrassment almost jumps off the page. Egan describes the swirl of shame, guilt and terror Sasha goes through with terrifying accuracy. The reader almost feels nauseated on her behalf. Later when she invites her date

back to her house the suspense is palpable. What will he say when he notices her hoard? What follows next is equal parts dismaying and concerning.

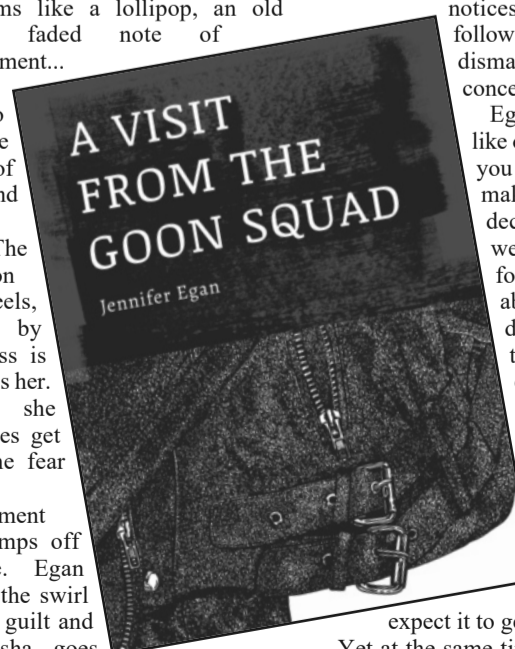
Egan writes Sasha like one of those friends you have. The one who makes terrible decisions and whose well-being you're forever concerned about. They text you details of their life that raise your eyebrows and make you ask, "Are you sure you're okay?". Reading Egan's story felt like reading one of those texts. When you expect it to get worse, it does.

Yet at the same time Sasha strikes a personal chord. Who hasn't done shameful things? Who hasn't been caught in awful, awkward situations?

Who hasn't prayed for change in a time of stagnation? Egan captures the struggle to move and change yet being stuck in bad habits and patterns beautifully. No matter how much Sasha attempts to not talk about her father or try to convince her therapist that she's moving towards redemption she knows deep down that she's still struggling to break free of the life she's somehow created.

Egan explores what happens when your most core insecurities get exposed to the world. At that moment, are you what your insecurities make you or are you something more?

**Egan writes Sasha like one of those friends you have. The one who makes terrible decisions and whose well-being you're forever concerned about**



(Above) Jennifer Egan; (left) Egan's 'Found Objects' would later be expanded into an anthology and win a Pulitzer in 2010

# Adani-Hindenburg saga, explained

Adani enterprise is deep in loan and interest expense is high

News Desk

**Chennai:** US-based short-selling firm Hindenburg Research came out with a report alleging "brazen stock manipulation." And fraud by the Adani Group of Companies.

Khushboo Narayan, dean of Asian College of Journalism-Bloomberg programme, in a special lecture delivered recently, explained Hindenburg's January 24 report's main allegations and how the short seller had been successful against other companies such as Nikola.

Following the publication of Hindenburg report, "The Adani group had lost about USD 118 billion within 10 days.

In India "short selling" is not illegal. The report said various shell companies were used to inflate Adani's stocks.

Narayan said multiple cases of alleged stock manipulation, accounting fraud, and other charges had been filed against the



**IN DIRE STRAITS:** Gautam Adani is accused of pulling the "largest con in corporate history"

Adani firms in the past. The group has also been accused of "stock parking."

She explained that when an

organisation sells shares to some other party, thinking that the other party would buy the stake after a short period, it is known

as stock parking. She said that in the past few years, the Adani group had seen a phenomenal rise in its business enterprise.

Although the billionaire had started as a diamond trader, he later diversified into edible oil business, telecom and media, airport sector, transport sector, minerals, mines, and so on.

She said the Adani enterprise is in heavy debt, it has been taking loans from Indian banks for quite some time, and its interest costs are high.

Besides making allegations against the group companies, the report highlighted allegations against Adani's brother Vinod Adani, who has citizenship in Cyprus and has transacted large sums in Mauritius. Around eight members in a higher position in the group belong to the Adani family.

Hindenburg has cited most of the Indian media reportage in its report is something unique to this report, she said.

# Gene Machine, now in Tamil

Nobel Laureate's book launched in Chennai

News Desk

**Chennai:** Competition can be bad for scientists but good for science," said Nobel Laureate Venki Ramakrishnan in Chennai recently. He said he had to travel to places like Brookhaven, Utah, Cambridge, and Oxford for years to work with different teams and use advanced techniques known as X-ray crystallography to discover the structure of ribosomes.

The Nobel laureate was speaking at a function organised by Kalachuvadu Publications to release the Tamil translation of the book *Gene Machine: The Race to Decipher the Secrets of Ribosome*, at the Asian College of Journalism. The book *Gene Machine*, written by him in 2018, is an autobiography which was translated by Professor Stephen Sargunam.

He spoke about the significance of Ribosomes which produces protein for the body. He cited George Emil Palade and all



**Venki Ramakrishnan |** PHOTO: ACJ INDIA

the scientists he worked with like Peter Moore, Thomas A. Steitz, Ada Yonath, and many more.

According to him the lack of funding and bureaucratic hurdles are holding back Indian Science, though India produced world-class science pre-Independence. He cited the works of C.V. Raman, J.C. Bose, S.N. Bose, Meghnad Saha and Homi Bhabha, and Vikram Sarabhai.

Taking questions from the

audience on genetic modification (Genetic modification is the process of altering the genes of an organism by controlled, or selective, breeding of plants and animals) crops technique, he said he is generally in favour of genetically modification as nature is not capable of producing the required yield. Also, GM crops increase the nutritional value of crops.

Professor Stephen Sargunam, translator of the book, said that after reading the book twice he agreed to do the translation but it was during the lockdown that he understood the nuances. During that period he read and translated science books like *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and came up with new Tamil words to describe science and technology.

The entire auditorium was filled with science students, journalists, journalism students, and VIP guests. N Ram, Director of the Hindu Publishing Group, presented a copy of the book to B Kolappan, a political journalist.

# Impose wealth tax on the richest: Economist

**Chennai:** Marxist economist Prabhat Patnaik has suggested that India should impose wealth tax and inheritance tax on the top elite as a means of safeguarding the five basic universal economic rights of the individuals.

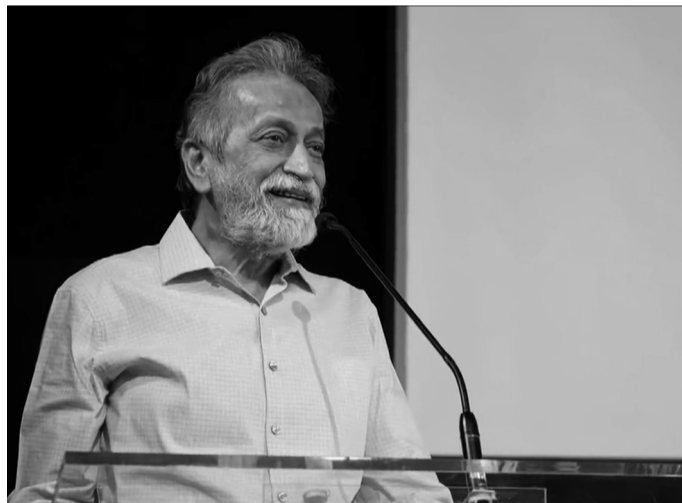
At an event at the Asian College of Journalism here recently, Patnaik was given the prestigious Malcolm Adiseshiah Award by the jury members.

The award ceremony preceded a lecture, in which he focused on why any nation-state should fulfill individual rights to bring a welfarist development model. He said this is one of the prerequisites to achieving a socialist state.

The dignity of Indian citizens should have the basic right to life, he explained in the lecture.

In the ceremony, he said India's is one of the most profound and remarkable constitutions created by our forefathers; despite that, the promises that were made during the anti-colonial struggle still remain unfulfilled even after 75 years of India's independence.

He said the elemental definition of poverty shows how the government failed to provide universal rights to the individual.



**SAFEGUARDING RIGHTS:** Prabhat Patnaik addresses the gathering at the ACJ | PHOTO: ACJ INDIA

Hence, he suggests it is significant to impose a 2% wealth tax on the top 1% of the population and an inheritance tax on 1/3rd of the population, who are usually the richest.

The five basic universal rights are: The right to food, the right to employment, the right to free healthcare, the right to free quality education, and the right to old age and disability pension. He explained that the overall expenditure on these five rights

only covers 16% to 26% of India's GDP.

He remarked that individual rights should not be a condition of capitalism; it is the social arrangements of India's institutions that shall serve the individual rights to overcome poverty in India.

Patnaik said many European countries have been following these liberal socialist ideals to create an egalitarian society.

India was one of the foremost nations that established universal franchise in its constitution, much before the French state. These five economic rights of the individual could be protected if it is granted to the masses through constitutional provisions.

News Desk

**Chennai (March 2, 2023):** BJP's alliance with Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) in Tripura and NDPP in Nagaland led it to form the government in the two North Eastern states which witnessed intense campaigning. In Meghalaya, The National People's Party (NPP) won 26 seats, and Conrad Sangma returned as chief minister.

Tripura rewarded BJP with 32 of the 60 seats they contested. Their ally, IPFT, was only able to win one seat as Tipra Motha Party won 13 of the 20 constituencies they contested in.

In Nagaland, the NEDA alliance of National Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) and BJP won 37 of the 60 seats. Neiphiu Rio is likely to retain his position as CM. In 2018 elections, NDPP and BJP formed a coalition to form the government under Neiphiu Rio. (Update: He did take oath as CM subsequently.)

In Meghalaya, National People's Party (NPP) won 26 seats and United Democratic Party won 11, while BJP won only two.

**Tripura**

In Tripura, the CPM-Congress alliance won 13 seats but saw a reduction of two seats compared to the 2018 elections. The BJP preserved its stronghold in the

state, barring the tribal constituencies.

It was a head-to-head contest between the present Chief Minister Manik Saha, from BJP, and Congress' Ashish Kumar Saha. Manik Saha won with 49.77% votes.

**Nagaland**

Neiphiu Rio, the chief minister of Nagaland, won with a vote margin of 15,824 in his home district Northern Angami-II, defeating the Indian National Congress candidate Seyievlie Sachu in the state's elections today. The NDPP-BJP alliance of

40 and 20 seats kept a strong lead throughout the counting with a combined 51% vote share for the counted constituencies.

NDPP's Hekhani Jakhalu became the first woman to be elected to the Nagaland Assembly by winning the Dimapur-III seat. The Republican Party of India (Athawale), which won two seats, announced its support to the NDPP-BJP alliance.

**Meghalaya**

The National People's Party (NPP) with 25 leads, including 16 confirmed wins, emerges as the single largest party and is likely to

remain in power in Meghalaya. The United Democratic Party (UDP) follows with 10 leads.

Trinamool Congress' entry had initially affected the electoral equations of the state, but as the counting nears its end, TMC has only 3 wins and 2 leads.

Incumbent CM Conrad Sangma said that the NPP is "waiting for the final results, after which we will decide on the way forward," hinting at possible alliances with either the BJP or the UDP.

*This is one of the reports from the live coverage of election results by ACJ students.*



**POWER RETAINED:** BJP supporters out on the streets in Agartala

**Patnaik remarked that individual rights should not be a condition of capitalism**

# Cathy Otten discusses gender-based violence

News Desk

A workshop on covering gender-based violence was conducted by Rutgers University professor and journalist Cathy Otten at the Asian College of Journalism on January 30, 2023. The workshop focused on methodologies for reporting that do not dehumanise or disempower survivors, like

interviewing techniques that prioritise interests. Otten, who authored the book *With Ash on Their Faces: Yazidi Women and the Islamic State*, underlined the need to report problems while also highlighting solutions under way, to "rebalance the news." Discussion with students touched on the pros and cons of "solutions journalism" and whether outsiders could report on issues within a community.



# SDGs: What they mean to the marginalised

Kondeti Chandini

**Chennai:** We often come across stories on climate change. The ever increasing environmental consciousness among all of us, in the present times.

But, what does sustainability mean to the people who are most affected by the policy measures? The policies like Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, the SDGs, the upgradation of climate responsibilities from the era of Millennium Development Goals of year 2000 (MDGs), the targets of UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change).

The burden of responsibility between developed and developing Nations with regard to climate change is a well known story for over a decade now.

The annual targets and commitments of CoP (Conference of Parties) to make betterment in climate change patterns is indeed

a laudable gesture. Developed countries like the U.S contributed more than 70% of the world's carbon emissions so far. So they are made more responsible in reducing carbon emissions than developed nations like South East Asian countries.

Even then a sense of injustice prevails. The emission data and energy usage patterns from International Energy Agency (IEA) clearly shows the indiscriminate fossil fuel usage and extraction in the US and China (India is relatively very low in terms of carbon emissions or dirty fuel usage).

**Climate justice**

But what does it mean to the people who are always behind in receiving the fruits of development? Do they have to share the climate burden equally with the rest of the segments of society? Here is the story of real climate justice from the perspective of one of the climate think tanks, CSETP (Centre for

Science Technology and Policy), Bengaluru.

While responding to the massive seed hybridisation and soil degradation, Dr. Indu K Murthy, Executive Director, CSETP, said, "The people who are in the field (farmers and tribal people) always know better than any other expert. All we need to do is patiently make them understand the policy tactics that destroy their lands. It's not the lack of knowledge that hinders the small changes in favour of sustainable usage of land, it's the lack of options available for them in reality."

There's a tribal community in Karnataka which uses a species of shrub to fence their small farm lands. Educating the communities comes into picture in these scenarios.

Social development, the environment and economic development are interconnected. We can't neglect one aspect in the process of developing the other (which often has its repercussions,

that we can't predict).

Sacred groves reflect the harmonious coexistence of nature and humankind.

Among the tribal community in Odisha, selective rotational protection of forests is employed to save the meadows (fodder for their cattle). Traditional knowledge plays a very important role here.

**Spiritual connections**

Community management of forests, spiritual and religious connections result in better management of forests.

Habitat loss and interacting with the forest communities are essential in understanding the patterns of habitat loss and disappearance of many endemic species in a particular area.

It's their choice of usage of a particular species for a specific purpose (under lack of options available to meet their needs of farming living). Eg: The forest dwellers of Karnataka who use a shrub to fence their farm lands

experienced exponential loss of biodiversity in their own forest lands, and decided to protect the shrub in a selective approach, and succeeded.

So, its often not the lack of knowledge but the lack of socio-economic support from the government side that worsens the forest management and sustainable living conditions of some tribal communities.

We need to address the issues of people who are most affected by the climate change. Understanding, the mechanism of climate change solves half the problem. It includes the acceptance of the fact that indigenous communities and marginalised sections of the society are the least contributors to climate change: it's the other sections of the society that are responsible.

So, a case specific approach to climate change would yield better outcomes, rather than imposing big goals on those, who are underprivileged.

# 'Need to understand casteism in Islam'

Caste debate has ignored Pasmanda Muslims, says expert

News Desk

**Chennai:** Caste is not a homogenous institution. Rather, it operates differently in varied circumstances. Even the Muslim and Christian demographics in India are riddled with caste. At the panel discussion on caste at the Asian College of Journalism in February, academicians discussed how caste has evolved in India, its post-colonial changes and how it influences Muslims, and the changes brought about by Dravidian politics.

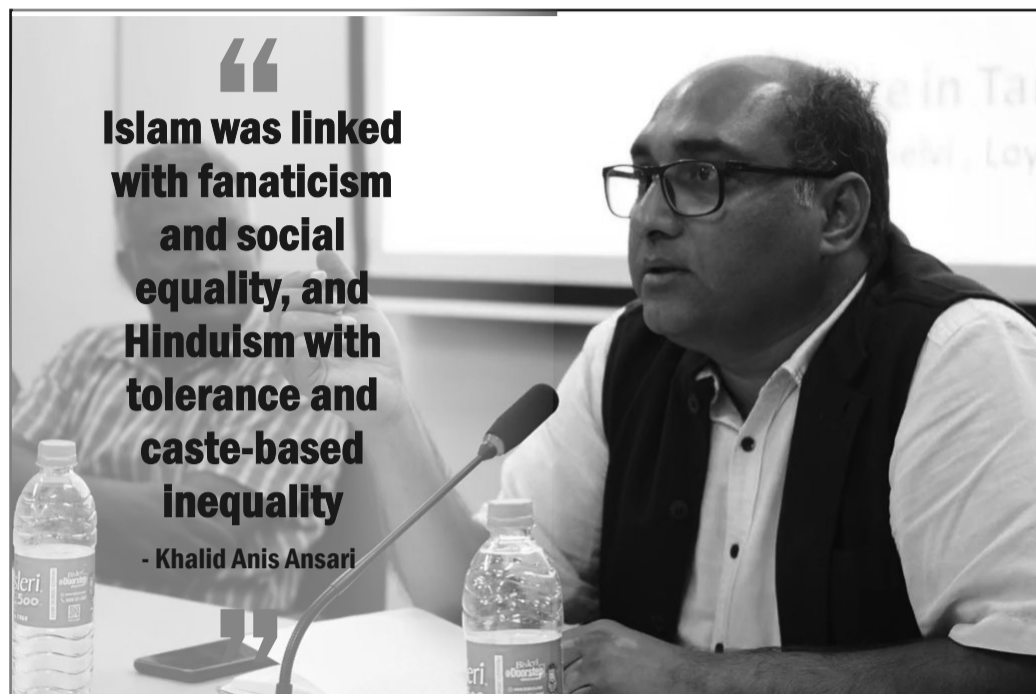
Khalid Anis Ansari, a sociologist professor at Azim Premji University, discussed his academic work, titled, 'Revisiting the minority imagination: An enquiry into the anti-caste Pasmanda-Muslim discourse in India'.

The Pasmanda movement is a caste movement among the Indian Muslims belonging to the lower castes. It has challenged the monolithic understanding of Islam in India, and the traditional discourse on the Muslim minority, Professor Ansari said. It has validated the notion that caste was disinvented from Islam.

Professor Ansari also delved into history to put today's movement into context, and he said that factors like British colonisation, the mapping of India, emergence of print capitalism led to religion gaining prominence over caste.

"Islam-Muslims were associated with iconoclastic fanaticism and social equality, and Hinduism-Hindus with tolerance and caste-based social inequality," he said.

Professor Ansari also said that upper-caste Muslims are always represented in greater numbers, which is why the Pasmanda movement challenges the idea of a mere separate Muslim quota. Buddhist Dalits and Sikh Dalits were eligible for reservations, but only Christian and Muslims were



**MINORITIES WITHIN MINORITIES:** Academic Khalid Anis Ansari addresses students during an event on caste and Pasmanda Muslims at ACJ | PHOTO: ACJ

excluded. The movement also questions this discrimination.

Additionally, the Pasmanda movement highlights that there are minorities within minorities.

"The Pasmanda counter-discourse has inaugurated a semantic and analytical battlefield where the received understanding of the concept of minority and majority-minority framework will be under increasing scrutiny," Professor Ansari said.

While caste has a role to play even in non-Hindu religions, it functions differently in different regions too.

Semmalar Selvi, an Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work, Loyola College, spoke about the relevance of caste, and how its dynamics have been changing. Professor Selvi spoke about caste in Tamil Nadu, where it needs to be understood in the context of Dravidian and linguistic politics.

While the state had been a witness to an anti-Brahmin movement, she pointed out that it is important to question whether the movement was against Brahmins or Brahminical ideologies. While Tamil Nadu has been progressive, it has not succeeded in bringing down the Varna system.

Neoliberalism adversely affected the marginalised communities, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act did little to remedy the exclusion that marginalised people faced.

Criticising the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), she said that the party claims to work for social justice, but continues to polarise votes on the basis of caste. She also touched upon the problem of honour killing, provoked by non-endogamous marriages.

Inter-caste marriages within

Tamil Nadu constitute less than five percent, she said. Caste-based atrocities have not reduced in the state, she said.

Moreover, caste has evolved in various ways. Dr C Lakshmanan, Associate Professor at the Madras Institute of Development Studies said that the evolution was influenced by five major landmarks - the establishment of the Mandal Commission, the demolition of Babri masjid, the 73rd and 74th amendments, Ambedkar's centenary, and the de-regulation of the Indian economy.

Dr Lakshmanan pointed out that in pre-colonial times, caste was not a uniform institution like it is today. While a strong, modern and democratic society is needed for the eradication of caste, he said that it cannot be a colonial modernity. "Annihilation of caste is possible only if we look at the population as categories without caste," he said.

# Science, society and sustainability

Day-long event covered AI, science history, immunology and cancer, sustainability

News Desk

**Chennai:** Close to 55 to 60 percent cancer is preventable, said Professor T Rajkumar, Department Head of Molecular Oncology at The Cancer Institute (WIA), Chennai.

He was one of the speakers at The Colloquium on 'Science, Technology, Policy and Society' held at Asian College of Journalism, Chennai, which had a series of lectures divided into four sessions.

Professor T. Rajkumar talked about the lack of immunity as the reason for the spread of the coronavirus. He provided a brief description of 'Immunology' and 'Immunotherapy', adding that autoimmune diseases occur when the immune system fails to distinguish between a foreign cell and a natural cell from the body.

Dr. Dipankar Banerjee, Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, talked about the evolution of science in the first session, from Einstein's theories of relativity to quantum mechanics. He stressed on the need to include ethics and morality while using technology.

Dr. Aparjith Ramnath, Associate Professor at Ahmedabad University, traced the history of the design of Howrah Bridge. He said that acceptance of any product of science, technology and engineering depends on the social and political context of its development.

Dr. Indu K. Murthy, Sector Head of Climate, Environment and Sustainability at the Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), spoke on 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs), and 'Understanding of the Ecosystem: Interface and trade-offs'.

She highlighted the five themes of SDGs, adding that "the interconnections between these



**SCIENTIFIC TEMPER:** Indu K Murthy of CSTEP on propaganda-driven science reporting at an event at ACJ

themes are extremely strong".

She stressed on the concept of 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle' and talked about India's rank - 121 out of 163 countries - in SDG performance. She said there was a need to reduce emissions, providing an example of the use of

Electric Vehicles (EVs).

Dr. Nandan Sundarsanam, Associate Professor at IIT Madras, talked about India's rank - 121 out of 163 countries - in SDG performance. He attributed the boom of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to the shift to digital platforms.

Dr. Sundarsanam raised important questions about increasing security while using AI.

The final session on the role of media in science and society started with Dr. Shubashree Desikan focusing on the missing conversations in science.

Dr. Desikan, Associate Editor of IIT Madras' Shastra Magazine, said that "without democracy there would be no scientific research". She raised unexplored issues like the practicality of growing "organic locally-grown food". She recommended caution against propaganda-driven science reporting, prompting the need for contextual information in news.

**Without democracy there would be no scientific research**  
- Shubashree Desikan



**HISTORICAL DEBRIS:** Many buildings within Fort St George are in a dilapidated condition but repairs are nowhere in sight | PHOTO: Vaishnavi Shukla

# Heritage street in city reduced to rubble

Vaishnavi Shukla

**Chennai:** Standing wide and tall across the shores of Chennai, Fort St. George, the first British fort in India, was established in 1639-1640 CE. Today, the fort is the administrative headquarters of the Tamil Nadu government. The legislative assembly and The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) are situated on the ramparts of the fort.

Throughout the fort, a total of 11 structures are protected by the Archaeological Survey.

A place used for the exchange of goods and commodities by merchants in 1790 CE was converted to the Fort Museum. This is the only ticketed entry by ASI within the ramparts. Visitors to the museum get a view of the British rule in India through

conserved antiques. The artifacts include uniforms, swords, coins, letters, crockery and many more.

The building has been conserved by the ASI. However, while doing so it has somehow failed to preserve its legacy, as modern material and coloured paint have been used, making it look out of place.

However, neglect within the fort is visible on St Thomas and Charles Street where buildings have been reduced to ruins. In photographs documented in 1919, the street has residential buildings

fronted by verandahs. Today, the street is a makeshift parking lot for two-wheelers, and the structure is left to collapse.

After India's independence, the fort was declared a protected monument by the ASI. The ramparts were also a town for its residents at that time.

Today, few structures have survived due to neglect and lack of maintenance.

The street that once housed majestic buildings with large windows, king-size rooms and spacious halls has lost its legacy.

**A street that once housed majestic buildings with large windows, king-size rooms and spacious halls has lost its legacy**

Senjuti SenGupta

**Chennai:** Former Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray moved the Supreme Court on Monday, challenging Election Commission's order on February 18 that recognised the Eknath Shinde-led faction as the 'real Shiv Sena' and allotted them the party's popular 'bow and arrow' logo.

While Shinde hailed the decision as 'victorious', Thackeray slammed the EC for such an 'undemocratic' decision based on the 'test of majority' of the Shinde camp in the Assembly. He also called for the dissolution of the poll panel as it violated the guidelines under Para 15 of the Election Symbols order (1968).

However, EC justified its decision, citing the 1971 Supreme Court judgment in Sadiq Ali that upheld the EC's order on the symbol-allocation matter based on the legislative majority of two rival factions in a recognised political party in the legislative houses. Eventually, the Shinde camp beat the Thackeray side with 40 out of 67 MLAs and 13 out of 22 MPs in both houses of the Assembly when Eknath Shinde rebelled against Uddhav Thackeray last June.

**The bow and arrow**

The Thackeray-led Shiv Sena group will not be liable to use the party's bow and arrow symbol after EC's order on February 18. However, the logo has a three-decade association with Uddhav Thackeray.

Shiv Sena was not a formal legislative political party when it was founded. It was an organisation with a 'roaring lion' symbol. Till 1989, the Sena didn't have any permanent symbol allotted by the EC.



**Eknath Shinde (left) and Uddhav Thackeray**

They contested with several symbols in the past like 'sword and shield' (1968), 'train engine' (1980), and 'a bat and ball' (1985).

However, the EC allotted them the 'bow and arrow' symbol as their permanent poll symbol in 1989, and it became part of the identity of Shiv Sena since.

Now after the EC's order on

specifically empowers EC to settle the dispute between two rival factions in a recognised political party after investigation.

EC has to identify the faction that contains the legislative majority and the support from the majority of office-bearers in the party. The order acquired legal validity from the Supreme Court during the Sadiq Ali judgment

**Eknath Sinda rebelled against Uddhav Thackeray over administrative powers within the Shiv Sena**

Tuesday, the Thackeray group will have to continue with the 'flaming torch' logo while Shinde can use the Sena name and the traditional 'bow and arrow' symbol.

**Para 15**  
The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order 1968, gives the EC the authority to recognise a political party and allot them a poll symbol. Paragraph 15 under this order

(1971). In the matter of Shiv Sena also, EC recognised Shinde based on these criteria.

However, Uddhav Thackeray filed an appeal in Supreme Court, challenging this decision. He said in the appeal that the Election Commission had failed to discharge its duties as a neutral arbiter of disputes under para 15 of the Election Symbols Order.

**The Sadiq Ali judgment**  
When Indira Gandhi became the

leader of the Indian National Congress after the premature death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, her autocratic attitude upset other Congress leaders. A group of Congress leaders like Sadiq Ali, Moraji Desai, and then Congress President S Nijlingappa, formed an anti-Indira Gandhi camp inside the Congress party, called Sangathan Congress. When Sadiq Ali became the Congress President after the resignation of Nijlingappa, the Sadiq Ali vs Indira Gandhi dispute was raised in EC. The EC filed a case against Sadiq Ali in Supreme Court in 1971.

The EC recognised the Indira Gandhi camp as the real Congress based on their legislative majority and rejected the criteria of the test of party constitution and ideology. The Supreme Court upheld the decision and said that the number of votes cast in favour of the candidate of a political party is relevant enough for the recognition of a political party.

**Shinde's rebellion**

In July 2022, Eknath Shinde expressed his dissatisfaction with the party due to Uddhav Thackeray's changing way of working and re-aligning with Bal Thackeray's ideology. The Shinde faction emerged as 'Shiv Sena-Balasaheb' on June 25, aiming to protect the Balasaheb's Hindutva ideology that Shinde believes was subverted by Uddhav Thackeray after becoming the Chief Minister.

The EC recently learned that the distance between the two leaders grew more because of the amendment of the party constitution in 2018 that empowered the 'Shiv Sena Paksha Pramukha' to appoint most office-bearers and Thackeray was elected to this designation for five years.

# Anaemia rampant in women, children

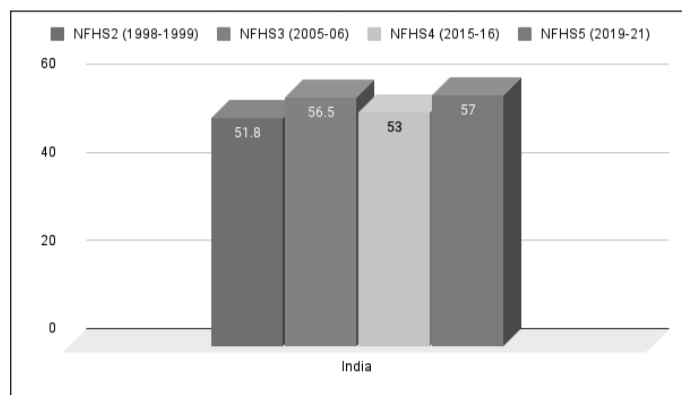
Medicines can only help so much; government needs to focus on nutrition intake, say experts

Vaishnavi Shukla

**Chennai:** Half a century after India launched a programme to tackle anaemia — which disproportionately affects women — more than half of women and children in India are anaemic.

India launched the National Anaemia Prophylaxis Programme in 1970. It focused on distributing Iron Folic Acid (IFA) tablets among pregnant women, and children aged 1 to 5 years — the two most vulnerable populations. However, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 (2019-2021), 57 per cent of women and 67.1 per cent of children in India remain anaemic.

The NFHS-5 indicates the National Iron+ Initiative could not deliver the desired reduction in anaemia nationally. It is additionally concerning that IDA (iron deficiency anaemia) among women and children in states such as Delhi-National Capital Territory, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, and Rajasthan has jumped dramatically. For instance, in Chhattisgarh, anaemia in women has grown from 47 per cent to 60.8 per cent in women and 41.6 per cent to 67.2 per cent in



Iron deficiency anaemia in all women aged 15-49 in percentage

children.

Dr Soumya Swaminathan, pediatrician and chief scientist at the World Health Organisation linked iron deficiency anaemia in women to menstruation and undernutrition.

She said, "Menstruation leads to regular loss of blood in women. If this is not compensated by

higher iron intake, this could lead to iron deficiency anaemia." There is a huge gender disparity — just 25 per cent of Indian men aged 15-49 years are anaemic — due to what Dr Swaminathan calls "dietary diversity".

In many communities, due to the social importance placed on men, women often tend to eat less

and have a lower intake of protein and micronutrients than men. Dr Swaminathan explained that the composition of meals also affects iron absorption in women — phytates in wheat tend to inhibit iron absorption, as does tea, while citrates aid in iron absorption.

Prachiti Natekar, a microbiology graduate and research fellow in public health at Tata Memorial Center, said that beyond problems in government programmes, the issue lies in the lack of public awareness. While working in a slum in Mumbai through an NGO, she realised that the government provides ration for mothers and children up to 2 years of age, but nowhere is the message of the right nutrition given to them.

The government needs to take into account that people don't know how anaemia can affect their health, and how IFA tablets can improve their health. Due to this, patient forgetfulness is also substantial, and thus they often don't take the IFA tablets for the prescribed minimum of 100 days.

Government policy also does nothing to address the actual and imagined side-effects of these tablets, Natekar says.

In rural areas, women often complain of side-effects such as

nausea, heartburn, and abdominal pain, discouraging them from seeking or continuing treatment. During one of her field visits, Natekar reported that several women feared that too many iron supplements could "produce too much blood or a huge baby, making labour more arduous".

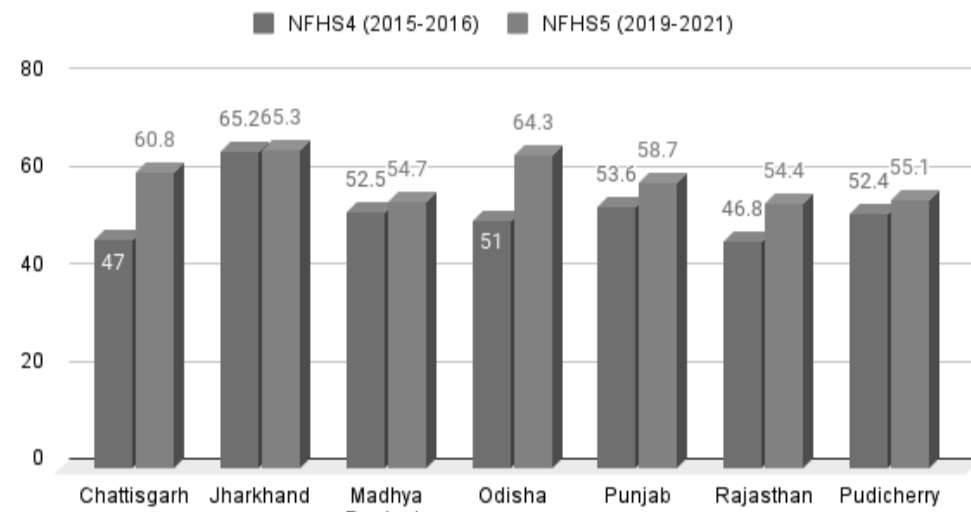
Dr Swaminathan said that the side effects of IFA tablets are usually related to gastric irritation. "Because anaemia is

multifactorial in causation, the solution also has to address all the root causes. Hence, IFA alone may not be enough, especially if protein and other micronutrients are lacking, and chronic infections are not dealt with," she said.

Government programmes don't address the social biases and biological factors.

It's important to prioritise nutrition and monitor its impact, says Dr Nitya Rao, professor of

gender and development at the University of East Anglia in the UK. "The National Health Mission has only focused on drug-based solutions and not food-based ones. This needs to change... Iron was always there in traditional diets but has gradually eroded with migration, dependence on the Public Distribution System, enclosure of forests and common property resources and so on," she said.



States with increased women suffering from iron deficiency anaemia aged 15-49 years

## Vitiligo: Beyond stigma

Lack of awareness results in misinformation and isolation

Arya Mishra

**Chennai:** "I just have small white patches on my fingers and toes and a little bit on my arms, but people still come up to me and ask me if this is contagious," said Manish Kashyap (48), who has had vitiligo for the last 25 years. Kashyap, who works for Finnish software company Tieto Evry, is in Bangalore.

Vitiligo is a skin disorder that results in the depigmentation in patches, and people who have it often face social stigma. Due to the lack of education and awareness, people who have the disease may be victims of isolation and misinformation. This becomes even more significant given that India has the highest prevalence in the world at 8.8 per cent, according to the IP Indian Journal of Clinical and Experimental dermatology.

Dr. D.A. Satish, a Bengaluru-based dermatologist, said that vitiligo occurs when "melanin, the pigment responsible for your colour, stops getting synthesized and secreted at some spots", thus resulting in pale skin there. "How is it possible that a disease borne out of someone else's bodily dysfunction will affect someone who comes in contact?" Dr. Satish asked.

Melanin synthesis, also known as melanogenesis, is the process of generation of the pigment melanin in melanocytes, which are the cells where melanin is produced.

According to the paper 'Insight into Natural History of Congenital



Annual seminar by IADVL for vitiligo awareness, 2022

Vitiligo', published in the journal Case Reports in Dermatological Medicine, vitiligo can develop in any person at any age, but for many people the patches appear before they turn 20. The journal states that Congenital Vitiligo or vitiligo at birth is quite rare but does occur.

Dr. Satish said that there are ointments that can be used to return colour to the skin. "But it doesn't always work and there are chances that it may not work on the whole area of the disease," he added. The American Academy of Dermatology also lists out 'Light Therapy' or phototherapy in which a certain kind of ultraviolet light is used to treat the condition.

"Some people may also opt skin grafting, which is a form of surgery in which pigmented cells from the patients' skin are taken and transplanted to the areas where depigmentation has taken place," Dr. Satish said. He added that patients take these steps,

despite the fact that vitiligo is not "a life-threatening disease" due to the societal reactions.

Vitiligo tends to affect the marriage prospects of the patients too, according to Sandeep Kumar, who has worked in multiple pharmaceutical companies like Glenmark that develop medicines for skin diseases.

"This bears heavily on female patients, because people who are unaware usually reject them because of the white patches on their skin," Kumar, who is presently the regional sales manager for eastern India at Biocon, said.

However, he added that sometimes people may also refuse getting married to patients because it can be passed down. "A certain percentage of patients do have relatives who also have vitiligo, which means that there is a genetic aspect to it," Dr. Satish said.

"I faced multiple denials from

potential suitors, because my mother had vitiligo," said Priya Kujur, a software engineer. Although she does not have the condition and has now been married for five years, the hereditary factor took a toll on her parents. "My mother would either stay in her room or go out whenever a man and his family would come over," she said, adding that her mother often blamed herself for having the disorder.

When tackling diseases like vitiligo, "awareness is the key", Kumar said that this was the reason many NGOs and doctors were advocating for awareness about skin diseases.

"The Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venerologists and Leprologists (IADVL) has been supporting research on vitiligo and participating in the World Vitiligo Day programs," said Kumar.

Dr. P.K. Barla, a dermatologist and IADVL member, said that the association conducts seminars and health camps where patients get free treatment, on June 26, which is recognized as World Vitiligo Day. "There are also CMEs (Continuing Medical Education), which help healthcare workers improve in tending to patients," Barla said.

Barla, a resident of Bengaluru, said that he took part in 'Vitiligo Rath', an IADVL awareness program conducted last year that included a van travelling throughout Karnataka. "We covered more than 4000 km and went to all districts," he said.

Krishna Yadav

**Chennai:** The Supreme Court's recent refusal to act on a Public Interest Litigation that sought a directive to states to frame rules for granting menstrual leave for working women and students in India has triggered a debate. A three-member bench led by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said that since it is a policy matter, it would be appropriate if the petitioner approaches the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development.

The petition, filed by lawyer Vishal Tiwari on behalf of his client Shailendra Mani Tripathi, asked the court to direct the Union and State governments to comply with Section 14 of the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.

Way back in 1992, Bihar introduced a period leave policy for women, but due to the stigma attached to menstruation, the policy was termed "special leave" for women. Last January, Kerala introduced a period leave for university students.

In 2017, NinongEring, Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh, introduced a private member bill titled "Menstrual Benefits Bill", which proposed two days menstrual leave for women in public and private workplace, but it was not passed as the legislators were too embarrassed to debate.

Some private organisations also initiated menstrual leave at their workplace. In 2017, Gozoop and Culture Machine — two Mumbai-based companies — were among the first private companies to introduce menstrual leave for their employees.

In 2020, food delivery giant Zomato came up with menstrual leave for 10 days a year for its women and transgender employees; Swiggy and Edtech company like Byju's have also introduced the same.

Many countries across the world have introduced such leave for women, the most recent being Spain. These stories of progressive and scientific views

are rare in India, as menstruation — a biological phenomenon during which a woman goes through hormonal changes in her body in for the possibility of pregnancy, accompanied by bleeding, cramps, nausea, headaches — is a subject of taboo and considered a stigma in our society. Cultural beliefs and myths surrounding menstruation are compounded by the lack of awareness and knowledge of the physiological process among girls.

According to a study, 71 per cent of the adolescent girls in India are unaware of menstruation until they get it themselves; 70 per cent of the girls consider menstruation "dirty". According to a report by Dasra, an NGO, titled Spot on, around 23 million girls drop out from school annually due to lack access to proper menstrual hygiene.

The notion of purity attached to menstruation goes back to Vedic times when menstrual flow from the woman's body was linked to the Indra's guilt of slaying a Brahman called Vritas. It's believed that women have taken the guilt of Indra upon themselves. Beliefs like this become an excuse in Hindu religion to exclude women from social life, like barring entry to temples and taking part in rituals.

Naysayers highlight how menstrual leave can lead to the possible shrinkage of women's participation in the workforce, which is already one of the lowest in the world. Granting such leave could de-incentivise employers from hiring women, as the Supreme Court has cautioned.

While some progressive steps have been taken by private companies and state governments, the SC decision to not intervene in the matter shows that it is still viewed as a policy matter rather than a fundamental right for women in the workplace.

It is imperative that the Union government study the issue and come out with concrete steps. Any committee formed to look into the issue should necessarily have women members and medical practitioners on board.

**In 2017, Gozoop and Culture Machine were among the first private companies to introduce menstrual leave**

## 'Unbelievable' did what other TV shows couldn't

Athira Elssa Johnson

Trauma is often exploited in the media, which, in layers, has enabled rape culture by using women characters as the subject of rape-revenge plots even in big-budget movies and TV series like Game of Thrones or as a backstory to build a strong woman character in iconic movies like Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*.

However, these defaults and stereotypes in rape narratives associated with shame and a flashback of "badly behaved women" characters are dismantled in the series *Unbelievable* created by Susannah Grant.

The series revolves around investigations of rapes that follow a similar pattern. The story starts with Marie Adler (Kaitlyn Dever), one of the rape survivors. Marie has been in foster care

since age three and finally when she starts to live independently a stranger breaks into her home one night and rapes her. There is no evidence of a break-in or traces on her body that the police expect in a survivor. Instead of shifting the focus to the vicious plan of the rapist, the investigation hangs onto Marie, who doesn't fit the police's image of a rape survivor.

There are repeated instances where Marie is not believed (hence the title of the series). When Marie reveals that she has been in a million foster homes and tries to get help from people she knows — her friends, her boyfriend, and all possible former foster parents — she is dismissed.

Instead, Marie is accused of making it up for attention. The series depicts every recollection of the rape — the disturbing excerpts from her memory — as it is, and

feels like a deliberate move to discomfit the audience to show what lived experiences can do to someone's state of mind and functioning.

Later, when the investigation of similar cases of rape takes place in

a different part of the state, the series shifts its focus to other survivors, investigated by two detectives from the area's police force. The difference — in terms of how the detectives treat survivors and the police

procedures that made Marie suffer — are stark. Survivors here are treated with concern and knowledge of post-traumatic stress and assurance of legal aid. Here they aren't made to recollect the story in ways they didn't want to. In one scene, detective Grace (Toni Collette) asks a senior officer, "Where is your rage?" referring to the passive attitude of people in the police department towards assault cases. *Unbelievable* doesn't do anything extraordinary.

Perhaps that is why the series is so important — it shows what the ordinary and normal should be to deal with people in pain. Not many films and TV shows allow space for survivors to be what they are, before and after a tragedy. There is a cyclical sorrow expected from survivors, and if that doesn't come the fact that

anything tragic ever happened to them is not acknowledged.

Another crucial thing is language. When Marie says, "He raped me," the officer replies, "You need to be more specific." In another scene when Marie says, "I am pretty positive that it happened," the police ask, "Pretty positive or positive?"

When Marie wants to get a bedsheet similar to the one she had before, her foster mom says, "I wouldn't get a similar one, especially after something like that." Marie eventually succumbs to the pressure of not wanting

to go further with systemic torture. Her priority becomes coming out of the bureaucratic trap that doesn't understand her, until, towards the end, a different investigation elsewhere finds similarities with Marie's case. The shift to finding the rapist — which should have been the centre of the investigation in the first place — is brilliant.

The series calls out a system that gets away by enabling loopholes for perpetrators of crime to escape thanks to the time the legal procedures focus on dissecting the survivors.

**In one scene, detective Grace (Toni Collette) asks a senior officer, "Where is your rage?"**



Actor Kaitlyn Dever as Marie in a still from *Unbelievable*