

AMBATINES

VOLUME 11 / ISSUE 2 / APRIL 2021

INSIDE CAMPUS

JAIN to Host Khelo India University Games - 2021

EXPRESSIONS

Living the Moment Forever

THEATRE

Turning the Spotlight on Tulu Theatre

TRAVEL

Varanasi - An Abode Beyond Time

A SAGA OF REPRESENTATION





Saluting Real Heroes





The more than a century old Indian Cinema industry, has always had a fair share of women taking on numerous roles. However, they were mostly on the periphery, playing second fiddle, stripped of creative or decision-making powers and certainly with no say whatsoever in the business aspects of cinema making. The viewership too couldn't imagine them essay roles other than that of actresses. However, things have changed and the 21 Century has witnessed women venturing into uncharted territories. Today, women along with acting prowess have mastered the technical aspects of cinema making. We are witnessing the rise of several commercially and critically acclaimed women directors, producers, cinematographers, music composers among others.

With women taking on these roles in cinema, which were heretofore dominated by their male counterparts, the visual culture of representation is evolving to present multiple realities. The mainstream male gaze is finding the emergence of a powerful counter gaze that is accommodative of varied genders and the spaces they inhabit, and their interactions with the self and the world. We welcome women espousing these critical roles in cinema-making, and wish their tribe all success in this issue of AVENTURE.

Not just in glamorous tinsel town, but we see ordinary women becoming agents of change by embracing self-reliance. Read more about Kavita Mishra who single-handedly transformed a barren farmland in the most arid district of Karnataka into an agricultural gold mine, and Uma Preman who went beyond her debilitating circumstances to offer a new lease of life to many through her charitable organization.

Do read the Review section for a critical assessment of the contemporary relevance of celebrated filmmaker Satyajit Ray's films; a brief sketch of the Tulu theatrical tradition of coastal Karnataka; and a review of the book *Despite the State*.

Stop by to gaze upon some stunning images capturing life at its ordinary best through the lens of photographer Ramesh Babu.

The Health section takes a look at how a sedentary lifestyle, which unfortunately has become the norm in these pandemic times, affects spine health. We also give you an insight into how Drone technology has been used in pandemic crisis management across the country.

The pandemic-induced lockdown has once again caused a delay in bringing out the April Issue. This issue will be mailed along with the forthcoming July edition.

Hope this issue of AVENTURE makes for an interesting read.

Do write to us with your valuable feedback

Cheers!

Editor

CHIEF PATRON

Dr. Chenraj Roychand, Chancellor

PATRONS

Dr. N Sundararajan, Pro-Chancellor Dr. Raj Singh, Vice Chancellor

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

M S Santhosh

EDITOR

Shubha Srikanth

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Greeshma Sukumaran Shwetha H C

CONTRIBUTORS

Roshan Nair Suman Joshi Sridhar Prasad Nalme Nachiyar Tejus R S Gaurav Sharma Dr. Payel Sen

PHOTOGRAPHS

Staff Photographers

COVER PHOTO

Kandukuri Ramesh Babu

DESIGN

Sham Sundar S E

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: MS Parswanath

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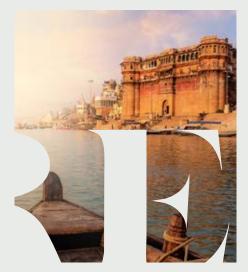
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MESSAGES

MIND OVER MATTER

TEACHERS HAVE ALWAYS

COUNSELLORS, FRIENDS, GUIDES,

CO-TRAVELLERS; THIS, DESPITE

NOT BEING MANDATED AND

REMAINS UNDOCUMENTED.

TAKEN ON THE ROLE OF



The World Economic Forum has ranked Emotional Intelligence as one of the top 10 skills needed for the fourth industrial revolution in 2020 and beyond.

Educational institutions have always played a crucial role in not only imparting knowledge but

also moulding the character of its students

through value-based education, making them worthy citizens by inculcating political consciousness and civic sense. Teachers have always taken on the role of counsellors, friends, guides, co-travellers; this, despite not being mandated and remains undocumented.

Even as we are enhancing their knowledge base, making them employment ready, we

at JAIN, are also focusing on imparting the necessary skills to make our students psychologically strong. While the youth has acquired sensational levels of cognitive skills, It is time we look at how we can empower our children with mental fortitude and resilience, which are perhaps the most important life skills today. The McKinsey Group has identified that in the coming decade, the need for social and emotional skills will grow at a much faster pace than the need for cognitive skills.

As educationists and parents, it is of tantamount importance that we spare a thought on how we can empower our children emotionally to withstand the onslaughts of the Corona Virus and the changing socio-cultural dynamics, on the human mind and body. Particularly vulnerable is the youth. Having built dreams, set career goals, and worked towards them with due diligence, the pandemic has cast nothing but a fog of uncertainty about the future. Not to mention, the social isolation, and the resultant physical and mental ennui.

The need of the hour therefore is for parents and teachers. being the most important agents of socialtisation, to allocate time for open communication with our young adults. With the lockdowns and restrictions on

> movement, even if they succeed in escaping the virus, they may still be victims of far-reaching emotional consequences. Hence all possible measures need to be taken, within the framework of health-safeguarding restrictions, to build a robust mind and agile body, that can cope with and overcome, testing times. Research by The Institute for Health and Human Potential

indicates that Emotional Intelligence skills accounts for 85 to 90 per cent of what is required for exceptional performance and leadership. With more and more millennials entering the work force, we need to foster generations that are emotionally intelligent.

DR. CHENRAJ ROYCHAND **CHANCELLOR**

MESSAGES

INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO EDUCATION



No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens. - Michelle Obama

Over the recent years, the higher education scenario in India has witnessed exponential growth in terms of the number of institutes

and universities, along with an increase in student population. But female employment remains a matter of concern. While feminist campaigns in the early years concentrated on equal rights, in the recent years the emphasis has been on equitable empowerment of the sexes.

Globally, the solution to ending bias is to provide adequate opportunities for the education of women, which would help bolster economies, mitigate inequalities, and lead to prosperous, robust communities. Although the Indian educational system has made enormous strides over the years, change has not always been egalitarian, and girls continue to face some of the most egregious forms of exclusion.

While several programmes have been initiated by the government to encourage women's education and improve their involvement in learning, gender disparities in education still prevail. Not only the government but also the wider societies in India are also directing their attention on improving the lives of women, as educated women are increasingly becoming the key contributors to India's progress. Highquality education has the potential to empower individuals,

especially women and transform societies at large. that Now, the learning outcomes are improving rapidly among girls as compared to boys around the world, newer forms of gender gaps are

WE MAY ATTRIBUTE THIS DISPARITY AND STEREOTYPICAL MINDSET TO THE LACK OF GENDER **RESPONSIVE CAREER** COUNSELING.

emerging, such as the assumption that girls are less likely to pursue a course in science and technology at schools and universities. Stereotypical mindsets and lack of genderresponsive career counselling are to be attributed to this.

We at JAIN, believe in providing opportunities to pursue technical education and career oriented professions, through gender-responsive career counselling, which is the need of the hour as they are the building blocks of progress and innovations that will bring new layers to the nation's prosperity.

At a time when the country is gradually booming to be an economic global influence, the participation of women in multiple roles allows for the holistic growth of society and the country as a whole. It is vital to sustain the impetus of empowerment of girls and women through education for inclusive development. There is a great deal of value in raising consciousness about women's influence in today's world not just to advance, but also to defend it.

DR. N SUNDARARAJAN PRO-CHANCELLOR

MESSAGES

FOSTERING EMPLOYABLE SKILLS



The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but brings our life in harmony with all existence.

- Rabindranath Tagore

leaders Industry have often observed the lack of congruence between what is learned in the educational institutions requirement of the industry.

Owing to developments in the industrial and employment sectors, there is an urgent need for qualified and skilled employees.

Despite India's exponential progress, there is a lot that needs to be done to present the masses with employment opportunities to prosper, and become contributors to the economy. When the focus is on building Atmanirbhar India, it is imperative that the youth be equipped with specific skills that are in demand.

While education at the elementary level is a point of contention for those committed to social human development, higher education is emphasized on societal and professional agility along with academic and individual progress. And this necessitates reinvigorated attention to curriculum and skills development, in the modern and rapidly evolving ecosphere. Though the Indian government has initiated many schemes for skill development to bridge the skill gap, many graduates and post graduates are unable to find a job that matches their skill and education. Whilst the groundwork has been laid in the last few years for an open, competitive and sustainable environment for improving skills, now is the time to build a stronger, effective, and enduring proficiency ecosystem.

The path forward is to include technical education and the advancement of skills within the curriculum at a very young age. As educationists, we must focus on providing an institutional structure for skill creation and vocational education alongside academics within our system at the initial stages of learning. Acquainting the learners with skill education in the formative years will present them with various prospects to select their vocations. To enhance employability, it is critical to integrate skill development and education.

THE PATH FORWARD IS TO INCLUDE TECHNICAL **EDUCATION AND THE** ADVANCEMENT OF SKILLS WITHIN THE CURRICULUM AT A VERY YOUNG AGE.

With the union budget expected to concentrate education, research and innovation, higher education sector is expected to witness an interesting phase of transformation.

DR. RAJ SINGH VICE CHANCELLOR It gives me immense pleasure to say that the magazine Aventure has been wonderfully compiled. The magazine has wonderfully captured different articles in their original flavor and has blended them beautifully with rich graphics and animation. I enjoyed reading the entire magazine but what I liked the most is the Expressions section, on Mr. S.P. Balasubramaniam whose voice is truly the masterpiece of God.

Vice Chancellor (Sister Nivedita University)

Aventure featuring an assortment of columns with varied topics of interest is very much impressive and well presented.

Vijay Kalantri, (Honorary Consul of the Republic of Uzbekistan.)

The January 2021 issue provides very useful and educative information. We look forward to the next issue.

Ernest Nana Adjei, (Minister Counsellor/P&E. **High Commission of Ghana)**

> The topics and articles covered in the magazine have been quite amusing. I have observed that the focus of the magazine's content is not only for youngsters but for every age and every gender. This is highly appreciable. The gospel of brotherhood highlighting Swami Vivekananda's message of manifestation of divinity in the soul through humanism was thought provoking. The intent and inclusion of Dinacharya as one of the articles is praiseworthy.

> Dr. K Kanakavalli, **Director General** (Central Council for Research in Siddha)

fter perusal of your magazine Aventure. I found it to be informative, entertaining and educative. Most importantly, I found your musical section the most captivating. Your copy of the magazine will enrich our library.

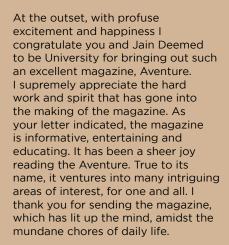
Dr. GM Chipare, (The Ambassador-designate of the Republic of Zimbabwe)





The editorial team has succinctly compiled various aspects of life of two great a of our country; Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri. I compliment your editorial team for such inspiring biographies.

General Bipin Rawat, (Chief of Defence Staff)



Vice-Chancellor, (MAHARANI CLUSTER UNIVERSITY)



MARKETING MANAGEMIENT FEST NAKSHATIRA 2020



MBA Department, at School of Management, Jain (Deemed-to-be University) hosted a national level virtual Marketing Management Fest on December 9, 2020. This online fest endeavoured to provide the students pursuing MBA, PGDM, and M. Com programmes an opportunity to evaluate their knowledge and skills by participating in various marketing challenges that demand an appropriate mix of wit and wisdom.

Titled 'Nakshatra', the fest included five events, namely Ashwini, Rohini, Vishakha, Ardra and Uttarayan, aimed at identifying the best budding marketing talent of the year. While Ashwini was the name of the quiz, Rohini was a platform through which participants embraced their perspectives and viewpoints. Vishakha, the connecting dot of nakshatra was chosen to test the students' ability to find words, and their overall cognitive memory. Ardra was to make the participants think more vividly, vigilantly and spontaneously and Uttarayan, the most exciting round amongst all was for the marketing pitch to make one confident of selling. The events had a panel of esteemed judges and received registrations from reputed institutions like IIM Indore, NIT Karnataka, Mithibai College Mumbai, NMIMS Mumbai, Lucknow University, MIT Pune and Jagan Institute of Management Studies (JIMS).



TOP3 WINNERS OF THE NAKSHATRA 2020

Winner

Ms. Aparajita Singh, Indus Business Academy, Bengaluru

First Runner Up

Mr. Sri Bharat Rathi, Indus Business Academy, Bengaluru

Second Runner Up

Ms. Divyam Maheshwari, Christ (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru



CELEBRATION

A host of activities were conducted virtually at various campuses of JAIN to mark the celebration of Women's day on 8th march 2021. A microcosm of this global celebration was manifested at a macro level at Jain (Deemed-to-be University).

The events co-ordinated by Major, Dr. Rekha Sinha on the virtual platform attracted more than 400+ students from various streams. This diversity encouraged the audience to express their views on women's day from various perspectives. Embracing uniqueness and converting it into strength was widely discussed during the event.

As the event unfolded, various guests who were invited to the event shared their thoughts and spoke across varied topics including gender diversity, women rights and empowerment, positive thinking and dreaming big and many such. Sharing of success stories from the female student community was one of the highlights of the event.

Ms. Leena Manimekalai - film maker, poet and writer, Ms. Suneeta Kulakarni, Protection Officer, Women and Child Development, and a Psychological Counsellor, Ms. Smitha Keeran graced the occasion of celebrating womanhood virtually.

While, Ms. Leena Manimekalai deliberated about overcoming prejudices prevalent in society and how women should voice their opinions and stand for their rights, Ms. Sunita Kulkarni, addressed the virtual gathering about the need for a woman to pursue her dreams. She also encouraged everybody to support fellow women in fulfilling their dreams and to focus only on positivity. As a government officer Ms. Kulkarni also spoke in length about various government schemes that exist for the betterment of the underprivileged women.

As an accomplished Psychological counselor, Ms. Smita Keeran discussed one of the vital aspects of a woman's life - maintaining work-life balance. Her discussion involved a few pointers on how women need to focus on elements of stress and find the stressors and resolve them with various techniques.

Students and faculty members participated actively in the question-

and-answer session that followed the discussion and gained insight into Women Empowerment.

A webinar titled "Women in Leadership: Balance for Better", was held as a part of the Woman's Day celebration. Syed Umarhathab, Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli- India, the webinar speaker highlighted the importance of women leaders in today's society. He also threw light on various women's issues that are prevalent in the society. He explained how women are underrepresented in leadership roles, but have performed better compared to men when offered management positions. During the course of his talk, he also discussed the ability in women to collaborate, connect and empathise which forms the basis for a sustainable future. The event showcased pre-recorded dance and musical performances from the students, enhancing the cultural aspect of the celebration. Such events held at the university not only assure a socially developing generation, but also instills knowledge and the ability to acknowledge gender diversity while celebrating it.





FINSTREET 2020

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT FEST

School of Management, Jain (Deemed-tobe University) hosted a one-day national level virtual financial management fest, FinStreet 2020, on December 12, 2020. Sponsored by TATA Tiscon and Dalmia Bharat Cement, the event witnessed huge participation from various colleges like Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, IISWBM, CMS Business School, Christ (Deemed-to-be University) and Xavier Institute of Management. This student-managed fest was a combination of the finest exponents of financial acumen, as the participants competed in a series of events. The various events tested the ability of management students by presenting real-life corporate scenarios and equipped them with the necessary skills to achieve greater heights in their professions. Mr. Kamlesh Sharma (General Manager, International Financial Services Centers Authority - On deputation from Reserve Bank of India) presided as the Chief-Guest for the event.

Inspired by financial hubs Dalal Street and Wall Street, the name of the fest, Fin Street signifies the importance of finance in every sphere of life. As rightly expressed, finance is the lifeline of a business; it's a tool that will help organisations reach their maximum potential. The fest comprised of five different and exciting rounds like:

- 1) Intraday Testing the participant's knowledge of the various aspects of trading in the markets.
- 2) Quizzards A quiz competition to examine the participant's understanding of financial jargon, economy, and general awareness.
- 3) Plan O Fin A stage to exhibit participants' knowledge of basic financial planning and analytical skills. This event was judged by CA Prashanth Vellanki Co-Founder and Principal Consultant at ProLead Financial Solutions, and Dr. Alok-Chhajer Founder and Chief Financial Planner, Alreadylate.com.
- 4) Risk N Control Allowed participants to exhibit their critical thinking capacity, check their ability to identify various risk factors, and suggest appropriate control measures.
- 5) Corporate Governance Given a hypothetical situation, participants were to assess on how creatively they would resolve the scenarios. Dr. Tuhin Banerjee Chief Managing Consultant, Wanderlust KASH



consultant, and Mr. Punith Raj - Founder and CEO, EIPOC Pvt. Ltd were the judges for the event.

Mr. Makam Thipparaju Harshith, St. Joseph's Institute of Management, Bengaluru emerged as the winner of the event Finstreet, while Mr. Bibin Thomas, Asian School of Business, Trivandrum and Mr. AshishMenon, St. Joseph's Institute of Management, Bengaluru bagged the first and second runner up titles respectively. The fest was a huge accomplishment that delivered the right inputs and provided the students with an opportunity to hone their business skills, core financial skills, and demonstrate their talents. The event was a mix of fun, games and learning about finance and the winners were awarded cash prizes, trophies and e-certificates along with exciting goodies.



JAIN TO HOST

KHELOINDIA

UNIVERSITY GAMES - 2021

Jain (Deemed-to-be University) is all set to be the venue for the second Khelo India University Games (KIUG) 2021, to be held later this year. The games will be hosted by JAIN in partnership with the Association of Indian Universities (AIU). Shri BS Yediyurappa, Chief Minister, Karnataka and the Union Sports Minister, Shri Kiren Rijiju announced the venue earlier at a press meet in Bengaluru.

champions of India. The Government of Karnataka will ensure that University games will turn out to be a massive success."

Kiren Rijiju, stressing the need for a sustained, concentrated effort and plan to identify talent from Universities said, "Countries that have great sporting performance have often forged their



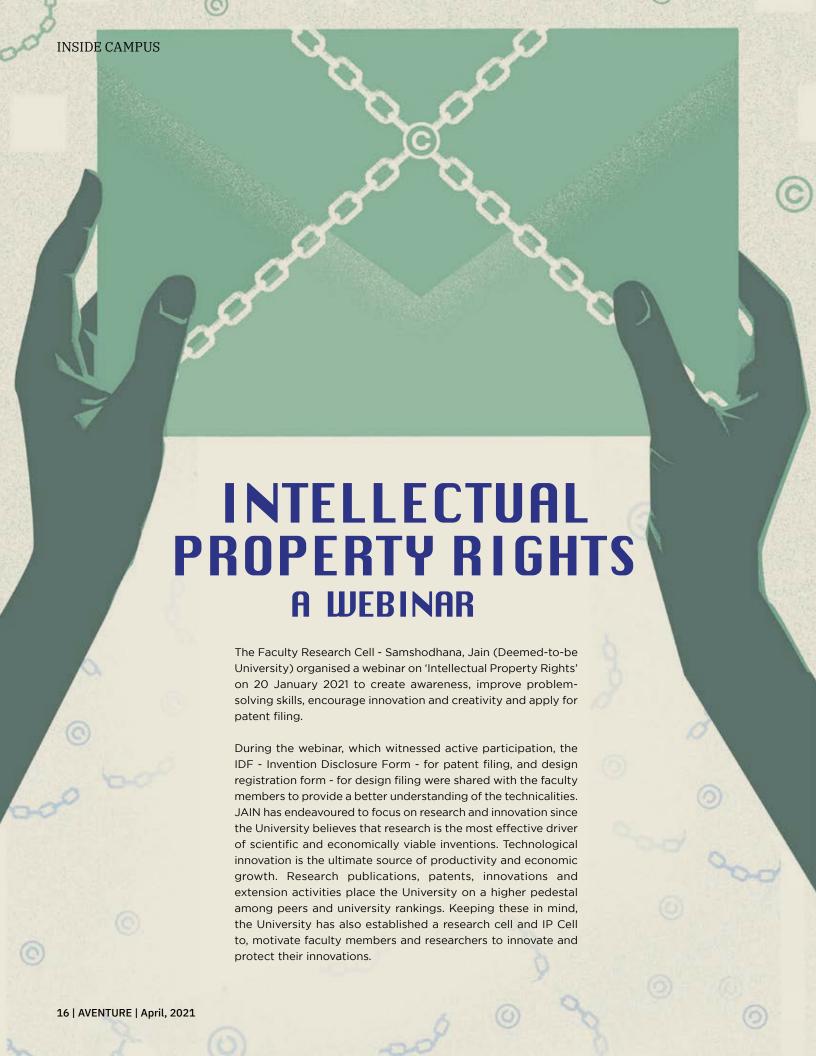


KIUG is the largest University Games in the country and is aimed at harnessing sporting talents who can represent India in international events, including the Olympic Games. The 1st edition of KIUG, which was held in Orrisa, Bhubaneswar in February last year saw a participation of around 3182 athletes in the U-25 age group from 158 universities and colleges across the nation.

The 2021 edition will see a total of 19 sporting disciplines, with the addition of two more - Yogasana and Mallakhamb to preserve and encourage the centuryold sporting disciplines of the country. This year, the games will be conducted in the under-25 age category following the World University Games norms. Over 4,000 athletes are expected to participate in the second edition of the Khelo India University Games. Announcing the venue, the Chief Minister, Yediyurappa said, "We are honoured to be hosting KIUG 2021, and we are confident that the Games will produce some of the best future sports sporting heroes from the university level. This year, with the inclusion of indigenous games in the competition, we are hopeful that the number of participants will see a marked increase."

Dr. Chenraj Roychand, Chancellor, JAIN on his part said, "Hosting KIUG at JAIN campus is yet another step towards strengthening the University's commitment towards the sport. We are extremely honoured to have an opportunity to host an event of this magnitude, and being part of this national initiative for developing sports is a matter of great pride for us at JAIN. The pragmatic approach of our University towards this sports programme is on the same lines as the vision of our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, who forever encourages sports to be an integral part of one's daily life."





UNION BUDGET 2021-2022

AN ANALYSIS

Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CERSSE), Jain (Deemed-to-be University) hosted a panel discussion to analyse the Union Budget 2021-22 on February 4, 2021. Prof. R S Deshpande - Former Director, Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bengaluru, Dr. S R Keshav - Professor of Economics, Bangalore University, Bengaluru and Dr. Xavier V K - Professor and Head of Department, Economics, School of Humanities and Social Sciences. (SHSS), JAIN being the panellist, Dr. Priyanca Mathur -Associate Professor, JAIN, hosted and moderated the discussion. The discussion was attended by over 100 participants from the field of academia.

Prof. Deshpande initiated the discussion by stating that there has been an effort by the NDA Government to give an overview of what is in the Budget, what is to be expected by the people, how to counter the enemies that confronted the Indian Economy during the last year viz, infrastructural fragility, growth, lurking inflation, the industrial sector, and unemployment.

During the discussion, Dr. Keshava pointed out that international institutions like the IMF and World Bank had predicted India's GDP to decline and presented a lot of numerical data about the inflation rate, GDP, economic factors, and

more. He also mentioned the major aspiration of the people to recover from the pandemic and how poverty and unemployment are the biggest challenges. He also expressed that although the budget holds good, there was nothing extra-ordinary as it claims to be.

Dr. Xavier believed that the Budget is "Taxing Peter to Pay Paul". The middle-class earners' Marginal Propensity to Consume is quite high and they contribute the tax revenue to the government. They should be compensated when income and livelihood were lost during the pandemic. He also mentioned that disposable personal income is the main contributor to aggregate demand. Customs, at 3%, are the least contributor to government revenue, and therefore, Dr. Xavier believes that increasing the import duty will not have much effect on the revenue side of the economy.

After the discussion, the Panellists addressed the questions asked by the audience and expressed the hope that implementation of all the good points of this budget would take place in the current fiscal year so that the fruits could be trickled down to all the sections of society and only then inclusive development will see the light of the day.

INDO-U.S. RELATIONS

TRAJECTORIES AND TRENDS



Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CERSSE), JAIN (Deemed-to-be University) organised a virtual panel discussion on 'Future Trajectories and Trends of Indo-U.S. Relations: Impact on South Asia, on January 21, 2021

It is often said that when America sneezes the world catches a cold. The swearing-in of Joseph R Biden Jr. as the 46 American President and that of Kamala Harris as the first Women Vice President has signaled a new wave in the realm of the power dynamics of the world, the ripples of which will be felt in every nook and corner of the world. The panelists of the webinar included Prof. M.J. Vinod - Professor, Department of International Studies, Political Science and History, School of Social Sciences, CHRIST (Deemedto-be University), Bengaluru, Prof. D. Suba Chandran - Professor and Dean, School of Conflict and Security Studies, National Institute of

Advanced Studies, Bengaluru and Prof. Rahul Tripathi - Professor, Department of Political Science, Goa University, Goa.

Dr. Priyanca Mathur - Associate Professor, CERSSE, JAIN chaired the session and gave the introductory comments highlighting the watershed moment of the Biden-Harris victory in world history and the novel path the American Government is poised to embark on. The panelists reflected on all dimensions of this grand event in international relations, through the lens of its impact on South Asia by large but Indo-U.S. Relations in particular. Attended by academicians, research scholars and students, the webinar reflected on this transfer of power with the departure of former President Donald Trump from his office.

Webinar Highlights

Trump remained out of public view in his last week of power. He was also not part of the tradition of attending the successor's swearing-in, and was unapologetic for the violence he incited and was unwilling to abandon the false election claims that have been riled up by his supporters. Biden, on the other hand, has been trying to get Americans focused on the future as his team outlined the first steps that his office would be taking towards aiding the struggling Americans amid the pandemic and fulfill the campaign promises he made like climate change, criminal justice, and immigration. He is now emerging as the climate hero for reversing Trump's decision to not be a part of the Paris Accord and he did it in the first few hours of his presidency. The bottom-line of this new power dynamic is for a "United" States of America. A promise of a President and a Presidency which speaks even for those who acted against them!

There is a growing sense of seeking mutuality of interest with the United States of America. There will be a change in the outlook and a change in the approach on matters of America's equation with individuals and with leaderships of other countries. Trump's Foreign Policy will be shaken and stirred, partly indicated by Biden signing the Paris Accord to be a part of it.



The way the US looked at the world, with a kind of isolationism perspective-let's do it alone attitude, had become the hallmark of Trump's administration and this will no longer exist. One would see the United States engaging more and more with the multilateral regimes, and be it with regards to climate change, WTO, G20, there will be a greater oration of each other's interests. U.S. will now be more and more engaged across the world. Biden's expectation from South-Asia would be how South Asia on its own can project a picture of the region which is in some way or the other able to converge with the larger U.S. policy of democracy and human rights.

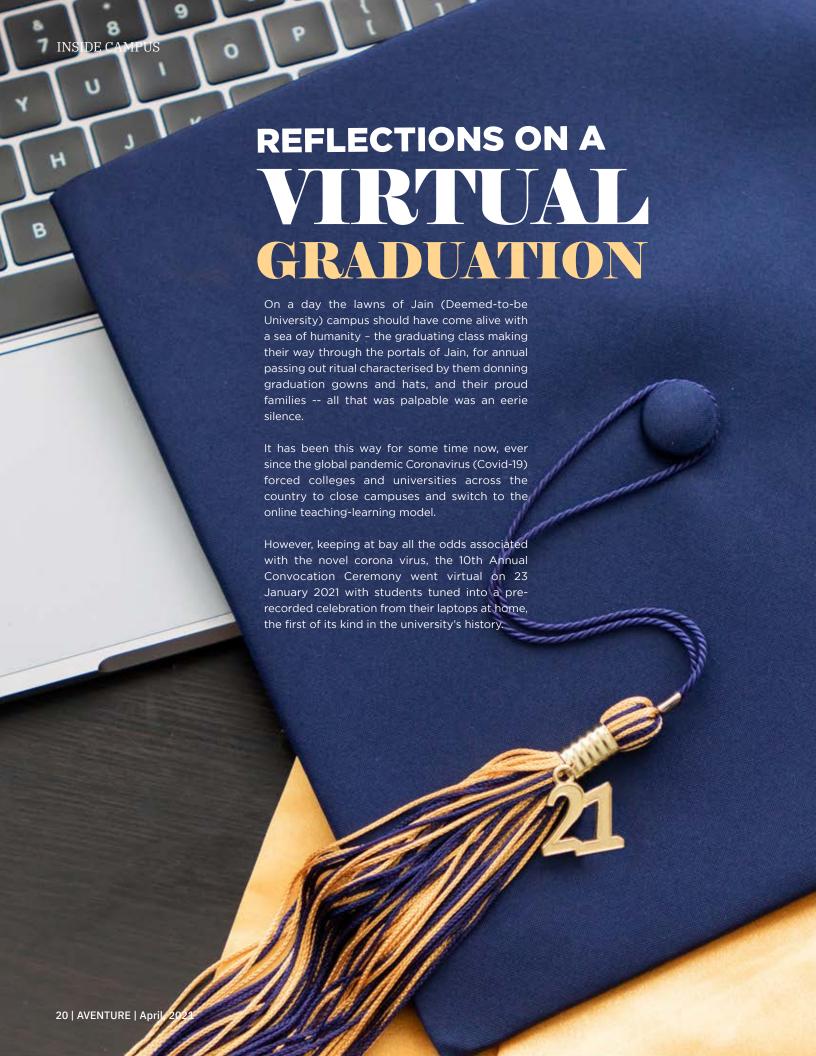
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The growing cultural wave of 'Browning of America', heralds a change in social and policitcal equations with the Right Wing no longer remaining fringe element in the U.S.

Ultimately, international relations and political leadership do matter. How signals emerge from top leadership sets the tone. Trumpism will take a while to go, but it depends on the rest of the world too to let go of it. The growing cultural wave of 'Browning of America', heralds a change in social and policitcal equations with the Right Wing no longer remaining a fringe element in the U.S. The more America becomes Brown, the more the Right-Wing comes to the forefront.

Dr. Sandeep Shastri, Vice-Chancellor, Jagran Lakecity University, Bhopal, who was a part of the webinar pointed out that the appointments that the Biden administration has made and proposes to make are people who served in the second-level positions during the Obama administration and are now in the top positions in the Biden administration.

This indicates that there will be continuity in the Biden administration from the Obama administration at many levels. He will be a President for even those who voted against him and it is predicted that Biden, as is his nature, would be accommodating in his approach. The Indo-U.S. relations has very little to do with whether a Democrat or a Republican is in power. This notion that either one of those parties is good for India is something that has never been empirically proved.



The convocation address was delivered by Chief Guest Dr. Devi Prasad Shetty, Chairman and founder, Narayana Health, a chain of medical centers in India.

"I have been looking forward to addressing this special group of students who are graduating today. The students who didn't stand 1st or 2nd or 3rd in the class, are the students who for the most part of their life sat on the backbench. Our society is made to believe that if you are not one of the outstanding students or one of the gold medalists, you can't make it in life and you can't be successful. But the reality is different. Some of the institutions which changed the world and some of the organisations that ushered disruptive innovations were established by backbenchers.

Because, these are the students who refused to follow norms and wanted to carve their path for the future. And believe me, they are the ones who are going to change the world. To all the students who are not the toppers, believe me we have trust in you to make this world a better place for all of us."

On this significant day, JAIN presented the graduating certificates virtually to the students, while congratulating and wishing all the graduates a successful career. Dr. Chenraj Roychand, Chancellor, JAIN said, "What is the success formula of a person at the individual level? I always felt even the great souls would have followed this. It is these 9 words that are enough for us to propel ourselves in life to become successful and balanced individuals." The 9 success mantras as enumerated by the Chancellor are Talent, Never Give Up, Dream, Ideas, Power of Networking, Focus, Self-Management, Don't Complicate and Keep It Simple.

Dr. N. Sundararajan, Pro-Chancellor, JAIN said, "I am sure the quality education that you have received here at JAIN will not only make you stand in good stead, but also will make you to blossom into fine flowers of human beings. The education that you have received here will liberate you and empower you with knowledge and skills. I wish that every student practices and follows the values and virtues inculcated here."

Dr. Raj Singh, Vice-Chancellor, JAIN, said, "As we emerge from 2020, which is a memorable year in more than one way, maybe we couldn't have the life we lived, maybe we couldn't find solutions which the world needed from us, but one thing is for sure that if we hope for a better future, which I am sure 2021 will have for us, we will be able to do what we wanted to do."



JAIN has always believed in empowering and encouraging women to learn new skills and the 10th Annual Convocation rightly presented yet another opportunity. The convocation folders for the latest graduation day were the handiwork of rural women artists. The beautifully crafted eco-friendly folders are a testament to the perseverance and fortitude of women who worked during such challenging times.

The 10th Annual Convocation Ceremony of JAIN was held virtually on 23 January 2021, the first of its kind in the university's history. Aniruddh Nagesh speaks to Veerti Mehta, Rohit Krishna and Niyonsaba Jeremi, toppers and gold medalists in their respective streams. Inspired by their perseverance, he presents here their journey to success in Jain, their aspirations and goals for the future.





Empathy is a quality that one would strongly associate with Veerti Mehta; and this is also one of the many outstanding qualities that has made her the amazing personality that she is today!

"Gratitude to family, friends and teachers was the first thought that came to my mind when I received the gold medal for academic excellence during M.Sc Psychology," recalls Veerti.

Before gaining a glimpse into Veerti's success, let's revisit her childhood and upbringing. Hailing from Gujarat, Veerti did her schooling in Surat and then took up Science as mainstream with Physics, Chemistry and Biology as majors during 11th/12th grades.

Apart from being academically astute, exposure to social innovation such as inclusiveness, freedom of expression and world-wide travel very early in life had a profound impact on her thought process and behavior which later helped immensely in shaping her career path.

Though an illustrious career path in MBBS was there for the taking, Veerti says with a

lot of humility that she chose Psychology with a singular focus of 'giving back' to the society. This again reflects 'Empathy and maturity' in her thought process at such a young age which is indeed inspiring!

Bon Voyage to United Kingdom

After a brief stint at a Mumbai school, Veerti realized that the curriculum in India for undergraduate studies was far too general than specific to Psychology. With a laser sharp focus on attaining a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, Veerti headed towards the West and secured admission to University of Buckingham in U.K. Apart from the in-depth researchoriented curriculum, the social community of having friends in U.K, made it a preferred destination for Veerti outside of India for undergraduate studies. Other than gaining academic expertise in the field of psychology, Veerti's versatility multifolded with exposure to moral values, heterogeneous community culture and research skills and capabilities during her undergraduate years. The formative years spent in U.K and global exposure early in life has shaped Veerti to find a niche for herself in the field of Psychology. At this time, another brilliant career path in the UK was there for grabs; however, Veerti made the heartfelt choice of coming back to India with the desire to increase public awareness in the space of mental health. This decision speaks volumes about her love for the country and its people, in times when, the youth of the country dream and aim only for a life and career on foreign shores.



Return to Roots

When asked about why she didn't pursue MBBS in the first place and why she chose to return to India for a Master's program. the succinct response from Veerti left me spellbound - In a confident tone, she says, "MBBS would have allowed me to treat patients and serve the society but most of the patients need emotional connect than a medical prescription and this is the reason why I chose Psychology. And regarding my decision to return to India for Master's degree, unlike other career streams, Psychology is centered around community and culture and hence the advanced Psychology education in one country might not be cent percent applicable in the context of another country. Coupled with this, the desire of always wanting to give back to Indian society, made the choice to come back to India an easy one; and to top it all, I couldn't have made a better choice than pursuing M.Sc Psychology at Jain(Deemed-to-be University)for the academic excellence it offers in terms of curriculum, professionalism and the expertise of professors."

Pursuing Excellence at JAIN

In pursuit of establishing a career in clinical psychology, Veerti started her journey at JAIN by enrolling into the M.Sc Psychology program. The transition from U.K to Jain(Deemed-to-be University) was seamless, she says, as the curriculum was focused on content-based learning much to the liking of Veerti's interests.

Veerti emphasizes on the holistic curriculum that starting from different nuances of Psychology to research trends and interactive classroom discussions – all of which have paved the way for a strong foundation. She also talks fondly about being a class representative of the clinical psychology class, which further elevated her leadership and interpersonal skills, considered essential for any aspiring medical practitioner.

Other than the academic curriculum Veerti talks highly about the intensive 45-day internship Program which offered valuable insights related to psychological therapy, pragmatic assessments and the Indian socio-cultural context and its impact on behavior. According to her, such programs that offer students real-world experience complete with the practical challenges, especially in a subject like psychology goes a long way in bridging the theory-practice chasm.

The lighter side of Veerti is heartening to see when she talks about Bangalore. Being social by nature, the cosmopolitan culture of Bangalore and an amicable community has made Veerti fall in love with the city. The umpteen food joints that Bangalore offers, and the pleasant weather adds as an icing on the cake mentions Veerti about her stay at Bangalore.

Celebrating the Success of a Modest Champion

By constantly striving for excellence in academics, the pinnacle of Veerti's success was there for everyone to see when she secured the Gold Medal for her academic accomplishments in the M.Sc program in Psychology. Veerti, in all humility and gratitude dedicates this award to the faculty members at Jain (Deemed-to-be University), family and friends.

As we celebrate the journey of Veerti Mehta's success and wish her well in future endeavors, it's a true inspiration for everyone, to see such a young woman with great clarity of thought and vision about her career and, and more importantly, calling in life. The qualities of empathy and compassion are perhaps the most crucial qualities for someone who wishes to alleviate the pain points of fellow humans. This remarkable story of a successful young woman again emphasizes on how the core qualities of empathy, humility and maturity when blended with honesty and perseverance can yield great results.





Veerti Mehta

"Gratitude to family, friends and teachers was the first thought that came to my mind when I received the gold medal for academic excellence during M.Sc Psychology,"



Conviction and free-spiritedness are qualities that define Rohith Krishna. His achievements in pure science speak volumes about his pursuing passion for a subject which quells the easy route of falling into the comfort zone and of making mundane career choices based on sheer lack of will and herd mentality.

A native of Kerala, Rohith was born and brought up in the city of Dubai. Inspired by his mother, who is a scientist of chemistry - the natural inclination towards science and chemistry was evident in his childhood. He was curious as a child and enjoyed watching simple chemical reactions and spent endless hours understanding the concepts of Chemistry by performing various experiments and building scientific instruments under the guidance of his mother.

With this curiosity and passion towards Chemistry, it was a natural decision for Rohith, to choose science as mainstream during 11th and 12th grades. Rohith also says that he spent more hours mastering other subjects such as Physics to get better at them, since Chemistry came naturally to him. This helped Rohith in

appreciating different facets of science and promoted an interdisciplinary approach to his understanding of science. The other amazing fact is that Rohith took tuitions for his peers while still in the 11th and 12th grades; and this highlights his in-depth understanding of the world of pure science.

After completing 12th grade with high distinction, Rohith had the option of traveling abroad for undergraduate studies. Since Dubai was a young country when it came to education in pure science and wanting to explore life away from family, Rohith chose India as a destination for undergraduate studies; considering curriculum and return on investment as important parameters in his decision making. By now, he had zeroed in on a career in Forensic Science. While researching for the best Indian universities in Forensic Science, Jain (Deemed-to-be University) stood out for the holistic curriculum it offered and topnotch faculty, says Rohith.

When asked about his decision to specialize in Forensic Science, Rohith explains the rationale behind the choice -

"I always wanted to specialize in analytical chemistry because, – one, it tests your problem solving skills and creativity through the associated qualitative and quantitative analysis; two, it is more a social cause, involving reporting scientific evidence in the court of law so that the innocent are not punished." Choosing a path less travelled by, is certainly a mark of a distinctive personality.



From Dubai to India

After spending all these years in Dubai, coming to a different country altogether is bound to give butterflies in the stomach, considering the differences in culture, food, weather and more importantly, the overwhelming home sickness. "However, the sense of belongingness that Bangalore provided just amazed me," recalls Rohith. Rohith with great joy alludes, "The best part of Bangalore is its cosmopolitan culture which is open and accepting of new citizens with such graciousness".



Settling with ease in the Garden City, Rohith begins his quest by working passionately towards the ultimate goal of his professional life - "spearheading a laboratory for research in the field of analytical chemistry and its applications". To achieve this feat, Rohit acknowledges the need for a strong foundation. curriculum, experienced and knowledgeable faculty members and the infrastructure for applied science in terms of practical laboratories gave Rohith a great head start in building further expertise in Forensic Science. The 'opendoor concept' of the Forensic Science department at Jain (Deemed-to-be University), with faculty members always accessible to students, led to many productive discussions, mentions Rohith, with utmost respect to his teachers.

Rohith talks about one of the most notable experiences during his tenure at JAIN that shaped his interpersonal skills, which was the opportunity to be a student administrator in a group called "CRESTAS". Crestas is a Forensic Science

community consisting of young minds across the Forensic Science fraternity established by the alumni of JAIN. By coordinating various events and real-world sessions as part of his role at CRESTAS, Rohith expanded his skill-sets and gained leadership acumen.

Considering a wide range of learnings at during undergraduate studies, Rohith by virtue of his intellect and perseverance gets awarded a gold medal for academic

excellence, in addition to attaining a Bachelor of Science, Honors degree. With a sense of pride, Rohith recollects the sacrifices he had to make skipping meals, sleepless nights, the physical and mental grind all of which has now yielded fruits by not only championing

Rohith to achieve but also has paved the way to accomplish his long term goal of becoming an entrepreneur and researcher in the field of analytical chemistry and Forensic Science.

Lauding another great achievement inside campus, the two key takeaways are: amidst general perception that pure science is becoming a victim to rapid growth of Information Technology, Rohith's achievements send strong signals that pure and applied science are here to stay and can transform the economic and social development of the country in a big way. The other side of the coin worth looking at is that aspiring young minds should be encouraged to walk against the grain while making career choices; to follow the heart, so that when passion and perseverance meet - the outcome is, the making of geniuses like Rohith.





Rohith Krishna

"I always wanted to specialize in analytical chemistry because, — one, it tests your problem solving skills and creativity through the associated qualitative and quantitative analysis; two, it is more a social cause, involving reporting scientific evidence in the court of law so that the innocent are not punished."



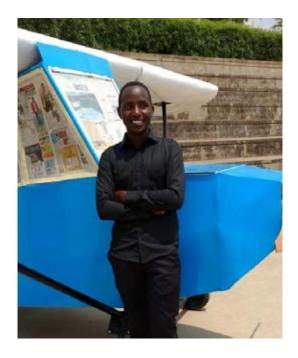
The adage "Adversity can make you or break you" resonates with Niyonsaba Jeremi. - as the challenges and obstacles faced very young in life has brought the best out of Jeremi and made him a highly responsible individual; which is

a true inspiration story indeed.

While he is back in Rwanda and chasing his dreams, the COVID-19 pandemic might have paused Jeremi's progression to the next level to some extent. but has not stopped him from breathing positivity and honing his teaching skills, which are aligned to his long term vision of establishing an educational institution in Rwanda. This speaks volumes of Jeremi's character and positive attitude, of focusing on the path to achieve a goal rather than the result itself. Before going that far, let us step back and rewind the academic journey of Jeremi and the great accomplishment at JAIN.

Hailing from an emerging country like Rwanda and a humble background,

Jeremi perhaps represents a generation that is well-aware that to make the most of the economic boom owing to industraialisation, education is the key. Like a true leader and humanitarian, his



thoughts are not limited to achieving personal success; but, aligned towards

elevating and empowering his fellow countrymen through education. And thus, his focus is on establishing an educational institution on home soil. Wearing this noble thought on his sleeve, Jeremi scaled up in early education and by 10th grade recognized his strength in Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry, which enabled him to successfully pass the 12th grade with distinction.

Bangalore Calling

The fact that Rwanda is still young in terms of higher education in a professional course like Engineering, Jeremi decided to step out of his country to pursue higher studies. Jeremi says "I chose India because it is one country which doesn't discriminate and is welcoming of all ethnicities." Jeremi's coming to India underlines the democratic and cosmopolitan nature of the country. "I have many friends in Bengaluru and the their feedback about education has been very positive. They also spoke highly of the technological innovation taking place in the city and most importantly they found it to be a civilized society. Hence Bangalore became an obvious choice to pursue Bachelor's degree and eventually the Master's program," he says.

Though you are mentally prepared to step out of your country for the better good, an element of culture shock still exists and Jeremi experienced it during the initial days. Adapting to the food and learning the basics of the regional languages was a challenge, recalls Jeremi. However, with the overall objective very clear in his mind and with support from friends, these obstacles didn't last long.

Considering the availability of job opportunities in Electrical Engineering in Rwanda, Jeremi chose Electrical Engineering as mainstream during undergraduate studies and joined Acharya Institute of Technology (AIT), affiliated to Visvesvaraya Technological University (VTU). A strong foundation is always a key to achieve great heights and Jeremi built his aptitude at AIT by attaining first class with distinction, which paved way to the world of Avionics, at Jain (Deemed-to-be University) during the Master's program.

Mastering Avionics Engineering

Jeremi always had a fascination towards becoming an aircraft pilot but couldn't pursue it due to the financial expenses associated. However, the ever ebullient Jeremi was quick enough to identify the nearest alternative which is what influenced him to take Avionics Engineering during the Master's program. With the choice of specialization sorted, Jeremi had to now choose the school.

Being in Bangalore for four years now, Jeremi had done enough research on universities offering specialized education in Avionics; and found the faculty and curriculum of much to his liking. This coupled with the international collaboration of Jain (Deemed-to-be University) with Rwanda and the scholarship opportunity made him enroll at JAIN to strengthen the path towards his dreams.

Jeremi talks highly about the International collaboration at JAIN and the structured process it has laid out for International students, starting from enrollment, to direct access to officials and eventually

in getting the degree certificates. "Jain has an established and hassle free process for international students. This is very important because in addition to all the challenges associated with moving to a different country, if you are clueless in the campus, they you are doomed. Being hassled, stuck in a chaotic process at college can take away precious time and focus. The environment at college certainly helped me focus and work towards carving a niche around Avionics," he says. Apart from learning the theoretical nitty-gritties of Avionics and excelling at it, the project work he undertook under the able guidance of Dr. Natarajan has contributed significantly to the overall academic development, recalls Jeremi.

A Masters program is no doubt intense and can become monotonous and at such times, Jeremi found an ally in the game of football. As he goes down memory lane - Jeremi looks as happy as the new young kid on the block, when he talks about the wonderful sporting facilities at the University; which not only rejuvenated his mind but also helped him make great new friends.

The academic rigor that Jeremi put himself throughout the six years of study in Bangalore is a testimony to his commitment, perseverance and diligence. And it comes as no surprise that he bagged the coveted gold medal and entered the history books of JAIN. As we celebrate this achievement, we are also hopeful that one day Jeremi fulfills his eventual dream of establishing an Avionics University at Rwanda; which will be yet another evidence of "Education being a great equalizer in Life."





Niyonsaba Jeremi

"My friends also spoke highly of the technological innovation taking place in the city and most importantly they found it to be a civilized society. Hence Bangalore became an obvious choice to pursue Bachelor's degree and eventually the Master's program."

CENTRE PIECE A SAGA OF REPRESENTATION



inema as a medium has always been and continues to thrive as a homegrown industry in India since it established presence more than 100 years ago. While Indian cinema has made incredible strides, along the way, has seen a substantial transition in the representation of women on the screen, and it has also embraced diversity and inclusion. This journey is evidence of how far Indian cinema has come, while making significant contributions to the empowerment of women in the industry. In recent years, women in cinema have seen their roles progress and refine beyond the screen just as in the wider society. While men have traditionally had an edge in the film industry, women made inroads and delivered in departments, considered fortes of men.

Shwetha HC takes a look at some of the finest women who have excelled in various capacities as actors, singers, directors, technicians, producers etc., as she raises a toast to womanhood!

From actors like Madhubala, Nargis, Jayalalitha, Savitri, Sridevi, Vijayashanthi, Malashree, Ramya Krishnan to Priyanka Chopra, Kangana Ranaut, Nayantara, Divya Spandana (Ramya), Anushka Shetty, Indian cinema bears witness to showcasing women and their characteristics, their charm as well as power, their will to achieve, mental fortitude and the courage to rebel against all odds.

"From being depicted as damsels in distress, waiting for the prince to rescue, to being powerful icons, women have taken a huge leap in cinema. Today's actress is a woman of substance, a woman who stands for her rights, raises her voice against oppression, battles for her integrity and self-respect, and rebels against injustice," asserts acclaimed actor Taapsee Pannu. She points out that her character in the movie Pink was one such and also the easiest role because the character was very close to her real-life persona -one who pursues her heart and doesn't really care about what the world thinks. From essaying the character of Shabhana Khan in Baby to her latest character Amrita in *Thappad*, Taapsee has never shied away from stepping out of the stereotypical portrayal of women on and off-screen. She is among the new breed of actors, who are open to experimenting with cinematic characterization.

Today, the individualism of a woman in real life and the characters of the Indian woman depicted in cinema are closely entwined. The clichéd depiction of a woman, that ruled the roost in

Indian films for several decades, has been witnessing a noteworthy transformation only in the recent times be it the sensible and realistic daring journalist Rani Mukherjee from No One killed Jessica, a calm and composed spy Vidya Balan seeking revenge from Kahaani, the beautiful fearless princess Anushka Shetty from Arundathi, an empathetic and brave

nurse Reema Kallingal from 22 Female Kottayam, secret agent Taapsee Pannu from Naam Shabana, a widow battling her carnal desires - Shruthi Hariharan from Naathicharami, five women Pooja Bhatt, Sahana Goswami, Amrutha Subash, Plabita Bhortakur and Aadya Anand from different walks of life from Bombay Begums, each of the characters broke the conservative mould, representing women who take the onus of their decisions, who do not conform to societal norms and excel in their professions. Actors playing such strong and independent female characters have been significant in turning the spotlight from just their physical attributes to their identities.

"We are too *distant from* parity, but we are en route the right direction. There were hardly any female-centric films two decades ago, but now big budget movies with women as protagonists are being

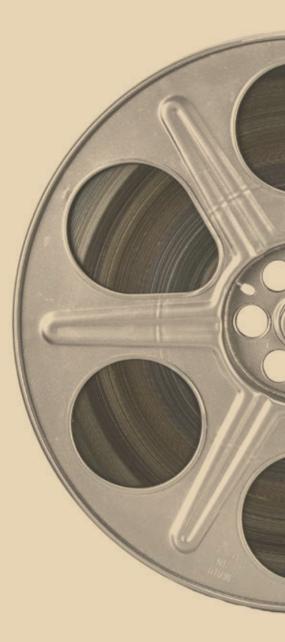
made and released on a wider scale. The perception of our audiences has changed and OTT has been a powerful influencer in this transformation. There is much less bias on the OTT releases and



Movies with lead actresses in power-packed performances are breaking new ground and are only reinforcing the belief of filmmakers in women-oriented scripts.

that is why we have so many female-led films which are game-changers today," believes south Indian award winning actor Parul Yadav whose journey from being a modest actress in *Govindaya Namaha* to an all-rounder in Kannada movies has been nothing short of a roller coaster ride. Parul has been crushing typecasts unapologetically by foraying into all aspects of films which is a rarity amongst the female actors in the South.

Films like Mother India, Bhumika, Damini, No One Killed Jessica, Kahaani, English Vinglish, Bucket List, Queen, Mardaani, Arundhati, Rudramadevi, Mary Kom, Pink, Lipstick under my Burkha, Tribhanga and many more have broken new ground with lead actresses in power-packed performances. In fact, it is only reinforcing the belief of filmmakers in womenoriented scripts.

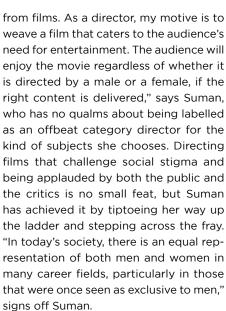


ACTION ... CUT!

It's not about just women-centric films, but women are also pulling strings on the silver screen by donning the director's hat. Fatima Begum, who first achieved fame on the Urdu stage and went on to be recognized as the star of the Indian silent cinema era, is credited as the first woman film director of India when she carved the film *Bulbul-e-Paristan* in 1926.

A few years ago, female filmmakers in Indian cinema were rare. However, today the industry takes pride in the new-generation female directors, who are generating a range of interesting ideas and artistic perspectives on the big screen. A former journalist and now a screenwriter and director in Kannada films, Suman Kittur is one such director in the Kannada film industry, who deviated from the conventional mould, by foraying into a delicate subject that even male





Sudha Kongara, one of the very first female directors to have made it big in the Tamil cinema industry with her recent venture *Soorarai Pottru* has only raised the bar with the cash registers ringing at the box office. Sharing her thoughts about being called a female director, Sudha, in a television interview said, "I feel very insulted whenever I am termed a female director. Male directors are never addressed so, then why is this label for



CENTRE PIECE

a woman? Director is a director regardless of the gender; it's what I bring to the table that matters at the end of the day."

Contrary to Sudha Kongara's viewpoint, theatre exponent Champa Shetty says, "Patriarchy is far more pervasive than merely in the minds of people. I don't have any qualms about being designated as a female director because the idea of sexism is deeply entrenched in the society for centuries and we cannot expect this societal dogma to be nullified in a few years. Rome wasn't built in a day. Was it? Slowly but surely things are changing." Having said so, Ms.Shetty also acknowledges the fact that there have been several male colleagues who have been supportive of her work, albeit being skeptical of her capabilities initially. "Being a woman, I had to prove my ability as a director at every step of helming a film and this bothered me," says the young director who asks for her work to be recognized on the basis of her proficiency and insists that she needs no reservation as a woman. "Recognize me for my skills and don't deprive me of an equal opportunity," she asserts. Sidelining commercial potboilers, Ammachi Yemba Nenapu directed by dubbing artist turned director Champa Shetty hit the right chord with the audience making her one of the promising directors.





Priya Belliappa, recognised in international and national film festivals for her innovative style of story-telling says that it's her upbringing that instilled the confidence in her to work assertively in a world dominated by men. Venturing into the world of cinema by spinning a real-life incident based loosely on the gruesome murder of a techie, she set a milestone. With an all-women crew involved in the process, Ring Road captained by Priya showed that collective efforts by women can bring a change. "All women crew was not a deliberate attempt. It was during the pre-production process that names of some passionate people in cinema cropped up and they all happened to be women. With a neutral and unbiased perspective on the subject matter, the allwoman crew served Ring Road to the audience," she says. Although Priya thinks that the young generation of women directors' are equalizing the field, she also knows that for female directors, the rise to fame in the male-dominated industry isn't a cakewalk.

ROLLING CAMERA!!

Film audiences are more likely to appreciate the cinematography of a movie, once it becomes a blockbuster, but in the grand scheme of things, nobody notices the work of the cinematographer who created the film frame by frame. Although an important aspect of film making, cinematography, in reality, is underrated, ignored, underappreciated and is an uncomfortable paradox that the people behind the camera don't forget.

A renaissance in cinematic sensibilities began only during the last decade, with more and more women technicians finding a strong footing behind the camera as well as in front of it. Despite their best efforts, women technicians still have to battle against theme sreserved for women. For this very reason, the action-packed flick *Airlift*, shot by Priya Seth raised eyebrows and axed the notion that a woman is incapable of handling difficult action sequences or big films or physically demanding ones.

A deeply embedded psychological phenomenon in the film industry encourages us to perceive women in non-authoritative roles. This sexist attitude is reason enough that very few female practicing cinematographers are employed in the mainstream film industry today.

"It's a technical job, requires more physical strength and involves a lot of endurance and guess this is why women are not thought to fit the bill. Isn't this ironical?" questions Priya Gupte who has wheeled the camera for movies like *Brij Mohan Amar Rahe*-part of SAIFF New York 2017, *Rukh*-part of many national and international film festivals including the Stuttgart Indian Film Festival, Germany 2018, *Crossing Bridges*-which won the Indian National Award, 2014 and was part of film festivals in India and abroad, *Thiraikadal*- a part of Jaffna International Film Festival, 2018 and many more. Growing

CENTRE PIECE



up in a street opposite FTII in Pune, watching the buzz around the sanctified institution, Pooja always wanted to be a part of showbiz. "When I started, there weren't many women cinematographers, but gradually I witnessed a significant increase in the number of female technicians. There is an acknowledged sister code, where women cinematographers around the world come together and help each other in their grind, with suggestions and work references," says Pooja who believes in crafting opportunities for herself and women around her.

This segment of the film making process is physically an arduous task, but also offers a high level of creative satisfaction which is why many women gravitate toward it regardless of the bias.

Famously called the `cameraman madam' in the southern film industry, Preetha Jayaram has an eclectic experience as a DOP (Director of Photography) shooting documentaries, short films, music videos, television commercials and feature films. She believes that historically, cinema has always told women's stories, but hardly any women have told them and that is a reason enough for more women to be part of the technician fraternity. Making her debut with an Indie English movie Knock Knock, I'm Looking to Marry, she has to her credit films like Abhiyum Naanum(Tamil), Vaanam Kottatum(Tamil), Boxer(Kannada), The Fakir of Venice(Hindi), Tadka(Hindi) and many more which have not only tasted success commercially but have also been a critic's delight. In addition, she has collaborated on a documentary for NFDC (National Film Development Corporation) titled Asli Aza, which narrates the life of women freedom fighters. "Cinematography is a tough business; irrespective of gender, one has to carve a story that has to be a visual

treat technically using the lenses and lights," says Preetha.

With some successful films in her career graph, ask her if she still works twice as hard as a man to prove her ability, Preetha quickly asserts, "I did find myself wanting to prove myself more as a woman cinematographer in the first flush of my career. I was trying to be aggressive, but as years passed

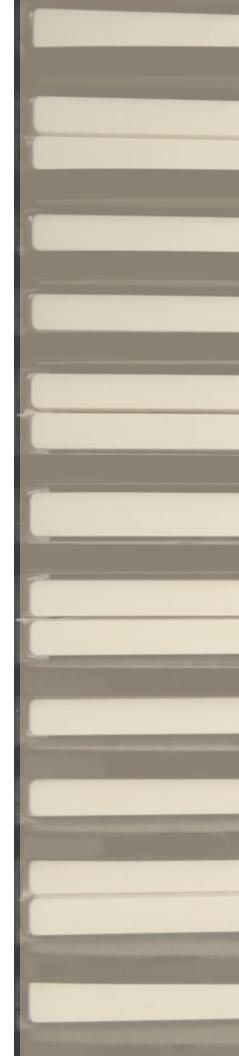
by I realized I didn't have to exhibit that nature, to be taken seriously. Once I am on board, my film becomes a showcase of my talent. If there is a challenge, then it is about getting an opportunity. How I shoot a story effectively and creatively is in my control and that talks on behalf of me, but the decision of getting me on board is beyond my control."

CENTRE PIECE



Having assisted legendary cinematographer PC Sreeram and a gold medalist from FTI, Chennai, Preetha had her share of struggles. "In the early days of my career, I wasn't even allowed near the camera. I had to learn everything theoretically first and then watch the involvements in actuality which would be exasperating at times. I learnt that cinematography is not only about shooting a film creatively but is also about people management and coordination. Many people like the light boys, gaffers, focus pullers, DITs (Digital Imaging Technicians) are a part of the team and we practically have to manage everybody, besides handling the camera. People in this system will not approach you based on your resume. They see your work first and then will contact you, but not without apprehensions, if you are a woman," states Preetha, who emphasizes the fact that opportunity should be talent-driven and not gender-based.

Women cinematographers have also joined hands to launch IWCC - Indian Women Cinematographers Collective, which serves as an excellent platform for women cinematographers to exchange and contribute their thoughts, showcase their work and inspire and support their peers. Representing the surfacing aura of women cinematographers who are etching their forte in cinema, Preetha has pursued the unorthodox sector of cinema in her quest for ingenuity and passion for storytelling.





IN PERFECT HARMONY

Try recollecting names of female music composers in India and if you fall short even before reaching 10 names, and can only remember numerous men folk; point fingers at history, because women have been under represented as compared to their male counterparts. Despite the fact that women have made their inroads into direction and camera department, music composition remains a field untapped by women. Jaddan Bai, mother of the legendary actress Nargis, has been hailed as the first-ever woman to raid the music composing arena of Indian cinema, albeit for one movie Talashe Hag in 1935. Her move inspired many women artists to try their hand at creating music with much success.

Having born into a family of musicians and being married to a famous music composer, Vani Harikrishna had only dreamt of becoming a successful playback singer. When an opportunity of composing music for a feature film knocked on her door, she had second thoughts and even contemplated over her decision even after accepting it. Since then she has been juggling between song recording and composing careers successfully. "As a singer, I was inclined



Jaddan Bai, the mother of the renowned actress Nargis, has been regarded as the first woman to enter the Indian film industry as a music composer for the film Talashe Haq.

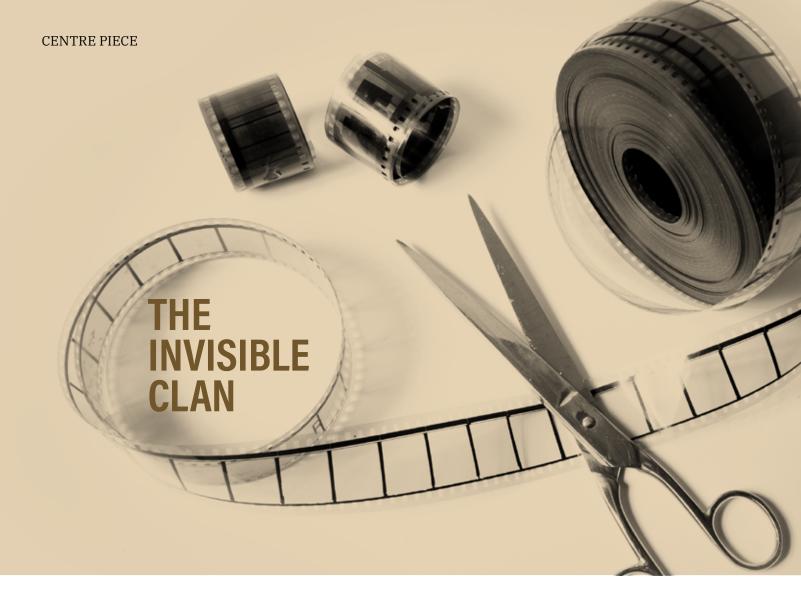
towards rendering my voice for songs and never really thought anything out of the box. Turning a music composer gave me an ambition, and I hope to achieve more. I always whiled away my free time watching television shows or the usual errands, but



now my mind is constantly on the run and I use all my free time to compose new tunes," says Vani. As the conversation veered towards the paucity of female singers and composers, she is quick to point out the disparity. "Entertainment has been a male dominated sector ever since its evolution and there seems to exist a certain kind of unwritten law about a woman being incapable of handling major responsibilities. Showbiz doesn't facilitate big breaks for women," disclosed Vani who although debuted as a playback singer in 1993, wasn't recognized by

music directors until she bagged the state award for her song *Madhuvana Karedare* in 2008. "Despite the award, I hardly got any offers for the next couple of years. Somebody has to believe in us to give us an opportunity and that waiting period to get that one break can be frustrating," states an evidently disappointed Vani who believes that there is

a dearth of fair opportunity in showbiz. Vani Harikrishna has composed music for movies like *Loosegalu, Meenakshi* and *Ring Road,* besides havingnumerous super hits and classical tracks to her credit..



By assembling shots into a structured series with skill, artistry, and practised methodology, editors create wonderful motion pictures. Many film enthusiasts are aware that Dadasaheb Phalke is known as the Father of Indian Cinema, but very few know that his wife Saraswatibai Phalke,



was of immense support and helped him accomplish his goal. And even fewer know that besides being his moral support, she was also a support professionally, since she edited the first movie of Indian cinema – Raja Harischandra. Saraswatibai Phalke gets her recognition as the first women editor of Indian cinema, in the book Lights...Camera...Action! The Life and Times of Dadasaheb Phalke, written by Rupali Bhave.

Although a challenging and intellectually arduous task in film making, cinema editing has a handful of females to its credit. To name a few: FTII graduate Renu Saluja who has documentaries, television commercials and feature films in her oeuvre; Beena Paul, predominantly working with Malayalam cinema and recipient of many State and National Awards; Sharmistha Jha who has worked for many national and regional television series; and Aarti Bajaj who has to her

credit films like Jab We Met, Black Friday, Dev D and many more. Prerna Saigal, a member of this unappreciated tribe of cinema, is also a much sought after editor in Bollywood today. With more than a decade's experience, her notable films include Tigers, directed by Danis Tanovic, Peddlers helmed by Vasan and Bombay Velvet directed by Anurag Kashyap.

"The editing department is a team of creative professionals who are also storytellers but use editing techniques as their tool to do so. Regardless of the gender, this (editing) section of film creators is often snubbed in the grand scheme of things, making it twice as daunting for women. We editors don't just mechanically put things together but use our sensibility and creativity to sew various elements of the film to create a story. Basically, it's the grammatical correction of the script," explains the Bombay Velvet editor.

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CONNOISSEURS OF SHOW-BIZ

Off late, we have seen an increasing number of women getting into film production; to bring out films with wellplotted, dexterous screenplays. With a new surge of content, women are

ushering in a paradigm shift by producing stories without any prejudices.

"The most exciting aspect of production is choosing the kind of stories I want to cover, and looking for information that suits that desire. My aspiration as a producer has always been

In partnership with her brother, she set up Clean Slate Films which produced movies like NH10, Phillauri, Pari and the recent Paatal Lok which was released and wellreceived on the OTT platform.

to create challenging and thought-provoking stories," said Anushka Sharma at a press conference.

Co-producing the remake of the Bollywood blockbuster Queen in 4 different languages, Parul Yadav

who plays the titular role in the Kannada version titled Butterfly, observes "While acting is a pretty convenient task, production of a movie is a demanding

Working business. around the schedules, permissions, arranging for the necessities, scouting for locations, the

financial aspects are not easy and require a lot of potential to multi-task. Though it drained my energy at times, I've enjoyed this whole process and now I am more

confident to produce another movie." Parul elucidates that the entertainment sector is a diverse platform and one can learn and explore as many skills as long as one is open to learning.

> Dia Mirza's journey from a beauty pageant winner

> to an actress who shot to fame with Rehna Hein Tere Dil Mein to a producer has been an inspiring one. "As an actress, I always played a role that was inspired by someone else's view, but as a producer, I have my ideas. The process of translating my

vision into reality gives me a sense of satisfaction as a human being, as well as places me in a strong role to have my say which is otherwise not possible as an actor," said the producer of movies like Love Breakups Zindagi, Bobby Jasoos and many more.

Even as women are battling societal taboos and stereotypes, in

> reality, films as influencers are steadily heralding the responsibility of echoing this shifting social trend. The new generations filmmakers, of predominantly women are becoming the harbingers of change, by crashing down the glass

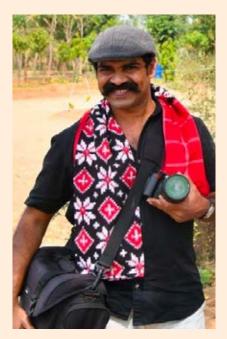
ceiling of patriarchy induced neuroses. With women in showbiz influencing the facade of Indian cinema in a reserved and well-defined manner, a lot is accomplished but a lot remains to be enriched.



oment Forever

Shubha Srikanth

In a world that harps in hyperbole, delights in the high decibel, craves for all things tantalising is a space dedicated for the understated though elemental and profound. Amidst this relentless sensory avalanche is a space called samanyashastram a space that celebrates the simple, the ordinary and the quintessential. As I talk to Kandukuri Ramesh Babu, the auteur of this counter-philosophy, I come to see that it evolved organically during the course of his life as journalist, writer and photographer. samanyashastram is as much a physical space as it is sensorial, experiential and ideological; a worldview that emerged through the temporal and spatial dimensions of his life and life experiences; a creative sensibility of recognising, valuing and celebrating 'ordinariness'.



Ordinariness, as Ramesh Babu sees it, is not something that emanates from the physical attributes of a person or their social or economic standing in society. Ordinariness is the quintessential being-ness that one experiences of oneself when stripped of all externally borrowed or imposed identities and roles. He finds this quality embodied and enduring largely in the common folk. It is a quality that is perhaps integral to every human being, but varies only in the extent to with we embrace it in our 'selves' and express without inhibition. When I press him further on how to experience or achieve this 'ordinariness', he quips, "Read my book - How to Become An Ordinary Man? To experience ordinariness you have to unlearn many, many things." I ask him for some direction and he says, "Go for a walk early in the morning. Let yourself bask in the early morning rays of the sun. Let go of your 'self'. The 'self' as you know it. Shed all the things that define you. You will gradually become oblivious of your surroundings and then of your 'self' - your 'ego'. What remains

is your ordinariness. That is your true or ordinary self," he says in a simple, matter of fact manner. He elaborates that this essential 'self' remains intact to a greater degree in the common man who is more in touch with the elements of nature. And so you find the flower weaver comfortable on the pavement beneath the sprawling green canopy; the woman balancing earthen pots of water on her curvaceous hip, delicately and gracefully; the woman drawing intricate rangoli celebrating earth; the woman who is as much adorned in jewellery as by the caress of the wind or the kiss of the sun and blush of the earth...

Ramesh Babu engaged himself in his father's photo studios in Yallareddypet, Telangana learning all aspects of photography, from shooting with complex gear, mixing chemicals, treating negatives to printing the photographs. His ambition was however to become a writer. After a Master's in English Literature, he joined a leading Telugu daily and in course of time, started writing the column 'Samanyashastram' for the Sunday magazine. "I have always been fascinated by the common folk I see around me. Both print and electronic media is swamped with news of the rich, the famous and the elite. There is limited space for the common man. Within a span of 10 years I found my area of interest," he says. A new wave was born in Telugu journalism with his column - a space reserved for articulations of and about 'unsung heroes'. Ramesh Babu also produced and hosted reality shows for the silver screen which featured only common men and women, once again breaking the mould. This nonfiction format found its way into 13 books he authored profiling the lives of hundreds of men and women from every walk of life.

Lustrous Tokens of Radiant Lives

At the centre of his creative sensibility are women - in all their earthen hues of beauty, munificence, pride, fearlessness, tolerance, grit, tranquillity and ferocity. Women lend an altogether different dimension to samanyashastra. Ramesh Babu says, "I find that women are closer to nature and are at ease with nature. They are the 'real daughters of the soil' in the intense elementality that they embody." Thus far, he has curated three women-centred photography shows. The most recent being, an 'Ode to Womanhood'.

This show originated when he was travelling the interior districts of north Telangana and adjacent districts of Maharashtra. He noticed that women in this particular district wore only the 7-yard saree in a drape he hadn't seen elsewhere. The saree fascinated him as much as the jewellery they wore, which again was native only to these districts. He quotes Sarojini Naidu who in Bangle Sellers describes bangles as: 'Lustrous Tokens of Radiant Lives': and says that the lives of these women shine through their ornaments. Jewellery are often symbolic of socio-economic status. But the jewellery worn by these women, he says, "is not merely a piece of ornament or just an extension of their physicality, but an embodiment of their spirit itself. Yet, without the physicality of the woman, it is a mere lifeless object. The jewel comes alive only when in contact with the woman's physicality."







"There is so much more nuance and dynamism in the lives of real people than that can ever be captured or created in fiction." The artist who paints boards and hoardings of the multitude of meat stalls in the marketplace is one such who makes his way into Ramesh Babu's books. "The skill and artistry of this artist is unique. Do we know anything about it?" he asks.

Amidst these activities, photography, an integral part of his growing up years, had taken a backseat. Meeting Raghu Rai (Padmashree awardee Raghunath Roy Choudary, a protégée of Henri Cartier-Bresson) changed the course of his life. Having seen the potential of his photography skills, Raghu Rai urged him, 'Life has several fruits to offer, don't pick and choose.'

Ramesh Babu resigned a well-paying job as a journalist and diverted his attention to full-time photography with renewed passion and has to his credit copious work. He was all set for his first solo exhibition, when to his chagrin he discovered that there is no space in Hyderabad to showcase his kind of art and aesthetics and his non-commercial mind set. "The best galleries in Hyderabad refused to showcase the common man because people don't want the common man in their living rooms. Instead of the regular 7-day period, they offered 2-3 days only for my exhibitions, because, my subject matter was not 'sellable' and 'profitable'. I sell my prints at a fair-price and hence the commission out of sales for the gallery owner, even at 40 per cent is rather meagre. But I have sold over 1000 prints and the gallery has invited over 5000 people," he says giving a peek into art world politics.





The City and Its People

Huge time, money and public attention is spilled on all that is larger than life. Then, are we erasing from our own consciousness the ordinary lives that the majority of us are living? These lives in which nothing extraordinary ever occurs? Spare a moment to think of the most extraordinary thing that has happened to you? How do you fare?

And thus, the need to document and celebrate us, the ordinary folk. It is from this thought that Ramesh Babu's series My City My People emerged. For him, it is not so much the physical structures that make a city; but, the flora and fauna. Especially

the ordinary folk who toil on the streets. The street is their workplace. The implements a farmer carries, is so much a part of him. The cart puller, the fruit seller, and the millions who sell their ware on the streets, the work they do is integral to them.

He has captured thousands of such moments from their lives over the past few years. "Usually, photographers represent their city with iconic land marks and architectural monuments. For me it is the people who represent a city. Animals and birds too. It's their home, after all," he claims emphatically.







To counter this elitism Ramesh Babu decided to establish and run his own gallery. Since 2016, Samanyashastram Art Gallery, located in Manikonda, has seen 13 shows and enthralled thousands of visitors. Despite his conviction and passion it's not easy running the gallery. "Photography is by itself an expensive art form - be it the camera and lenses, developing, printing technology and framing, gallery maintenance and management. "The beauty of this whole exercise," he says, "is that visitors, many of whom cannot afford a print, offer financial aid, no matter how big or small, but it covers nearly 50 percent of my expenditure for the upkeep of the gallery and for the practice of my art. They quietly drop some notes into the donation box. This is the most heartening and enriching experience for me." He is candid when he says that patronage from government and public and private institutions would go a long way in promoting and encouraging artists like him. Ramesh Babu's vision and purpose remain unadulterated with no desire for commercial gains and success.

While many artists only exoticise all that is exquisitely cultural, it is apparent that Ramesh Babu derives a deep sense of fulfilment from the mere presence of these people around him, who he says are as much 'ordinary' as he is. And so you find the protagonists of his works visiting his gallery, which is always open to them.

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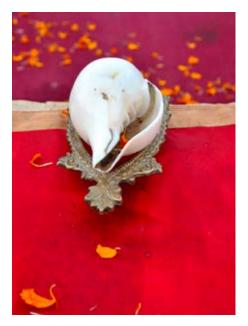
I don't need celebrities or politicians to inaugurate my shows. My art is for the common man and by the common man. 99

Ramesh Babu invites these men and women, whose lives he has captured to inaugurate his exhibitions and to release his books. They are his special guests and their presence enriches his work. He says emphatically, "I don't need celebrities or politicians to inaugurate my shows. My

art is for the common man and by the common man."

He treasures most the innumerable conversations he has with his protagonists and visitors. This unique experience cannot be bought; visitors spend nearly 4-5 hours at the gallery. They have often expressed that they feel a special connection with his captures, which somehow take them back to a part of their long-forgotten selves, or which they never knew existed. A simple photo of an earthen pot had left a celebrity visitor in tears. The photo took him back to his ancestry of pot makers. He still had childhood memories of his family being engaged in pot-making.

If this is the impression on visitors, that on his protagonists is quite different. Since none of his models are staged, coached, prepped or polished, I was curious about how his protagonists, especially the women reacted to a stranger on the street clicking their pictures. He laughs heartily and says, "Somehow I







am blessed. The women take no offence. And as soon as I show them their photo they are thrilled. Because in my photos of them, they see themselves as they had never seen or imagined themselves before." The enchanted women ask for copies which he readily gives. No wonder his protagonists are comfortable and integral in their natural environs - the peace and quiet of a man consumed in his afternoon slumber and of time coming to a standstill; the gay abandon of women chit-chatting; the camaraderie of a group of kids playing on the streets makes you wish you were a part of it.

His images remain in your mind haunting you, not in an unpleasant way, but sweetly; with the spark of life they capture, the narrative of simplicity and elementality they convey, the atmosphere they evoke go on to stay with you stirring you back to them again and again, and be rest assured, to experience novelty each time. Like reading a poem to gather new dimensions upon each revisit.

Between Life and Death

An impulsive decision to visit Kashi culminated in the 9th exhibition, 'Kashi' to commemorate the gallery's 4th anniversary. Although, photography was not the purpose of this visit, the camera is his constant companion. Upon his return from Kashi, the pandemic reared its ugly head and then came the lockdown. As he prepped for the exhibition, he wondered how relevant an exhibition of his work, which is largely a celebration of life and people, would be in the atmosphere of fear and anxiety. The obvious contradiction dissipated when he realised that life and death are but inevitable to human experience. The Kashi photographs suddenly became extremely relevant. What better way than to find solace in the images of Kashi, where funeral pyres burn alongside the invigorating Ganges? And which symbolises acceptance of life and death on the same plane? "The serene images of Kashi, I felt were most ideal for restoring the spiritual balance had been violently shaken. Kashi is a celebration for the soul since according to our dharma the soul finds liberation in this holy land," he says. His Kashi series, as he hoped, offered solace and equanimity to the thousands who visited the exhibition.

ROMANCING THE MYSTICAL CONTOURS OF DEATH VALLEY

Dr. Payel Sen & Dr. Raj Singh

"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."

-John Muir, Our National Parks

East away from the Sierras, south from Panamint and Amargosa, east and south many an uncounted mile, is the country of Lost Borders... and as far into the heart of it as a man dare go. Not the law, but the land sets the limit. Desert is the name it wears upon the maps. Void of life it neveris, however dry the air and villainous the soil.

[Mary Austin, The Land of Little Rain, 1903]

Blatant in appearance and haunting in name Death Valley(DV) is a teeming desert set between high rising snow-capped mountains. California's DV park being the hottest, driest and the lowest region in North American continent, offers itself as one of the most challenging landscapes on the globe. Often hailed to be the desert paradise, the national park unweaves some rare artistic brilliances of nature. Born of a stretching continental crust and the resulting faulting, this region features dramatic elevation changes. The

diversity of terrain also creates fascinating variances in patterns of rainfall received. Very few places on earth can boast of flaunting such striking combinations of sights and sounds, textures and patterns, colours and conditions for the human senses to remain eternally captivated in the sublime beauty. Feminist activist Edna Perkins, an early 20 Century visitor, who sought refuge in the desert for a time, described DV eloquently in the line: "We knew that the valley was sterile and dead, yet we saw it covered with a mantle of



such strange beauty that we felt it was the noblest thing we had ever imagined." The roadless wilderness of DV undoubtedly takes explorers on a breath-taking voyage of discovery. Treading along the rolling and rugged desert plains one encounters richly diverse sets of unforgettable experiences conditioned by the natural extremes and oddities. From the frosty snow that crowns

the soaring peaks in the valley to the lush wildflower meadows and small patches of oases that provide a heavenly respite from the intolerable desert heat, the land of extremes never leaves the curious yearnings of its visitors go unheard or unrewarded. Artists' Drive, an area of multicolored eroded hills resembles an artist's

stretches itself in stillness beneath the vast, cracked salt flats extending to nearly 200 square miles. Also, found here is a springfed pool of water, undrinkable because of its high salinity. The vast expanse of sand flats is embellished with surreal patterns crafted out of the intricate salt crystals. While about 550 square miles i.e. 1,425 square km of the valley's floor is below

by sediments that were eroded from the surrounding hills; in the central part of the valley the bedrock floor is buried beneath as much as 9,000 feet (2,745 metres) of sediment. The valley floor has continued to tilt and sink. Tracts of continually shifting sand dunes lie scattered across DV. The multiple shapes and forms acquired by them make the small patch of shadowed

graceful curves a visual delight. When sands slide down the steep faces of high dunes, the friction between sand grains create soothing sounds of music, a rare natural phenomenon to witness. Likewise, Racetrack Playa is home to one of DV's most enduring mysteries. Scattered across the bottom of this dry lakebed are hundreds of

rocks that leave trails on the ground when they skid. Zabriskie point showcases a picturesque maze of wildly eroded and vibrantly colored badlands. Devil's Golfcourse, another weird yet impressive marvel of nature, is a colorful landscape worn by wind and rain into beautiful jagged spires. The sculpted salt formations construct a thorn-like rugged terrain laid with highly serrated rocks.

The valley floor is notoriously noted for its extremes of temperature and aridity. The oven like heat, the frigid cold, and the driest air imaginable combine to make this one of the world's most inhabitable locations. The frighteningly high summer temperatures (often exceeding 120°F) and low humidity contribute to an exceptionally high evaporation rate. Clouds hovering on the valley under right conditions seldom melt into droplets. Extreme aridity in the region is caused as the mountains to the west rise high to arrest the rainfall. In addition to the short stretches perennial surface flow of Amargo sariver, saline ponds and marshes around the salt pan constitute the major surface water sources.



colorful palette as oxidation of natural metal deposits in the mountains radiate gorgeous shades of green, blue and purple. Being far removed from human crowds and habitation, it offers unbeatable views of the stars. The darkest night skies in the valley are a delectable treat to the reflective eyes gazing at the spectacular expanse of the Milky Way, bathing in the silvery moonbeams or tracking the showering meteors.

Geological Perplexities and Climatic Extremes

As a geological wonder, the valley is bound on the west by the Panamint Range and on the east by the Black, Funeral, and Grapevine mountains of the Amargosa Range. It is located in proximity to the undefined border between the Great Basin and the Mojave Desert and structurally forms part of the southwestern portion of the Great Basin. Portions of the valley floor, popularly known as the Badwater basin, which comprise the lowest exposed ground on earth (at 282 ft below sea level)

the sea level, as one moves westward to less than 20 miles (30 km), the gigantic Telescope Peak, (the area's highest point) appears to the vision. Indeed, an incredibly sweeping terrain in just a little space.

The formation of DV is the result of a complex geological process involving different types of fault activity at various periods besides crustal sinking and even some volcanic activity. One of the volcanic eruptions left its mark in the form of a massive crater popularly known as Coyote's Basket. One is left awestruck at the sheer size of the crater which demonstrates nature's valor. Essentially, DV is a graben, or rift valley, formed by the sinking of a tremendous expanse of rock lying between parallel uplifted, tiltedblock mountain ranges to the east and west. Block faulting, a special type of fault activity, marked by predominantly vertical movement began to create the valley about 30 million years ago. The sinking of crustal blocks formed the great trough of the valley, and other blocks were uplifted to gradually form the adjacent mountain ranges. As the valley sank, it was filled

Glimpses into Desert History

DV weaves an interesting human history. To quote a line from the Park's website, "The human stories in this vast land are as numerous as the variations of color found in the hills and valleys here."

'Death' Valley, the forbidden name, when heard for the first time, hits the ears hard enough to immediately unleash a jet of spooky feelings and spine chilling imageries. A few retreating steps back in time, however, are enough to put the dreary minds and conjecturing hearts to rest. Legend goes that the seemingly intractable landmass was christened in 1849 by a group of woeful emigrants who were lured into taking an imagined quick route to reach the newly found goldfields of California via Sierra Nevada. In their attempt to get across the harsh stretch they had to endure intense hardships and suffering for over four months. For long the towering Panamint mountain stood as an impenetrable wall. While one in the group succumbed to the prolonged struggle to get across the salt flats and pass over the Panamint range via Warm Springs canyon, other fellow travellers, weary and discouraged though, could ultimately manage a heroic escape out of the scary labyrinth. The irking remnants of the obnoxious encounter shaving taken deep roots in the minds of the survivors, as they made their way out of the valley to finally travel westward over

the mountains, a female voice seemed to have proclaimed "Goodbye, Death Valley," giving the valley its morbid name.

Prior to the incident, the unique geological terrain was scarcely known except to a bunch of native Americans called Timbisha Shoshone Indians and prospectors exploring the surrounding mountains in search of minerals. Apart from the valley floor, the Timbisha tribal homeland also encompasses the surrounding mountains. A brief scientific mention of the valley was made in 1868 by a California-based state geologist in a publication. As DV posed an obstacle to movements of pioneer settlers, the area remained seldom visited until the 1870s, when gold and silverwere discovered in the surrounding mountains. Later, in the 1880s, following the discovery and production of borax, miners began to flock the region. Settlements of miners sprouted up new townships. A prominent among them was Rhyolite, a gold-mining boomtown of 10,000 people founded in 1904, with its own stock exchange, jail, train station, electric plant, and opera. However, the existence of these mining towns was only short-lived and they wore



a deserted look with the depletion of the mines. Rhyolite still stands as a ghost town with a handful of musings of the golden days.

Borax production, notably at the Harmony Borax Works (1883–88), gave rise to the famous Twenty Mule Teams, possibly one of the best symbolic representations of the DV till date. These "big teams" pulled massive wagons hauling borax from the

Harmony Borax Works near Furnace Creek to the railhead near Mojave, a grueling 165 mile, ten day trip across primitive roads. The teams which happened to run for only six years during 1883 to 1889 left an indelible imprint on the sands of time. The successful advertising campaign promoting 20-Mule-Team Borax Soap and the longrunning radio and television program of the yesteryears are greatly cherished memories of today. A pair of the last remaining wagons in DVstill attracts touristic appreciation.

In one of his last official acts, President Herbert Hoover designated DV a national monument in February 1933. Following Roosevelt's ascendency in 1933, the

DV began to grow. The CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) crew constructed roads, erected buildings, installed water and telephone lines and so on. Additionally, to help improve visitor experience the crew built camp grounds, ranger stations, restrooms and picnic spots and other facilities. In 1994, DV received the new look of a national park; and thus transformed one of earth's least habitable spots into a sought-after tourist destination.

Life Amidst Death Valley

The inhospitable terrain of DV brims with life ranging from vibrant wildflowers and unique species to cultured past and scenic landscapes. Although nothing grows on the salted ground of the desolate desert environment, it would be erroneous to think that nothing lives

in DV. The complex ecosystem, despite its extreme conditions, claims to host several endemic species and generously extends sustenance to some of the rare and endangered ones too. Miraculously, the diverse geological terrain has, for over centuries, nestled multiple life forms, flora and fauna. Well-preserved fossilized footprints of birds, horses, camels and even mastodon-like creatures make DV a gateway to the fascinating history of the



continent. The region is currently home to 51 species of native mammals (including the iconic desert bighorn and ubiquitous coyote or jackrabbit), 307 species of birds, 36 species of reptiles, 3 species of amphibians and 5 species of native fish. The endangered Pupfish (the world's rarest fish) resides only in the waters of Devil's Holewhere water temperatures and oxygen concentrations are lethal to most other fish. While the tiny road runner is the most commonly spotted wildlife species in DV, the desert tortoise happens to be one of the longest-lived reptiles. Similarly, more than 1,000 species of plants are found here. Among these, 50 species are found nowhere else in the world.

Occasionally, the DV comes alive with colour and effervescence in early springtime when one sees the parched desert suddenly explode into a sea of gold, purple, pink or white flowers. This spectacular wildflower display, though a rare and magical sight, the blossoms of which are never totally absent even in the off years. The fleeting super blooms create everlasting memories in the minds of the park visitors.

Random Reflections

"The poetry of earth is never dead" once said John Keats. And, so is the poetic enigma of DV ceasing never. On the raw, bare and sun-baked earth of DV, one of the world's most unwelcoming locations, Mother Nature magnanimously showers her infinite creative potentials and might. Little seems to have really changed about the essence of DV since the dawn of creation. The naked and uncrowned mountains still stand tall and erect. And, the bitter waters of saline lakes ceaselessly evaporate into odd, toothed crystal formations. Yet the dusty and obscure land scapeis empowered to elevate noisy minds to a higher

state of contemplative serenity. DV, a place once feared and dismissed as barren wasteland, in its simple language of silence teaches humankind life-sustaining values of tolerance of diversity, endurance of odds and the delicate art of peaceful co-existence. The access and autonomy it offers has made it a preferred habitat choice for certain life systems despite the tough environmental conditions. The universal values and vital life lessons exalts the vast locale of DV from its recognition asan object of topographical admiration to its reverence as a sacred cradle of eternal wisdom.

This article is authored by Dr. Payel Sen, Assistant Professor, Coordinator Training, Jain (Deemed-to-be University) with inputs from Dr. Raj Singh, Vice Chancellor, Jain (Deemed-to-be University)

Reaping the Fruits of Self-Reliance

Shwetha H C

"In a gentle way, you can shake the world."

- Mahatma Gandhi

The disruption in global supply chains due to the pandemic is an aide-mémoire of the importance of self-reliance today more than ever. Nevertheless, the silver-lining is the immense opportunity for India to become Atmanirbhar or self-reliant. This vision is our country's way forward to achieve the status of global

leadership.

A vast majority of Indians continue to be engaged in agriculture, and it plays a significant role in achieving India's goal for self-reliance. However, the agricultural sector in India has been mired in a vicious loop of

land acquisition, climate change, debt and poverty for many decades, and is in need of a radical change. Hence for the nation to become self-reliant, every individual must make self-reliance a canon in their daily lives and that is what she did, precisely. Grabbing her destiny in her own hands, Kavita Misra, the agriculturist from Manvi Taluk in Raichur

farming. Lush green isn't what comes to mind when one thinks of Raichur. Synonymous with water problems and muddy terrain, Raichur concocts an image of brown swathes of land filled with dust. But, this woman changed the tag for the town.

district, created a paradigm shift in



Long before the country embraced self-reliance as a socio-economic strategy, Kavita, who hails from a small village, embodied this philosophy in her daily life. Sandalwood cultivator and a progressive farmer, she began farming nearly 15 years ago, in the early 90s, and harvests the

dream of being a corporate employee, but unfortunately it wasn't meant to be. Having been married into a conservative family, she was forced to refuse the job. As compensation, Kavita was offered eight acres of barren land off the 45 acres owned by her husband Umashankar

and was advised to take up cultivation.

Instead of becoming crestfallen, she viewed this as a golden opportunity. She sold the wedding jewellery gifted by her parents and dedicated herself to cultivating organic produce on the land that was once barren. Kavita's farm is home to several trees that include 2,500 sandalwood, 1,500 pomegranate, 800 mango, 800 teak, 600 jamun or Indian blackberry, 300 lemon, 600 guava, 150 coconut, 600 custard apple, 150 gooseberry and 150 tamarind trees. Her farm also comprises of plants like 150 drumstick, 100 curry leaf, 100 jasmine along with a few sweet limes, banana, coffee, pepper and turmeric plants.



fruits of her efforts today, as she nets at least Rs 25-30 lakhs a year. No wonder, she is an inspiration for many farmers in this region.

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every individual must make self-

reliance a canon in their daily lives

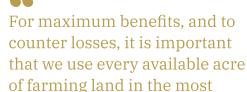
Kavita, who holds a master's degree in Psychology and a diploma in Computer Science, had been offered the job of a programmer at a multi-national company. She was looking forward to realising her



On the Path of Self Reliance

She began by planting pomegranate trees under the guidance of agriculture experts and reaped good profits but also had her share of losses. While there were times when she sold the produce for Rs. 180 per kg, there were also days when she sold it for just Rs. 10. "Once, I had invested Rs. 10 lakh but earned only Rs. 1 lakh and

that is when I understood that as farmers we don't always have control over pricing." Such hands-on-experiences ultimately spurred her to seek for more than one stream of income. She advises farmers to diversify their sources of income through multi-crop-



effective manner possible. 99

ping, which according to her is an ideal strategy to generate more profits. Elucidating further, Kavita says, to set up a farm for multi-cropping, the land must be divided into short-term, long-term and season-wise crops with yearly harvestable produce.

"For maximum benefits, and to counter losses, it is important that we use every available acre of farming land in the most effective manner possible. Animal husbandry is an option for farmers to raise their profits; likewise, poultry, beekeeping or sheep rearing can also be considered," she points out.

As a part of a multi-cropping strategy, Kavita-planted sandalwood trees, which are semi-parasitic (plants that receive nourishment from the root systems of other plants, however are also able to subsist on their own, without host plants). She picked guava, mango, custard apple, jamun, amla, tamarind, curry leaves and bhel trees as host crops, as a part of multi-cropping. Kavita's investment strategy for sandalwood and fruit-bearing trees has now grown to become a great source of income. She imported saplings of these trees, from farmers across Karnataka and Telangana.

She shares, "Sandalwood trees are like fixed deposits for farmers. Though a 10-15 year old tree yields good profit, they yield maximum benefits as they age. According to the latest pricing set by the Karnataka government, one kilo of

sandalwood costs Rs. 10,000 which means that the cost of 100kg would amount to Rs. 1 crore. Approximately 4 to 5 tonnes of sandalwood can be expected from each acre of farmland if sufficient time is invested which translates into a multi-crore income per acre." Kavita also specifies that increasing the standard of living of

farmers would improve India's economy, since they are, after all, the country's backbone.

What's inspiring about Kavita's story is that she has made it her mission to spread the message of self-reliance among farmers. The spark in her eyes cannot be missed as

she talks about women showing interest in exploring farming as a career option. "Determination, devotion, hard work with a lot of endurance is what it takes to be an agriculturalist and these are the qualities that a woman is born with and makes it a lot easier for women to take up farming. Many curious visitors come to my farm every day, many of whom are women interested in learning my farming practices I follow and I enthusiastically share my knowledge," states Kavita, whose expertise has helped many farmers procure good harvests.

Kavita's continuous efforts to introduce new and improved agricultural practices and quickly implement new technologies have played a central role in her accomplishments. "If we are to see a revolution in agriculture, farmers must stay abreast of innovations in agricultural practices and technology. The role of my technical education and training has been significant in my journey so far," she claims.

Being one of the leading sandalwood cultivators in India today, Kavita supplies saplings and seedlings throughout the country and also provides sandalwood and red sanders to a reputed soap and detergent manufacturing company in Karnataka. In her mission to help farmers, Kavita provides free seedlings, valuable suggestions and also visits farms in Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra to help others take up integrated and organic farming.

An Autonomous Farming Entity

Her farm operates more as an independent entity and this is an added reason why Kavita's journey is a brilliant example of self-reliance. In a bid to avoid usage of chemical fertilizers, Kavita developed organic fertilizers for her farm with sheep dung and cow urine, with assistance from workers on her farm. The organic fertilizer made of raw materials has worked wonders for her farm. She has earned accolades and appreciation from many organisations for her eco-friendly farming and for assisting underprivileged farmers. Hundreds of birds and snakes live on this property. and help keep rodents and insects away. Instead of using toxic chemical pesticides, she has developed a natural ecosystem in partnership with nature to drive pests away.

Interestingly, her farm is not labour-intensive despite thousands of trees and she has currently employed 12 people to look after the farm. "My farm is just like a forest, it takes care of itself. I only attempt to reduce the cost of cultivation," she discloses. She also manufactures organic fertilizers to increase productivity and reduce cost.

Security System

The 44-year-old millennial agriculturalist has harnessed cutting-edge technology to safe-keep her crops. Theft has been one of the biggest problems for sandalwood cultivators in

Honours and Accolades

Kavita has won numerous awards for her innovative integrated farming, which include,

- 'National Innovative Farmer Award' from Ministry of Agriculture Science,
- 'Honour of Excellency Award' from Ministry of Agriculture and Food Technology.
- 'Best Farmer Award' from UAS Raichur (2013);
- 'Gold Award' from ICRISAT (2014);
- 'KisanJyoti Award' from Shiva ShaktiPeeta, Ilkal (2015);
- 'National Innovative Farmer' (2016);
- 'Best Horticulture Farmer Award' from Bagalkot University,



India and she is preserving her precious sandalwood trees by embedding microchips developed by the Institute of Wood Science and Technology. This device's built-in chip sets off an alarm which can be monitored from a smartphone when someone attempts to cut down a tree. Even if someone does manage to uproot and take away a tree, it can be tracked using GPS. Apart from this, the dog squad on her farm alerts her of trespassers.

Kavita toils from 5.30 am till 8.30 pm day after day. She proudly says that her three children have imbibed her love for farming and nature. "They work more than me when they are home for holidays and contribute with creative and innovative ideas to help advance my farming methods and practices. It was their idea to sell our products on e-commerce platforms. Thanks to my kids, now farmers and the general public can get their orders home-delivered."

Kavita claims she would not have been successful had it not been for her husband's encouragement. "They say behind every successful man is a woman, but behind my success is my husband. Today, whatever I am, is because of him," she concludes.

Her farm is open to visitors on Sundays and people come to meet her from other states too. So if you are interested in learning some tricks to develop a green thumb, who could be a better teacher than Kavita?

SHAKING OFF SHACKLES ONE AFTER ANOTHER

Deserted at a young age by her mother, reunited a decade later only to be forced into marriage barely after her 18th birthday to a man she had never met, Uma Preman plucked up remarkable courage, perseverance. determination and resolve to steer through toxic relationships to change the course of her life. She became a social reformer for some, care provider and saviour for others, and an organ donor for a person she had never met before even if it meant putting her own life at risk.

In a tête-à-tête with Greeshma Sukumaran. Uma Preman - the woman of myriad shades - parent, donor and the brain behind Santhi Medical Information Centre. a charitable organisation based in Guruvavur town in Thrissur district of Kerala sheds light on her motivation to champion the cause of those saddled by life's challenges and shelter the dreams of the less privileged.





Despite the disappointments and hardships, Uma's father was always preoccupied by a noble calling—caring for the underprivileged.

Separation

In an ideal world, children live with their parents, experience a sense of belonging and significance, and in the process, learn to be capable and independent as they grow up. But in reality, even those with both their parents still living together, do not come close to this ideal situation. When parents don't live together, life can become complicated and a test of character. Growing up in Coimbatore, Uma reflects that her early childhood years were quite normal of building dreams, aspirations and hopes. Happy days were those when Uma snuggled in the warmth of her mother, Thankamani. Not for too long! Thankamani turned her back on the family, leaving Uma and her father to fend for themselves. Even then, nothing ever prepared her for a life bereft of a mother's care or the ridicule society would heap on the already distraught family. Facing flak for a fault, not of their own making, both father and daughter became near recluse unable to stem the barrage of insensitive questions hurled their way by those they once considered family and friends.

Entrapment

Uma however, focused on wriggling out of life's strangling grip, despite the shame and humiliation. She found solace

in the realisation that it was not their fault that Thankamani deserted them. She had to rise above her circumstances. and she did. Uma took it upon herself the role of mothering her sibling, then aged three. As for Balakrishnan, her father, a difficult life only turned worse after being deserted by his wife. Barely a year into his MBBS course at Chennai Medical College, he was forced to discontinue to take charge of his uncle's farm. Later, he took up petty jobs at a cloth mill to make ends meet.

Despite the disappointments and hardships, he was always preoccupied by a noble, calling- caring for the underprivileged. Uma often accompanied her father on these pursuits of compassion. "Although my father left his medical training halfway, he had a good knowledge of medicine, and whenever an opportunity presented itself, he endeavoured to alleviate the pain of those suffering in the community," remembers Uma with pride. Probably, it is these little deeds that sowed the seeds of activism and service in the young woman's psyche.

Short-lived Reunion

Perhaps driven by her innocence and yearning for the care of a mother, Uma set

out to reunite with her mother several years later. But if Uma was expecting a change in her fortunes, fate had planned otherwise. Barely out of her teens, she was shocked to find herself betrothed to her mother's best friend, a man. 22 years older than her with three failed marriages behind him. "When my mother pointed to the man and said he would be my husband, I thought she must be kidding me," recalls Uma. Thankamani had amassed huge loans and Preman had helped her tide over her financial indiscretions. Upon Uma's arrival, she found the easy way out of returning the favour, by marrying off Uma to Preman. Betrayed and heartbroken, Uma made futile attempts to get out of the skewed marriage. But the die had already been cast. She had to put up with an abusive husband who would at times bring home drunk friends and torment her as she played host. "Seven years of my marriage were the worst years of my life," she insists. She saw her world come crashing down right before her eyes. Yet Uma stuck around, not keen to follow in the footsteps of her mother as a runaway wife.

Confronting Illness

She found out that her husband was suffering from acute tuberculosis. While tending

to him, she visited various healthcare facilities. Preman left for his heavenly abode after a prolonged illness with Uma by his side. With his demise, Uma was again left alone although this time she had her threeyear-old son keeping her company. After Preman's death, Uma was confronted by people who claimed to be Preman's heirs. Intriguingly, though the marriage gave her no joy, it had a profound effect on Uma's outlook on life. And to bring the world's attention to the battles she had endured in life, Uma did not drop Preman from her name.

Bevond Grief

All through Preman's illness, the biggest challenge for Uma was access to information on his medical condition. After Preman's death, she decided to support those afflicted with pain by making available accurate information on affordable healthcare, gratis. Santhi Medical Information Centre maintains a database on various ailments and information on health facilities available in the country. "When Preman was alive, I always felt my life had become unbearable but was I ready to die, no way!" she affirms. The tinge of sadness is unmistakable in Uma's voice as she recounts her life, yet she draws her strength from a popular Tamil saying,



'Aandandu kaalam aluthu purandaluma adal varuvathillai.' Loosely translated, it means that which is lost can never be reclaimed, no matter how long you mourn for it. Since then, she has traversed the length and breadth of the country gathering information on hospitals and various facilities. This initiative took many by surprise. "A lot of people I met had their doubts about how a woman with only a Pre-university degree would manage such an enterprise," she says. "It was indeed a struggle to access information initially." But those belittling her efforts only served to strengthen her resolve to walk a path less travelled.

Dawn of an Era

Firmly pegged on a strong desire to lend a helping hand to those burdened with pain, Santhi Medical Information Centre came into existence in 1997.

The Centre is a living testimony to Uma's passion and courage. But the path to its realisation had hurdles aplenty. Apart from the large sums of money required for the

establishment of such a venture, there was the nephrologist's salary to be settled as well.

Luckily, donors came to her rescue. Slowly, things got better and she was able to mobilise funds for the Centre's activities. She travelled long distances to meet potential donors or to visit charitable institutions for support. Thus, she was able to turn the initial hiccups into tales of remarkable success.

"Initially, I was concerned about the huge financial liabilities that come with running dialysis and sought ways of lessening this burden on the patients," points out Uma. Besides providing medical information on

chronic diseases, life-crippling or threatening ailments, the Centre conducts free dialysis, facilitates heart surgeries, and mobilises funds to support those unable to afford medications while charging a nominal fee from those with adequate resources. Today, Santhi's activities

have panned out so well and continue to touch the lives of people in many ways. However, the onset of the Corona Virus (COVID-19) had adverse effects on the Centre's activities. "We are finding it difficult to run the facility," regrets Uma. "Hopefully, things will pick up again once the global pandemic is tamed."

Santhi has 18 dialysis units under its umbrella in Tamil Nadu, Lakshadweep and Bhopal.

Santhi also runs prevention care campaigns with the assistance of local panchayats and other charitable organisations to create awareness about lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and their prevention.

The Centre has secured ambulances equipped with diagnostic facilities, which traverse rural and urban areas

with doctors conducting detection tests at nominal rates. The Centre also runs a Mobile Dialysis Unit and Mobile Cardiac ICU manned by well-experienced doctors and staff to assist patients unable to visit hospitals because of their dire conditions.

Not surprising then, Santhi Medical Information Centre and Uma Preman's life are so intricately intertwined. Curious to know if Uma ever gets



Santhi Medical Information Centre has 18 dialysis units under its umbrella in Tamil Nadu, Lakshadweep and Bhopal. 99

time for anything else apart from sharing her life with the thousands of people seeking succour, this woman with grit and grace replied, "Yes, I do a lot of fishing lately as a hobby." Certainly, this is one aspect of Uma's life that is hidden from the public. Yet on any

given day, she is always neatly draped in a saree sporting an ear-to-ear smile. She insists it is important to be presentable to get people listening to you. Maybe!

Tryst with Adivasis

Another activity that the Centre is associated with is the welfare projects targeting indigenous communities residing in remote parts of the country. When I reached out to Uma before the interview, she had just returned from Attapady, a block in Kerala with a large concentration of indigenous communities. She is spearheading campaigns to uplift and empower the lives of these communities with education, sanitation, agriculture and selfsustaining projects. It saddens her that despite crores being earmarked for welfare, these communities are still fighting for their rights and barely get a share in it. She has been instrumental in establishing several cottage industries under the Santhi banner such as manufacturing napkins and palm leaf plates and thus providing sustainable livelihoods to these communities. Uma has also established APJ Abdul Kalam Residential School in Attappady that provides quality education to the Aadivasi children. Pink Toilet with sanitary napkin vending machines is another unique initiative of Uma's team in Attapady seeking to maintain menstrual hygiene. This concept has been adopted in several parts of the country, giving credence to the noble work Uma and her team has been doing.

Life Saving Gesture

Uma had touched many a life, but none like giving a new lease of life to Salil. During a visit to a hospital in Coimbatore as part of Santhi's work, she was introduced to Salil, who was undergoing treatment for renal complications. The chance meeting provided a lifeline for Salil when Uma offered to donate her kidney to alleviate his suffering. Uma donated her kidney to Salil on July 28, 1999. Salil lived with Uma's kidney for over two decades before succumbing to cancer recently.

"Salil was more than a brother to me," she says, barely able to hide her tears. "He was actively involved in all the initiatives and activities of Santhi following the surgery. Of course, he also carried a part of me in him." Salil had become Uma's co-traveller in her humanitarian journey, and the duo had embarked on a campaign to spread awareness on kidney donation.

The Nagaland project was close to Salil's heart. "Salil and I had planned to travel for the launch

of this project and now he is not with us," bemoans Uma.

For now, she will have to do it alone, but that has been the story of her life—standing alone and standing tall at every juncture of life!



THE INDIAN STATE - A REALITY CHECK OF HINTERLAND INDIA

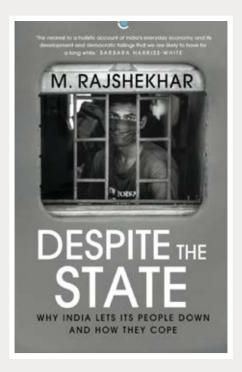
Suman Joshi

Public Policy Enthusiast

Anything you can say about India, the opposite is also true. This is a truism often heard through India's tryst with her destiny of 73 years. By most accounts, especially after the 1991 reforms, we have had reasonable success in meeting our poverty alleviation goals. Opinions mostly focus on the emergence of the great Indian middle class, the 1991 reforms and the choice and the liberation it delivered to the urban masses. This claim can certainly not be negated. But have we looked at 'development' and 'progress' through the lens of the non-urban, non-elite masses of the country?

Finally, here comes a masterful book that pushes us out of the comfort of our armchair thinking to confront realities that we have chosen not to engage with, the realities of the hinterlands, where most of India lives. M Rajshekhar's book - Despite the State, drawing from his award winning journalistic series titled 'Ear to the Ground' for the online publication scroll.in, makes an important contribution towards assessing how the country has fared, not just in urban centres but across the hinterlands too. This A+ report card of sorts gives the Indian state an F grade!

While the public domain is replete with plenty of review literature, an honest ethnographic study was missing. This one-of-its-kind book fills that gap, marrying observations and interviews along with rigorous data analysis. Travelling through far-flung corners of 6 states -- Mizoram, Odisha, TN, Punjab, Bihar and Gujarat -- for 33 months, observing and interviewing people from all socio economic groups, the author asks piercing questions on the state of governance in India. He parses each of the states through the filters of history,



economics, politics and society, while keeping the all important issue of the environment in the background, and offers a comprehensive insight into issues ailing the respective states. The book is especially instructive for those who wish to study agriculture, industry, education and public health policy of the country.

The book gets off to a great start, taking us into the lesser known North East (NE), specifically Mizoram. We travel through the history of warring tribes of Mizoram, the state's brush with colonialism and the discrimination experienced on account of the people's ethnicity and identity. Speaking to a cross-section of people across the state, and using examples of daily trade like the cable TV business, the author sketches the economic landscape dominated by small firms vying for a share in a small pie, making it unviable for all stakeholders. This feature pervades the NE, with the State playing the role of the largest economic engine. The corollary is that the state itself becomes a centre for rent seeking as illustrated by the state's policy and practice on road building beset with patronage and corruption. The causality of a weak trading sector is traced to the state's inability to build public infrastructure such as roads, resulting in elimination of any competitive advantage the state could have gained. In addition, its policy on jhum farming and pushing cash crops, poor capacity, the widespread siphoning of funds and the weakening federal links has cumulatively led to economic stagnation and what's more - the resurgence of AIDS and drug addiction, which the state seemed to have stemmed a few years ago. This economic, social and environmental disaster provides no reason to remain hopeful.

If the northeast is the story of a resource-starved region and the state's incompetence, Odisha is the story of a resource-rich state impoverished by government actions. Investigating the iron ore boom of the early 2000s, the author inquires into the reasons why it did not translate to tangible gains for the people. Policies to promote iron ore export instead of incentivising steel production gave short term gains to only a few people. The incompetence and corruption in the state's most basic function of tax collection resulted in developmental milestones to remain a distant dream.

The author connects the engineering college boom to the unaccounted money from the iron ore export trade and further throws light on the spectre of migration of unskilled workers from Odisha to the kiln manufacturing industry of the southern states. The policy of favouring capital over people pushed Odisha to dire straits. The author is critical of the people of Odisha too for their acute apathy in demanding accountability from their elected representatives. He lays it down succinctly, "People opposed expropriation far more than the under delivery of services by states." Little wonder that the people find themselves in a precarious situation!

Punjab conjures up images of verdant fields, muscular men and joie de vivre. It also has a storied past of rising from the devastating effects of partition to become the bell-weather of food security in India through the green revolution. Aided by the industrious nature of its people and helpful policies, the state also made its mark in hosiery, sport goods and a host of other manufacturing, before it fell into an insurgency-induced morass. Analysing the post-insurgency decades, the author posits two major reasons for the decadence: 1. Political extraction by

state actors 2. While extraction or rent seeking is a common phenomenon, what you see in Punjab is a takeover of the State apparatus by the people in power which the author likens to the 'intreccio', where the world of crime does not exist in an alternative domain but is deeply entangled in the state.

In Punjab, this meant a takeover of high-revenue yielding sectors such as excise, real estate and transport by one family with enormous political clout. This severely hampered tax collection, because of the tweaking or creation of policies that favoured the players at the cost of the state exchequer. The state made up for this loss of revenue by increasing taxes on electricity and water. While increasing taxes had cascading effects on business and savings, the reduction in state revenues led to poor health and education infrastructure outcomes. The author gives interesting insights into changing weather patterns and its effects on farming, the diminishing role of bureaucracy in information dissemination for the farming sector, and the inability of the state policy to gear the SMEs to the onset of the import liberalisation regime that began with the 1991 reforms. The author finally ties all threads with the phenomenon of religious deras and their increasing importance in the power struggles as well as people's everyday lives. The state that began with a lot of promise is on the cusp of disaster, yet again!

The author then travels to what is widely believed to be among the better governed states of India, Tamil Nadu. It has consistently shown better results on the Human Development Index (HDI) owing partly to the anti-caste movement that originated in the late 20 Century. The book does a reality check on this as well as other parameters. The state has seen an increase in caste atrocities with even honour killing rearing its ugly head and the traces this to the unviability of agriculture due to changing climate patterns forcing the landed classes to migrate for livelihood. The progressive educational choices of the lower castes caused heartburn amongst other communities. His assessment ends with the observation: "caste will be the last hierarchical structure that will be dismantled..." Yes, disappointing but true in many ways! He then analyses the two supposedly well-performing state sectors, health and education and discovers that while the state made initial strides in the health sector, a narrow focus on a few metrics (IMR and MMR in health and pass percentages in education) and large scale fudging of these metrics, projected nothing but falsehood. Further, unproductive populism in terms of handing out doles while providing branding opportunities for politicians, do not actually improve outcomes for the majority of the population. The author analyses the damage being caused by the politician-business nexus, especially in the sand mine industry.

Bihar has been an interesting study for economists, political scientists and sociologists, all at once. The over-the-top portrayal of vile politicians, dysfunctional government machinery in the movies pale in comparison to the reality narrated in the section on Bihar. The author traces the historical roots for its backwardness to the zamindari system and the attendant problems that policies of land redistribution could not mitigate. The stories of the communal pot that is kept boiling for political games is heart-rending. While the late 80s saw the deepening of democracy, with social classes hitherto out of the government being represented, it did not change development outcomes in health or education. In this section, the author tries to answer the question -- how do people cope in such a dysfunctional state? The answers lie in the interesting but imperfect solutions that have stood in for the inaction of the state -- strongmen who assure law and order, free markets as illustrated by coaching centre industry to fill the gap in the education sector and NGOs with their limited mandates and resources to overcome health challenges. But are they inclusive and equitable? No! Like the northeast, the small formal economy and an almost absent state made the small haats and bazaars the engines of employment. Truth sometimes is stranger than fiction is the feeling you are left with after you read the report on Bihar titled - The Absent State.

In the last section, the author travels to Gujarat, a state that is believed to have its own 'model' of development. The author finds that on the social side while the

state always had its share of communal tensions, its embrace of majoritarianism was complete after the 2002 riots. This slide has been led by the state, aided by big businesses and civil society in equal measure. The author traces it to the economics of the state. The MSME, agriculture and co operatives have seen a paradigm shift in how business is conducted. Efforts to formalise and add scale through the botched GST implementation, the government's pro business (rather than a pro market) stance with reference to polyester and the oil seeds without creating other avenues for employment has seen people staring down the barrel. This is manifested in demands for reservations being made by even forward castes. Like the deras in Punjab, ecumenical religious sects are partners in controlling the minds of the people taking Gujarat to a brink under the veneer of development.

In the end the reader is tempted to ask, But what about solutions? The author follows a "show-don't tell" style of writing pointing to all that is wrong. While he does not prescribe any specific solutions as must-dos, the book interspersed with his commentary on political parties and politicians point to the direction of electoral and societal reform combined with tackling climate change on a war footing. The concluding chapters, grounded in the author's readings of other authors, philosophers, economists and the like, clearly sets the charter for the years to come.

Climate change, economy, inequalities and social harmony will determine the future trajectory of our country. As the author says, denial, diversion, cultism and endorsement are arrows in the quiver of politicians and they will employ these to steer us away from these issues. It is said that, 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty'. This book is a must read for citizens and policy makers alike to move towards that vigilance!

Spotlight on Spotl

Nalme Nachiyar

India has a long and rich history of vernacular language theatre that emerged as a departure from classical Sanskrit plays, combining traditional folk forms with modern contemporary theatre. Especially in Karnataka, where multiple languages and dialects coexist, vernacular theatre grew beyond Kannada, a majority language, and found expression in minority languages like Tulu, Konkani, Beary and Kodava.

Seeking an alternative to classical theatre, the people in the coastal districts of Karnataka, not only nurtured local theatre but also their respective languages. Today, in the Karavali region, Tulu and Konkani languages have vernacular theatres with a mass appeal that may even surpass Kannada language theatre in popularity, if not practice. One reason for this is how deeply entrenched these plays are in the culture of Tulunadu.

Another reason is the presence of Tulu and Konkani diasporas - mostly engaged in banking and the hotel business - across the world. These communities migrated extensively to places like Mumbai and the Gulf countries in search of better jobs. Though fewer in numbers, these diasporas have remained generous patrons of its folk and ritualistic forms of deivaraadhane or Bhoota Kola, Yakshagaana and vernacular theatre



Pre-Independence Era

Tulu plays written during the preIndependence era were moralistic and
preachy addressing social evils like
dowry, alcoholism,
blind belief, says
Chandrashekar

Prof. Lakshmi
in her article,



One of Tulu theatre's most successful and longest running plays ever, in India and abroad, is Vijaykumar Kodialbail's Oriyardori Asal. The storyline, filled with ample punch dialogues and quick repartees gained it a cult following.

Anyabhaasha Rangabhoomi. The first Tulu play Janamarl written by Madhava Tingalaraya in 1933, spoke up against the practice of untouchability. Vidyada Taadi, directed by Padubidri Shivanna Hegde in 1940, espoused Gandhian values. With the freedom struggle capturing the imagination of the subcontinent, numerous plays were also written in an attempt to indirectly fan the flames of the movement and drive public opinion against the British, Chandrashekar writes. Post-Independent India saw the emergence of many playwrights who helped Tulu theatre spread its wings. Prominent among them was K N Tailor whose company Sri Ganesha Nataka Sabha, established in 1958, was among the most successful Tulu theatre



troupes. His productions including Yaan Sanyaasi Aape, Kandane Budadi, Pagetha Puge, Bisathi Babu, Yer Maltina Thappu drew audiences to vernacular theatre in Tulunadu. Along with Tailor, Dr. Sanjeeva Dandakeri, B Rama Kirodian and Vishu Kumar were also among the pioneers of early Tulu dramas and films.

In the 1980s, a new generation of troupes infused a fresh lease of life into Tulu theatre. Noteworthy among them were Vijaykumar Kodialbail's *Kala Sangama* (1983), Devdas Kapikad's *Cha Parka* (1986) and Naveen D Padil's *Lakumi*. These remain the most active and sought after repertories in the Tulu theatre scene even today.

Unlike Kannada theatre audiences, Tulu audiences associate their theatre with certain stars. People hold them in high esteem and throng to watch their performances. Actors like Arvind Bolar, Bhojaraj Vamanjoor and Naveen Padil have a fan-base that has remained loyal during their transition from the stage to screen.

Playwright-directors Kodialbail and Kapikad, too, aren't far behind. Both of them were greatly influenced by Marathi theatre's populist dramas with an emphasis on familial and societal values and their plays have defined Tulu theatre for an entire generation. They successfully



adapted comedy plays from Marathi (Sahi Re Sahi as Asal Yer and All the Best as Asal Murtilu), while localising it to Tulu culture and existing ritualistic theatre. Professional troupes in Mangalore are similar to drama companies of yore to the extent where the sole proprietorship lies with the head of the troupe, who doubles up as the playwright-director as well as the producer. The actors, too, remain committed to one team and are entirely dependent on the shows for income.

However, the performances are rarely ever ticketed, which means a production is only staged if the troupe is invited over and sponsored. The repertory also does not tour throughout the year and takes a break during the monsoon. This is because in small towns and hamlets, most shows take place outdoors, which makes putting up huge sets a risk. So the troupes, more accurately, can be termed semi-professional and seasonal.

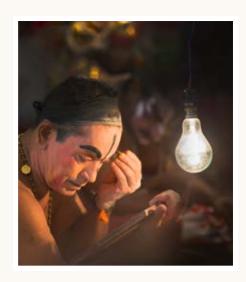
The presentation has seen some change over the years but the format of Tulu

plays has mostly been restricted to a combination of social commentary and rib-tickling comedy, and of late, divine plays. The script is never too intellectual or critical, the core purpose being entertainment, not pedantry. Comedy plays, which are generally great crowdpullers, are considered a safe bet. The script is full of memorable dialogues, humorous gags, risque jokes and witty exchanges that leave the audience in stitches, and become a part of domestic conversations and even Tulu pop culture.

The music and vocals are loud and live and while the lyrics are in Tulu, the tunes are sometimes based on popular Kannada and Hindi film songs. The stage design draws heavily from Marathi theatre. Sets are elaborate, with specific backdrops for every scene. A scene inside a house, for instance, showcases design of a two-floor residence, with rooms done to the last detail - ornate doors, wall hangings, paintings, vases, and even a working tap.

The sets, properties and costumes are realistic. Directors stick to realistic blocking, without employing any symbolism in art design or stylisation in gestures or movements. The acting, on the other hand, borders on cinematic and melodramatic, in a bid to thrill the audience.

Neither the actors nor the directors are trained in theatre schools, so their only learning ground is the stage, show after show, night after night. Most actors who



have gained popularity through Tulu plays are known for their comic timing

rather than emotional range. Tulu actors are also known for cross dressing, a tradition borrowed from Yakshagana and Marathi sangeet. This use of theatrical female impersonation is often unironic, capturing the essence of womanhood almost perfectly.

However, actors are also much less interested in polishing their craft seeing as they do it for a living every day, a privilege otherwise available only to those engaging in amateur theatre.

As a rule, amateur theatre troupes are more open to experimentation - be it with light, music, stage design, acting or movement - and choose scripts that challenge the audience and artistes. A similar trend can be noticed in Tulu theatre as well. Some exceptional examples include Udupibased Rangabhoomi's production of Dr. Chandrashekar Kambar's Jokumaraswamy translated into Tulu by Amruta Someshwar and stage adaptations of D K Chowta's original Tulu plays Pili Patti Gadas and Dharmetti Maaye directed by Suresh Anagalli and Krishnamoorthy Kavattar, respectively.



There was a time when professional Tulu repertories churned out comedies by the dozen because the home audience wanted to be delighted and those living away wanted to feel connected to their soil. The latter comprised mainly young,

working-class men from the Karavali region who had migrated to Mumbai for a living. The shows would only start post 2 am when the shutters were down and the boys could kick back and spend a good three hours tasting a slice

The market for Tulu films has only opened up of late, before which audio cassettes and video CDs were the rage. Artistes voiced entire plays for audio cassettes and CDs and plays were recorded for the sole purpose of being sold as VHS tapes and video CDs.

of home.

These Tulu cassettes and CDs offered people the chance to enjoy a few laughs in their mother tongue, when Kannada TV didn't strike a chord. These cassettes also made for wholesome

family entertainment. The diaspora, of course, was the biggest consumer of such audio-video content. Today, most of these plays are available at the tap of a button on YouTube.

One of Tulu theatre's most successful and longest running plays ever, in India and abroad, is Vijaykumar Kodialbail's *Oriyardori Asal.* The storyline, filled with ample punch dialogues and quick repartees gained it a cult following. This prompted the makers to turn it into a movie by the same name, and they managed to recreate its success splendidly on-screen. The film, released in 2011, ran for a record 175 days and was responsible for the resurgence of Tulu film industry.

It is interesting to note that while comedy dominated Tulu plays, Tulu cinema had



a more serious streak. Following the success of *Oriyardori Asal* in 2011, many more films turned to comedy but very few clicked, and among them was *Chaali Polilu* (2014).

Chaali Polilu movie producer Prakash Pandeshwar was quoted

in an interview to an online news portal saying, "There is a lot of demand for theatre actors and Tulu movies will not be successful unless they are comedy based, so we decided

that if we make a movie, it must be of this genre."

Today, Tulu plays and films are associated with a loud, over-the-top style, and if they continue to accept and conform to this image, a point of stagnation is not far. Directors are averse to experimenting with form and style, or tapping into modern day dilemmas. And while it can be reasoned that that's what the audience wants, emulating a trend over and over again can lead to saturation, if not infantalising, of the audience.

To break this vicious cycle, Tulu theatre, and by extension films, will have to start taking risks if they hope to grow vernacular theatre into something that endures beyond the confines of Tulu Nadu and its diaspora and challenge the audience.

Who's Afraid of Satyajit Ray?

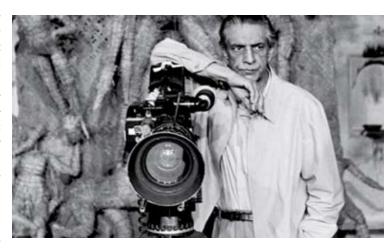
Roshan Nair

Teacher and Journalist

Ray's central theme through his career may be more topical for us than it was for his contemporary audience, so a re-evaluation is in order.

Satyajit Ray is supposed to have watched 99 films in 1950 in London during an official visit as an advertiser. One film that had a profound impact on him was Vittorio De Sica's 'Bicycle Thieves', made in 1948. The film was part of amovement that began in cinema after World War II, when filmmakers, who suffered under Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime, sought to move away from the cinematic mainstream and make "realistic" stories about working-class and

dispossessed people. The film features a family who pawns their belongings to buy a cycle that the father of the family would need for work; but, the family is worse off than before when the cycle gets stolen. Ray would later say in interviews that he left the screening of 'Bicycle Thieves' determined to become a filmmaker. Since then, scholars have tended to overestimate the film's impact on Ray, despite the fact that he has traced his influences to many others, especially John Ford and Jean Renoir. The tag of Neorealist got stuck to Ray even though many of his films, self-admittedly, are



about opulence. This disproportionately assigned influence therefore merits a reevaluation of the auteur's work; and, a search for what may have concerned the filmmaker in his career.

A reason Neorealism is seen to have such a commanding influence over Ray may be that his most famous work, The Apu Trilogy, works with the themes of poverty and wonder experienced by a child, much like in 'Bicycle Thieves'. In Ray's case, the themes come from the Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay novels that Ray was adapting for the films. Being the scion

of an elite Bengali family, he had never experienced poverty first-hand. Even rural life was a novelty till his late twenties. "Before I made my first film 'Pather Panchali', I had only a superficial knowledge of what life in a Bengali village was like," Ray told filmmaker B D Darga in a 1974 documentary. An inquiry into the filmmaker's central concerns can start with the German-American film

critic Gideon Bachmann, who was among the first to broach this topic. He sat down with Ray for an interview at the 1966 Berlin International Film Festival, where Ray's 'Nayak' (1966) was being screened. Bachmann tells Ray, "Your central theme, as far as I can see it, is the conflict between the old and the new. I think that you have, in many ways, for the non-Indian observer, revealed the problems that exist in adjusting to the technical society are the same all over the world...I feel very strongly about it, and among the people who have made this dialectic most clear in their work is you."



Ray confirms Bachmann's speculation. "When I started out...I didn't have this very ambitious idea in mind of doing anything beyond making films which pleased me and which I hoped eventually will please people. I didn't have an intention of reforming ... (but) expressing myself and enjoying the process of making it, and eventually, of course, hoping that people would enjoy...as I look back on what I've done, I feel you may be right, that the dominant theme has been the conflict between the old and the new... You have to accept the facts of progress because they affect your lives ..."

If Ray had not started exploring the theme that was to dominate his work in 'Pather Panchali', it begs the question: at what point did Ray, then, find his voice? If we fast forward about a decade from 'Pather Panchali', the theme is quite apparent. In 'Mahanagar' (1963), there is an open conversation about conservatism, while in 'Charulatha' (1964), the characters are keenly awaiting Liberal Party Prime Minister William Gladstone's victory in the British general elections, which would turn out to be crucial for India's modernisation. So, the first instances of Ray chancing upon his favourite theme can be traced to the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The germ of the idea appears in 'Jalsaghar' (1958). The film features Chhabbi Biswas as Bishwambhar Roy, an ailing royal whose best years are behind him. But even so, he throws caution to the wind and pawns the last box of his wife's jewels. His fall parallels the rise of Mahim Ganguly, a nouveau riche businessman who has no pedigree to claim. We can tell, through Ray's contrast of Roy's horse and elephant with Ganguly's car and lorry that the world order is changing. Ganguly is keen on improving his status with music room sessions of the sort Roy used to host, even though their nuances escape him, leaving him evidently bored.

REVIEW - MOVIE

Ray is too sophisticated an artiste to say that either tradition or modernity should unquestioningly be accepted. There are skeletons in both closets. Roy's heightened sense of superiority is as exasperating as Ganguly's desperation.

But there is a sense of the inevitable. We can tell from the rapid industrialisation that India had begun to witness in the 20 Century that Roy's way of life will be eclipsed by Ganguly's. Ray adapted the short story 'Jalsaghar' (1938) by Tarashankar Banerjee, set in the 1920s, which marked the onset of industrialisation in India. Ray

would have had even more reason to make this movie in 1958, when Nehru's industry-leaning second five-year-plan was in action.

The exploration that Ray began with 'Jalsaghar' reaches fruition in 'Devi' (1960). The old and the new are in open conflict, and tradition, which the filmmaker had treated with benevolence in 'Jalsaghar', is held accountable for its sins here. Devi, set in the 19 Century, revolves around Kalikinkar Choudhuri, a zamindar and patriarch, who lives in his old mansion with two sons, their wives and a grandchild from his elder son. The younger son, Umaprasad, is pursuing a degree in Calcutta, the first in his lineage to do so. His wife Dayamoyee is a favourite to both the patriarch and the grandchild, Khoka. One day, Choudhuri, a man "educated in the old ways" and a life-long devotee of Kali, has a dream which he interprets to mean that Daya is an incarnation of the goddess. Following his lead, the entire village and even people from afar turn her into a living deity.

A man well-read in the Upanishads, Ray was not averse to tradition in general, but towards tradition that had regressed into an unquestioned set of customs and rituals. Even while questioning the old ways, Ray is not unfair to people who have lived their entire lives under a different set of beliefs. Ray paints the patriarch as both dangerous and deserving of sympathy.

Umaprasad approaches a lawyer for help to rescue Daya from her predicament, and Ray's worldview is likely expressed

> through the lawyer, who tells Umaprasad of a fight he had with Uma's father many years ago. The father had resisted his attempt to change his faith, and he had fought back. "Mind you, he wasn't a bad man. But his beliefs and mine always clashed. I had to fight. And fighting these kinds of beliefs means you'll get hurt. But I wouldn't have had any peace of mind if I hadn't fought. What your mind and heart reject, what your senses refuse to accept as the truth, that is...", the lawyer says before the monologue breaks off.

> In Mahanagar (1963), Arati, played by the beautiful Madhabi Mukherjee in the first of her three collaborations with Ray, takes up a job after realising her husband Subrata's salary cannot make ends meet, upsetting her fatherin-law to whom she was

as beloved as Daya was to Choudhuri. Subrata, a man of moderate beliefs, is somewhat disconcerted, but fights for her. Although, almost everyone in her family is unhappy, she achieves professional success.

There is also another aspect of conservatism that Ray puts on trial in the film. Tribalism is an essential feature of conservative culture, and by its logic, the preference is always to one of your own. Subrata is relieved that Arati's boss is someone she calls, "Mr. Mukherjee", a Bengali. Mr. Mukherjee himself prefers the Bengali saleswomen in his office and is clearly not fond of Edith, the one Anglo-Indian saleswoman. When Subrata loses his job, Mukherjee offers him one because their ancestors hail from the same village in Bengal, but on that



With 'Devi', Ray is commenting on how conservatism, even in its benign form, can have disastrous consequences if we forsake skepticism. What is striking and ironical about the film is not that one powerful man is delusional, but that scores of people take him at face value. This lack of skepticism takes hold of Daya too. She stops herself from running away with her husband, despite the fact that the worship has become an obvious source of torture for her, because she begins to believe that she may unwittingly put Uma's life in danger for an act of desecration. A chance recovery of a boy from illness in Daya's presence is considered proof enough for the incarnation theory. But Ray shows us that such pseudo-scientific proof will not stack up well against the truth. Science lands a fatal blow when Khoka, whom a physician refuses to treat because it may be disrespectful to the Devi, dies in her presence.

very day, Arati resigns protesting Edith's unfair termination after an allegation of immoral behaviour.

Ray faced much criticism in the 1960s, which saw the rise of a turbulent political era in Bengal, mostly from people much further to his Left. However, Ray's politics is very poignant today. Of course, the zamindari rajbadi of 'Jalsaghar' and the delusions Bishwambar Roy were subject to, may have gone extinct, but tribalism remains as much a threat today as it was in 1963. As we move towards the end of Ray's career, the conservatism he is interested in is of a more extreme variety. Pedigree and privilege in 'Jalsaghar', the old-world education in 'Devi' and the tribalism in 'Mahanagar' are sets of beliefs their exponents grew up with; they were trying to retain the world of their fathers and grandfathers. The conservatism explored in 'Ghare Baire' (1984) is one that does not have any root in tradition. Sandip, the revolutionary in 'Ghare Baire', an adaptation of the Rabindranath Tagore novel of the same name, swears by his slogan 'Vande Mataram'. He uses it to bring women into his cadre, get money from the wealthy and even exploit the poor.

The slogan is one that strikes a deeply emotional cord for Indians today, but in the era that Ray and Tagore depict, it is a fairly new coinage. It was taken from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel 'Anand Math' (1882), when to think of the nation as the mother, and for that matter, to think of modern India as one homogenous unit. and not a group of disparate kingdoms connected by imperialism, was new idea. And within a short period of time since then, we began believing that the concept of India as a nation state always existed. This creation of tradition, or 'Nationalism' as it has been called since the time of the French Revolution, need not be an innocuous unifier of people, but can be used, as done by Sandip, for political and financial ambitions.

Near the fag end of his career, Ray decided to adapt Henrik Ibsen's play 'Enemy of the People', with a local flavour. 'Ganashatru'



(1990) is one of Ray's weakest films, and has, justifiably, received very little attention from scholars. Unexpectedly from a filmmaker often called one of the greatest in the world, 'Ganashatru' simply looks like a play that was shot with a camera. This fall in quality is a let-down, but it is a successful extension of Ray's favourite theme. Perhaps more than his other films, it has a direct bearing on those of us living in 2021.

Due to an improper piping system, drainage water flows into the temple pond in the village. The water is used for preparing the 'charanamritha', resulting in a large number of people contracting jaundice. Dr. Ashoke Gupta writes in the local newspaper that the temple must temporarily be closed down, failing which the town will face an endemic. The owner of the temple creates a hue and cry arguing that Tulsi leaves, which are added to the 'charanamritha', cleanses all impurities. The municipal commissioner, who is Ashoke's brother, does not disagree with the doctor, but sets out to discredit him

anyway because any news of the endemic will ruin the town's reputation, and its largely tourist economy. He convinces the general public that Dr. Gupta is an 'enemy of the people'- the eponymous 'Ganashatru' - and that his words can only harm the people. Ray may have been speaking to a Bengali audience in the late 80s, but the nation may today find it more relevant than they did. Looking beyond The Apu Trilogy, we see that Ray was providing a space, in his films, for ideas to battle themselves out; and the battle between tradition and modernity is one that we are living out every day. No Indian filmmaker has been lauded as much as Ray, either nationally or internationally. Yet, we have as a nation underestimated his importance for our times. While art is a beacon of light to depict realities as they are, it is not the function of an artist to offer solutions. Solutions must be sought by us as individuals and as communities. But art certainly serves as a reminder of deep-rooted crevices and unresolved conflicts.



INDIAN SKIES OPENING UP TO LOCATION OF THE SKIES OPENING UP TO LOC

Gaurav Sharma

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), applications for agricultural drones have skyrocketed resulting in a market currently valued at more than 32 billion dollars. With population projected to exceed nine billion by year 2050, agricultural consumption will concurrently increase. Technological innovation is imperative to enhance production capability, quality yields and, to achieve sustainability. Two decades into the 21 Century and Drone Technology is paoised to revolutionize governance and business verticals. agricultural productivity and practices like never before.

Sectors such as agriculture, inspection and monitoring, surveillance and disaster management, geography planning and development have embraced autonomous aerial flying vehicles or drone technology and deployed drone analytics to achieve transformative decision making practices. High-tech drones have led to the emergence of multiple applications and are increasing operational efficiency in processes such as farming, monitoring sensitive and dangerous areas, livestock management, city mapping and land-use, traffic management and wildlife monitoring. An added advantage is that drones can penetrate areas and situations that humans may not be able to drones

remain operational in inclement weather conditions, natural disaster sites, tough and inaccessible terrain, and other circumstances of logistical challenge.

Most recently, Airbus signed a MoU with Flytech Aviation Academy, a leading Indian aviation training academy, to explore collaboration opportunities in Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) training during the Aero India, 2021 Defense and Aerospace show bringing in a wealth of experience in UAV training, courseware development, safety and quality standards.

Government agencies, business establishments and farming communities are keen on including drone technology into their arsenal. India is at the forefront in devising policies, guidelines, license and training centres for procurement and operations of drone technology and training. The challenges in India are mostly related to security, monitoring, identification and payload capacity of drones in Indian skies. The government is also wary after intelligence reports of belligerent neighbours using drones to drop arms and ammunition into Indian territory at the borders, and drug proliferation.

Ariel Spraying of Pesticides

India has the distinction of being the first to have aerially sprayed agrochemicals through drones. Last year, when swarms of locusts (Schistocerca gregaria) hit the national capital and surrounding areas from April to July the government conditionally allowed drone deployment to tackle the onslaught. This incident served as a wake-up call and many state governments issued e-tenders to include drones in aerial spraying functions.



Pandemic Control

As much as the pandemic resulted in loss of life and property, it propelled us to innovate in our quest for ways and means to contain its cascading effects. The Drone technology came in as a perfect solution to monitor, assess and reign in the virus-spread through valuable data collection and critical decision making. Drones undertook three primary tasks – surveillance, sanitization and monitoring, thus, minimizing the risk of infection especially among front-line personnel. During the initial days of the lockdown, drones were used extensively across India:

Jammu and Kashmir administration used drones to announce restrictions on movement of people in Srinagar's busy Lal Chowk.

Delhi Police used drones to monitor people's movements in Ghazipur Mandi.

Gujarat Police used 200 drones across the state to monitor people's movements.

Municipal authorities in Madurai used drones for disinfecting areas near the COVID-19 wing of the city hospital.

Municipal Corporation of Warangal in the state of Telangana deployed drones for surveillance and spraying disinfectants in the city.

Efficient Governance

Besides, disaster management, Drones are being used extensively in the country to provide quality governance. Survey of India, with approval from DGCA, used drones in June 2020 for high-definition aerial mapping of villages as part of the Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas (SVAMITVA) scheme of Ministry of Panchayati Raj. The target is to map India's over 6.6 lakh villages by Dec 2024. The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) was granted conditional exemption by MoCA and DGCA for the deployment of Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) to carry out research and inspection activities at Vindhyachal Super

Thermal Power Station, Madhya Pradesh, Gadarwara Super Thermal Power Plant, Madhya Pradesh, and Sipat Super Thermal Power Project, Chhattisgarh using drones. Drones will be useful for terrain mapping, stockpile volumetric analysis, aerial inspections and other applications at the three NTPC sites.

The Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company (MSETCL) is using drones for inspection of power lines and transmission towers as well as for aerial surveillance and inspection of Extra High Voltage (EHV) lines and towers in remote areas of the state.

Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System is all set to use Drones to gather geographical data to develop a webbased Geographical Information System (GIS) platform for the project.

Farmer's Best Friend

Agriculture is one of the biggest sectors that is embracing drone technology. With the rapid decline in the cost of Agricultural Drones the worldover, they have become viable for Indian farmers, considering that 95 % of Indian farmers own farmlands that are between 1 acre and 5 acres and most farmers are small and marginalized. The agricultural drone market is expected to grow over 38% in the coming years. Equipped with such technology as propulsion systems, infrared cameras, GPS and navigation systems, programmable controllers, and automated flight planning, agricultural drones offer a host of benefits for farmers.

Applications of drones in agriculture with global demands rising and food production under duress, demand for high-resistant crop and the pressure to minimise crop loss is high. Implementation of drones integrating multiple technologies such as remote sensing, robotics and artificial intelligence are empowering and enabling the next agriculture revolution.

India has taken the first of many steps towards ratifying drone-based farming, with two government agencies, the Directorate of Plant Protection,



The Way Forward

There is a dire need for India to devise a regulatory framework to govern drone usage in critical sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and essential services. Delays in rolling out 'no permission, no takeoff' (NPNT) support to the Digital Sky platform, which itself is in the pipeline has impacted and delayed regulation.

The draft drone rule book proposes to regulate drones manufacturing components, which according to Drone Federation of India (DFI) is detrimental to the progress of the drone industry. Nano drones which do not fly beyond visual line of sight, should be freed from strict restrictions.

Considering that Drones are opening up a new occupational sector, a robust and interdependent ecosystem to generate skilled and certified drone operators, pilots and drone hardware professionals is necessary. For example, the current authorized number of drone pilots in India is hardly in two digits. The advent of 15 certified drone training schools and the third-party drone certification scheme, the legalized drone pilots in the country is set to increase. The focus on multi-skilled drone pilots, involving high-altitude flying and beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) flying is the need of the hour.

The Indian drone industry would flourish, once drone usage in commercial spaces is opened up, especially in for food delivery and health care services. Efforts are underway by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and DGCA.

To encourage fast adoption of drone technology rules must be relaxed in green zone areas with limited or sparse population.





Karnataka is one of the pioneering states in India, having used drones from 2018 and integrated drone usage as part of projects in agriculture, urban development, governance and policing.

The Forest Department has deployed drone cameras at Male Mahadeshwara Hills Wildlife Sanctuary in Hanur taluk, Chamarajanagar district, to keep a watch on miscreants and prevent poaching. Drones will also capture forest fires and detect miscreants in four to five km range.

Ernment used drones to find stranded people in flood affected areas in 2018. The drones scanned a wide area and recorded footage of stranded victims. The footage was then shared with district officials and other agencies involved in rescue work. Choppers were then sent to the area to rescue people.

They were used in Raichur and Uttara Kannada to check people congregating and violating lockdown regulations last year during the pandemic. They were used as part of the sanitation drive in Bengaluru by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP).

Karnataka accounts for 65% of India's defense and aerospace exports, the state government is thus aiming to sharpen its aerospace policy and focus

on domestic production. The drone industry could benefit as the Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) – the Indian state-owned aerospace and defense company, is headquartered in Bangalore and is working on projects such as drone deliveries to high altitude areas for soldiers of the Indian armed forces, deep-penetration deployments of drones in border areas and long duration high altitude surveillance. Karnataka government's new aerospace policy could be a stepping stone in supporting the Drone eco-system in the state.

Drones are thus one of the most advanced technology innovations that are small, compact, versatile, and agile. As part of the emerging technologies that combine multiple technology interfaces in hardware and software, the precision, autonomous operability, use and applicability of drone technology is just beginning to explode human imagination.

The use of drones will continue to increase and impact our lives to help save more lives, save the planet and inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs and technologists. As more and more young minds get excited and get involved in building innovative solutions for the new world, the role and use of drones would leave us wanting for more and find inspiring solutions.

QUICK FACTS

DGCA has created a Drone Directorate, a dedicated body under the Civil Aviation Ministry to promote the drones ecosystem.

India is all set to establish its very own drone highway corridor in the sky, thanks to the initiatives of the second campus of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Challakere, Chitradurga district, located 230 km from Bengaluru. These highways are to be equipped with drone ports and will be exclusively used for testing and flying both military and commercial drones. Around 1373 acres of land has been earmarked for the corridor.

The Centre-run flight training institute, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Uran Akademi (IGRUA) offers drone pilot training courses, a first of its kind initiative by a government body in India. Besides, over 10 aviation academies approved by the DGCA are functional in India.

Drone pilots in India need a license to operate, which costs ₹25,000 and is valid for 5 years. A pilot is eligible onaly after completing a 35-hour training program. The DGCA has approved a third-party drone certification scheme in partnership with TQ Cert Services Pvt. Ltd. of Tata Group to fast-track drone certification in the country.

There are 32 green zones in India. Green zones are uncontrolled airspaces where Air Traffic Control (ATC) service is not necessary. Drones compliant with the "no permission, no takeoff" (NPNT) protocol are allowed to fly in these airspaces.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDAI) is streamlining drone insurance, even as a few banks are offering drone insurance plans.

The author is a Policy Advisor to the 'Saubika Consortium', a Drone Consortia. Founder of the Indo-Swiss Future Leaders Forum

Though cricket rules the roost among the youth of India, many youngsters are exploring and excelling in other sports such as skating, chess, football, table tennis, shooting among others. For the youth of the country, sports is no longer a mere pass time or a break-time from studies, which is considered the mainstay. Children and parents today are open to considering professional sports as a career option, worth pursuing. Educational institutions are also encouraging and supporting students to pursue sports, even though entering

competitive sports often means prolonged absence from classes. Children are also breaking the myth that involvement in sports would invariably mean poor grades in school. They are smart enough and driven enough to multi-task and tread in more than one avenue that opens up for them.

Sridhar Prasad speaks to a few such stars-in-the-making who are pursuing sports with the dedication and hard work that would make for a champion.





66

Jahnavi Srinag

Despite cricket being the reigning game in the country, Jahnavi Srinag who began roller skating at the tender age of four, has been pursuing the sport with gusto. This 11th grader is grateful to her parents who inspired her to take up the sport.

While still in the 4th grade, she discovered her passion for the sport and started aiming higher and won trophies at the inter-club level and several other competitions.

The most important quality for a sportsperson apart

from talent and mastery over technique is the ability to handle pressure. "Competition at championships is intense, more so at the zonal and district levels. I take one game at a time and I am focused on improving my skills Winning at the interclub competition is all about teamwork and co-ordination," she says. Like any other kid her age she does feel jittery before a race. It all changes the moment she enters the rink. "But my confidence in my wheels takes over. It is always a tough fight and every competitor I have played

Being in the here and now is very important. I take one game at a time. I believe that the 'comeback' is always stronger than the setback 99

> against in so far is exceptionally fast. It's a few seconds which seal the game and that makes it so special. The race doesn't end till the last second," she says about the adrenalin rush every sports person experiences and enjoys.

Not every competition works in one's favour, therefore, handling setbacks becomes an integral part of sportsmanship. Jahnavi spells maturity when she says, "Being in the here and now is very important. I take one game at a time. I believe that the 'comeback' is always stronger than the setback'. Every defeat is disheartening but it has always helped me better myself."

An interesting aspect I noticed among the kids I talked to is that they realise early on that studies cannot be neglected and they build a mind-set to go the extra mile to achieve good grades along as well.

Asked how she manages to balance schoolwork and her training, Jahnavi talks about the importance of time-management. She completes her homework while still at school during breaks and the few minutes between classes, to make time for her sport. But with the lockdown and online classes that have been the norm over the past year, she has more time on hand for practice in her house compound.

Jahnavi's dream is to become an automobile engineer and build race cars. "I like speed and believe that skating techniques can be applied to enhance the speed and stability of cars," she says with excitement in her voice, as she gears up for her JEE exam with equal zeal.

Like most youth of her age, she finds Virat Kohli inspirational. "He never gives up and is a self-made champion. My grandfather, who has won nearly 500 trophies in statelevel table tennis (and still continues to win them) is another inspiration," she adds.

Besides roller skating, Jahnavi is a gifted painter and explores new art forms. She plays the keyboard and mixes music too!

"I have a long way to go, and I am excited for what the future holds," she beams with enthusiasm. She signs off with gratitude towards her coach and her team members who are her strength.

Ayush Yajaman

A sprightly lad, with a calm demeanour and an endearing smile. This seventh-grader whizz kid is a chess champion among other things. Twelve-year-old Ayush J Yajman of Airaa Academy, is also a flutist, game developer and white hat hacker. He enjoys cricket and football as well, which gives him physical exercise, a chance to interact with friends and be outdoors. This is perhaps a necessary antidote to chess, which is a game highly inwards and 'mentally challenging'.

Ayush recounts that on his fourth birthday, a friend gifted him with the king of all board games--a chess set. "Back then, I did not have the faintest idea of how to play the game. But I was attracted to it and I would persuade my father to teach me to play after he returned from work," he recalls.

In just four months, he beat his father at chess and from then on, his 'journey' began. Since then, he has probably won all the chess games he played with his dad. At this point, his father Jayanth was convinced that his son had what it takes to be a chess player – strong critical thinking skills and sharp memory and admitted him to a chess academy called Chess Shoots. He trained hard at the game and contested in various tournaments.

His budding 'chess' skills truly ripened at the tender age of four and half years. He made his first Under-7 state appearance at the age of five and finished 19th. Ayush rapidly graduated to blindfold chess, a form of chess wherein the players do not see the positions of the pieces and do not touch them. This forces players to maintain a mental model of the positions of the pieces. Moves are communicated via a recognized chess notation.

"I can remember the squares and the pieces. This comes with practice. You have to master a particularly important technique if you want to play blindfold chess. You must remember the middle

squares of the board -- that are e4, d4, e5 and d5. This helps you with a clear understanding of the position of your pieces and your opponent's pieces," says Ayush.



With these accolades in his bag, Ayush was all set and qualified to play a tournament abroad. He represented India at the Under-8 Asian Championship in 2015 held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

"I was playing really well (considering that it was an Asian Championship) until the

fifth round. I was second on the leader board until the fifth round. However, when I was playing against the top seed, I was piece up and winning but made a trivial mistake and lost. The fact that I had lost, upset me so much that it influenced my remaining games, and I didn't finish as well as I had hoped," he remembers. Asked how it feels to be a champion chess player. Ayush is both blunt and modest about it. "I am nowhere close to being a champion. If you had asked the same question to one of the best players in the world, Magnus Carlsen, even he would say that he is no champion. When a person like Carlsen himself does not think that he is a champion, then I am not even close to calling myself a champion." Having said that, he always believes in giving 100%. He says that his greatest learning is that, talent alone is not enough to achieve one's goals; hard work and perseverance play a greater role.

Discipline and time management are two qualities he vouches for. "Thanks to my



parents and my chess coach Jayaram Ramanna sir from Chess Shoots, I have learnt the importance of discipline and time management. This has had a profound effect on my day-to-day life, especially because I am juggling between academics, chess, music and coding."

His coach Jayaram Ramanna observes that Ayush is gifted with intense concentration and admires his exemplary work ethic. "Besides having the right balance of defence and aggression on the board, he is an exceptional end game player," he says.

Ayush has been featured under the Future Grandmasters of Karnataka.

For a 14-year old, he is rather candid and speaks his mind out. This comes across, when pat comes his reply, as I quiz him about his musical interest. "Honestly, I had no interest whatsoever in music. But my mom wanted me to learn flute. So, I started attending flute classes and to my surprise, I suddenly started liking music!"

Vrishin and Shreehaan

While every other Indian kid goes gaga over cricket, few are willing to undergo the rigor and hardship associated with cricket. Idols are aplenty - be it Tendulkar, Dhoni or Kohli. But few can muster the immense stamina and mental resilience to get themselves up there.

However, brothers Vrishin Arinjai [17 years] and Shreehaan Arinjai [12 years], students at JAIN are so passionate that they are making the cut at a noticeably young age thereby holding promise for a future in the sport.

"Being a champion is a good feeling, but it also brings responsibility with it. It instills confidence on and off the field. Sometimes it builds pressure, but I guess that brings the best out of me. Personally, I like the challenges that come along with being a champion, and I never give up," says Vrishin. His younger brother Shreehaan's



expression is similar- "Being a champion is a joyous feeling for me. I feel happy about my efforts and my parents', coach's, and brother's efforts also. I learn from every game and try to be better each day."

Vrishin took to cricket just like every other Indian kid. He was attracted to cricket

naturally and played it like any other game. He hadn't taken cricket seriously or professionally until he turned 12. That was when he started training and practising regularly, which eventually lead him to playing competitive cricket at school and club levels.

Meanwhile Shreehaan recounts that he grew up following his brother's passion and love for the game and that got him into it. "I am lucky that I am left-handed which is advantageous for me," he says.

Describing his experiences, Vrishin says: "It was an inter- school 1st division 2-day match and we scored 190 odd runs where I managed to get 34 runs. While the opposite team scored 71 runs for 3 wickets, I managed to get one wicket at the end of day's play. The challenge was to restrict them and qualify to super league.

Being a champion is a good feeling, but it also brings responsibility with it. It instills confidence on and off the field. Sometimes it builds pressure, but I guess that brings the best out of me.

The next day I ended up taking the rest of the 8 wickets, winning the game for my team." Another instance was where he was captaining his club team during an interclub tournament and it was the last league

against a tough team. He scored the much needed century and the team ended up winning the game and eventually reached the finals in the tournament. This was truly a turning point in his aspiration to become a super league cricketer.

For Shreehaan, it was a group stage match where he was the captain. His team was batting first, and he scored 60 plus runs. When they landed in a difficult situation while bowling, he managed to get 6 wickets for which he was awarded the 'man of the match'.

Quizzed about how he plans to accommodate his training with studies, Vrishin says that he plans ahead for the week. Planning helps him dedicate the right amount of time for schoolwork and for training, "Sometimes, one must do some extra bit of hard work and study when everyone else is having fun. But it is worth it when I get good marks despite not attending classes for almost 7 to 9 months in a year. In time, I have learnt to balance my studies and sport," he says.

Shreehaan has his own rule. "I dedicate a minimum one and a half hour daily for studies and revise whatever was taught at school every day. Over the weekend, I revise the lessons of the week," he says This plan makes it easy for him to focus on his cricket even during exams, "When you study what you have learnt in school that day itself, learning becomes easy," he believes.

Vrishin's motto in life is to enjoy his game and never give up. "Sometimes things happen in my favour; sometimes not; but the fact is, if I can't change the outcome, I can definitely stay strong mentally and overcome disappointment and that helps me to keep going," he says.

Shreehaan's motto is not different. He says: "I want to be happy and keep my family happy. I do not worry about things beyond my control and give my 100 % to whatever I am doing."



Asked about their aspirations when they grow up Vrishin says he wants to be a professional cricketer and represent India in cricket, while playing for the country in all three formats. "I also love designing products mainly sneakers and apparel so that is an alternative career I can opt for," quickly adds Vrishin.

Influenced by his elder brother, Shreehaan too nurtures a similar dream of pursuing cricket as a profession.

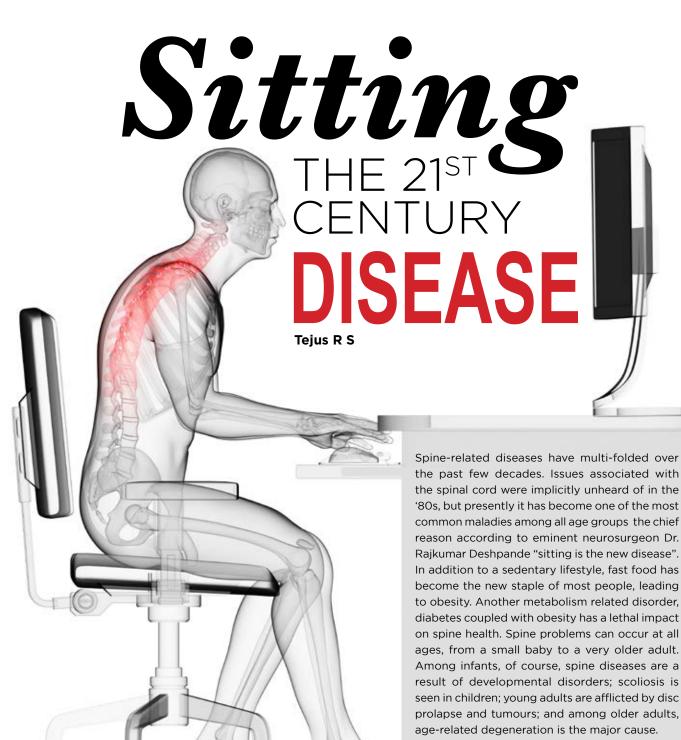
Vrishin's philosophy in life is simple. "I focus on what is happening at present, which is something that helps me achieve goals and believe in myself. Of course, one needs to have a plan but when things go wrong, staying in the present solves most of the problems,".

Shreehaan says: "I plan my day and try to be as productive as possible. I read books, and this helps me remain calm during difficult games. I also have fun

playing video games. This works as a stressbuster for me and in turn improves my performance in the matches. Vrishin is inspired by MS Dhoni and Virat Kohli their technique, their attitude, the sacrifices they have made, their thought process on and off the field and the amount of time they dedicate to the game they love. Their hard work inspires him to push his limits.

For Shreehaan, his inspiration comes from his parents and brother. "They make so many sacrifices to help me play cricket and study. I owe them lot for what I am," he says.

Besides cricket and school, Vrishin says he is a huge fan of hip hop music and loves listening to Travis Scott and Drake's songs. He has recently begun reading books and he says that it has already become a feel good factor. Playing video games is also a hobby that helps him relieve stress. Shreehan says he enjoys playing drums.



Backaches, in general, are uncomfortable, painful and hard to accept, but one has to understand the disease and practice the restorative process for relief and remedy. A disease process is a situation where the normalcy of a particular organ or human body part is disturbed due to wide ranging reasons from genetics, developmental problems, tumour, injury (trauma) to disc prolapse, which is caused by an injury or infection. Spine diseases may be of the following types: disc prolapse, disc degeneration, spine tumours among others.

Radiological Investigation (RI)

Nevertheless, radiological investigations like X-Ray and MRI are a must, although the general perception is that such investigations are only a rip off, says Dr Abhijit N, Senior Resident, Department of Radio Diagnosis at a Bengaluru-based hospital. Although, RIs are expensive, without these reports a surgeon cannot proceed with the treatment since the exact cause for back pain or the extent of damage can only be ascertained with an RI. The treating doctor or surgeon usually advises another RI examination of the said part or the organ to understand the status post treatment or surgery. "I always counsel and advice my patients regarding the importance of RI. It is critical in pre and post-treatment analysis," points out Dr. Abhijit.

"After the RI analyses of a particular patient, surgery is advised only if it is a must for the cure," says Dr. Deshpande. Surgery is indicated when any part of the body gets a disease that threatens a patient's life or the organ's functional capacity and severely hampers lifestyle. "Any analysis requires a lot of knowledge, skill and experience of the particular disease process and fine-tune it to that specific patient. After studying the patients' history and tests (X-Ray, MRI and the like), an algorithm or flow chart is visualised based on which a decision is made," he adds.



Exercise as Therapy

Most often, exercise is the best cure for spinal diseases. These days, many orthopedics and neurosurgeons are advising therapeutic gymming and yoga for curing and managing spine diseases. Bengaluru-based gym trainer, Dinesh, who specializes in therapeutic gymming especially for spine diseases, says, that he gets many patients who are recommended by doctors. Based on the doctor's report and the patient's lifestyle he chalks out a customized workout plan for the patient.

The patient is first introduced to floor exercises which include strengthening, flexibility and mobility exercises. The training is unique to each patient. Beginning with simple pulling and pushing,

medicine ball, and stretch band, , gradually based on the patient's response, the focus will shift to upper body and lower body, core, hamstrings, and other parts level by level. The period for any patient to get back to normalcy depends on the nature of injury and the patient's involvement. If it is a minor injury, it takes 2 to 3 months to strengthen, and in significant cases, it takes more than six months only if the patient follows the strict plan laid out by the both the doctor and the trainer. "The training must be controlled and under careful supervision of the trainer otherwise the chances of making the injury worse is great."

Having said that, hitting any run of the mill gym is certainly not advisable. Caution needs to be exercised here, since there are a mindless number of gyms and certifying agencies across the country, the credibility of which are a suspect. It is important that one consults with a gym trainer who is recommended by the consulting doctor.

Prevention of Spine related Diseases and Injury

To prevent any spine-related injury, one should have an active lifestyle, regular exercise, including walking, not becoming overweight, and avoiding smoking. Eating nutritious and a healthy diet is all is required to maintain a healthy spine. However, occasional consumption of junk should be compensated with proper exercises. Exercising requires a supervisor. In regular exercise and walking, you don't have a supervisor, whereas, in a gym, it is a controlled set-up with a supervisor. One should hit the gym to exercise and strengthen muscles to gain strength and stamina strength is a one-time event, and stamina is a more extended time event. In the gym, strengthening will be focused on a group of muscles than that of the whole body.





Conclusion

A healthy lifestyle is the key to good spinal health. The need to maintain a healthy mind, body and soul, is becoming more critical than ever. It is important not to fall prey to cheap tricks. Dr. Rajkumar states emphatically that he has not referred any patient for an alternative treatment that is not scientific. Be forewarned not to jump to conclusions based on the literature you find on the web. Besides, if you are suffering from a spine condition, you are certainly not advised to practice yoga or exercises by watching videos on the web. It is of paramount importance that you perform yoga or exercise in the presence of and under the guidance of a certified and trust-worthy practitioner. The importance of a balanced diet for spine health cannot be stressed enough, especially in times of our temptation for junk food.

Varanasi

AN ABODE BEYOND TIME

Shwetha H C

The universe is infinite to experience. The more places I explore, the more sights I see, the more curious I become about the world. Travelling to incredible places has always been a thoughtprovoking experience and relieves me of the mundane conundrums of life. One such travel was to Varanasi. With its engaging history, ancient architecture and hypnotic, celestial Ghats, no other city has had such an impact on me as Varanasi. Revered by Indians, idolized by fanatics and celebrated by the shutterbugs, this city has redefined the spectrum of the rainbow: women in polychromatic sarees, ash and vermilion smeared faces of holy men in white dhoti-kurta, not to mention their braided long locks. Regardless of the spiritual tag the town carries, it stands as an institution of art, culture, holiness and lifestyle of Indians. Standing majestically on the banks of the Ganges, Varanasi prospers with its intricate narrow alleyways packed with shops on both sides and a busy main street in the centre. Call it the divine Kashi, enlightening Varanasi or a delightful Banaras, this oldest living city in the world, echoing a multifaceted culture, is a must visit.

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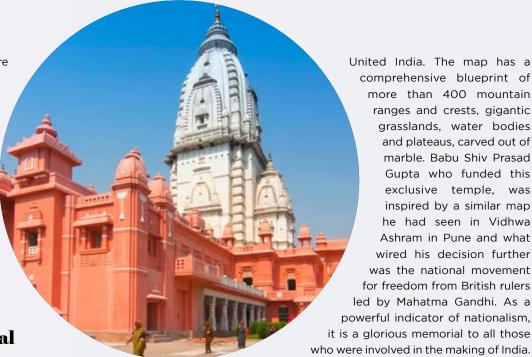


a boat ride to the ghats that were vibrant with various activities.

Ghats are embankments (riverfront steps leading to the banks of the Ganga River) and Varanasi has nearly 88 ghats. While most are reserved for pooja and for holy dips, a few like Manikarnika and Harischandra ghats are set aside only for cremation purposes. Each ghat is concomitant with mythical, royal and scholarly figures.

The Culture Capital

Kashi, known as the spiritual capital of India, even as it is compatible with the trident of Shiva, it has also been an epicenter of knowledge and learning since days immemorial. The historical authenticity and the legacy that the town carries are indicators of the integration of diverse ideas, philosophies and traditions. Kashi is considered to be the birthplace of modern Hindi literature and has played a prominent role in its evolution. Asia's largest residential educational campus and one of the world's largest-The Banaras Hindu University, founded by the famed Indian educationist and freedom fighter Madan Mohan Malaviya is sited in Varanasi. Spiritual philosopher Adi Shankara, legendary Indian surgeon Sushruta, poets Tulsidas, Kabirdas and author Munshi Premchand have lived and learned in this city and have been immensely influenced by it.



Architectural Marvels

My journey to Varanasi would have been incomplete without a visit to the famous Kashi Vishwanath temple which houses one of the twelve Jyotirlingams of Shiva. The temple which is an architectural marvel has been restored several times, but the most recent restoration was conducted in the late 1970s by Rani Ahilyabhai Holkar of Indore.

A little more exploring made me realise that Varanasi is not only an abode for ghats and temples but also marvellous forts. One of the significant attractions was the delightful eighteenth-century Ramnagar Fort, built with red sandstone. This Mughal styled fort houses the renowned Veda Vyas sanctuary and a peculiar gallery where I not only saw some vintage vehicles and weapons but also some antique hookahs and a standout colossal clock as well, which was over 150 years old.

Varanasi is said to be older than history and not without reason, I am convinced. A temple dedicated to not a deity, but to a nation - India, was certainly a unique attraction. The Bharath Mata Temple at the Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth campus stands as a testament to

United India. The map has a comprehensive blueprint of more than 400 mountain ranges and crests, gigantic grasslands, water bodies and plateaus, carved out of marble. Babu Shiv Prasad Gupta who funded this exclusive temple, was inspired by a similar map he had seen in Vidhwa Ashram in Pune and what wired his decision further was the national movement for freedom from British rulers led by Mahatma Gandhi. As a powerful indicator of nationalism, it is a glorious memorial to all those

While Varanasi is predominantly viewed as the global center of Hindu culture and philosophy, it is also founded upon other significant religious and philosophical forces. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism have all been a part of Varanasi's civilization, which makes it a multi-cultural city. It has traditionally been a leading cultural metropolis, with contributions in education, theology, mythology, meditation, ayurveda, astrology, poetry, literature, and spirituality that are far deeper than one would expect. For example, Sarnath, a short distance from Varanasi, is a revered Buddhist pilgrimage center. Legend has it that, after attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, Lord Buddha preached his first sermon here, which was further sanctified as the Maha Dharmachakra-Parivartan (Turning of the Wheel of Law).

Similarly, the oldest operational mosques are also situated in this city. Varanasi retains a place of sacred significance for Muslim devotees too. Popular for its intricate Islamic architecture, the Alangir mosque in Varanasi is exceptional for it is located on the banks of the river Ganga. Famed for its bucolic appearance and colossal ridges, this mosque built by Mughal ruler Aurangazeb is a spiritual and striking landmark of Varanasi.

Life Amidst the Ghats

Built by Queen Ahilyabai of Indore is the Ahilyabai ghat, which is also the first to be named after a mortal human. The Darbhanga Palace and ghat were built by the Darbhanga regal clan of Bihar. While the Chaushat ghat is dedicated to 64 yoginis, the Tulsighat is named after poet there while he composed the Ramcharitmanas. Munshi ghat is dedicated to Munshi Premchand, a native of Banaras and Hindi litterateur. Folklore has it that Lord Shiva cursed the Manikarnika ghat to become a cremation ground when Goddess Parvati lost her mani-karnika (ear ornaments) here. The Das-Ashwamedha performed by Lord Brahma gave the name Dasashwamedh ghat. On similar lines, many ghats reign of many rulers belonging to the Maratha, Scindia, Holkar and Peshwa dynasties and were named after them.

It is said that life revolves around the ghats in Varanasi and each has a story to tell. The waters beyond the horizon, sights of the meditating sadhus covered in ash, visage bereft of expression and worldly attachments, seagulls roving around the ferries, chirping morning birds, children and adults bathing in the holy Ganges, young pehelwans doing their pushups, tourists in boats capturing the sights of temples and turrets contouring the Ghats was nothing less than a melodic performance unfurling in front of my eyes. Collectively, the boat ride along the Ghats of the city left me with a flawless experience.

Lip Smacking Delicacies

The thin lanes of the city propose a lot of options to explore further. For the tourist, food is another major offering of the ancient town. Street delicacies in Varanasi are as delectable as the city's rich history. When it comes to street foods in India, I understood that Banarasi food culture is influenced by that of nearby states like Bihar and West Bengal as well, and is a delicious merger of a variety of flavours. Colourful visuals of a wide range of cuisines dotting the by lanes of Varanasi promised me an exciting gastronomic experience. While sipping tea right from the kulhad at regular intervals had become a ritual while I reconnoitered the city, the famous kachori sabzi served as an awesome breakfast option. Stuffed with spicy mixture of lentils and mashed potato served with tangy aloo curry, this dish was an appetizing start to my days in the city. While I savored the tamatar chat which is said to be Banaras's own unique chat delicacy, I realized that this scrumptious, spicy preparation was definitely

not for a sensitive palate. Subsequently, it was the makkhan malaiyo that calmed my



hyper active taste buds, post the tamatar chat.

Well-known as the winter dessert nimish, makkhan malaiyo is a Persian influenced cuisine, garnished with pistachios and almonds, which was a remarkably light and perfect dish for someone with a sweet tooth like me. Adding on to my sweet palette were the hot jalebis and rabri, thandai and the ice-cold velvety smooth lassi. Savouries like chena dahi vada, baat ichoka, choora matar and many more which were a fine fusion of traditional taste with a twist of modernity created some eternal food memoirs.

My exquisite gourmet experience wouldn't a wrap up with out a Banarasi paan, which is a lot more than a relishing savoury. Filled with a profusion of tastes due to the combination of fresh betel leaf, slaked lime, areca nuts, tobacco, gulkand (rose petals) and silver foil, this paan is an expression of reception and joy in the region.





THE GREAT INDIAN 'KITCHEN' CIRCUS

Greeshma Sukumaran

Ismat Chugtai, a revolutionary 19 Century Urdu writer when asked by her father what she would feed her in-laws after marriage if she didn't know how to make Rotis, mused, "If we will be poor, we will eat khichdi and if we will be rich we will employ someone to cook for us." We live in the 21 Century, and yet Ismat's writings remain fresh and relevant to our society.

Come to think of it, an enduring expectation from every Indian woman who embraces matrimony is that she must be a culinary genius, who can tackle loads of utensils in the kitchen, and most importantly, who has imbibed the art of spinning culinary delights, including perfectly rounded chapatis and tantalizing cups of Indian chai.

Let's reflect further. Ever heard anyone, man or woman, questioning the culinary skills of men? May be. Rarely. Not at all. I am sure it is rare to find answers outside these three options.

Simply said, men are not expected to be culinary geniuses unlike women, or should I say, girls, to be more precise. Surprisingly, the age-old tuning and domestication have also taught us the 'norm' is for women to cook and feed their families. Interestingly, even the so-called 'progressive' minded would tell us that cooking is a woman's responsibility. So we insist our younger ones or should I be specific, girls should master culinary recipes at the earliest because in future they will have to take on responsibilities in the kitchen.

Quite often, a scene plays out in most of our homes where leftovers remain scattered all over the table once everyone has relished their morsel, which are for the women of the household to clear. I was expected to do it as well. But being the person I have always been and keen to shelter my spaces, whether at

home or outside, I was clear in my mind, that I won't be the 'waste collector'. Yet I was well aware that my mom did her share diligently, my aunties in the neighbourhood continued to shoulder on and so too my friends and colleagues. But spare a thought for those poor souls over-burdened by never-ending domestic chores. Is this not part of oppressive practices that we have been saddled with for ages?

Let us face it. Even in homes where both husband and wife are working, when both return home from their engagements, between the two, it is the woman who is expected to retrace her steps to the kitchen to prepare a meal.

I can almost gauge the defensive responses that will be put up to justify these retrograde practices. Not at my place, some will say. It is for this reason that when I started this conversation, a male friend had this to say: What you are asking is similar to the tale of the hen and egg. Which one came first?' Even better was this response. 'Why seek a solution where there is no problem?' Can we read this as, where most men and some women don't see a problem?'I seek to apportion some blame on women as well for failing to raise the red flag. Even in contemporary marriages, women are expected to do the household chores before embracing other roles. In many instances, women are not appreciated if they don't turn out to be 'excellent' cooks.

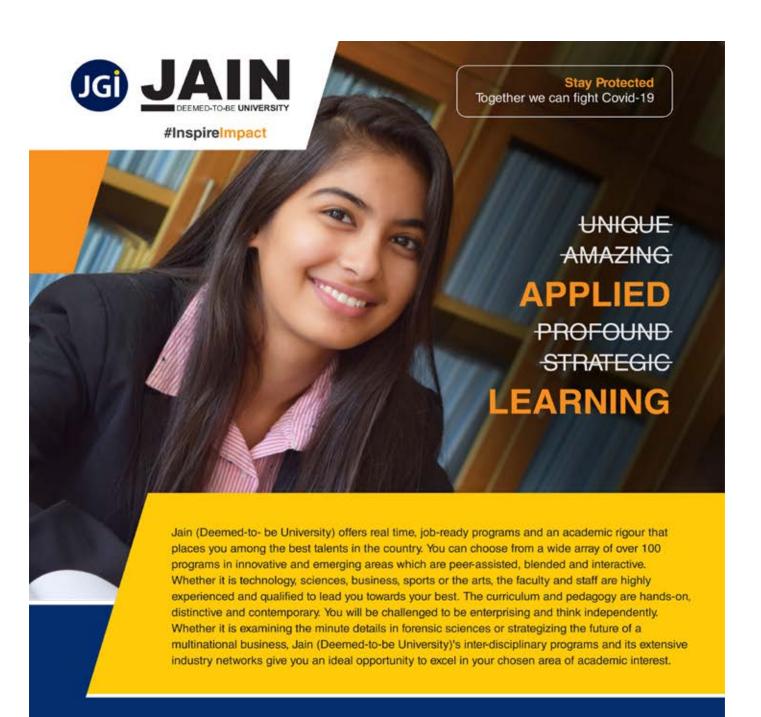
"But I help her in the kitchen," a proud husband with a progressive mindset once reacted. The irony here is that the major responsibility still rests with the women and the role of men comes only in 'helping out'. Think of it the other way. I can already see raised eyebrows. This domestication and normalization we continue to nurture is what worries me to no end. Why is

it that we don't find anything wrong when gross injustice is being meted out to generations of women? The answer is a simple one. We rarely see this as a problem. That's what patriarchy has made us believe, so much so that we even fail to identify the fault lines in their thinking.

Talking of entrenched traditions, many of us must have watched, enjoyed, and at times felt helpless, or squirmed in discomfort experiencing the unsettling feeling seeping through every passing scene in the Great Indian Kitchen, streamed on an OTT platform. Some women wrote lengthy posts but still made their way back to clear the pending utensils in the kitchen before going to sleep.

So glaring are these deep-seated gender disparities even when women embrace and succeed in positions of leadership. Not so long ago, while celebrating the remarkable victories of Kamala Harris, the Vice President-elect of the US, the global media found it necessary to focus on her culinary credentials. Wonder why? Wherever, whenever, we always find it fitting to retreat into these age-old oppressive traditions that continue to saddle women with responsibilities that revolve around the kitchen, whether they hold professional positions or not.

I would like to believe we should change this narrative beginning with the routines in our homes. Secondly, such inherent biases need to be banished so that we relate to each other as equals with complementary roles. It is demeaning to ignore the formidable strides made by women in diverse fields and instead peg their achievements on a single dinner plate that we bring on to the table. If I am wrong in demanding a level playing field in the kitchen for women, then I stand corrected!





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