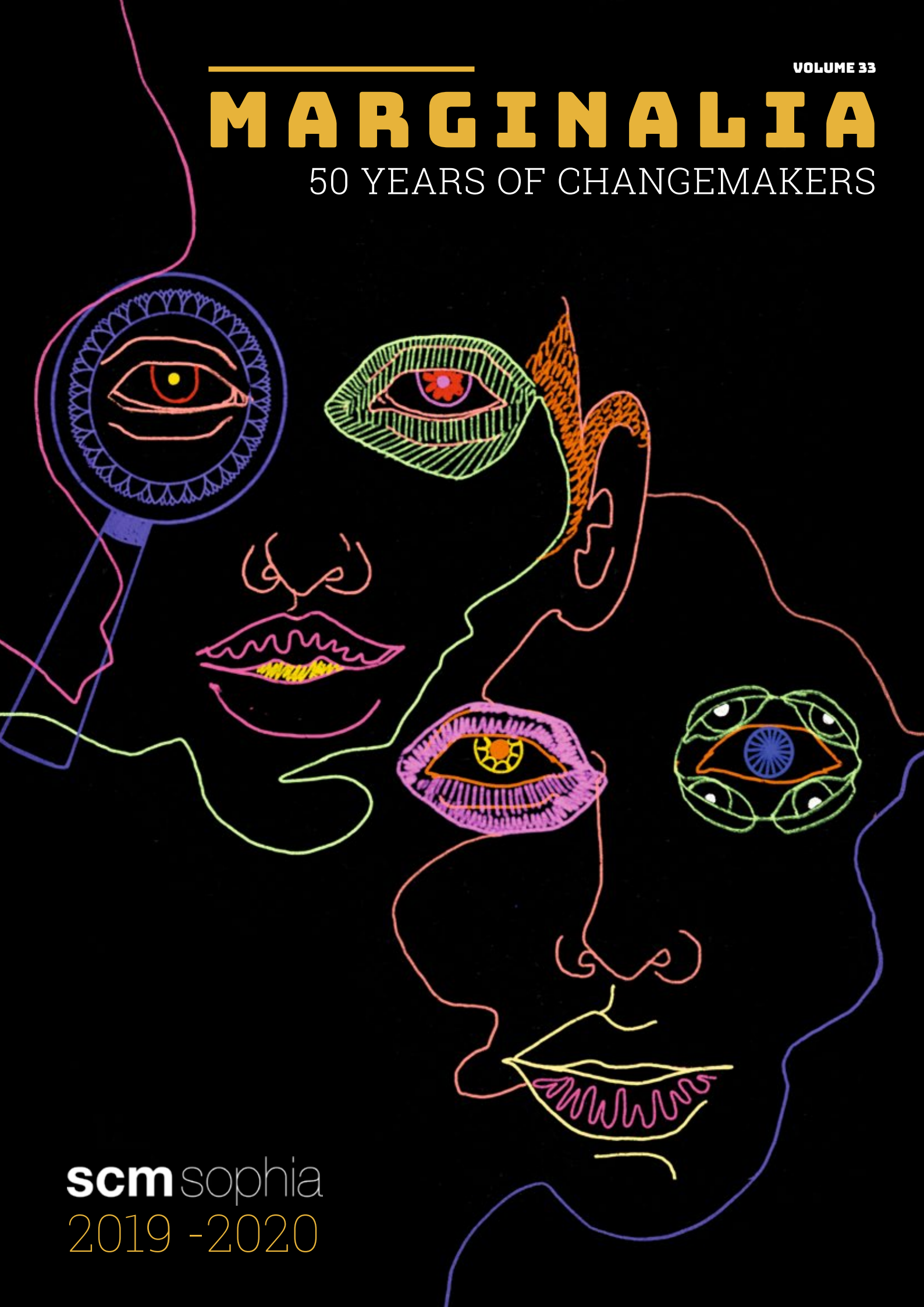


VOLUME 33

# MARGINALIA

50 YEARS OF CHANGEMAKERS

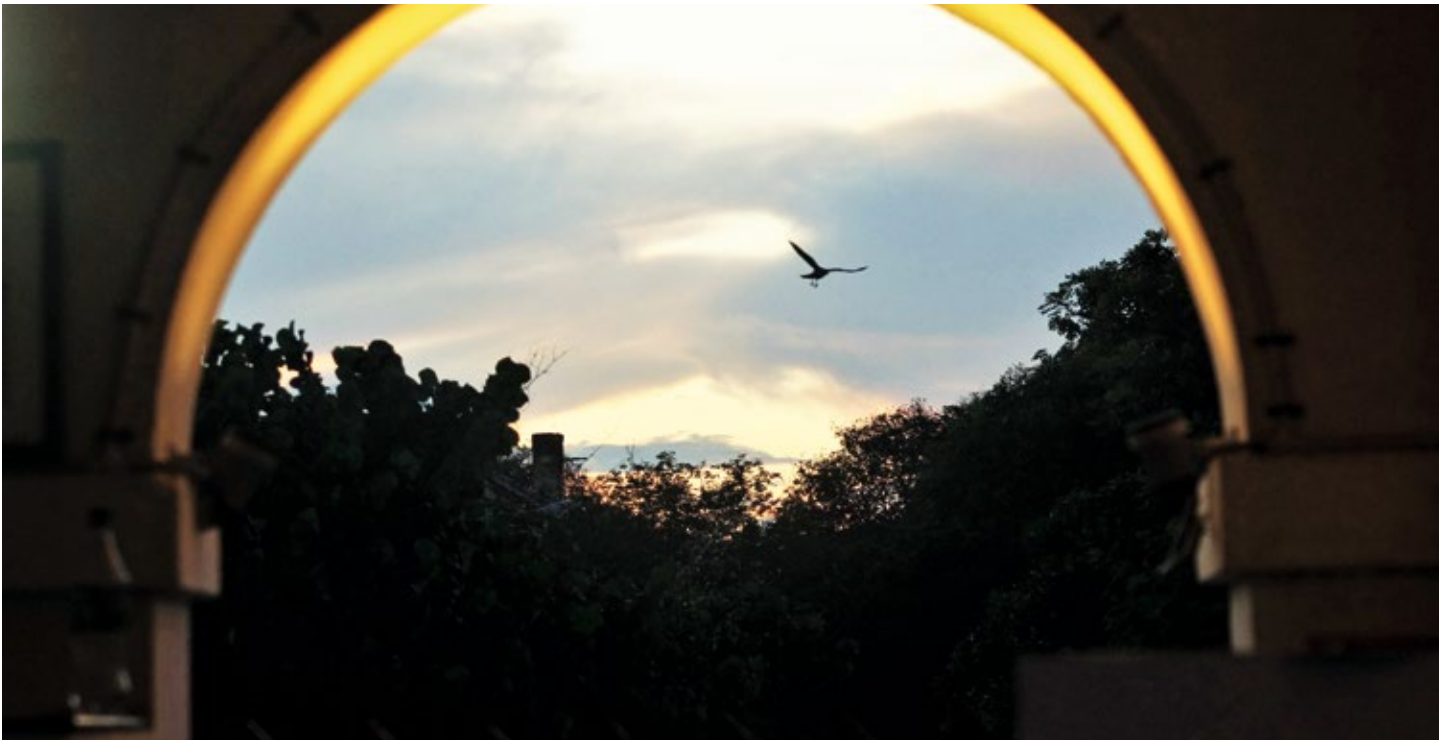


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## KNOWING OURSELVES

**W**e're heading out soon. Some of us want to be news reporters, documentarians, copywriters, musicians, dancers, photographers, cinematographers, directors, meme magi, but who are we, if not storytellers?

Forced out of the comfort of a classroom, as SCM students we were pitched headfirst into the real world. It was not only about awareness but also about taking charge! Starting off with a fun-filled treasure hunt (more about which you will read in these pages), the work quickly became taxing, exactly as we had been warned. "Go out and figure it out for yourselves," we were told. It required a lot of learning and unlearning. Struggles, blunders, deadlines: somewhere in the middle we found our way around the media space and discovered what it takes to tell a story. The assignments took us from the glamour of Malabar Hill and Bandra to the labyrinthine streets of Kamathipura and Dharavi in the quest of a story. We spoke to people. We made films and news features. In short, we became the storytellers.

However, in the world that we live in, there are stories that demand attention but never see the light of the day. These are issues that we discovered we were unaware or apathetic to -- gender identities and biases, caste-based oppression, occupations and cultures fighting a losing battle against the changing times. As the Italian poet Dante Alighieri puts it, "The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis." Taking this to heart, we resolved to make these voices heard. This belief led to the conception of the 33rd edition of Marginalia.

This year, which also happens to be the 50th year of SCM creating media marvels, has been special. It was not only about awareness but also taking charge by the Golden Batch! With cries of national pride and freedom rending the air owing to the current political scenario, we have, in this edition, portrayed different aspects of our nation and its vibrant culture: the tantalising spices of the East Indians, the profound verses of Sant Kabir, the enthralling powadas celebrating the lives of legends and songs inspiring the masses to put forward their voices of dissent.

We bring to light Bipin Awasthi's journey after years of drug abuse, Prateek Gautam's take on veganism and the (dis)connect with Dalit culture, the sustainable fashion movement. We have stories from Indore and Pondicherry too. Along with it, learn what goes through Anand Patwardhan's mind as he films documentaries, cinematographer Modhura Palit's success story and dialogue coach Vikas Kumar's fun-filled exercises to help the students unwind after the

intense workload that only comes with working in the media industry. The batch of 2019-20 aspires to be the future changemakers of society by sharing these stories.

While we understand that it is impossible to cover all the stories, we hope that the ones we did help make a difference in the world, however minuscule. We present to you the 2019-20 edition of Marginalia. Have a good read and remember: It's yours, take charge of it!



**Prabhat Nambiar, Sukanya Deb, Tanisha Lele,  
Anjali Awasthi, Karen Dsouza, Susanna Cherian**



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# 50 years as Changemakers



This is the 50th year of the Sophia Shree B K Somani Memorial Polytechnic and SCM. When we talk about celebrating 50 years of a post-graduate programme, we are actually talking about the journey of empowering the first generation of women born in Independent India. A powerful reality of SCM.

The year began with the celebrating our Changemakers, a time at once immensely uplifting and personally humbling, to see so many of us are changemakers, charting new territories and excelling in their chosen fields.

We continue the process of empowering the next class of students, and reiterate our brand purpose - to empower women; we have done this for 50 years and will continue to do so.

What worries us is the thought that we still need to work at empowering women, 50 years on.

Technology has become a double-edged sword in most of our lives. We are more and more dependent on it. It has made life easy for us. Don't know something? JFGI (Urban dictionary explains it as Just f\*cking Google it); Don't have something? Order it online. The new genie in our live is AI and we promptly get bombarded with ads on something we wish for. (I couldn't take a holiday this year and in a conversation with a friend just mentioned how I would like to go deep sea diving and voila! my phone told me to visit Maldives and holiday in Australia. Just rubbing it in!) Advertising is getting reduced to putting messages on Google, Facebook and Amazon. With a few more platforms thrown in. Netflix, Prime and some other platforms threaten to re-shape the entire media world as we know it, as they are ad free and, surprise, surprise, still making profits!

So how will we remain relevant as a media institute? Do values and ethics get dated? If not, we need not worry. We are adapting ourselves to the new world and learn while we teach, that a lot of news is now being shot on phone, in the vertical format and subtitled for the zombies who consume it on the phone, on mute, while they go about doing their thing, including sitting in your class! We enroll #motherwithasign to make them read messages that all mothers say anyway. We are considering starting a feed #teacherswithasign.

Here's to the 2020 issue of Marginalia. Happy reading.

**Nirmita Gupta**  
Head, SCMSophia



# 8 am Sharp!

**Anjali Awasthi and Prabhat Nambiar talk about a teacher at SCM Sophia who is quite unlike anyone they have ever met.**



**I**t all began on June 24, the first day of the academic year of 2019-20 at SCM, Sophia Polytechnic. We had already been warned by the alums to never, EVER, be late for this particular class because tardiness was unacceptable this teacher. We were just trying to get used to the new place, the new faces, but nothing could have prepared us for the teacher who darted into the classroom--at 8am sharp. Before he had even put his bag down on the table, he set about announcing the rules in a booming voice, "Time is non-negotiable! If you're not in class before 8, don't come in."

"You will be reading the newspaper every day for at least thirty minutes."

"If you're in my class, you have to ask questions, and ask them out loud. You're media professionals in the making! YOU MUST LEARN TO COMMUNICATE!"

"You will respect what your classmates are saying. You will learn as much from them as from any teacher."

He firmly believes that students must question authority and not respect the teachers just because they are teachers. For this, he has a simple exercise: Look straight into his face,

muster up your pent-up rage and say "F\*&k you!" to his face!

And then class commences. Is there a syllabus that he follows? No! We discuss the latest happenings, he shares stories from his childhood, life as a journalist, feminism and women's rights--practically every topic under the sun! How, we do not know, but he has perfected the knack of using these stories to incorporate media ethics, journalism and life skills. Beware though! There is a trick involved in these classes. You HAVE to take everything he says with a pinch of salt, because he deliberately gives false information. Thus, he gets us to start thinking critically and encourages us to call out on it. "Keep your mind awake at all times!"

As a teacher for more than 25 years at SCMSophia, he knows that students are easily bored, and can grow drowsy or distracted. To remedy this, he has the solution: entertainment. This includes singing, dancing around the class, practically anything you would not expect a conventional teacher to do. You would think that this teacher, the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Hindu Literary Prize, Windham-Campbell Literature Prize and other accolades, would be a lot more 'conventional'. No. For his students no amount of energy is too much so long as they learn to become better versions of themselves--professionally or personally. His students are testaments to his unique teaching style.

Sukanya Deb says, "There have been many instances when he mentioned about motherhood. Those words have stayed with me. No matter how much he tries to rationalise things and happenings of the world, every time he talks about motherhood, there is a deep attachment. He always says 'Mothers choose to be the second-class citizens in their own lives for their children,' and that made me more grateful for all the little things my mother has done for me."

Prateek Gautam says "The very first thing I learned from his class was the

confidence to speak up. This helped me a lot during my assignments where I had to interview people like politicians, police and celebrities".

"A unique person and an extraordinary teacher. His lectures were like a magnet which dragged all of us at 8 am sharp to the class. Missing out his one lecture felt like a loss of so many life lessons. He taught me not to be successful but to be extraordinary. The level of energy and enthusiasm with which he conducts his lectures is beyond words. One of the major things that I am going to miss after SCM is him. I dreamed that I too have a teacher who is known and acclaimed on a global level for his work and that for me, it is him. He once told me, not to call him 'Sir', to address our teacher as 'sir'. He asked us to use it only when we respect that word and understand what it really means. So, Sir, I am fortunate that I got my life lessons or teachings from you. I will be kind because you taught me to be kind. Thank you," says Shreya Khare.

This does not mean that all his classes were about him telling stories and laugh riots. True to the extreme nature of this one-year course, he has been pushing us to get the best quality journalistic work done.

On the first day, right off the bat, he tasked us students with interviewing each other and just as we were reeling from the pressure of it, he nonchalantly asked us to interview a celebrity, and then a politician. We were apprehensive but he was confident we could do it. "You'll be surprised by what you are capable of." Try we did, and boy, were we amazed at what we managed to do! We already had the skills at our disposal, all we needed was to persevere and stick our necks out. This is what he made us do.

Looking back at all the work done -- the assignments on places, on social issues, on our mothers, a book on women who tried to bring a change through their craft, the songs on culture and national integration sung -- we have definitely come a long way. We know that we still have a long way to go but we are already aware of the keys to success, thanks to him.

Words on paper would simply do no justice to the amazing teacher that he is. However, if these words do manage to get that awesomeness across, it is solely because of him. Thank you for your faith and your perseverance to make us better versions of ourselves.

(P.S. We would have written more but can't risk missing the 8 am class!)



## LIBERATION

# I am a vegan. I am also a Dalit. GOT A PROBLEM?

Prateek Kumar Gautam on some tough choices he has had to make.

**W**hen someone reads or sees a term like veganism, they usually make up an image in their mind of a bourgeois, upper caste, privileged guy, sitting in an air-conditioned room completely out of touch with ground realities. So, before you start to do that, let me introduce myself, I am Prateek Gautam, I am a Dalit, I come from a middle-class family and I don't have an air conditioner at home. At first, I don't look like a Dalit because that's not the image portrayed by the media. We are always shown as dirty, poor helpless victims of casteism powerless to defend themselves. So, when I say I am a Dalit, people are usually surprised. Still, this has not stopped the discrimination and humiliation

that I have faced based just on my identity which made me go vegan. I am going to talk about my transition to veganism and the problems I face as a Dalit vegan from all three groups of people i.e. non-vegans, savarnas, specially Brahmin vegans, fellow Ambedkarites, Dalit activists and the community.

I don't really love animals, but I don't hate them either. Still, as a kid growing up, I could feel the similarities between their suffering as a species, and mine as an individual. The idea of caste and identity was introduced to me so early that I don't remember who told me about this first, my family or the people in my neighbourhood. Soon, this identity followed me everywhere from classroom to playground. Kids from my neighbourhood who were otherwise good friends wouldn't play with me because they belonged to

upper castes and I would be sidelined or shooed away, similar to the way people treat street dogs. That was one of the first incidents I can recall where I made a connection with a species who was marginalized like I was. Slowly, this connection grew and I started looking at other animals the same way as people deal with me or behave with me. From being forced to pick up and clean shit in third grade in front of the whole class, being bullied in class by my classmates based on my identity to coming home and listening to pigs being tortured and bullied in a similar way, somewhere I made a deeper connection and decided to do something about it when I grew up. My community depends on animals and their products so much that even though I had some sort of a soft spot for other animals, I couldn't do much. It was only after I joined my engineering



college and moved away from my family that I was able to take some decisions without being concerned about what people in my family or community would say. So, I joined People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) for a very short time till I realized that they patronize animal issues for profit. Through a source, I got to know the word 'vegan', which I confused with 'vegetarian', but a Google search that took me to Dr. Steve Best's video cleared up the confusion. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr7Ax\\_p7ocw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr7Ax_p7ocw)) Dr. Steve Best is a professor of Philosophy at the University Of Texas, who teaches animal rights and veganism along with Marxism, Anarchism, Feminism, Communism, and Postmodernism. So, the problem started once I became a vegan, and not because of the lifestyle changes that I had to make but

because of my decision of going vegan itself. My mother and father were as disappointed as if I had dropped out of my engineering course. So I faced, and still face, three kinds of groups almost every day.

First: Non-vegans, who have little to no idea about animal people rights or any other rights for that matter, and look at animal people as commodities. They are privileged and feel it's their right to exploit and consume animals according to their wishes, which constitutionally it is.

Second: savarna vegans. These are the bunch of people who dominate the entire vegan movement and use veganism to assert their supremacy. These people have little to no contribution to the rights of animal people and are associated with right wing philosophies and groups like the RSS.

Third: These are fellow Dalit activists, Ambedkarites, Liberals, Marxists, leftists and all the left-leaning groups who are open to inclusivity and inter-sectionality but are still not open to see themselves as allies of animal people.

The first group is not really difficult to deal with, although it is mentally draining to have a conversation with a group of people who give no space for dissent and come up with bizarre arguments like 'plants have feelings' as their ultimate weapon, as if breeding a sentient being just to sexually exploit it and then murder it is equivalent to chopping potatoes. This is also the group that claims that they are exercising their constitutional rights over a sentient being that we treat only as a commodity, not realizing that we are violating their liberty, freedom and rights to make their own choices given by nature. When freedom of one violates the liberty of another, it becomes oppression. It is the same as white people claiming their rights over African American slaves or men claiming their rights over women, or Brahmins enslaving Dalits, all of these were constitutional or feudal laws once. Another big argument presented by this group is that plant-based alternatives are unaffordable, and the diet is unhealthy. Although veganism has never been about health or diet, people without proper research do come up with such arguments. Alternatives are expensive, and there are a lot of factors that make it expensive. Not only are they expensive but they also come from places that use exploited laborers or land where other

animals lived. Palm oil, for example, according to [worldexports.com](http://worldexports.com), India imported around 17% of its total palm oil from Indonesia. The main threat to the survival of orangutan populations in the wild is the massive expansion of palm oil plantations in Borneo and Sumatra. Due to these reasons, most vegans avoid alternatives. Alternatives are not needed, we can do very well without non vegan diet and also without alternatives as Dr. Michael Klaper, a physician and Neal Barnard have claimed in the documentary called "What The Health" available on Netflix. In India, it's even easier to be on a plant based diet as so many food items that are plant based are available at affordable prices. Here is a list of food products that are plant based or can be made plant based by removing curd or by replacing it with soya curd which is similar or sometimes cheaper than regular curd. Others include: misal pao, vada pao, bhakri bhaji, dal, roti, chapati, puri bhaji, masala dosa, uttapam, all varieties of vegetables and sprouts, lemon rice, tomato rice, makke ki roti, pongal rice, all varieties of idli, which do not include ghee or curd, litti chokha, pootharekulu, appam, saambaar, poha etc all these foods are plant based and I'm sure there are more options.

The most political thing we often come across when we talk about choice, is a cow. None of us Dalits are allowed to touch or come near her. As soon as she is dead however, we are called to clean the 'filth'. It's funny how sentient beings are valued only when they can be exploited and as soon as they die, their value and holiness also dies. So, one group treats her as God and sexually exploits her for milk, ghee, butter, and other dairy products. They also want her holy skin to be tanned and converted into beautiful majestic musical instruments. The other group also wants her flesh, apart from dairy products. But nobody wants to know what the cow wants. No one takes her consent in whatever they do to her. And if she is not in a position to give consent what does it say about us? She is an individual who has a right over her own body and children, just like any other sentient being on earth. No human has any right over any other species on this planet. Each sentient species exists for its own purposes, just like humans do. This is not to be confused with the supremacist and communal ideology the gaurakshaks carry in order to justify the killing and terrorism they

## LIBERATION

spread in the name of a living being. They do not care about cows or other animals. Cows are not protected, nor is any other domestic animal. They are all sexually exploited, tortured, and then murdered by the same people who claim to be protecting them.

Yet another argument this group makes is that there is not enough plant-based food in the world to feed everyone, but this too is futile. In the book called 'Enough: Why the World's Poorest Starve in the Age of Plenty', authors Roger Throw and Scott Kilmann talk about how we already produce 1.5 times the food required to feed the current population yet more than 795 million people go hungry. The same thing was said in a peer-reviewed research paper called 'We Already Grow Enough Food for 10 Billion People...and Still Can't End Hunger' published in the Journal of Sustainable Agriculture, which talks about the same problem. It is not the scarcity of food production, but rather consumerism that leads to the unequal distribution of resources. Another factor that leads to this is animal agriculture itself. According to a research paper 'Compassion in World Farming, Strategic Plan 2013-2017; Fish Count, 'Farmed Fish', there are approximately thirty farmed animal people for every human on earth. These farmed animal people are intentionally bred to be enslaved and used for human consumption. But fish farming uses a ridiculous amount of resources and this further leads to hunger. Tremendous amount of pressure is as a result put on the planet, which we have literally turned into a factory farm. The problem is not limited to your plate, they go much beyond that. It's funny how petroleum products which are scarce and whose reserves are rapidly depleting, can be transported to the farthest corners of the earth while food which is more essential, is wasted in huge quantities.

The next group that I have dealt with are vegans themselves. The movement is in such an initial stage that people belonging to powerful groups such as Brahmins and Savarnas in India, and White people in the West, have dominated it and use it as a tool for supremacy rather than talking about animal people's rights and total liberation. These are a bunch of people who have appropriated veganism and focus on the consumerist and capitalist thinking that supply and demand can change the way we look at animal people, without understanding

anything about liberation movements or struggles since they all come from a background that never required liberation in the first place. They are the reason why the word veganism connotes the image I mentioned earlier. Therefore, a lot of activists are now focusing more on anti-speciesism rather than just veganism as this word has now been appropriated by the oppressive capitalist system.

Speciesism is the prejudice humans have towards animals which means that just because they can't go to the moon or climb Mount Everest or don't need a sophisticated language to communicate, we have the moral right to exploit them and treat them as if their sole purpose on this earth was to be a resource for human beings. Anti-Speciesism fights against such prejudices and also act as an ally for animal people. Tiphaine Lagarde, a decolonial, anti-speciesist activist says, "The obsession with consumerism and individualism emphasizes veganism rather than anti-speciesism, and cares about the content of the plate rather than the fate of the oppressed. The word vegan has become a label, a brand, a fashion, a community, a trendy hashtag, a social identity, a brand of nobility for stars, a nice ideological coating to an unchanged society."

When it comes to India, this practice of speciesism turns into a casteist one, which I call 'casteist speciesism'. Under this type of oppression, each animal person is given a specific value and hence is used as a tool to oppress groups of humans and control them. For example, cows are considered holy and are only allowed to be touched or owned by Brahmins and Vaishyas, no Shudra or Atishudra is 'allowed' near her unless she is dead. Another example is the horse 'permitted' to be ridden only by certain castes. Here not only a human group is being oppressed but also those animal people who are enslaved and controlled or used without their consent. Brahmin vegans do not care about animal people's rights or about animal people for that matter. The idea that animal people should be free because they are associated with Gods and that they need compassion over rights is a huge problem. They would rather consider animal people closer to them than Dalits, Adivasis and Bahujans. Another problematic thing these vegans do is that they blame Dalits and Adivasis for exploiting animal people without understanding or ignoring the relationship between animal people and other marginalized group in the country. They ignore the fact that they are the reason Dalits and



Eggstreme cruelty: Chickens locked in battery cages

ATUL KASARE

Adivasis are forced to exploit animals in the first place.

This is how they use this issue to further marginalize us. The vegan movement is so small at the moment that it is completely filled with such casteist and racist people who are doing whatever they want. The mainstream media has totally bought into this 'trend' and is now using it as just another product. With all the things happening and this capitalism being such a powerful oppressive system that it tries to hijack everything for its purpose. It did something here as well. What rose as an animal rights, anti-speciesist movement was quickly taken over by the big corporate, sidelining the entire movement and commodifying everything. For instance, if you avoid everything that comes from animal people you are still not a vegan, you have to stand up for animals and not be ignorant, you have to be anti-speciesist. We call them plant based, not vegan. Almost all the celebrities that we hear about in the news are plant-based, not vegan—Virat Kohli is plant-based not vegan, Shahid Kapoor, Anushka Sharma, Sonam Kapoor, Sonakshi Sinha, Amitabh Bachchan, Jacqueline Fernandez, John Abraham, they are not vegan, they are all plant-based. These celebrities either endorse products that come from enslaved animal people or consume products apart from food that comes from them as well.

Jason Gillespie, an Australian cricketer, is vegan and I shall explain why. Virat Kohli for example, uses pads, gloves, bat and ball that are leather products. Jason Gillespie, on the other hand, rejected all of these and found alternatives, he even designed and proposed a synthetic cricket ball that functions exactly like a leather ball but of course we have a long way to go for that to be used in regular cricket.

The last group that opposes are my fellow Dalit activists. What my fellow Dalit activists fail to see is that veganism is not limited to just plate and diet, it goes much beyond a lifestyle or a trend. We talk about inclusivity, about intersectionality yet we fail to see the connection between billions of species enslaved, commodified, and killed to be served to us. When they try to call me a Brahmin mouthpiece or an upper-caste spokesperson, they erase the pain and suffering and oppression that made me relate to those animal people which made me go vegan. By calling me an animal

lover and not giving me space or by not acknowledging the fact that veganism has nothing to do with someone's individual choice rather than a stand for oppressed beings, they do the exact same thing, they fight. I don't need to love animal people to speak for them. You don't have to love animal people to be a vegan. Do you become a feminist only because you love women? Or are you anti-caste only because you love Dalits and Adivasis and Bahujans? Do you have to love a community or a group to become their allies or stand up for them? It's the same here.

What my fellow Dalit activists fail to see that veganism is not limited just to plate and diet, it goes much beyond a lifestyle or a trend. We talk about inclusivity, about intersectionality yet we fail to see the connection between hundreds of species enslaved, commodified, and killed. You see the other side of the people when you confront them for doing something that is oppressive or marginalizes a community.

I saw this happening when I confronted my casteist upper caste friends to stop using casteist slurs or in the debates against reservation or SC/ST Act, I saw the same pattern with my fellow Dalit activists when I called myself an ally of animals who are oppressed and marginalized in the same manner we have been for thousands of years. In fact, our problems are so interconnected that we are forced to exploit animal people so that only Brahmins and upper caste communities can benefit from sharing, but my fellow activists fail to see that. We are okay with us being exploited as long as we have someone to exploit and benefit from at the end, that's how the entire brahminical structure of caste system has been intact for so long. What my fellow vegan and Dalit activists fail to understand is that we are still playing for the system, we are still playing by their rules that is, we do what they don't want us to do, ride horses because that's somehow represents caste pride, or eat beef because that's our culture and tradition, drink milk or own cattle because traditionally we were not allowed to do that, ride elephants because we were not allowed to do that.

I understand that all this is also an act of rebellion and a way to protest against an oppressive system that has kept us at bay for so long; what I don't understand is that why we need to enslave, torture and marginalize other

species to do that. How can someone fight for their own freedom by enslaving another? These animals are neither our property nor the property of the Brahmins or any other upper caste; they are citizens of the earth just as we are. We are so selective when it comes to tradition and culture because when this tradition and culture forced us to be slave of savarnas we broke out of it and are fighting for it but when the same culture forced us to make certain decisions which treats another group in a similar manner we don't want to move away from it because 'food is an integral part of our culture'. Achieving liberation on the back of another oppressed group is achieving no liberation at all. Dalit vegan activism doesn't play by the rules of the current system and considers animals as our allies. The entire structure of Hinduism stands on three main pillars: the caste system, the exploitation of women and animal people, all three are there to benefit only a small set of powerful community.

In conclusion, I would like to end this piece by saying that we may be looking at the animal rights movement with a wrong lens because of a few elite and privileged people who have occupied it and are using it to further oppress the same people they are claiming to speaking up for, while also oppressing other groups they are already exploiting. No problem exists in isolation and hence the solution also can't be in isolation as well. To my Dalit friends and activists, I would like to say that animals and we, come from the same form of oppression, our pain and sufferings are similar, we are exploited in the same way and there is only one who benefits from it. We cannot fight Brahminism if we play by their rules and accept the values of animals they provide to us. I would like to quote a few lines from the song 'Sunie Fatime Didi' by Vilas Ghogre, a Dalit poet and a activist who lost his life fighting this system: 'Sunie Fatima Didi, aisi kholi ke murgi ka dadba, uss dadbe mein char char parivar, baans ki chatai se bata karma, sunie Fatima didi' which translates to 'listen Fatima Didi, my house is like a chicken cage, where lives a family of four, where rooms are separated by a thin mat.'. If it's not okay with us there is no reason that it should be okay to treat them the same way. We have to stop treating them as commodities and start looking at them as our allies because that's what we are, an ally, because we are exploited in the same way.

# FREEDOM

# ON MY OWN

**Nayna Agrawal travels alone. Yes. A woman who travels alone.**

“I’m off to Manali for the winter,” I said.

“Oh, what fun,” said my mother. “Will you book tickets for us as well?”

“No, Mummy, I’m going alone”.

“Wait, wait, what’s your hurry?” said my father. “We’ll go. We’ll go to Amarkantak too. It’s a hill station nearby.”

“Papa, I’m going alone”.

“When did you plan to do this?”

“January”.

“And who will be attending college?”

“Take your brother with you”.

“You’re too young”.

“This is not right”.

“Go with your friends. We’ll sponsor everyone else. Tell them.”

“Go to someplace closer. Himachal Pradesh is so far.”

They tried everything to stop me from travelling on my own. I had a rough patch with a few terrible incidents which don’t bear repeating here. They were concerned for my

mental health and my safety. But I was determined to go and I was determined to go on my own. I had decided on the place, the time, and also that I would pay for my trip

To give them credit, they agreed. I didn’t have to rebel or walk out or anything like that. I left them worried, anxious for me, but still supportive in their way. This was my way of trying to get over those memories and those incidents. This was my healing.

And this is how I ended up in Manali, staring endlessly at the mountains, the wind kissing my cheeks, the greenery felt like freedom. I was living some of the enchanted moments of my life, trying to soak in everything while the views whizzed past me as I rode in the State Transport bus until the halt in Kullu.

I intended to spend ten days but my train from Ambala back to Delhi and then to Indore and then to home in Mandla was delayed and I got home two days later. “You’re home”. “You’re safe”. “He Bhagwan, bring those nice

laddoos”.

My family was so relieved they didn’t even mention the two extra days I had taken. They even began bragging about their daughter who travelled alone.

The honeymoon ended when I announced that I was going to travel again. On that first trip to Manali, I went to various hostels at other locations like Kullu, Kasol, Naggar Castle and I asked them whether they would allow me to work there. They said they were willing to give me free boarding and lodging in exchange for work: I’d have to take care of the hostel, two hours of work a day, but no pay. This seemed like a reasonable deal and so I began to plan my next trip.

I already had savings of around fifteen thousand rupees. I saved it from my pocket money every month, and that would be my seed money. With lodging and boarding taken care of, I only had to spend on travelling.

And travelling did not mean air travel, by the way. It was either by a State Transport bus or the general



compartment of the train. My father was appalled. He thought I was going back to Manali and he offered to come with me and drop me off. I could not explain to him that I would not be staying at any single place, that my feet were itching to get to the next destination.

But finally, I did manage to convince them that I was going to go and would be doing this on my own.

“Dil Nnhin bhara?” (You still haven’t had enough?) My mother asked, Was my heart still full of yearning?

“What do you have against your family coming with you?” My father asked.

I have to say here that I love my family and I am happy back home. But I also wanted to be on my own, to be silent, to be willing to listen to other people’s stories, to meet new people, to see new things and to do all this with only myself as a company.

On this second trip, I went to Himachal Pradesh again. This time, I visited Dharamshala and McLeodGanj. It was a trip rich in Tibetan experience. I stayed in a monastery, free of cost and attended the chanting sessions. With a friend I made at the monastery, I went to Nepal and did the Annapurna Trek which is a three-day trek but I spun it out to a month. I had my tent but it often got too cold—I hadn’t really prepared for a Himalayan winter—and sometimes

used the guest-house which only cost fifty rupees a day.

On my third trip, I went to Rajasthan. From mountains to deserts. I went to Udaipur and then Mount Abu, the only hill-station in Rajasthan. There I lived in the Om Shanti Ashram; the food was free so was the stay. I went to Jaisalmer, the golden fort at the edge of the Indian border. There I lived in the walled city for a week; there was a desert safari going on so I went as a helper to a man and his camel. I remember the name of the camel: Jasmine. I don’t remember the name of the safari company but it was an interesting experience. Once again, it was free food but the real takeaway were the nights under the stars, the folk performances which I could enjoy for free. I went to the boundary of India and Pakistan and lived in the Army Tent House. I had my tent but stayed in their area. They were extremely hospitable; they offered me free food but with the only caveat that I had to tell them whether I was eating or not so that they could cook accordingly. One of the great meals I had was when the army cook would put potatoes, onions, spices, chicken and some alcohol into a dekchi and then slow cook it through the day so that the meat would be melting off the bone. It was a good introduction to non-vegetarian food for an Agrawal girl. (It does not pay to be choosy about

your food. When I was in Old Manali living in a hostel, the owner’s father had a bucketful of pigeons. In the night, there was a bonfire and alcohol and fairy lights. The Western tourists and the IIT boys who had come to Manali were all helping barbecues the pigeons over the fire. It was my first trip; I was a vegetarian and so I could not participate. By the time someone noticed that I was not eating, it was two am. And so, I was taken to café 1947 and I ordered a pizza, the cheapest thing on the menu. Only it was a four-hundred-rupee pizza which blew a big hole in my budget.)

One evening on the border of Jaisalmer, I went for a walk and came back to find my tent had been cleaned and my bedding folded. Someone in the army couldn’t bear my civilian mess I suppose. But it was a wonderful time, with fighter planes zooming overhead. I was also told I was the first woman to stay with them for a week on my own.

Then I went home. My parents were delighted to see me. This time they didn’t ask about my plans. They assumed I would be off again soon and when I announced that I had been planning the Chadar Trek, along the frozen Zaskar River in Leh. The hitch? The trek cost ₹20,000 and so I decided I would not join a group but would manage on my own. There was no network, no cell



Some Journeys are best travelled solo  
Location- Bir, Himachal Pradesh

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# FREEDOM

phone, no connectivity, I told them.

“Just come back alive,” said my father.

So, I rented gear for three thousand rupees and set out around January, for a 76-kilometre trek. The good part was that I went for a dive into the river, a freezing dive, ten seconds only but a lifetime experience. The bad part was managing food because I had not carried enough food. I had carried beans and sprouts but the water was too cold to sprout them. The energy bars were also insufficient. But I did make friends with groups who were travelling and they fed me. Through all my experiences, I have always come across people who are willing to help. I had a thousand rupees and myself to rely on. Mornings were misty, dark, no sun to guide you and just the river.

When I came home, my parents were relieved to see me. “You should go too,” I said.

I worked in a Ladakh hostel for six months. I even had a dog who came with me. The hostel loaned me a cycle with gears; the most expensive one I have ever had. I travelled all over on the bicycle with my dog, Maanu, at my side. (Maanu is the name of my younger brother whom I am very attached to.) The Ladakhis threw open their arms to this young woman and her dog. I went for several meals with them and enjoyed playing with their children.

Would I say you should go too? I can't assure you that you will have as good an experience as I have had. I look back now and see how often I have been helped in difficult circumstances.

Is it safe? I don't know. I came through unscathed but I would say this: preparation is key. Don't rely only on the Internet. The writing you see there is again personal. The pictures are taken in good weather and they are chosen from among hundreds of possibilities. So, you cannot trust them. What you can trust is the local informant. If you are going to Kerala, say, you should ask your friends about the possibilities. When I went to Kerala, I jumped on board a ship that was going to the Lakshadweep islands, a Kerala Tourism initiative. The price of a ticket is ₹2500 but I was given a concession; I paid only a thousand because my pictures had found their way into Incredible India campaign!

The first one is generally the most difficult because you're learning your way. But you make friends and suddenly you have a network of travellers who can help you by putting you in touch with local people or giving you tips about

how you can move around cheaply.

You have to learn to take the rough with the smooth. There will be people who will not help, who will turn you away even when you have a simple request like a glass of water. But as a traveller, you set your expectations low and you find that most people are wonderful. In Ladakh, I must have had a hundred or more free meals even though the people there are not rich. I made many friends and stayed in touch with them. Maanu is now housed with one of these families.

Then comes the issue of money. You have to be able to predict issues that may arise and set some money aside for odd expenses like going to the hospital to have your bone set, sanitary napkins in places where they aren't even heard of, or an impulse buy. A lovely dupatta may be or even a piece of cloth that you might need because a temple needs you to cover your legs or your head or whatever. There's also the impulse to help someone in need and you must consider what you can safely give.

I'd say you could save a lot of money simply by thinking it through. For instance, you don't need to add to plastic pollution by buying bottled water; you should just carry a bottle with you and fill it wherever you can. Sprouts are very good as a healthy light and filling snack. One air-tight dabba and a sprinkling of water and you're good to go for lunch. Some chaat masala sprinkled over it can help.

Another tip: bring less than you think for your trip because you'll need the space in your backpack. Harem pants or just pyjamas are an Indian wardrobe essential, and you can pick up some gorgeous ones cheaply at the markets. They're baggy and will suit most situations. They're also easy to wash and will dry quickly so you'll save loads of space in your backpack. The second essential item of clothing for India is a shawl, as these are particularly useful to have handy in case you stumble across a temple you want to go into, to protect your chest from the wind. You'll also want to wear a T-shirt with a high neck. Maxi skirts are great, as are culottes and long dresses. You should simply use common sense when deciding what to wear in India. Look around you at what other people are doing, and if in doubt ask the staff and fellow travellers at your hostel. It will also help you to keep you safe.

Safety measures like pepper spray or a little knife can also be taken but, don't break the law. This one might seem obvious, but it bears repeating.

It becomes tiring and challenging at physical and mental levels, but a little bit of planning can easily help overcome dangers.

I experienced a lot of different cuisines across the journey. In the North, it's rich and creamy and in the South, it's fresher and light, often with coconut oil. It's safe to say the food in India is on a whole other level. We tend to taste diverse and healthy food which adds to the happiness and energy levels. Gradually, get to know about new cuisines, cultures and understand different ways of life. Buying plastic bottles is not a traveller's bit to nature but refilling and reusing is, as water is the most crucial of all. Nature needs a little bit of helping hands and certainly, we are all one people. It is our responsibility to use it sustainably, especially while travelling.

Every step leads to extraordinary challenges and learnings about life, no matter what your age is. We dive out of our comfort zone to explore and yet can feel very sheltered by the universe. You will never feel alone, just be the first to smile. All it takes is a small effort to join them or simply ask questions about life. The people in India are crazy, funny and incredibly friendly.

If you're looking for an eye-opening cultural experience, head to the Northeast of the country, which is a bit more off the beaten track. Here you'll be able to meet some of the local tribes and learn about their fascinating culture. This small initiative will give you unforgettable bonds and treasured friendships. We may struggle with the language, but that doesn't seem to matter when tens of other things are lying around. There is always so much to see and explore that is certainly not in any girl guidebooks.

Travel is insanely addictive, even careers get delayed. You'll find yourself in places so beautiful, you'll never want to leave. Of course, there is no replacement for life experience, and you'll have that in abundance, but when you're slap bang back home, confronted with reality, with adventures behind you, it can be hard to see people who have moved on ahead. Routines then become tough to maintain and can hurt you, but you'll become a different person.

To be honest, there's no saying for sure whether you'll go through the same issues. After all, everyone's experiences of travel are different. Having an adventure, revel in the wonder and embrace the negatives that go with them is what leaves us content.



# HOW TO BE A CITIZEN

Arshi Khan reports from the frontlines of dissent.



Arshi makes clear what the protest stands for.

AKANSHA NEGI



"Hear our voices!"

NAVYA SAHAI BHATNAGAR



ARSHI KHAN

**O**n the 19th of December 2019, twenty SCMITes went to August Kranti Maidan and held up colourful placards, not for an assignment, but to volunteer and stand in solidarity with the students of Jamia Millia Islamia. The students in Delhi had undergone a brutal treatment from the Delhi police while protesting against the 'Citizenship Amendment Act'.

For many of us, it was our first experience of becoming a part of a protest happening at such a huge level.

"It was my first real protest. After reading about the police brutality in Jamia just the previous day, I was scared. I don't know why but those images of Jamia violence made me think that the same may happen in this protest but the police gave us protection. I never felt more secure, it was one of a kind of experience. Being in that crowd and shouting out slogans, I've never done anything like that before. We were all in this together, fighting and shouting slogans for a reason," said Nirmiti Kamat.

Despite being aware that we could get beaten up, arrested, or worse; people still showed up in massive numbers holding placards and banners while shouting 'Aazaadi' in unison.

"Some protests are peaceful too. After holding that placard, I realised that it is so convenient to put up stories on social media and to share them rather than getting into that feeling and being surrounded by a huge number of people who have

similar views; which is a different experience," said Navya Sahai Bhatnagar. Indeed it was the electric environment of August Kranti which filled us with hope and the power to shout slogans, not just from the tongue, but from our hearts.

"Initially, I was scared that what if a stampede happens, and what if I am unable to move in that crowd and what if I get beaten? But the air was surrounded by slogans of dissent which were chanted by people of all kinds, therefore, we were united by dissent," said Navya.

After studying journalism from Smruti Koppikar, Nayna Agrawal was consistently reminded about the power of people and democracy which gives way to dissent. "

The protest for us became our first opportunity to exhibit that dissent openly and challenge the authorities. You can enervise every potential in protests but violence is never the right way," said Nayna, appreciating the way the protest went so peacefully without causing any harm to anybody.

"The protest was a voice against the government. United, with peace in our mind, we marched to dissent for this was our right in a democracy. For me to be a part of this big protest was like my small drop of contribution towards a big wave that will hit the government," expressed Sakshi Sharma.

The event changed everybody in some way or the other, some felt powerful within themselves, while some realised the power of expressing opinions, even if they were against giants such as the Indian Government.



Music and motivation:  
Gateway to a new life

## PERSONAL HISTORY

# The Afterlife of BIPIN AWASTHI

Bipin Awasthi started taking drugs to help him sleep. His battle with drugs and his journey towards redemption, as described by his daughter, **Anjali Awasthi**

**Y**ou would not be able to tell Bipin Awasthi from any other businessman if you were to meet him on streets. Of course, he is not the classic businessman either: he loves music and plays the guitar as a hobby. He is also a homemaker who took over the reins of his household after the death of his wife. In 2011, Meenu Awasthi was detected with uterine cancer, stage 3B, she could hardly be treated. But every attempt was made. She survived for two years after her diagnosis and passed away on January 3, 2013. That was when Bipin Awasthi made the transition from being a father to being both the mother and the father. I know all this because he is my father.

His story is not ordinary. He has made a remarkable turnaround and now has a completely new life. "An afterlife, you could call it," he says and adds, "Blast the past, baby."

Bipin was fifteen when he was introduced to narcotic substances. He tells the story himself. It begins in 1970. "I owned a paan shop near Mahalaxmi Temple in Mumbai, where, because of the surroundings, I got used to bhang. I was working all day with my father in his dairy and sometimes I felt so tired I could not sleep. My friend said bhang would give me a good night's rest. And so, I tried it."

That seemed to work, so it became a habit. Soon, he was taking it whether he was tired or not. By the time he was in the eighth standard, he had moved on from there to charas (hashish) and ganja (cannabis). He experimented with his school friends. He loved music, and there too, he found there was a certain glamour associated with the use of drugs. "You name the drug, I have tried it," he says now.

In 1975, heroin hit the streets. This was a drug that had been developed in the laboratory by an English chemist who was trying to create a painkiller like morphine but without the addictive effects of the poppy-based painkillers. Unfortunately, heroin turned out to be much more addictive, producing intensely pleasurable sensations called a 'high'. However, tolerance develops quickly and the user needs more and more, and is soon willing to do anything to feed his or her habit. Bipin Awasthi encountered heroin with his musician friends and was addicted by the time he was 20 years old. Failing in SSC

five times in succession, he gave up on studies. "Life was a true pain then when I had no money to buy drugs."

His parents had given up on him. They just prayed he would recover soon. He was asked to work with his father in the family business near Mahalaxmi Temple. Bipin earned money from music events. He was an organising member with the People's Band where all the members were his friends. "When our parents did not give us money, we used to steal things from our home to sell and buy drugs".

In 1978, Bipin organized a show in Patkar Hall, Churchgate, with the People's Band, Electronic Dust, Waterfront Bunny, Bobby Duggal, Rony Desai and Ranjit Barot performed in the event. Looking back on this event, he says with a trace of sadness, "Most of my friends are dead; only a few are alive."

Whatever they made from the event went into the drugs. "It wasn't a lot of money," he says. "But it was my zone. There was the thunder of the music and it was magnified by the drugs."

He begins to travel back in time and starts singing a song which he wrote

"Ka se kamaaye jaa,  
Ga se...tu gaye jaa,  
Kha se tu khaaye jaa  
Gha se tu ghar basaaye jaa  
Yahi hai tantra...  
Yahi hai mantra..."

Apne liye jo jeete hain, khaak woh kya jeete hain,

Apna pet jo bharte hain, hardam bhukhe rehte hain.

Deoge toh paoge, Nahin to bhukhe hi rehjaoge,

Yahi vo tantra... Yahi hai mantra..."  
(You earn a little, you sing a little, you eat a little.

That's the mantra to live.

Those who only live for themselves, what life is that?

Those who fill only their stomachs, stay hungry forever,

When you will give, only then you will get

Otherwise, you will starve forever...)

By 1985, the 28-year-old Bipin had been on hard drugs for over eight years. His parents got him married, much against his wishes. "Drugs were still part of my routine. Everyone hated me in the family. My wife was also unhappy, she got to know about my habits after our marriage."

Five years after marriage in 1992, his first daughter, Shraddha, was born but his journey as an addict continued. In 1998, he was blessed with two twins, Ashutosh and Anjali. This led to a

positive change in his life.

All the years of Bipin's drug abuse came to a head when he contracted tuberculosis and was fighting for his life. His wife stood by his side. It was only after his recovery that he finally decided to turn over a new life. His childhood friend, Suresh Pawar, urged him to pull himself together before it got too late and got him admitted at a detox centre.

"In the year 2000, a new phase in my life began at the Seva Dham Detox Centre in Andheri. Seva Dham removes the fear that you cannot live without drugs. Each addict has to attend the ninety-day meeting which helps them remove the toxins from their body. It was a completely new beginning; music and drugs were all left behind."

Pawar says, "I was in the same situation for forty years, I understood his condition and took him

While rehabilitation did help, it was still a painful journey. "The twenty-day programme was one in which we were required to meditate, exercise, work and pray. We were put on special medication to ease the pains and irritability that come with giving up drugs," says Bipin. What helped him was the fraternity of all those around him. Many were addicts who had fought the same battles, so sharing experiences and regrets was much easier.

"They would say, 'I can't handle my problem but together we can solve all problems.' That's how we lived together. Eventually, I came to see my condition as a disease and I could see that if I made a complete change in my way of thinking, I could cure it myself. I suppose I just needed the guidance to be able to see it."

The programme stressed the HOW of recovery: HOW stands for Honesty, Openness and Willingness. "No medicine can cure you," he says now. "You need to cure yourself. You have to decide to live a full life. You have to work at it, using everything you've got. Yoga and prayer can help."

After his detox, there was a forty-day residential rehabilitation programme in Alibaug at Awas village. "We were left alone and were given different departments to handle. There was 'no free lunch'. We managed everything ourselves, right from cooking to cleaning the bathrooms. Every job was divided amongst us. The doors were always open for you to leave anytime. Twenty-five days and I was done; I could not manage it there."



.....  
**You need to cure yourself. You have to decide to live a full life. You have to work at it, using everything you've got. Yoga and prayer can help.**

With three of his friends, he escaped from Awas at 2 am. The four walked 15 to 20 kilometres along the roads of Alibaug, hoping for a lift. "Finally, we got a truck driver who was taking bricks to Panvel. We hid among the bricks. Later, he asked for money. Now the three of us had run away in our night shorts, carrying nothing. The driver was very angry. We took a train from Panvel and got home."

But since that day until today, Bipin has stayed clean. His father helped him stay on track and started working with him. Bipin also credits the Narcotics Anonymous meetings that he attends regularly "I attend meetings where we share our stories and that's how I improve".

Bipin, now 62 years old, meditates and reads the Ramayana every morning. At the Seva Dham Centre, he got into the habit of practising yoga and meditation which he continues till today. "I read 'Just for Today: Daily Meditations for Recovering Addicts' every day; that's my survival kit for each day." He stands firm in his belief that the only way to recover is "Starting Today".

# Written in Steel

**Nirmiti Kamat** looks at an old tradition, having your name inscribed on your stainless steel vessels.

**T**he other day, as I was washing my stainless-steel plate after dinner, my fingers chanced on a name carved on it. In raised letters, 'Sau. Vimal Kamat', my long-dead great-aunt. I had not thought of her for years but now her name on that plate brought a flood of memories back. She didn't do it so we might remember her, but as a sign of affection. That carved name, I feel, will ensure she will never fade into oblivion.

Digging deeper into this name-carving tradition, I found that this runs deeper than just gifting. Names were carved on utensils to identify who it belonged to. This began in villages where neighbours used to exchange plates of delicacies made on festivals. Since small villages had only one utensil maker, the plates used to be more or less identical, so carving names on them became a ritual to set them apart. When gifting the utensil to someone, the giver's name was always inscribed. There are many more interesting reasons on why to glide that heavy noise-making driller on the shiny utensils.

In search of the men who carve names on plates, I venture into the Panjrapole Lane of the Bhuleshwar Market. I am led by my ears for a constant drilling sound fills the air. Satish Shah, owner of the oldest shop in the steel market, Bina Stainless Steel Corporation says, "People usually get their names carved on the utensils, it will be carved out only if the maximum utensils are a dozen. Beyond that, we turn to laser printing." The drilling tool looks like a heavy machine which manages to drill out delicate tiny letters on steel plates and

pens. Shah explains, "A seller comes shop to shop selling these machines, this tool has no specific name, we just call it 'Naam daalneka gun' (name carving gun)". I probe him to know more about laser printing, and he guides me to Khimjibhai's shop.

Across three lanes in Chandan Vadi lies 'Shri Ganesh Ind[ustries]', the only shop in the entire market which does laser printing, now run by Khimji Bhai's son. Hiren Khimji Chedda tells me, "My father did the traditional carving in steel, I did it with the handheld machine, we got this laser machine three years ago, now my son designs the name printing style and operates the machine." The 35-year-old business gets orders online too, one such consignment was packed and ready to be sent to Bengaluru. Steel plates were to be distributed at a birthday party, and they had the birthday boy's name carved on it, alongside a Ben-10 cartoon. Hiren Chedda's son downloads such cartoon images and other designs from Google converts it and prints it through the laser machine. Company names are also printed. Speaking about the technology of the process, Hiren tells me that it's a foreign technology and works directly in unison with the computer attached to it.

Exploring the market, one can see brass utensils to being carved on, people flocking to buy utensils by dozen, men drilling on steel with vigour under the surveillance of stern managers behind shiny cash counters. One such young man, Umesh Kumar Yadav, drilling away with focus, says, "Yes people want their names written, it's mostly in Devanagiri script, even in Gujarati at times. It took me a long time to master this tool, as it's a bit



Umesh Kumar Yadav drilling into a copper lota

heavy." Yadav hails from Gonda in UP, he studied till the tenth standard in an English medium school. He shares that he can write and carve in English, Hindi and Marathi, "But when someone wants it written in Gujarati, it's tough for me, if too hard, I just hand it over to a fellow worker." He adds that right now the market is down, but people flock to get carvings done in the Diwali period.

Deepali Kushe, 47, a homemaker residing in Dombivli, shares "When I was studying in Balmohan Vidyamandir, Dadar, the winners of races got steel bowls. A week later, the principal distributed prizes, 1st prize- korleli vaati (carved bowl), 2nd prize- korlela chamcha (carved spoon) and so on, and these prizes had their names carved on them, so students had a sense of pride in achieving them." She further recalls that in Saraswat weddings, handa (steel/brass pots) were given to the bride when she left for her in-laws' place. And these had the 'to-be-married' name of the bride carved on them. "I've seen wedding homes before the wedding day where there are handas ready with the bride's 'to-be-married' name, which is an irony because she is not even married yet", she adds.

Jaspreet Kaur, 18, a dress designing student from Mumbai has a stirring memory to share, "There's a 'gundi' (pot) in our house which has my name on it, so the story goes that when my mother was carrying me, she used to drink water from the same pot, and when I was born and named, my father got my name carved on that pot." Jaspreet hails from Mahasamund in Chattisgarh, and she says, "In our village, whenever women buy new utensils, they get their husbands' name carved on them."

Students in government schools carry their plates for midday meals, with their names carved on them. But this tradition is dying with the introduction of china cutlery and glassware. People now opt for fancy utensils rather than tikau (lasting) steel. Though carving is an additional cost, people continue to demand it during festivals and special occasions. But even if demand falls, and the art goes extinct, the steel plates and carvings will remain, bearing signs of someone's life and times.

BHOOMI MISTRY



## The Rise of Carrie Brings-Her-Own-Bag-Shaw

In a market where the Indian consumer is all set to become king, why, and how, do we become sustainable in our clothes habits? According to The State of Fashion 2019 report (McKinsey), “The Indian middle class is forecast to expand at 19.4 percent a year over the same period (2018 to 2022), outpacing China, Mexico and Brazil...India is set to move from being an increasingly important sourcing hub to being one of the most attractive consumer markets outside the Western world.”

This year, we have experienced the terrible effects of climate change in forms of floods that have wrecked havoc in 13 Indian states and we need to become mindful of how our habits and affect the climate. An article in the Madras Courier says, “It (fashion industry) produces twenty percent of global waste-water and accounts for ten percent of global carbon emissions.” Which means the fashion choices we make now, will impact the climatic conditions in coming years.

“As the fashion industry takes step to regulate production, we should also take conscious steps to sustain consumption...it has been a year since I have stopped buying from fast fashion brands such as Zara and H&M,” says Rushmika Banerjee, Senior Fashion Features Writer at Verve Magazine.

But where do you start? “Sustainability is a scale and a label that should strive to be on the right side of that scale as much as possible. The UN Goals for sustainable development is a good

start,” Rushmika adds. When you buy something, you should know if it was made ethically.

The rise of vintage thrift stores on Instagram is gaining momentum in India and it is a great way to invest in unique fashion pieces without damaging the environment. “I had been buying unique second-hand pieces for many years and when the idea of vintage clothing came to India, I started an Instagram shop because it was easier to operate that way. There was no point in launching a website because my pieces are very limited.” says Sujala Newar, founder of The Local Vintage, the coveted vintage store on Instagram.

“As I started becoming more aware of the impact fast fashion has on the environment, I started cutting down the size of my wardrobe and donating clothes I didn’t use. I realised the magnitude of the impact I could make if I started collecting clothes from friends and family. One thing led to another and now we’re excited to expand now and hold thrift store pop-ups in multiple cities,” says Sana, the founder of Bombay Closet Cleanse, a sustainable start-up on Instagram. “We compromise on branding to ensure we use the least amount of paper and plastic in our operations. Customers are asked to get their own bags to shop,” she adds.

While sustainability may seem like a steep slope, we can start by becoming Carrie Brings-her-own-bag-shaw. **Bhoomi Mistry**

## Fashion Forward

The brainchild of Satyajit Vetoskar, an award winning industrial designer, BANDIT bags is a sustainable initiative that uses up-cycled tarpaulin to design artful bags that can be carried in multiple ways. With frequent collaborations with well-known Goan graffiti artists, this bag is perfect for eco-conscious consumers who love street art. Along with SCM alum Deepa George, Vetoskar showcased Bandit bags at Serendipity Art Festival Goa, 2018, and has won multiple design awards since then.

Excerpts from an interview with Deepa George.

**How did you think of Bandit bags? What is the core idea of this initiative?**

The genesis for the up-cycling and sustainable concept came to industrial designer Satyajit Vetoskar when flying into Mumbai. He noticed the city enveloped in blue tarpaulin, especially in the monsoons. This was the point of inspiration for him to use an ordinary, common yet robust material such as tarpaulin to make uncommon, functional, durable, stylish products. For over two years, in-depth research was undertaken on the material, post which designs were made, re-made and made again—all to get the perfect cohesion between design,

material and manufacturing. The bags were then tested extensively with various users and the final product was showcased at the Serendipity Arts Festival 2018 in Goa.

**Are the other materials like the belt, zip, etc also recycled to make a Bandit bag?**

No, they are not, but we are working towards it. Currently, it’s just the material of the bag or the body fabric that is up-cycled but we are in the process of experimenting with other materials.

**How is Bandit bags working towards sustainability. Is Bandit bags a zero-waste initiative?**

In its current avatar, it isn’t possible to make BANDIT a complete zero waste product but going forward we are trying to evolve towards that goal.

Where is the tarpaulin sourced from?

The tarpaulin that we use is sourced from ISO9001 factories that manufacture good quality tarpaulin in large quantities. We source the excess or waste material that often lies around to be finally discarded.

**How do we clean the bag so that it doesn’t shed micro plastic?**

You don’t need to clean the bag. The beauty

of tarpaulin is that it is a durable and water resistant material. It can just be wiped with a cloth to clean it.

**How did you arrive at the idea of making a bag using recycled tarpaulin? And of making a bag that can be worn in multiple ways?**

The founder, Satyajit Vetoskar, is an architect and an industrial designer with over two decades of experience in design across product categories from luggage, watches, jewellery, shoes, electronics and toothbrushes. His knowledge of design along with understanding of materials and manufacturing, led him to design Bandit with a versatility in the way one can use it. It’s really about carrying it Anyway You Like It!

**Can you tell us more about Bandit x MAAKOAD?**

Shrey ‘Flyin Monkey’ Sawant is a fabulous graffiti artist/illustrator who is also based in Goa. We want to collaborate with various artists and this is the first step towards that direction. If art can be taken out of galleries and to the streets, why not take art to products with a similar vibe? The first step towards this collaboration is to have a street art festival in the second week of Jan that combines music, art and charity. **Bhoomi Mistry**

# 10

## tips for a sustainable wardrobe **By Bhoomi Mistry**

**W**hen the famous fashion photographer Bill Cunningham said, “Fashion is the armour to survive the reality of everyday life.” Perhaps he did not predict how the gravitas of his words would shift in light of climate change. According to an article by United Nations Environment Programme published in 2018, “The fashion industry is the second-biggest consumer of water, producing 20 per cent of waste water while also generating more greenhouse gas emissions than all international flights and maritime shipping combined.” It is imperative now, more than ever, that this armour should be made sustainable, so as to keep our carbon footprint to a bare minimum.

As thrilling as the concept of fast fashion is, its impact on the environment outweighs the joy of wearing a cheaply priced t-shirt four times and then throwing it away. Every time a garment made out of polyester and other synthetic based materials is discarded, it adds to the load of non-decomposable waste that will pollute the planet, even long after we're dead. Wondering what you can do about this situation? Here are ten tips for a sustainable fashion wardrobe.

1

### START WHERE YOU ARE!

Being sustainable means having a low carbon footprint and generating minimum waste, so if your closet is full of fast fashion right now, the best way to start is to get the maximum wears out of the garments stuffed at the back of your closet. Make slight alterations and fix small holes where ever possible and see if the garments can be repurposed or donated at the end of their wear cycle.

2

### CHANGE YOUR LAUNDRY HABITS

Our washing habits influence the shelf life of the garment significantly. Washing clothes inside out is more effective than washing the outer part, as it slows down the fading of colour and it is more hygienic to get rid of all the bacteria on the side of the garment that really hugs the body. Washing clothes less frequently and washing them in bulk, especially synthetic fabrics, reduces the friction between two garments and the amount

of microplastic shed reduces. Whenever possible, hand wash your clothes and save water, detergent and electricity.

3

### DO IT FOR THE CULTURE

Remember how your mother scolded you for forgetting to switch off the fan after leaving the room? Or how exciting it was as a child, when your cousin finally handed down her adorable dress to you? Or how it ended up becoming a rag when it could no longer be worn? As Indians, most of us are taught sustainable values at a very young age. Revisiting them in times of climate change can help you lower your carbon footprint. Next time if a relative or a friend is cleaning their closet, look out for steals and return the favour when you can!

4

### INVEST IN SUSTAINABLE, TIMELESS SILHOUETTES

Sometimes there is no way to avoid a purchase and let's face it, sometimes, you'd rather indulge. Buying from sustainable brands and prioritising quality over quantity affects the wearability of the garment. And there are plenty of options to choose from! More and more sustainable brands are popping up every day, it's about finding one that aligns with your aesthetic. In a broader sense, it is wiser to invest in timeless silhouettes and styles like the little black dress or a staple sari or tan vegan leather or cork wallet as these are unlikely to go out of fashion in future. And although sustainable garments decompose faster, the key here is to get the maximum wear out of these items. Whenever possible, hand wash your clothes and save water, detergent and electricity.



5

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT FABRIC**

Buy recycled denim and t-shirts made out natural fabrics like wool, bamboo, hemp, organic cotton, linen, jute and lycocell, as they do not shed microplastic and decompose faster. Cloths like khadi dyed with organic dyes are also good alternatives to polyester. Opt for vegan leather and accessories made out of recycled materials like rubber tyres and cork, etc. Invest in recycled denim and avoid fancy washes as they use more bleach and water. Another thing to look out for is natural dyes, as they are far better for the environment than their chemical counterparts.

6

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT WORKOUT CLOTHES**

Most of our workout clothes are made of synthetic fabrics like nylon and spandex. While Nike has taken an initiative to recycle plastic bottles into dri-fit clothes, there is no clarity on how the process is carried out and how much microplastic is shed per wash. Satva, Stretchery and Deivee are some Indian brands that offer sustainable active wear options.

7

**CHECK THE LABEL, DO SOME RESEARCH**

Often you will come across tags that say '100% Organic Cotton' written next to 'Made in Bangladesh'. While lowering the carbon footprint, one should also support ethical trade practices for a holistic approach to sustainability. In such cases, do some research on the brand to see if the intermediaries are paid fairly. The best thing about living in the internet age is that if a brand with large stake in the market takes one wrong step, the woke police does not waste a minute before calling the brands out. Another example of this would be t-shirts that say '100% Organic cotton' but when you read the material composition, it also mentions spandex. This means that the t-shirt is not sustainable. Be vary of misleading tags.

8

**SHOP VINTAGE**

"It's hard to be on social media and not read about how we are damaging our planet. The awareness is rising and hence the rise of vintage since it is one of the ways to consume consciously when it comes to fashion," says Sujala Newar, the founder of instafamous store 'The Local Vintage'. Re-selling garment business is having a major moment all over the world and even in India, people are now starting to look beyond their prejudices to consider shopping second-hand. Not only are they a much more sustainable option, but also fashionable. If you are planning to invest in a luxury piece, going vintage can get you some unbelievable deals.

9

**REGULATE ONLINE SHOPPING**

According to an article on BBC Earth, "Each year, 5 billion pounds of waste is generated through returns." Which means that when you return the t-shirt that you shopped online, it most likely ended up in the land fill instead of the store inventory. Brands like Burberry and H&M have even admitted to burning their stock. It would be a wise idea to go to the store and shop, but if you insist on shopping online then make sure to go through their return policies to get a better idea.

10

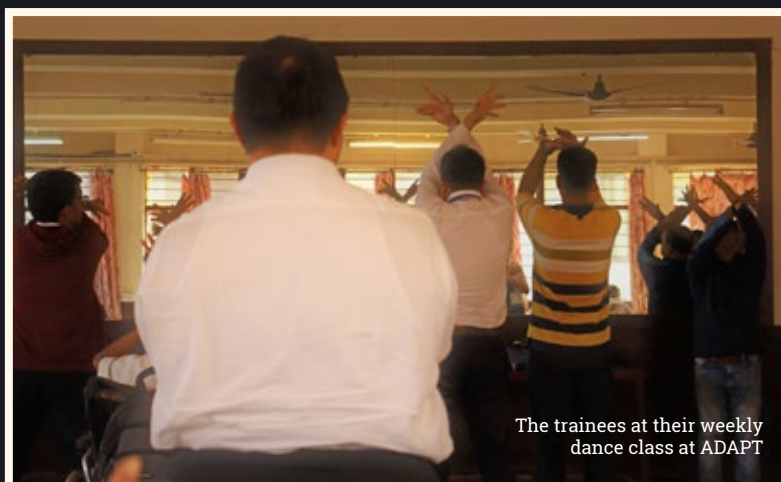
**DONATE!**

At its core, sustainable fashion is about mindful consumption, reduced wastage and fair payment to the intermediaries involved. This also means that you're responsible for what happens to garments after you are done using them. Donating them is the best way to make sure that they're either recycled or repurposed into something useful instead of ending up in a land-fill. Goonj, an NGO based in Delhi works towards repurposing used clothes into sujnis (quilts). Producing these quilts is a source of livelihood for several women across rural India. The NGO has several donation centres across the countries, where they collect under-utilised household items.



ALL PEOPLE TOGETHER

**Susanna Cherian** visits ADAPT's training centre at Chembur where the differently abled are given a chance to prove their skills.



The trainees at their weekly dance class at ADAPT

**W**hen the movie *Margarita with a Straw* was released in 2015, it helped make people aware of the story of differently-abled people. The film was inspired by the story of Malini Chib, who won the National Award for her autobiography, *One Little Finger* (Sage Publications, 2011). Malini Chib was diagnosed with acute cerebral palsy when she was born. Her mother, Dr Mithu Alur, refused to accept that her daughter would always live 'as a vegetable'. Instead, she got her daughter into a special needs school abroad. In 1972, she founded The Spastics Society of India, what is now known as ADAPT or Able Disable All People Together ([www.adaptssi.org](http://www.adaptssi.org)).

We visited ADAPT's Skill Development Centre at Chembur, Mumbai, where adults within the age group of eighteen to thirty years are given training with the aim of getting them employed. There are various departments like the textiles and tailoring, pottery and ceramics and the department of computer

applications. They also train candidates as telephone operators, receptionists and automobile mechanics. Apart from extra-curricular activities like dance, music and yoga, the trainees also have speech therapy and physiotherapy.

Earlier one of the trainees wouldn't move when he took admission at ADAPT. He would freeze at one place, afraid of moving ahead. Even a black line on the floor would scare him. He had to be urged and coaxed to move. Today, the trainee either takes the lift or walks up the ramp floor himself.

The trainees also have therapy sessions with a clinical psychologist. We sat in on one of these.

"Draw me a picture of how you feel when you're happy," the psychologist asked. The trainee bent over her paper and began to work.

"What makes you happy?" she asked.

"When...mother takes me out, I like...yes," answered the trainee.

"And when do you feel unhappy?"

"When sister doesn't buy me what I want..." replies the trainee.

The textiles department at ADAPT is designed to teach the trainees textile designing, the printing process and allied processes. Some other skills include block printing and dyeing cloth and paper. The department now has a Central Government-recognised certificate course, a one-year programme in collaboration with the Weavers' Service Centre. This course encourages parents to bring their children and learn the skills required to set up their own businesses and also market their own products.

When the organisation went to the lawyers with this idea at first, no one thought that differently-abled students would be able to do anything. But they were proved wrong when the students at ADAPT also won the trophy at the 'Art meets Science' exhibition in Mumbai, defeating students from IIT and prominent art colleges. The exhibits made by the trainees were indeed art, through textile designing and processing. There was also quite a lot of science involved in using clay and mineral powders like ball clay, quartz or silica, china clay and bentonite. "The clay is



fired upon individually, at different temperatures like fourteen hundred or twelve hundred degree centigrade. There is an entire process of firing, making different compositions and to create test pieces, all having their own colours. One needs to know its correct compositions,” said the head of the textiles department at ADAPT.

At ADAPT's tailoring department, they teach the trainees garment stitching and embroidery work. They make aprons, table mats, corporate folders and notepads, table napkins, cloth and jute bags and cushion covers. Adapt has an 'I Can' bazaar and apart from it, has showcased their work at the Kala Ghoda Art Fest and the Chembur Exhibition Fest. In partnership with corporates, their products are displayed at many such exhibitions and festivals.

At physiotherapy, the activities are planned in such a manner as to reduce dependency and increase confidence with the eventual goal of making each person physically independent. “If a child is not able to move or walk properly, we treat them accordingly. Since we are job oriented, we devise plans that will work in tandem with what the trainees want to do. Some skills may need finger movements more so we plan according to the job profile requirement,” says the physiotherapist at the centre.

A trainee at his computer types letters while using ‘Typing Master’, a software that helps learning. His trainer asks him to have a look at his report on the screen.

“How much is your typing speed?... Can you tell me?”

He points out at the speed on the screen which reads, ‘Fifteen words per minute’.

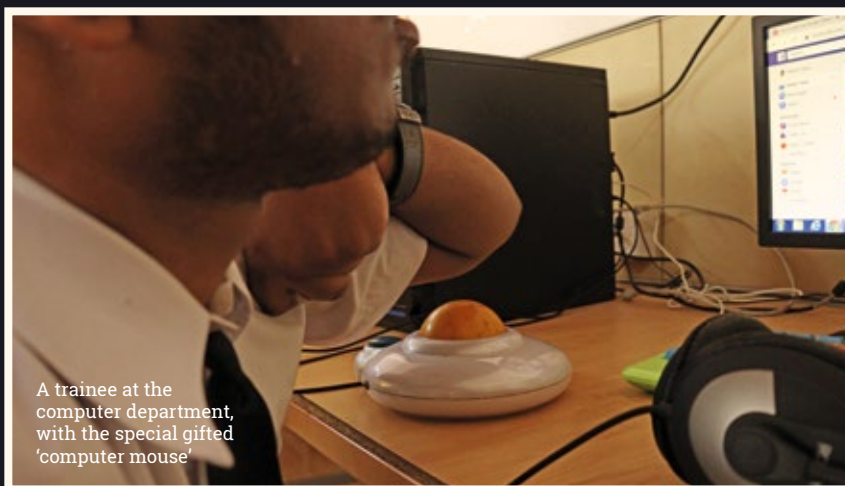
The teacher at the Computers Department says that they like expressing themselves through sign language and with their fingers.

“How does ‘Typing Master’ help you?” she asks.

He looks up at her in wonder. His eyes say he knows the answer but he doesn't know how to explain it. The letters on the screen turn green every time he types the right spelling, and remain purple if not typed on the answer pad. So she asks him to enter an incorrect spelling.

He presses on the wrong key on purpose and nods at the purple colour in affirmation.

Among the trainees there was perseverance in every eye, and patience within the teachers. Their steps were



A trainee at the computer department, with the special gifted 'computer mouse'

‘What makes you happy?’ she asked. ‘When mother takes me out...I like...yes,’ said the trainee.

tiny, but there was talent being expressed.

After training is done, placements begin. While the teacher may conduct soft skills for the trainees, it is also their responsibility to see if their student has an issue. This may vary from finding out the cause of a sudden outburst to addressing a social or intellectual problem.

They need to be made ready for the world outside. They need to know what their responsibilities are but equally, they must be made aware of their rights, even things like the ‘good touch-bad touch’.

“When our trainees went out to work, we found out that the people who they were working with, they couldn't understand what our trainees were trying to communicate,” says the teacher with the group of trainees who have been deemed ready for placement. The trainees must be placed in organisations sensitised to the needs and rights of differently-abled people. While placing the trainees, the placement officer also sees to it that workshops are organised at the workplace to sensitise other employees.

A suitable environment at the workplace is of utmost requirement. And the organization is very careful

while placing their trainees. “For disability, placement is a very challenging job, either being infrastructure or our own trainees have lack of skills or it could be travelling to the workplace. India is not a very disabled friendly country,” says the placement officer at ADAPT. With intellectual impairment, learning disabilities or multiple disabilities, work becomes a lot more challenging when one is unable to communicate. And then there's the other challenges of those whose mobility is impaired. “It's also a challenge for the parents to help them with a wheelchair for them to travel to the workplace, or for toileting and ramp facilities to be available at work.”

The trainees also suffer from health issues like diabetes, infections or one may get sudden epileptic attacks. Today, with technological advancements, those visually impaired, or those with hearing impairments, can get assistance with gadgets, but if someone has a low IQ or has multiple disabilities, that remains a challenge. While they are learning here, the teachers still attend to them with patience. “If they are not behaving well, we say, okay today he's not in a mood, today he's angry. Something might have triggered it. At the workplace they require a mentor initially,” says the officer. The trainees often have a mentor at the workplace to guide them, but this does not reduce the challenges. Often one may not always retain a job, it could be a lack of skill, a behavioural issue or an inability to adjust to the work environment.

But parents don't look at job employment as the only reason for coming as it's also for trainees to pick up socialisation, to learn therapy and to learn how to live more independently.

# The economics of fat-shaming

**Karen Dsouza looks at the economics and politics of fat-shaming**

“**P**sychologically, fat-shaming affects me. Sometimes it affects as I think twice before eating in public, I don't wear sleeveless because of this. So basically, I don't have the confidence to portray myself or carry myself as I am. I have spent around ₹25,000 so far in an attempt to reduce weight,” says Madhura Khasnis, junior account executive at Avian WE, a PR agency.

“I tried diets, yoga, green tea, Ayurvedic medicines. My mom made me do all this to reduce weight. It worked. I spent almost ₹4000 a month on yoga and maybe ₹1000 on green tea and Ayurvedic medicines. But now I know that weight isn't a parameter for beauty and I have learnt to accept myself, just the way I am,” says Alyssa Rebello, a school counsellor and a postgraduate in clinical psychology.

Culture determines the correct body weight and then everyone has to fit in or face body-shaming in one way or the other. At one point, after reaching puberty or with the slowing down of the metabolism, one is faced with the challenge to lose weight or be 'fit'. Most of us, at some point in our lives, have been hit with inane comments on our weight like, “You have put on weight”, “You must hit the gym” from an annoying relative or insensitive friend. Or there is that relentless model of perfection Sharma Ji ka beta who has the perfect body because of ‘five glasses of water in the morning on an empty stomach and one hour of pranayama’. None of this helps. All it does is to make you conscious of your weight and suspicious of your own body.

We're so used to this that we don't even see it as toxic. But Aiman Shaikh, a feminist and a postgraduate student in clinical psychology at Gujarat Forensic Sciences University, has a very different take: “People take



AKANSHA NEGI

shaming and bullying of any kind very, very casually. Especially in Indian households, where our nicknames are physical descriptors, these can become a person's identity. So if you're short, you're 'Chotu' and if you're fat, you're 'Moti'. This same thing extends outside and is seen amongst friends and peers. This behaviour is thus completely normalised. This is taken in the guise of dark humour. In reality, it is just people being downright rude and disrespectful.”

But beyond issues of politeness, there is also the psychological damage that can happen because of this, says Shaikh. “This shaming harms the person on the receiving end of this treatment. The first and foremost being the person's self-esteem. Even if they are to take this mistreatment in stride because the other person is ‘just kidding’ or if they don't like confrontations, or whatever other reason, it still starts taking root in the unconscious, which then manifests into a lot of self-hate and self-loathing. This can be very dangerous and unhealthy. And you know how, if you say something enough times, it starts sounding like the truth? So even if you call someone a name enough times, even as a ‘joke’, the person is very likely

to start believing it. This translates into emotional and physical vulnerability. This person is likely to become very sensitive about the thing they're being shamed for, say their weight? Imagine constantly being told that you need to eat less? It will start taking over and before you even know it, unconsciously, you have the beginning of a food disorder. You tend to start believing other people and what they have to say about you and then somewhere down the line, these opinions of people start to define who you are, more than what you think of yourself. When you bully someone, no matter for what reason, you're normalising that behaviour.”

The idea of perfection is different for every person. But societal norms dictate a perfect body type for everybody. Nobody is born alone. Hence the norms of society create a sense of belonging in a person who has nothing but societal expectations to fulfil in this world. In a world that is dominated by norms, the body becomes a ground for societal values and expectations to be fulfilled.

Dr MT Joseph, a sociology professor at Mumbai University, explains society's notion of the body. “People are pressured to be perfect. Every

culture has its ideas of the perfect body. The notion of the ideal body type is a changing one. Yet at any given point in time, the reigning body image exerts immense pressure on people to conform to it. The body is ubiquitous and is thought to be something very personal. It's the opposite. The body is a social construct. A lot of our ideas about ourselves and even some life chances are dependent on how one carries his own body in consonance with the perfect body image that reigns supreme in a society. Society enforces the idea of the perfect body through the ongoing process of socialisation."

Some argue that facing down a bully is a necessary part of socialisation. But bullying makes living slow torture and it is a constant reminder for the victim to be traumatised.

Shaikh says, "The behaviour of bullying someone especially when it isn't punished or reprimanded. Bullying is self-replicating. Victims turn into bullies themselves because they have been bullied, too. So compassion and empathy take a hit. Think of it like this: if nobody was kind to me, why would I be kind to others? All of this, when you integrate it, leads to the person being exceptionally conscious of whatever they're being teased for. Whether it's their skin colour or bodyweight, or whatever. You're reinforcing the idea that if you don't look a certain type of way, there's something wrong with you. If you're being bullied for being fat, it means your weight is the problem. If you're being bullied for your colour, it means your complexion needs to be fixed. Our brain starts receiving these messages, even without us realising it. It ends up making one feel like they need to change things about themselves for the bullying to stop or

even to make themselves feel better."

The media is a major contributor to reinforcing body stereotypes. The media conditions the body to fall in a certain manner. Dr Joseph says, "The messages about the ideal body are thrown at us all the time through media advertisements or even our conversation and daily gossip. Medicalisation of the body is another manner in which this happens. Newer and newer medical conditions are imagined onto being to explain and cure the non-perfect body. Exercise regimes and diet plans are today scientifically designed for those who would like to attain the perfect body. We are witness to a heightened sense of bio-politics over the perfect body. Universally people are not shamed for being fat. There are cultures in the world which have different standards of beauty. There are some cultures in Africa where the fat body is seen as more beautiful. There, the same would apply in a reverse manner. Yes, body stereotypes curb the freedom of the body. They engender practices which further commodify the body for commercial purposes with packaged programmes—dances, gyms, yoga, cosmetic surgery and a host of allied practices on offer."

Arundhati Kamat, a postgraduate from London School of Economics and a research assistant, thinks we should make a difference between the essential self-care we all need to do and what may be optional. "I think that we can divide this effort into two categories: one, effort on bodily appearance that we deem socially and medically essential. This may involve taking a bath, using a moisturiser for dry skin, combing our hair, cutting nails, etc. The second may involve

something that is not essential per se, but that people may choose: make-up (liner, lipstick, etc), hair styling, hair removal, etc. While the effort on the first often does not involve a lot of time, effort on the second does (although that depends on the depth of effort). I think the amount of effort or time that a person spends on the second category is viable or optimal as long as it does not start affecting their productivity—personally or professionally. I think women are more likely to spend on their weight. Modern beauty trends, popular culture, social media, social norms place a greater premium on thinner/leaner bodies when it comes to first impressions (affecting a person in educational and professional settings), romantic dispositions, etc. And an even greater effect is on women, given how the burden of being 'attractive' is always placed on females. Against this background, females considered not lean/thin, face pressure from personal relationships and the beauty sector. The latter, especially, has been quick to capitalise on this insecurity and pressure that women face. Realising that the need to conform can lead to open purse strings, the beauty sector has created additional pressure. Although men, as well, are susceptible to this social pressure, I think women are far more likely to spend more on their weight. Under bodily beautification, I would consider a large part of the retail sector: clothing, jewellery, make-up products, skin/hair/body/dental care products, etc. Some of it is crucially essential - such as everyday clothing, soap, etc. But even for products and services that can be afforded by stable incomes, expenditure in a country like India is very high. So yes, it is important to have economic stability. Given that these are an important part of consumer expenditure, inability to spend on these would lead to a fall in production, employment rates and wages across the economy. This could set off a slump in the economic activity and growth rate. Of course, from a personal point of view, sustainable, labour-friendly and animal-cruelty-free products are also important for economic stability in the long term."

Bodies are treated as commodified objects that constantly need to be kept in check with correct proportions. Fat-shaming leads to the humiliations and economic burden of fat people; just because they cannot fit into the status of the fit body given by society.

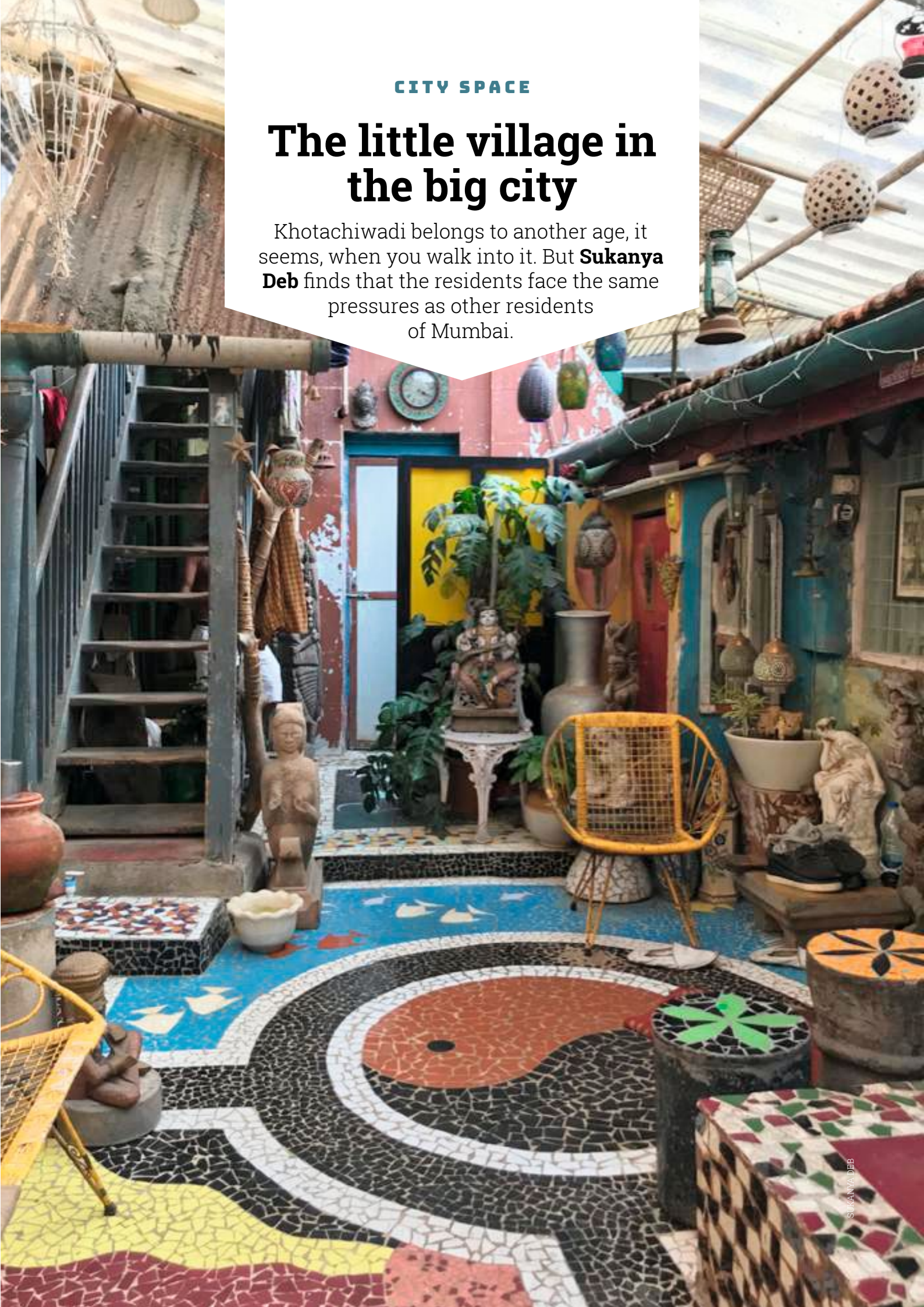
SIMRAN DANG



CITY SPACE

# The little village in the big city

Khotachiwadi belongs to another age, it seems, when you walk into it. But **Sukanya Deb** finds that the residents face the same pressures as other residents of Mumbai.



**K**hotachiwadi has been one of the homes to the Portuguese community living in Mumbai from the pre-independence era. It was owned by Khot, a Pathare Prabhu—the original settlers in Bombay from Saurashtra(Gujarat). Khot allowed the Portuguese workers of the East India Company to settle down here for convenient conveyance. “As our ancestors used to travel daily from places like Bandra, Kurla and Borivali Mr. Khot allowed us to build our own tiny community village to ease our transport hazard,” said Wilfred Felizardo, who prefers to be called Willy Black, his stage name. Willy is one of the oldest residents of Khotachiwadi.

The little village, also known as the Goa of Bombay, bears an architectural resemblance to the Hetawadi of Bandra; the only difference being it is located in the heart of South Bombay—almost behind Saifee Hospital and near Charni Road Station. While everyone talks about the serene beauty of Marine Drive and the Art Deco buildings lined up along it, people seem to have forgotten the charm of the vintage, vibrant houses of Khotachiwadi.

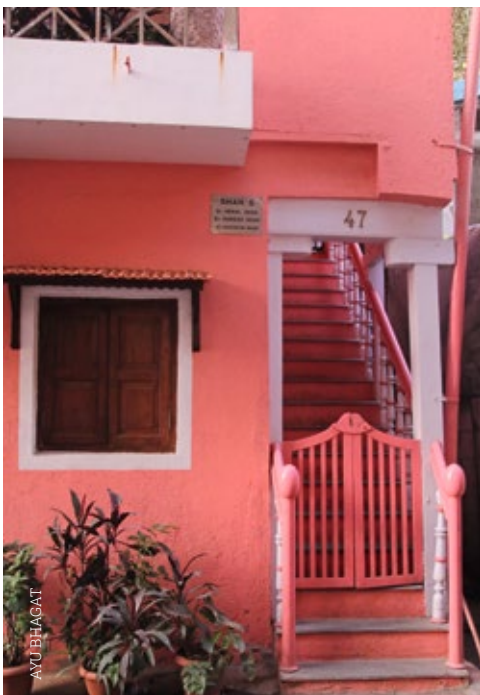
“Earlier Khotachiwadi had as many as 65 bungalows. In the past four decades we have seen the bungalows come down as people have been

selling off their properties to settle abroad. Now we have only about twenty five or twenty six houses left. Most of the people I grew up with have left the neighbourhood and this place has suddenly become unfamiliar to me,” Willy Black said. Khotachiwadi was a piece of land reclaimed from the Arabian Sea and used for plantation purpose in its initial days. “Now I mostly spend my days lazing around, sometimes singing to my guitar chords or just playing with my cat,” Willy continued, who misses his childhood friend Kenneth Gomes.

Most of the houses in Khotachiwadi have been bought by Gujarati families. Fashion designer James Ferreira said, “This one community has been constantly trying to buy properties in our locality. For them we can’t even get non-vegetarian food around. We have to go down to Grant Road Station market to get meat and it’s so disheartening.”

The pop art look of coloured walls amidst the blacks and grays of the busy city, the old mahogany staircases, the artsy-junky courtyards attached to every little house, the unwinding alleys that are almost maze-like and of course the small chapel at the entrance of the village, all this makes Khotachiwadi what it is. Even half a century ago, such a small locality would not stand out, for the world had not paced up into modernism like it did since the 1970s.

Scenes from Khotachiwadi



Pastel shades in Khotachiwadi:  
some exteriors

.....  
“I don’t want  
Khotachiwadi to be  
my home and just be a  
tourist spot for pretty-  
looking pictures. It  
should be treated as a  
a heritage spot.”



But today, in the twenty-first century, Khotachiwadi sure adds a breathing space in the modern concrete jungle of South Bombay.

James Ferreira said, “The government should take more care of this place and try to maintain it well to keep it true to its whole flavour. I do that. All my furniture has been collected and kept in order to maintain the vibe of Khotachiwadi. It has been my home forever and with all my family and relatives settled in Australia and New Zealand, I have the whole space to myself.” Ferreira continued, “My studio, showroom and workspace is all here. The government has declared this place as a heritage site, so we have a lot of customers visiting my store.”

“We used to be the festive corner of the town. From talent contests and orchestra to fancy dress competitions; we had events lined up all through the year for our people. It used to attract people from all corners of the city. I used to organize a Christmas party for the children till 2017; it witnessed as many as 300-400 children dropping by for games and fetes during the Christmas week. But I had to stop it as there was no one else to help me coordinate. As I was growing older, I got scared what if some child went

missing or there was a stampede situation because things could get quite carnivalesque. After all, the lanes are really narrow”, Willy said exhaling a nostalgic breath.

James Ferreira, too, took a nostalgic trip and said, “We had so many community activities. All the children and men-women living here were like a family, organizing get-togethers every now and then. I do not plan to leave these memories of me ever. I have lived here all my life and I plan to do it for the rest of it. I don’t want Khotachiwadi to be my home and just be a tourist spot for pretty looking pictures. It should be treated as a heritage spot where its culture and history should be celebrated.”

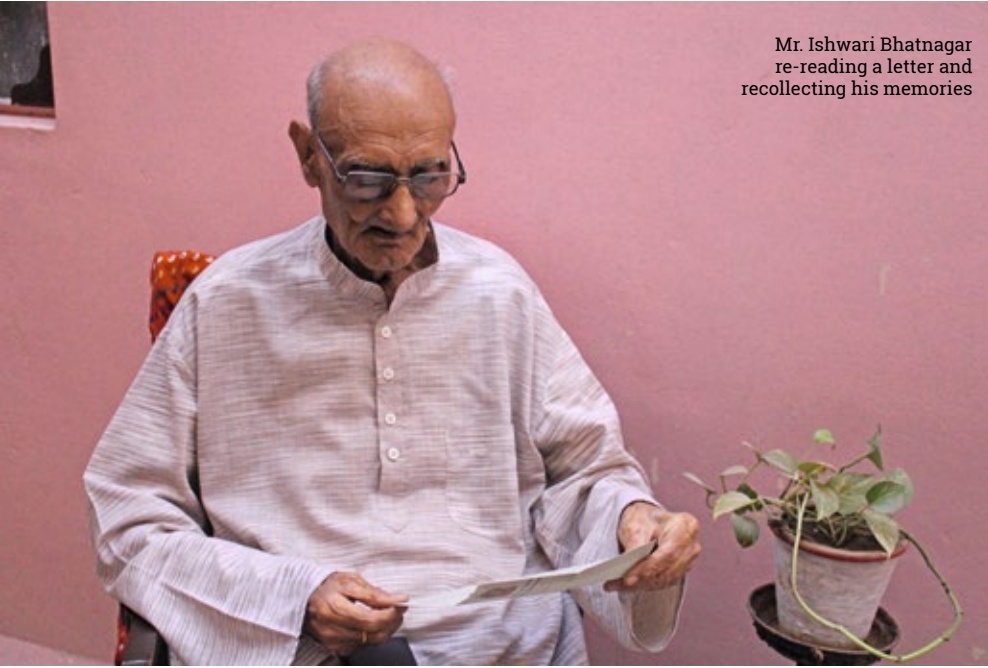
Life in Khotachiwadi has become much more mundane than it ever was. Earlier, the gorgeous tiled lanes of the village witnessed young Portuguese kids playing goli-danda and lagori now sees careless young bikers triple carrying in the broad daylight trying to look for a “cool spot” to chill and smoke. Yet there are a few travellers who come looking for pre-independence flavor of the city and witness the beautiful residential architecture that the locality has to offer. “Some people

refer to my house as the mini Chor Bazaar as I visit the market regularly. I am hoarder of everything that is colourful, pretty and screams vintage. My courtyard has become a favourite spot for the tourists as they come and take a lot of shots here”, Willy said with a sense of pride in his eyes. No one can ignore his beautiful courtyard which is nothing less of a mini museum with artifacts and unique collection of century old statues and other décor pieces. Also, his collection of over 20 birds that fill the courtyard with their chirpy music attracts every passerby’s attention.

Khotachiwadi has come down to nothing but a fancy spot for visitors to take “aesthetic” photographs. No one who enters the lanes even knows the real history of the place and the reason behind setting up such a community village in the middle of the “uptown area” that Girgaon has become.

“You will see these young girls and boys coming around the afternoon when everyone is in their houses, to create nuisance and after sunset, this place has become a spot for them to come and have drinks and smoke. As if it’s some pub,” said an angry Aunty Bidi, as she likes to be called, an old lady from one of the blue-pink houses of Khotachiwadi.

Mr. Ishwari Bhatnagar  
re-reading a letter and  
recollecting his memories



## MEMORIES

Looking at another person's story from another corner of the country, Chhanda Deb is 82 years old and lives in Kolkata, West Bengal. She retired as the General Manager of Quantum Consumer Solutions, Kolkata Branch.

She too collects letters.

On being asked why she still keeps the letters she said, "These are for memories. The letters carry a lot of sentiments." The letters that were sent by her granddaughter Sukanya are very precious to her. She added, "Sukanya used to make my face in the letters and referred to me as her Thamma. This was her way of telling me she loved me a lot." When asked if she wants to hand over her letters to her granddaughter she said, "Not now. These letters are very precious to me and that is my property."

Chhanda Deb also said, "I received many appreciation letters for my work which makes me feel very proud. I have a friend in Dubai who used to send me letters as well." She added, "I used to write the letters with ink pen and that was the trend at that time."

Talking about the letters versus WhatsApp debate, Bhatnagar said, "I am on WhatsApp and it is very convenient for me to connect with everyone. I have people of all ages in my contacts who are using the application. But letters have always carried a heavyweight of emotions and by reading them I can feel their fresh emotions. They make me feel blessed."

However Chhanda added, "You can keep the letters safely and read them anytime but on WhatsApp, you delete the messages or sometimes they are lost due to backup issues. But, letters have memories which are preserved forever. They are important to me."

There are markets with antique collections like Chor Bazaar and museums which have preserved many old letters of political and social importance. The coming generations might have many more advanced ways to communicate but for some, re-reading old letters is a pleasurable activity. The only difference is that, earlier a person used to spend money to send that paper of love and now they spend money to buy the antique which might or might not carry equal emotional quotient.

## Messages from the past

**Navya Sahai Bhatnagar interviews two letter collectors and writes about their cherished memories of letter writing.**

**I**shwari Bhatnagar is 85 years old. He lives in Kekri, Ajmer District, Rajasthan. He retired as Deputy Director of Education Department, Ajmer Range. He comes from a generation where there were no blue ticks to indicate a message had been received. Communication required effort. You had to find stationery, write a letter, find a stamp and an envelope and get it to the post box. And then there was the long wait till the postman came back with a reply. Even if WhatsApp messages can be saved in hard drives for eternity, the essence that the handwritten letters had much more impact than a few words popping up on the mobile or laptop screens. No wonder then, letters written by hand carry a resonance for him, a resonance that has made him a collector of old letters.

Ishwari Bhatnagar said, "Currently I have around 50 to 70 old letters. These letters are from my close friends, relatives. When I was away from home, my mother used to send me letters and I used to get very emotional while reading them. I have an old friend in Wisconsin, USA, and for many years we remained in touch through these letters, because of that we have sustained our friendship for fifty-nine years."

He added, "Now I don't send letters as technology has advanced.

Everyone prefers WhatsApp messages but during Diwali and New Year I do send out greeting cards to all the loved ones. I send them a handwritten note inside the cards.

"Earlier, empty postcards and envelopes were bought from the Post Office for 5 paise. The letters were delivered in 2-3 days. But now, everything is so instant." Adding to the information he said, "There was a very special relationship between the postman and the letter receiver as I received something precious from him every time we met. I used to give him some token in the form of cash or sweets on festivities which was awaited by him."

"I have sent Diwali greetings to Chief Election Commissioner of India, Sunil Arora, as we have worked together in the past. He replied to my greetings and sent a handwritten gratitude note for me. This gesture of his made me feel very happy."



Mr. Ishwari Bhatnagar's  
collection of letters

## Decoding Digital Marketing



**Nirmiti Kamat meets Jehanin Pajniagar to tell tik from tok.**

**G**one are the days of television and print media. Social media and new age media are extensively used by brands as it is the age of 'Influencer Marketing'. Now there is a new platform in town: Tik Tok.

Jehanin Pajniagar, who is an SCM Sophia alumnae, has headed the content production team of PING Network. Her team worked in building digital strategy at FoxyMoron for clientele like L'Oréal Group, Procter & Gamble, Bisleri Group. Currently, she is an account manager at Aer Media and helps in coordinating between brands and influencers.

**Tell us about advertising in the digital space.**

The industry has just erupted. So, every day you need to update yourself. You know when Whatsapp came along, it was like America was not that far anymore. The same thing happened with marketing. Suddenly we could talk to anyone and everyone across the globe. Every day something new is evolving, whether on Google or on social media. So, staying updated is something I feel is a big learning. I've never worked in the mainstream so I don't know what it is like. I've always worked in the digital space.

**Earlier, you worked as a content producer; now you're an Account manager for Aer Media. Why the change of streams?**

I just wanted to have a 360 degree understanding of what the digital space is like. The thing with digital, production is everything. For a year I did production. The budgets are really small. In my last company all the content was going up on YouTube and various social media platforms, but they were still using mainstream equipment to shoot their content. And I think at some level I got a little saturated as well.

Eventually, FoxyMoron, a digital media advertising company, just happened to come my way and I was interested in understanding what advertising on digital space is like. So the whole transition was not thought through, it just happened.

**What's the difference between traditional forms and digital? And what are the new things you learned?**

The content is brief and snappy. But you pick that up on the go. I was not very good with numbers. I'm not a person who likes numbers but I've learnt to read data better. You need to understand the algorithm of platforms and improve the metrics. That was a big learning at Aer media, but I think FoxyMoron taught me to understand what good content is. They taught me to work around a brand's ethics and values to create your own content. Being at SCM really helped, we were made to work in a team, that process shaped me because this is the kind of work which you cannot do alone. So, SCM teaches you much more than your day-to-day work. And I think that's what's important.

**Nowadays, Google algorithms use our data to show us advertisements, do you think this is ethical?**

I do know it is scary how much they know; you have a conversation one day and Google is throwing it on your face the next. Advertising can get very frivolous; it has made us talk about makeup and skin care and about things that are very flaky. But that's also where the money is. And brands are willing to



spend that kind of money. But if you accept a service that's free, whether it's email or a messaging service, you're accepting their terms.

**In the last couple of years, influencer marketing has grown, what do you think has been the game changing factor in that?**

It's definitely been a game changer when it comes to how these people are suddenly just bursting out of nowhere. It's already a big thing. The irony right now in offices is how do we sustain this as a business, because every brand wants to grow on social media and are struggling to do so. They have content, but to gain more market every brand is after influencer marketing. Since it's a part of the digital space, you don't know what is coming up next. Initially, brands were just throwing money at influencers, now they are also demanding the data and knowledge, the ROI (Return

of Investment) they are getting out of working with these influencers. Like if they are spending 'x' amount of money on an influencer, is it leading to sales, is there a transaction happening, how is it working for them. Our clients range from skincare products to even life insurance plans.

**Beyond Facebook and Instagram, brands are now focusing on Tik Tok, what's next in this field?**

I've worked very minimally on Tik Tok. I've just sat in a bunch of meetings where Tik Tok was brought in the discussion. The mass brands focus there because it's the girl next door who's there—she just picks up her phone, points it at herself, sings a song and before you know she's got like a million followers, and that's literally how influencers have come to be influencers. Now all the brands want to be on Tik Tok. These influencers have a lot of followers and brands now want to reach these followers through these people. I downloaded Tik Tok to understand how it works, but I have no idea what's happening on my dashboard. If you want to be in the digital space, it's important to understand the metrics. I know it's frivolous but it's also something that attracts the masses. I remember when Instagram was launched, we took it lightly, and believed we are too mature to be on Instagram, but look how sought after that platform is now. If you want to do advertising and content creation, I would definitely recommend that you be on Tik Tok and understand the content put out on it. There was this Tik Tok festival in Pune, and it's mind blowing that the following and reach of these influencers is so huge.

**What's your role in influencer marketing and how do you select your influencers?**

We do 360-degree activation for a couple of brands. As an influencer agency, we get a brief and based on the requirement, we curate an influencers list as well as a content plan of what the influencers will be talking about based on the objective of the brief. So, for example Maybelline has launched a new lipstick and the key point of the lipstick is that it stays on for eight hours. Now they want a set of people to talk about this on Instagram. So, we give them the recommended set of people who we think fit. So, you will have your beauty and fashion influencer, then we try to tap onto

different buckets, like can a travel influencer, a chef or a micro-celebrity create content to talk about this product in an interesting fashion? The idea is that it should not look branded so that it adds value to the premise. My job here is to coordinate between the client (brand) and the influencer. Also, helping the influencer with the content and then shooting, creating the entire thing. A lot of our campaigns happen on Instagram but we do a lot of campaigns on YouTube as well. And Tik Tok is what we are looking at. We work with a lot of Tik Tok users who are also on Instagram.

**You created content for YouTube in your first job.**

Yes, that was my first job in Bombay. I was a producer of digital and video content over there. I learned video production and shooting a video, the right and tight frame, ways of shooting, night-time shooting, shooting outdoors, shooting in the studio. I got an overview before I went on to Instagram. I had a strong hold on YouTube, so it was easy to make the switch.

When you joined SCM, did you come with advertising in mind?

No, I never thought of advertising when I joined SCM. I also thought, "Okay, you know what? I'm going to go out there and be a journalist and save my country." But I did not do so. I am working with makeup products. I think a lot of things here are frivolous. But I still like writing. So, I write for myself. I love watching films. I think that understanding, to think more and do more came from SCM. I was bad with numbers, but now data is something that really interests me, so because of advertising you tend to tap on to many things unknowingly. In my year at SCM, I specialised in broadcast journalism, I did nothing further in Broadcast Journalism, but that kind of helped me do video. So you see, it's all interconnected. I did the specialization under Sunayana Sadarangani. We went to a village in Thane district. My topic was about the women and the scarcity of water because the rains had not happened that year. We did a story on the lives of women there, and that's what got me interested in video. So that led me to do video production, only when you shoot, then the footage is completely different than what you thought. On the edit table, a different film is seen. So that's how you learn.

.....  
"But if you accept a service that's free, whether it's email or messaging, you're accepting their terms."

# हमारा इंदौर



## CITY SPACE

# Outdoors in INDORE

Indore is one of the cities in India which is popular for its lip-smacking and economic street food. Chappan and Sarafa are well known for the eateries. **Shreya Khare** wonders how the city manages to stay clean.

**S**arafa is a market filled with jewellery shops, but as soon as they shut down in the evening the entire stretch becomes a hub for street food stalls. Only the pedestrians are allowed to enter the lane at that time and it stays open till late at night. Sarafa is the ultimate paradise for all food lovers because of the culinary diversity available in just one lane. You get everything from dahi-vada to pani-puri to jalebis and

malpua—any chaat or sweet, you name it and the lane has got it. Dishes from every corner of the country are available in the lane like dosas, parathas, poha, dhokla, saabudaana khichdi and others.

Once done with late night strolling and eating in Sarafa, the next morning you must visit Chappan to have poha and jalebi for breakfast. There, Om k Namekeen is a shop internationally renowned for the savoury Jonhy Hot Dogs, Mutton Benjo and Egg Benjo which were also awarded the 'most ordered dish' in Uber Eats Summit held in Hong Kong in 2019. It also got the tag of the 'most popular menu item' in Asia Pacific.

Indore was declared as the cleanest city of India for the third time consecutively. The parameters used by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to judge the city for its cleanliness



included elimination of garbage dumps, implementation of 100 percent household waste segregation and productive waste management by turning the garbage into useful products like compost or fuel.

“During the initial years, the most important thing to run a campaign on cleaning any city is to have a strong consensus from the local political party. Then, the support of administrative and environmental executive officers at the local and state level is required. The challenge is to make them understand the real issues, the probable solutions and ways of implementation,” said Asad Warsi, the Project Design and Management Consultant of Indore for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Mission), launched on October 2, 2014. He added, “The research team first identified the problems faced in order to achieve a cleaner city and a more hygienic environment. This is one of the most important difficulties which everybody who has worked in solid waste management faced.”

Earlier, a huge amount of garbage was dumped on the streets of Chappan and Sarafa every day. Due to lack of awareness amongst the people about waste segregation, everything would get piled up in a heap. This made recycling extremely difficult. Hence, education was provided at different levels to locals. The segregation of waste materials into dry and wet waste played a key role in making the cleaning process easier.

Sarita Dev, a nurse at Khare Nursing Home in Indore, said, “People from the municipality would come on a weekly basis to teach us how to segregate waste. They held meetings in government hospitals every fortnight, which provided a space for feedback and open discussion. They would listen to our problems and bring necessary changes. They established four dustbins in four different colours and taught us what kind of waste went into which dustbin.” Hospitals staff and managers were educated on how to dispose of medicinal waste and accessories (syringes, drips, cotton swabs et al). Cafes, restaurants and food stalls were educated to use reusable plastic or paper plates and cups. Schools and colleges also took the initiative to segregate their waste.

Vijay Singh, who works in a shop at Chappan, talked about the consequences faced in failing to segregate garbage. He said, “Wet waste like vegetables, fruits and dry

wastes like polythene bags and paper are dumped separately. The clean-up truck comes thrice in a day to collect the dry waste. Compost plants have been installed in different parts of Indore to collect the wet garbage and then dump it in that plant. Every day, we submit our wet waste there and our wet waste is weighed. If we do not separate the dump, we have to pay a fine, the initial fine is 250 rupees, next time the amount is doubled to 500, then a thousand rupees and it increases accordingly.”

Public Service Announcements were aired on all the local radio and television channels. “Wealth from Waste” competitions were encouraged in all the schools. This initiative made students find creative ways of recycling waste materials into beautiful artistic posters and things. Today, Indore has zero dumping grounds as garbage and waste gets re-utilised in some manner or the other. Indore generates 1100 to 1200 metric tons of waste out of which 50 percent goes into producing compost.

Pushpanshu Khale, an Indore-based theatre artist, said, “In other cities trucks for the cleaning of roads and garbage used to come only twice a day, but in Indore the cleaning was done three times a day. Sweeping and cleaning of roads and footpaths, cleaning of public dustbins were not only done in the morning and evening but also during the night. It takes hard work on the part of everyone and a unity of will and endeavour to make sure that a city comes in the top 10 cleanest cities of India—that too ranked number 1 thrice in a row.”

Despite the success story, Warsi believes that the journey is not over. He believes that Indore has started on a road and it needs to walk-the-talk. “Indore has reached a certain level in becoming cleaner, but to sustain it for a longer duration and to make further improvements it requires an upgrade in the technology and infrastructure. We try to utilise the best of the technologies available in the world and we have been modifying these technologies keeping in mind Indian conditions and context.”

Cleanliness is not an event. Just cleaning a spot once does not do it. Just creating photo applications is not enough. What is necessary is a process that we all adhere to, every day of our lives. For “cleanliness is next to Godliness”, just like this country has learned about purity and sanctity from their age old faith and belief.



.....  
**“Cleanliness is not enough. Just cleaning a spot will not do. Simply creating photo opportunities is not sufficient.”**

# THE BECHDEL TEST

The Bechdel Test (1985) is a measure used to whether a text is feminist or not. **Tanisha Lele** questions whether the test is an adequate measure of feminism today.

**T**he media has always been notorious for its misrepresentation of women. It is often found that where a film had more than one female character, the two women would usually talk about petty, irrelevant things, cry over things, fight over a man or talk about a man. With the rise of new wave cinema and feminism however, initiatives to bring about a change started being taken. The Bechdel Test was coined by American cartoonist Alison Bechdel in her comic strip, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, back in the year 1985. You can use this to check if a film treats its women characters with some measure of respect. There are three conditions:

- \* The film should have at least two female characters.
- \* They should talk to each other
- \* They should talk about something other than men.

The Bechdel Test lost its main purpose as over the years, more films with female characters began being made. The argument most commonly used was that it made men central. If two women sit down and discuss the relative merits of a holiday in the Bahamas versus a skiing holiday in Aspen, are they being feminists? More often than not, female characters are shown obsessing over insignificant things like jewels, cosmetics, clothes etc. The test also does not look at other factors such as whether the cast and crew of the film are all women, if the women characters have any productive role in the unfolding of the film. So even if certain films pass the test, they still don't showcase women in empowering ways, which in turn, nullifies the entire purpose of the test in the first place.

Over the years, strong visual content mediums have multiplied and are not just limited to films. In such technology dependant and competitive times, it becomes essential to check women's portrayal in different mediums like advertisements, short films, web series, TV shows etc.

Speaking about the Bechdel Test in the context of Indian advertisements, Schbang Digital Solutions's Senior Creative Lead, Mayanka Goel, says, "The test may not be very scientific but it does help one understand the gender aspect of the content around us. So many films and shows I watch hardly make the cut. If they do, it may be because the women are talking about household chores, beauty, or their children among other stereotypically female subjects. It's also disturbing that I personally need the test for my own work because, at the very least, it helps me stay aware."

Goel adds, "The Bechdel Test is almost always at the back of my mind every time I watch a film or a TV show. It

also helps me while I write my scripts. The results are most often surprising and disappointing. I don't know how one can determine if the test 'works' or not. Either way it gives one perspective and that itself is insightful enough for me."

Today, with the increasing popularity of over-the-top content making platforms, the regressive content made for Indian television seems archaic. But the reality is such that majority of the Indian population watches television, and the audience is mostly women. It is no surprise however that, were the Bechdel Test to be applied to Indian TV soaps, it would fail miserably. Mukta Dhond, a creative producer who is currently working on multiple projects at channels like Zee, Alt Balaji, Star Plus etc. feels otherwise. She believes that Indian television has come a long way in its representation of women. "Given that almost all of Indian television is watched by women are there enough female characters? Yes. Are there enough female characters not talking about men? Yes. Are there enough female characters discussing their own issues? Yes."

But before you raise a shout for Indian television, she agrees that the content is regressive and explains the reasons. "Most of urban India has switched to the web, so today we are making television for people in the interior parts of India. By interior parts I mean really small towns, because rural India watches the free channels, meaning they don't have dish antennas. Over here, they don't have the exposure that we do, they haven't seen the outside world. The ones who are giving me TRPs have very basic issues: Does your husband show you a little love? Okay, he behaves badly but does he love you a little? That's important. So we have to keep that audience in mind."

Speaking of the change in the content, she says, "There is a distinct difference between television now and ten years ago, but women are still bound by rules and politeness. So a woman in one of the serials will still touch her mother-in-law's feet, but when the mother-in-law is being a jackass, she will talk back. Moreover, there are women who have children out of wedlock and they are heroines. They are not shunned and sent to the corner with characters saying, 'Arre tu badchalan, tu chudail!' (You jerk, you witch!) That doesn't happen anymore."

She establishes her point by giving an example from a show, "Women have started seeing themselves in those heroines. Therefore, the heroine is not a doormat from ten years ago, she doesn't take shit. There are layers in everything. So today's woman fights back, she just fights back politely. Because in India impoliteness is not accepted. It is seen as a trait in a vamp. There is a hugely thrashed



TANISHA LELE

show called *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*. In that daily soap, when the woman's son was accused of molestation, she looked into it and when she got to know that he had molested the woman, she took him to court and got him punished, I mean he went to jail. If this is not a positive change in the representation of women, and if in spite of these well written women characters Indian television fails the Bechdel Test, then I have my doubts about the Test."

Sruti Visweswaran, an editor and filmmaker, shares her thoughts on the test by saying, "One of the biggest problems that people have with this test is that it divided people into those who have a penis and those who don't. Just because they are not talking about men, does not mean they would be talking about something important." She also says that she believes that the test is superficial. "This test reduces feminism to something one-dimensional. But feminism is much more than that. Lipstick under my Burkha (2016, Alankrita Shrivastava) is a good example. The director thought: 'Let's make an all-women film about their sexuality.' Not talking about men would be problematic here. Feminism is much more than what two women are talking about."

### TESTING THE TEST

In order to understand the test in more detail, some women were asked to apply the Bechdel test onto their daily lives. And the results were surprising. Some accounts of their experiences are narrated below in two parts, before and after the test.

#### Before the test:

- Twenty-two-year-old Saakshi Kaulgud, a student of psychology at Mumbai University, did not know what the test was. After being informed about how it works, she said, "Most of my friends are in a relationship, so am I. It'll be quite difficult to pass the test for these reasons but let's see. I'm excited."
- When Swapna Hankare, 43, an architect teaching at Raheja College in Mumbai, was told about the test, she said: "I think the whole concept of this test is very silly. I mean

women and men are co-dependent on one another and at some point or the other you have to talk about each other. How does that define if a woman is progressive or empowered? But fine, I will try to do this." She also used words like 'pointless', 'extreme' and 'unnecessary' to express her thoughts about the test.

- "I shall pass the test with flying colours, I am least interested in talking about men," says Carol Coutinho, 21 years old, currently studying at Mithibai College.
- Rashika Joglekar, 35, a civil engineer, said, "I think I fail to understand the purpose of this test in today's day and age. I can understand where it came from, though. Nevertheless, I will take the test. But given the work I do, it is almost impossible for me to pass the test. It'll be a self-awareness experience, if nothing else."

#### After the test:

- Sakshi Kaulgud: "My best friend called me up to complain about her boyfriend. Twice. And my mom spoke to me about my dad's health issues. There was a leakage in the water pipeline, so we spoke about men who we'd have to call to repair it. I tried to change the topic while my friend was complaining about her boyfriend, but she just wouldn't listen. That conversation went on and on. The rest of the men-related conversations were unavoidable. I've miserably failed the test, I know. Not very proud of myself. I realised how much time of the day goes by talking about men in some way or the other. And also, that I am pretty dependent on them in case of physical work."

- Swapna Hankare: "I applied the test for a day. When my fellow colleague spoke to me about the nuisance one of the male students has come up with in her class, I simply couldn't ask her to not talk about it. Another instance was when my house help asked me about my husband's food preferences for the day. Rest of the conversations that came up, I could tackle or change. But these two were absolutely unavoidable. Does that make me less progressive as a woman though? I don't think so."

- Carol Coutinho: "It did not go as I planned. I had presentations to make and discussions that followed. So it was kind of unavoidable. Now that I've consciously thought about my conversations throughout the day, I've realized that they at some point or the other ultimately focus on men, even if those men are fictional. It doesn't help that the subject I've chosen to study is also quite male-dominated. Then too I took some effort to stay away from the topic, but I ultimately failed when I had presentations to do."

- Rashika Joglekar: "I am a civil engineer and almost all of my colleagues are males. I interact with clients who are also usually male. The only females that I come across on a daily basis are those who work for my clients or me. But since the only link between those women and me is the men, we have to talk about them. Even if it is in a context like, 'Are so and so's floor graphs pending?' or 'Did XYZ transfer the payment?'. And this continued to happen throughout the day and I couldn't really escape it."

# Stuck in Between

And though you can locate the word in the dictionary, locating your home can be difficult for some, Sakshi Sharma discovers.

For most of its brief span on earth, humankind defined home as the place where the fire was kindled, the darkness dispelled and the flickering light revealed faces you knew and whom you could trust.

What does home mean to a twenty something year old who has left the place where she lived with her parents and had moved to another space?

I, for one, have not lived at home for the past four-and-a-half years now. Sure, the first few months it felt strange living with four other people in a single room where the only space you could call your own is the bed to which you have been assigned. But then, after a point of time, it gets to the stage where the single spartan bed had the feel of home. After a hard day at college, coming back to that bed was comfortable and reassuring. Oddly enough you begin to refer it to home as well. While I was in Delhi, whenever people asked me where I was, I would say home, and they would be confused, as they thought I had gone back to Chandigarh while I was referring to my flat as my home without even realising the mismatch I made.

Snigdha Jain, from Bikaner, Rajasthan, says, "It's been only five months in Bangalore, since I shifted here, I still refer to it as my PG but as time will pass I'll start calling it home that's what I called my PG when I lived in Delhi but it took me some time." She also adds, "I like the vibe of the place and most importantly I found good people where I am currently living. It is always easier to adjust when you have a good company."

So can we say that the idea of home is just the mind's way of making a sense of space because that same home that I had been living in for the past twelve years didn't feel like home when I went back after a year there?

Navya Sahai Bhatnagar, from Rajasthan, defines going back home for breaks as "a total rollercoaster of emotions. There is the excitement of reaching home but there is also the thought of when will I be coming back to this place again."

This is what might be described as an approach-avoidance conflict. One side of you is jumping with joy at the thought of going back into the space of familiarity, of comfort where your position is assured and you don't have to explain yourself. But another part of you knows that you miss that sense of independence and the kind of responsibility it brought in you.

Simran Dang from Jaipur says, "It's kind of a mixed feeling. When I am in Bombay I miss home especially ghar ka khana (home-cooked food) and the luxury of sleeping on a double bed all by myself and the space to roam around but at the same time when I am home for a longer period of time I kind of miss Bombay. The rush, the speed and everything about it. I feel restless at home."

Perhaps one gets to the point when one always lives in two places at once. There is a constant tussle between your home and the 'other place'

There is also a feeling of detachment that comes with it. When you are living in a new place, everything is already new but when you go back home to the place where you have spent most of your early years, the place you know becomes strangely unknown to you that it takes a day to settle down in your own room. The strangest feeling is when you have to ask your mother where what is kept in the house as if that same house has become a stranger to you.

As Shivani Singh, from Bareilly says, "It's happy at first when you are back at home but then I can't sleep because the bed doesn't feel like mine anymore. There are memories in that room but nothing new or exciting."

As students, perhaps the idea of home is also attached to the people you share your space with. Those four walls start to feel like home because of the roommates you find. I can say this because when I go back to Delhi, to my old flat, it does not look like my home anymore; it feels like a stranger standing there, the absence of belongingness. Sure all those memories come rushing back to you but it feels like someone else's place now. As Simran says, "This place would not be bearable if the people around were not nice. I am very close to my previous roommates. This year new people shifted in my room. This room will never be the same for me because I'm used to being in this room with the people who I first shared it with." That is why home is the place where you can only feel like a stranger for a while.

Living away from home is an experience that one must have as it brings another level of independence in you. It brings out the side of you which you were unaware of. As Navya aptly says, "In my first year away from home, it felt very different to step out and stay at a new place, but now I am habituated to it and the idea of newness excites me. There is so much to explore."

But always keep in mind that staying away from home will come with a feeling of being stuck. As life goes on, you move on and change places, but this pinching emotion of strangeness stays with you. There is a small part of you that doesn't want to go back home to your parents, and desires to come back to your room to the same roommates. It's just that I have accepted my reality and this is a choice I made to come out and explore the world. So all you need, as Jyotsna Mani, from Chennai has said is to find the right balance between the two. But somewhere down the line, I feel, you will always have one foot in one boat and the other in another, so you are always kind of stuck in between.





An ecstatic Modhura in her element

## INTERVIEW

# FROM CALCUTTA TO CANNES: MODHURA PALIT'S JOURNEY

**Sweekriti Tiwari** traces Modhura Palit's journey as a cinematographer who has won the prestigious Pierre Angenieux ExcelLens at Cannes.

One day, Indian cinematographer Modhura Palit opened her email and found a mail whose header read: Excellence in Cinematography award at the Cannes Film Festival. She sent it to her Spam folder. But it was true. She had won an award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2019, the prestigious event in the world of cinema where pioneer filmmakers like Jane Campion and François Truffaut have won awards. Thankfully, The Indian Women Cinematographers Committee called her up later, asking her to reply to the jury's mail.

India's relationship with the Cannes Film Festival has always been that of glittery makeup and floor-mopping dresses. Modhura Palit added a new variable to this equation by winning The Pierre Angenieux ExcelLens in Cinematography Award at Cannes in 2019. She won it for the body of films she has worked on in the past and

is the first-ever Indian to receive the honour.

Modhura is the daughter of award-winning art photographers, Partha Kumar Palit and Shaswati Palit. Reflecting back on her childhood, she said, visuals and cameras were ubiquitous throughout.

"I grew up in a household where photography was very normal; it was a way of living. I was initiated into that process of filmmaking from early on in my life," she said.

With a tinge of nostalgia in her eyes, she shared how fascinated she was with the entire process of developing photographs with her father, whom she calls Baba. "Baba used to develop and print photographs at home. My first memory is of Baba letting me hold his film camera when I was in Class IV or V. Baba is very protective of his camera so I knew this was an honour. The world looked very different through the lens, more magical, more beautiful."

An alumna of WWA Cossipore English School, Kolkata, and having done her eleventh and twelfth from Ashok Hall, she said that the camera wasn't her only interest. "I am a trained classical dancer (Bharatanatyam) and I used to paint. I did anything that I could do basically when I was in school."

She went on to pursue mass communication at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. However, she claims that the real transformation began only after college when she joined the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI), Kolkata, to study cinematography. She feels that the institution has transformed her.

"I think I have learnt so much in SRFTI, it is very difficult for anybody to understand. It has helped me not only learn the craft that I know today, but it has also helped me understand myself," Modhura said.

For her, SRFTI was not an institution but an experience. She adds that the

## INTERVIEW

institution opened up international forums for her. She went on to work in Looking China Youth Film Program (Project) where ten students along with Modhura were chosen for the same. Not only this, she represented India in the Asian Film Academy, which is part of the Busan International Film Festival. After graduating from SRFTI, she worked in an Indo-Brit virtual reality film and the independent feature film *Ami O Manohar*, directed by Amitabha Chattopadhyay and released in 2018. The film later won the best debut feature film at the Kerala International Film Festival, 2018. Having worked in international and intercultural spaces, Modhura believes Indian films can do really well on those levels. Her experiences tell her that both Indian independent and mainstream cinema have amazing resources in terms of manpower and creativity. According to her, one of the reasons India is not able to perform to its potential is because the conventional outlook towards Indian audiences hasn't changed. "We have underestimated Indian audiences. We are still thinking *ki yeh audience nahi lega. Arre ek baar audience ko deke to dekho, woh kyon nahin lega?* (We still think that Indian audiences won't accept new or different content, but why don't you first create such content and try it, then come to conclusions).

Modhura says that Indian creators and consumers have always undermined their own culture and worshipped the international. "We are just not trying hard enough. We seem to get hung up on technology, as if that is the answer. If there is something new out there, we want it here. If we can send a satellite to the moon in half the budget of what international projects are doing then making films is nothing." In fact, a diverse mix of Indian and international cinematographers have influenced Modhura over the course of her journey.

Subrata Mitra, Wong Kar-Wai, Roger Deakins are a few cinematographers who Modhura feels, have shaped her to a great extent. One of the short films on which she has worked, *Paper Boy* by Aniket Mitra released in the year 2015, is a black-and-white film about a little boy who sells newspapers for a living. The close-ups of the protagonist in *Paper Boy* remind one of the sheer innocence Apu portrayed in *Pather Panchali*.

Another of the films on which she worked is *Watchmaker* by Anindya Banerjee. The film, which bends time and logic, is inspired by the styles

of German Expressionism, the well-known art and cultural movement of the 1920s. Both *Watchmaker* and *Ami O Manohar* (Manohar and I) are black-and-white Bengali feature films. "Black and white is personally my favourite, I really love shooting in black and white! But in both the films it was decided that the story can be told better if there were no colours. Every film has its own decisions and every film there has its own language, image and consciousness behind it."

*Ami O Manohar* went on to win best Debut Feature Film at Kerala International Film Festival 2018. Modhura claimed that the film was shot entirely in an iPhone. Though the film isn't available in the public domain, the trailer itself is quite intriguing.

She has had her share of challenges too: "One of my favourite memories is tying myself to a jeep and shooting in the mountains. It was a low budget film, and the producer did not have money to purchase a rig for the camera. But the director wanted that particular shot, so I became the rig."

The journey she chose has its own hurdles; some exist simply because she is a woman. "For decades, a woman's role in the film-making process has remained confined to a heroine who adds glamour to the 70 mm screen," said Palit. She shared how sexist and stereotypical attitudes in the industry have landed her in awkward situations, "There have been times when I have reached the director's office for the role, and instead, I was mistaken for being the costume designer."

Cinematography is one of the many professions that is regarded as an only men's zone. Modhura bursts this myth, she said, "It is believed that only brawny, hulky men can bear a camera's weight. That's not my only job. Cinematography isn't running around with a camera on your shoulders, it's about technicality. No bulky male DOP wields a camera for fourteen hours to take one shot."

Commenting on the extent to which the workspace is gendered she said, "The problem is the fact that I have been celebrated so much as a female DOP, this tells you that it is so gendered. The day we stop talking of jobs as male and female jobs will be the day when we have ungendered the profession." Her passionate emphasis on the mental preparedness that the field demands from a woman is hard-hitting. She admits that her petite stature doesn't always fit people's

connotation of a leader, she isn't someone from whom they can take orders. "I always knew I had to kind of fight it out, I was prepared for all of this, more or less," said Modhura. One poignant remark she made is that the main struggle for female figures in authority begins even before the process starts. "They are continuously doubting 'you', that is even before they have seen me on the floor, so that is where the main challenge is, it is after 'you' hit the floor I know I can do my job but how will I prove it before I hit the floor?"

As for the future, "I wish to work in more meaningful films. independent films and films that are trying to make a difference. It's very difficult to pinpoint. Projects that will challenge me and help me grow as a DOP."

She would also like to travel the world, a book in her backpack. Lately, she has been impressed by *Servants of The Goddess: The Modern-day Devadasis* (Penguin India, 2014) written by Catherine Rubin Kermogrant, which traces the sex work culture of ancient India.

The kind of work people like Modhura produce helps the Indian film industry enter a whole new dimension. It opens out opportunities for upcoming artists, giving them unique spaces to explore. In such a scenario, an international award isn't just recognition but a path towards change.

A still from *Ami O Manohar* (2018). Source: <https://asianmoviepulse.com>





## NGO BEAT

# FEED THE HUNGRY, TEACH THE KIDS

## That's what the Robin Hood Army does, says Anuradha Nagar



Well fed, well read

**T**he Robin Hood Army (RHA) was founded in the year 2014 by Neel Ghose, with a team of four friends in Delhi. It was based on Portugal's Re-food Programme that works to get food from restaurants and the community to feed the less fortunate. The RHA began by using social media to contact the donors and to identify the needy.

They started out from Delhi and reached other cities like Mumbai and Ahmedabad. They are currently in two hundred cities and more than fifteen countries. The volunteers are called Robins; all are either professionals or students. The Robins collect food from hotels, restaurants or from people who are willing to sponsor the food. There are thirty chapters (identified slum areas) within Mumbai itself.

In Mira Road, for instance, there are weekly food drives conducted and fifty to seventy people are fed. Every Wednesday, the food comes from the Second Wife Hotel. On Sundays, donors or volunteers from the organisation sponsor freshly-prepared food.

They also have another initiative, the Robin Hood Academy, where they teach forty to fifty children every Sunday in Mira Road. The academy aims at providing children with basic primary education and to give the children an opportunity to have access to education. While conducting the sessions the volunteers take care of every little thing, for example they make sure that the children have proper bath, wear fresh clothes, brush their teeth and make it to class on time. It was amazing to see how dedicated every volunteer is.

The class begins with the national anthem, followed by a few exercises. And then begins the fun part of studying. The children are between the ages of five to fourteen years. Out of the forty children in each class, ten go to government schools. "If we see that the

child has the potential and has interest in studying we help him in getting the admission in a government school and the ones who do better are also sent to English medium schools," said Momina Sirguroh, who has been a Robin since the time Robin Hood Army has started in Mira Road. Momina Sirguroh is a teacher at a college in Mira Road. There are more than six thousand academy students in more than sixty-nine cities and about 1600 have been enrolled in schools.

"We celebrate all the festivals together, we also have regular eye check-up, medical drive and awareness program" said Anju Agrawal, a Robin who has been associated with RHA since a year now.

Namrata is a part of the Robin Hood Academy and got admission in Holy Cross School, Mira Road. She aspires to become a doctor and is extremely interested in dance and music. Her mother works as a caretaker and father is a machine operator. Nine other children like Namrata have been given the opportunity to study.

Children come running the moment they come to know that their Didi and Bhaiya are here. Kashish Khanderia, 23, currently pursuing his post-graduate diploma in finance from a college in

Mumbai, was previously working with RHA Ahmedabad and now works with RHA Mumbai since July 2019. "Many people do not get a meal even for one time and we help them in whatever way we can."

Shweta Gawde, a thirty-two-year-old Robin has been associated with RHA from the last nine months said, "I always wanted to give back to the society in some way. Then I came across RHA and decided to join it." One gets to see all kinds of people working in the RHA family. From college students to working professionals, everyone manages to spend few hours every week with these children, trying to make their life a bit better with whatever help they can.

This is the story of just one area in Mumbai. Apart from Mira Road the Robins conduct drives in other areas of Mumbai as well which include Vasai, Malad, Borivali and Andheri to name a few.

Faiza Dhanani, Mumbai city coordinator shared her experience of working with Robin Hood Army and said, "It has been the most fulfilling and satisfying experience. The minute you realise that each weekend the kids wait for us, it gives us the feeling of responsibility and keeps me motivated to give back more and more."

SIMRAN DANG



# How to be a Struggler

**Akansha Negi looks at the lives of young people who come to the city with Bollywood dreams in their eyes.**

**T**he narrow lanes of Versova and Andheri in Mumbai are filled with aspiring actors, belonging to various socio-economic classes and age groups and coming from all over the country. They are all here with a dream. They want to be actors. They want to see their names in lights. They want to be the next big thing. They are all trying hard to get somewhere from the lowest and most slippery slopes of the entertainment industry.

But the struggles are real, no matter where you come from. “I always wanted to be an entertainer and a famous person,” says Saahhil Sethi, 32 years old. He has appeared in Mrs. Scooter which is on Amazon Prime, Unfreedom, streaming on Netflix, played an antagonist in the Zee TV serial, Zindagi Ki Mehak Season 2 and a few digital ads. He says that his struggle started after he did not get selected for a role in a Yash Raj Films (YRF) project, which he was almost certain of getting. And now after 12 years of keeping that dream alive, he says, “I know that it is important to audition to get the role, but now I don’t feel comfortable in going from one casting house to another just to ask whether I fit in with the criteria or the look demanded by the role. I think there is some measure of mediocrity in the casting agencies. Not all of them look for acting skills. Most of the times, it’s just about looks. They might cast an actor whose looks fit the requirement even if she/he is average at acting and it’s never the other way round.” So not getting attention, despite having the necessary skills, is also a struggle an actor undergoes, psychologically.

“I am not here just to be an actor, but a great actor,” he says. Saahhil wants to be recognised both on national and international platforms, for his skills and the self-training he has undergone over the years. But meanwhile, life is tough when you are working on your dream. For instance, Saahhil does not have a house of his own right now. He moves around



In one of the lanes of Aram Nagar, the hub of struggling actors

from one friend’s home to another with his luggage, so that he would have somewhere to sleep. He now trains actors to earn a living but he does not want to be recognised as a teacher or a trainer because he believes, in Bollywood, if you attach a tag to yourself, you may carry it forever. And the chances to move beyond that label are really low. Saahhil calls himself a dreamer. “Sometimes not being practical is what keeps me going. Being philosophical helps me sustain myself and my dream and that’s what I do,” he says. “For the rest, it’s craft, craft.”

Saahhil is not the only one who emphasises the importance of

auditioning on a regular basis. But actors can also stop auditioning due to constant rejection they face. Ayush Nathani, who has appeared in a few content videos for FilterCopy, a digital content platform, and is also a theatre artist, stopped auditioning for about six months after having auditioned for 95 continuous days without getting offered a single role. Nathani says, “If you keep auditioning and you get nothing out of it, it’s demotivating. I was forced to doubt my choice of being an actor. I constantly questioned myself if I have chosen the right path.” But he believes, one should audition every day, because you get some acting practice every day, you get to confront a camera every day and that’s the way you get comfortable in front of it.

He reads scripts because “it helps me visualise the scene, I compare how actors performed the same role. I do voice exercises and breathing exercises when I don’t go for auditions.” According to him, the biggest struggle of an actor is to wake up early as it decides the entire routine for the day. “It’s the smallest thing yet the biggest,” since aspiring actors are generally

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“Why do we call someone a struggling actor or an aspiring actor, why not just an actor?”

perceived as lazy, their day begins at noon. Another part of the struggle is that “there’s no genuine feedback,” he adds.

Prerna Dua, 28, moved to Bombay in 2013 without any experience in acting and within a few months started getting casted in ads. She has done around 38 ads so far and was known as ‘Sun-Silk Model’ back then. But now, it’s been quite a while since she has received any projects. There was a time when she had to sell her car because she had run out of money. For about three days, she had no place to stay in Mumbai. The free meals at the Sikh gurudwaras, the langar, was the only source of her meals for more than a month. “People had forgotten me and that hit me hard, I’d almost given up.” She took up a job at a call centre, later switched to being an education counsellor and a trainer at Aviation Academy but realised that these were not things she wanted to do.

She earned a bit just to sustain in the city and switched back to auditioning for roles. “A lot of people give up, I didn’t. Girls often tend to choose the wrong path, because there is no shortage of sugar daddies!

.....  
“Casting couches are for real but no one would do anything without consent in the industry

If they don’t get work, that’s what they are bound to choose, to sustain a life in Bombay.”

She adds, “Yes! Casting couches are for real but no one would really do anything without consent in the industry. It’s a different matter that if you turn them down, you won’t get the role.” Prerna says she has managed to escape whenever she came across such a situation. Her purpose now is to prove herself as an actor and that’s what keeps her going. She believes, “the struggle never ends for an actor, it’s lifelong, it may end financially but mental struggle always remains.”

Rohan Joshi, 24 moved to Mumbai almost three years ago. According to him, the struggles an actor faces in Mumbai ranges from not finding a place to stay, to dealing with fake casting houses. His personal struggles include sometimes failing to perform the way the director wants him to and there’s the perennial problem of negotiating for payments for a newcomer. “But hey, who doesn’t struggle? There are people who are looking for office jobs, who want to become pilots, they’re all struggling. And even when you have your first job, it may not be the kind you dreamed about and now you’re struggling, even in a nine to five work situation. Look around, this city is full of strugglers.”

Rohan Joshi started his career with Tata Sky TVC, and has appeared in Student of the Year 2, Mission Mangal and many more films. It was slightly easier for him to make a place in this industry because he had already done a feature film called Mantra before moving to Mumbai,

which is now available on Netflix. To him, experience does matter, that’s how he bagged his first role, but he says, being visible matters more. You have to be seen, you have to keep performing and working on your skills, no matter what. He says, “Even if you’re in the remotest of villages doing a nukkad natak (street theatre), someone will find you”. He continues, “There’s nothing like ‘struggling’, it’s just a hyped term. Why do we call someone a struggling actor or an aspiring actor, why not just an actor? Everyone who acts is an actor. It could be theatre, street plays, ads or films—there should be no hierarchies.”

Much of being an actor is looking the part. You need to wear the right clothes, you need to have a trendy haircut, you need to look the part. Only looking the part costs money and that’s precisely what strugglers don’t have. The cost of maintaining a lifestyle is certainly more than what they earn from their first project. But still actors by far need to make sure that they are visible and they look good. Rohan Joshi says, “Gym is important because you need to make sure you’re fit. It’s about fitness, not lifestyle but if that’s all you’re doing and not working on your skills, then it doesn’t work. You need to understand whether you are here to be a traditional hero or an actor.”

“I don’t think what you wear matters, you must just look presentable and you don’t really need brands for that. Looks are important but it’s the character’s look, not yours,” adds Ayush Naithani.

“I make sure I look fit. When I can’t afford gym, I go for a run, I exercise on my own. I cut down on other expenses so that I can get a proper diet. Even though there are times when I sleep on an empty stomach. But I know I’m constantly working on my skills, that’s what counts,” says Saahhil Sethi.

Prerna Dua shares similar views, “I think looks, these days is not at all a criteria, there are a lot of actors like Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Rajkumar Rao, Radhika Apte and Konkona Sen who are trying hard to break the myth around beauty and looks by just their skills. Though sometimes, when you go for auditions, they will still consider how you look but undeniably, it’s not just looks: that will work but your performance as an actor, that will help you sustain yourself in the industry.”



## FREEDOM

### AN IMPULSE TO RIDE

The rhythmic thump of the iconic Royal Enfield Bullet immediately brings to mind images of machismo and badassery of hardy men. But, Anamika Joseph is one of the few stereotype-defying women who celebrate the freedom that only riding on two wheels can offer!

**Prabhat Nambiar** catches up with her.

**A** reason. Just the tiniest reason. That's all Anamika Joseph, "a marketing manager by profession, and a rider by passion", gears up and sets her out on a ride on her Royal Enfield Classic Stealth Black 500, which she christened Iza. Even today, she is on her way from Mumbai to Pune but has agreed to meet for a quick bite and more importantly, a peek into her motorcycle diary.

Anamika says that her passion for motorcycles began about 15 years ago when she was in her ninth grade, thanks to her cousin. This was the time when the Bajaj Pulsar 180 had just been launched. Interested, she learnt about the most basic components of the bike from him. She then asked him for the bike's keys so she could just go for a short spin. The passion for bikes now manifested in her, she knew exactly what must be done!

"I ran away with the bike for two hours. I had no phone, I'd informed nobody. My mom was shit scared. There was complete chaos around the house - 'Where has Anamika gone?'. I come back after two hours, I get the beating of my life. I give back the keys to Bhaiya. The only thing that Bhaiya says - 'Maza aaya ki nahi?' (You enjoyed it, right?) That is what motivated me to start riding because that gave me the freedom to do whatever shit I want to. Baad me maar kha lenge (I might get beaten up later) but, like, whatever shit you want to do."

This spontaneity, she says, is the reason behind her Instagram handle *impulsive.joe!*

Getting a motorcycle, particularly a Royal Enfield, was highly personal for Anamika. It was a tribute to her father, the late Dhiraj Joseph, an auto enthusiast himself.

"My father had a 1976 Royal Enfield,"

says Anamika, "he had to sell it off because I was coming into this world so that he could buy a scooter for a family of four. At that point of time, he sold his Bullet and I now know what he must have felt and what he must have gone through when he lost his Bullet. I was in the sixth standard when I decided that no matter what happens, the Royal Enfield that my family lost, we will get it back one day."

Eventually, in January 2019, Anamika fulfilled her dream of buying herself Iza. This, she says, has transformed her life in many ways. She has also made it clear that NOTHING and NO ONE can come in the way of her passion. As she puts it, "...certain life decisions that I have taken in the past one year have been my bike-focused, my motorcycle focus and my passion focus. Lot of people that I have left along the way who have not been supportive of me riding, I've changed myself. I've changed things in my life to address my passion."

Her obsession with riding meant that she had to let go of some people. However, as a rider, she found her tribe: the biker brotherhood. She developed a deep bond with like-minded riders in Goa during Rider Mania, an annual gathering of Royal Enfield riders. This was grounds to an inevitable camaraderie.

"Last week I came back from Goa. I had a ball. I made some amazing friends... I've been following them on Instagram for a while now. But we met for the first time and it just did not feel that we met for the first time because ultimately what happens is we share the same mentality. We all are passionate about riding. So we became a family. We went through ups and downs, we cried together, we laughed together, we had fun together. We're still in touch. Every day we make it a point that whoever is nearby can catch up and meet and

we stay connected. So that is how the family bond inculcates once you start riding and you start getting involved with the community. The brotherhood or sisterhood or whatever you may call it."

Speaking of brotherhood, the world conspires to keep women down with gender roles, "log kya kahenge", you're just a girl, how can you..." yadda yadda yadda. So what is Anamika's opinion pertaining to female riders in a male-dominated space?

"I actually don't feel there is any need for gender bias. It's a motorcycle, and it's a soul. Motorcycle is connected to the soul. The gender is just a tag that we're giving. Women can do a lot more things that men can't do. Men can do a lot more things that women can't do. I've never understood the fact that 'Oohhh, lady rider!'" She now asks indignantly, "What do you mean by 'lady rider'? There are so many men riding on the road, why do we not say that 'Ohh, there is a man riding!' Why do you have to gender-specify this?"

"I ride because I love riding. I've seen a lot of female riders. They're riding just for the name, fame. Don't do it. If you're passionate about bikes and passionate about riding and you love riding, do it. Always remember that this is a territory which is very male-dominated. Men will tell you 'aise nahi karna hai', 'waise nahi karna hai' (don't do this or that). Be accepting, listen to whatever they're saying, take whatever you need to keep and just forget about whatever else they're saying. There should not be any discrimination between male and female and gender bias. That is utter bullshit! I've met enough and more men in my life who don't deem me as a female rider. They deem me as a rider. It is because of the way I conduct myself. Your conduct and how you pose yourself and how you treat your motorcycle is

The next ride plan is  
also on her mind



the way how people will treat you back. So if you're seriously into riding, be serious and don't do it just to show off."

For all her impulsiveness, Anamika sure means business while she's riding. She ensures that she takes safety measures whenever she's out on the road - whether on a cross-state ride or a trip to the nearest chicken shop. Her mantra: ATGATT - All The Gear All The Time. She says that when she bought her bike in January, she had already purchased her riding gear so she won't be riding like a jhalla (idiot) or a chapri (loafer). Also she takes the whole riding culture very seriously, as while returning from Rider Mania in Goa, her riding companions' bikes started

breaking down.

"Guys were having breakdowns," she says in mock smugness, "None of the girls had any breakdowns in their vehicles and the girls were fixing their bikes BY THE WAY...the guy whose bike had broken down said, 'Agar tum log ko late ho raha hai, you guys leave'. (if you guys are getting late, leave). But that is not how riders are. We were six people and we made sure that all of us are together. All of us reach home together. Even if we need to stay there the whole night, I have a tent, we'll camp and stay there. But we will all be together. So it's very important that if you're riding with a crew, you're comfortable with the crew. And you share the same

mentality. If you don't share the same mentality, they will just leave you stranded in the middle of the road and eff off. That is not how riders are. When you're riding together and you're moving together and you're staying together, you move forward and take care of each other."

With all this conversation done, Anamika gears up yet again to set out on the 170-kilometre ride to Pune. I ask her with curiosity, why is she going there.

"I'm going to Pune to buy some lemon barfi," she says dismissively, "my friend really likes it."

That said, she kicks Iza into life and thunders out into the highway.

PHOTO ESSAY

# Mumbai before sunrise





**Y**ou see the vada pav seller outside the station or you see a cobbler on the roadside, you see many faces working in the city. But there are a few places and faces that you see before the actual hustle begins.

These are the faces because of which Bombay is called the city that never sleeps.

They work during those wee hours when everybody is sleeping and disappear as the sun rises. The city

rises from sleep as these men blur out with the first rays of the day. They sink into their dens of narrowed down alleys and their identities get lost in the dust of the buzzing streets.

Waking up at 3 am to capture these faces took us through a road less taken. Initially, it was undeniably straining to follow these faces but gradually it introduced us to a new world and the hush and rush of those hours. Here is one perspective of the city at 4 am.

**PHOTO ESSAY**

Where is all the news coming from?



SIMRAN DANG



SUKANYA DEB

What's cooking?  
Something fishy!

The first few sips



SUKANYA DEB





Pav kilo Mumbai.

SIMRAN DANG

Distributing Dissent.



SIMRAN DANG

Let's get the  
buns home.





Same rush,  
Different faces.

SIMRAN DANG



Fresh smiles.

SUKANYA DEB

## Couplets of Kabir: Finding relevance even today

*Based on Anjali Awasthi's childhood. Anjali Awasthi and Sweekriti Tiwari reflect on Kabir's relevance and need in today's times.*

**Aisee vaani boliye, mann ka aapa khoye/** apna tan sheetal kare, auran ko sukh hoye.

(Your words should dismantle your ego. They should soothe yourself; they should soothe others around you.)

I was in class six when I was introduced to the poet Sant Kabir or Saint Kabir, one of the best-known of the Bhakti saints. The movement was known for the devotional poems and stories created by people like Kabir who devoted themselves to this cause. The best part was that I got to read them daily in my Hindi textbook. However, I went a step ahead and read one every night before going to bed. My teacher, Asha Singh, used to add rhythm to the quotes, embedding the memory of his poems deeper. Kabir always believed that odd is one and Guru, that is teacher, can lead us to god. Guru is the link between God and oneself. In my case, my teacher introduced me to a divine world of Kabir's poems.

Whenever he saw me procrastinating my father would say, "Kal kare so aaj kar, aaj kare so ab/ Pal mein pralaya hoegi, bahuri karoge kab?" (What you have to do tomorrow, do it today; what you had to do today, do it now. The apocalypse can come in a moment and we lose everything.) I guess the fondness for Kabir's poetry runs in my blood.

Another of his quotes, "Bura jo dekhan main chala, bura naa milya koye/ Jo mann khoja apnea, toh mujhse bura na koye." (I went looking for the devil, I couldn't find him. When I searched inside myself, I realized I am he.) has stayed with me because it urges me to look inside myself. Getting to read his work at a young age helped me shape my opinions and ideas about the world. the meaning of life?, though I haven't found the answer yet.

Kabir was born in Kashi, now Varanasi, in the year 1440 he was the son of a Brahmin widow and was adopted by a childless Muslim couple. He passed away in 1518 in a place called Magahar, about 240 kms from the city Lucknow. "Jaati na poocho sadhu ki, pooch lijiey gyaan/ Mol karo talwar ka pada rehne do myaan." (Don't ask

the caste of the saint, seek knowledge from him/ The sword has more value than the sheath). These words of Kabir are a crystal clear representation of his ideology. He had criticised organised religion when he was alive and spoke fearlessly about the banality of religious myths and customs. His harsh criticism of the caste system invited a backlash but he kept going on. He chose to break myths even at the time of death as he chose a place like Magahar to die in, which was cursed by upper-caste Hindus. (It was believed that anyone who died Magahar would not reach the heavens in the afterlife.) Kabir abandoned the 'holiness' of Kashi and chose Magahar. Ironically, his death caused a quarrel between Hindus and Muslims on whether to perform Hindu or Islamic funeral rites.

Kabir's couplets and poems are like a mirror to the present society. His principles stand true today as well. The volatile political times and anxiety rode society needs the words of Kabir more than ever. The country has seen a wave of protests in the past month. It is becoming harder than ever to maintain peaceful mental health at such times. Almost one out of five adolescents in India suffers from some level of mental morbidity, says a 2019 study conducted by the Bengaluru-based National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences. The youth fails to find peace in the country, where injustice prevails, the killing of democracy, communal violence in all aspects has surrounded our country.

Taking a break from the noise of pop culture and going back to the couplets of Kabir might be one way to reclaim our sanity. I have already gotten back to my old habit of reading one couplet every night before sleeping.



## A sound of my city

*After moving to Mumbai from Jaipur, Simran Dang reconnects with her hometown through the folk music of Rajasthan*

**Every time we have a guest visiting Jaipur,** my mother is the perfect tour guide, showing them around the city and takes them to all the places that they should be visiting in the fabled Pink City. So when my relatives from Delhi were visiting us, we all went to Chokhi Dhani, which is a theme restaurant which is supposed to be a representation of Rajasthan in miniature. After having a hearty thali of dal-baati-churma, everybody just wanted to go home. We were all strolling towards the exit when we saw a group of musicians playing folk music. It was cold so no one wanted to stop but there was this one man whose instrument fascinated me. He was moving his hands in a manner which was difficult to comprehend, it was like somebody was clapping at an extremely fast pace but it produced a mesmerising rhythm.

I wondered how somebody could clap at such a fast pace

and I tried to replicate the sound with my hands, standing right there. Of course, it didn't work. Overcome by curiosity, I went up to the man playing the instrument to know what it was. He told me that it was known as a 'khartaal'. He showed it to me; it was a pair of wooden clappers held together by a metal ring. The sound is produced by bringing these two clappers together at a fast pace. The musician was kind enough to allow me to 'play' but of course, nothing I did sound as interesting as the music he was producing. I wanted to learn some more but my family was getting impatient now and I was dragged away.

Many years later, an episode of Coke Studio on MTV was playing as I was engrossed in some other work. Suddenly I heard the same clapping sound and I was immediately struck. I knew I had heard it but I couldn't figure out where. This led to a flashback of memories and I recalled the first time I had heard it, on a cold winter night in Chokhi Dhani.

I searched the Internet and reconnected with the sound of the khartaal. I discovered the root of the name: 'Khar' means hand and 'tala' means clapping. It is a percussion instrument which is often used to carry the rhythm of a folk song. You can see why it would be an instrument of choice. You don't need a huge investment, just two pieces of wood, and a ring and your hands. Set up a rhythm and you're done.

Sadly, I wasn't exposed to Rajasthani folk music during my childhood so I did not develop a lot of interest in this art form. But after leaving my city and coming to Mumbai, I listened to the music of khartaal everytime I missed home. Like many other sensory cues that made my city what it was, I did not appreciate khartaal enough, but after coming to Mumbai, their absence can be felt dearly. The fast-paced movement and music of the khartaal are similar to the buzzing city of Mumbai. It fills me with the kind of energy I need in a city like Mumbai.

# Worship Music: My Surrender

*Susanna Cherian shares her connection towards Christian worship music.*

**'What can I give, What can I bring?/ That would be pleasing to my King/I'll give my heart, Not just a part/ I'm lifting up my everything/ Well, it's all I have to offer, And it's all I have to give/ Two hands, One heart, One life to offer you'**

These lyrics from Don Moen's song, 'Two Hands, One Heart' is exactly what worship means to me. In India, one of the most popular contemporary Christian bands is the Sheldon Bangera Band. From an engineer, Bangera turned full-time musician and then wrote over two hundred worship songs. He became one of the most influential worship leaders with the making of the Nachoonga album in June 2013, which was an initiative to translate common English songs into Hindi for the Hindi church congregation. As part of his 'India on Wheels' tour the SB band travelled to more than a hundred cities by road to spread the message of the Gospels. In 2019, the band also travelled to twenty cities in the USA as part of the 'America On Wheels Tour'. Sheldon Bangera also founded 'Jaago Music' which is a worship arts community in Mumbai to raise future Christian worship leaders. Similar to organisations like Live Jam, they use music and media to reach out with the Gospels to the younger generation.

Pastor Anil Kant sang along with Johnny Lever for the album Pray For India. He was a music composer who was converted to Christianity in 1991 and dedicated his life to produce Christian music. In 2002, Anil recorded his first gospel album and went on to release eighteen more. Together with his wife Reena and children, Shreya and Rishabh, he composes songs including those from the Book of Psalms.

In his album Meri Rooh Se, they sang the Lord's Prayer in Hindi and Urdu, which is a meditation song that most Christian schools

played. Other songs released by Trinity sounds included 'Ibadat karo' (Psalms 100), 'Meri Rooh Khuda Ki Pyaasi Hain' (Psalm 42) and 'Kab Tak Khuda' (Psalm 6).

One of my most memorable albums was Don Moen's old album 'Thank You Lord' which released in 2004 and included worship songs like 'My Creator King', 'Arise, Be Enthroned', 'When It's All Been Said and Done', and 'Throne of Praise'. In 2013, he released another album, 'Uncharted Territory' which has been very close to my heart. There was something about how every word touched one's heart and could be sung with such a flow of melody. It included songs like, 'Divine Exchange', 'Your Love Never Fails', and 'You Will Be My Song', among others. Some of my favourite worship leaders are Matt Redman, Matthew West, Tim Hughes, Zach Williams, Chris Tomlin, Tommee Profitt, Brooke Griffith, Darlene Zschech among others. Some of the worship music that I have grown up listening to is, Hillsong and Bethel Music.

Worship to me is surrender. It is a surrender of myself, and my circumstances to God.

Worship music was what gave me expression. I found words couldn't suffice my feelings, and felt empty. It was then when I learnt that worship filled that void in my heart. And my cup ran over with unexplainable joy and peace as my voice cried out, and what came out was melody. Nothing else, but melody came forth.

Colton Dixon's song, 'You' would explain my music.

'When I can't find the words, to say how much it hurts

You are the healing in my heart  
When All that I can see, are broken memories

You are the light that's in the dark

You Are the song, You are the song,

You Are the song, I'm singing'

# Life through embroidery

*Bhoomi Mistry explores the vibrant heritage of Kutchi embroidery*

As a generation that is happy to flaunt the latest #OOTD's on the 'gram, shouldn't we stop and think what our clothes say about us other than the usual aimed for 'Hot AF'? As a Gujarati living in Mumbai, I had never paused to think why my jeans spelt 'all-American', and hinted at a culture I only know about through Crossword best-sellers and Netflix rom-coms, when I have colourful and lively textile of my origin, Saurashtra (South Gujarat), to fall back on. It would be unfair to disregard the convenience of jeans and T-shirts in our globalised, urban lives. Perhaps they even tell our stories. But if we just have one life, don't we want to confidently assert and examine our identities instead of getting swept up by waves of fast-fashion trends?

Gujarat is a state well known for its embroidery, but to say that would just be to scratch the surface of its rich textile and handloom heritage. According to the Living and Learning Design Centre, there are 42 types of embroidery in Kutch alone, which are practised by 12 different communities. Each smaller community has a type of embroidery, and specific colours and textiles that set them apart from other sub-communities of the same area.

"The embroidery of Kutch called Suf is usually more intricate and fine. It is embroidered using satin stitch in contrasting colours on a dark cloth. These geometric motifs require tremendous effort," says Urmila Mistry, my mother who first introduced me to embroidery as an art form. "Women in Kutch usually sat at home, while the men went to work. This left them with a lot of time in their hands. Women embroidered to pass time and it wasn't as much about the finished product as it was about the act of embroidering," she adds.

In certain Kutchi communities increased your chance of getting better marriage offers. The pieces made before marriage would then be given as a part of aanu (dowry). While this pattern was evident across Gujarat largely, the pieces they embroidered on, differed from community to community. In Saurashtra, embroidery is largely associated with home and decorative items like torans (wall hangings for the doorway), chakla (a piece of cloth to carry the dowry on) while in

Kutch, it is usually embroidered on clothes (or cloth).

"The Rann of Kutch is harsh and arid, so women use their imagination and bright colours to beautify their houses and clothes. Also, because materialistic possessions were few, women embroidered more intricately to thicken the base cloth and increase the longevity of the piece," says Urmila Mistry.

"In Saurashtra, usually, conches are used extensively in embroidery and is done in silk and wool threads. This style of embroidery is called katha work, of the Kathiawadi people. Religious motifs are usually embroidered on door hangings, as it is considered auspicious. There is also extensive use of mirror called abhla throughout Gujarat. Abhla work is one of the most prominent embroidery works of Gujarat and is usually done by most communities across the state," says Urmila Mistry. But the works of the Rabaari community of Kutch stands out. The embroidery of the Rabaari community features mythological and geometric motifs in vibrant colours. There is extensive use of the famous chain stitch, to go along with the Abhla work.

"Interestingly, embroidery and textile were also indicators of socio-economic status of the community.

Women usually wore dark colours because they were not allowed to work for money so they stayed at home. Men however, only wore white, as the colour reflects light and is ideal for the harsh sun. Turbans of men across communities vary slightly in terms of textile, weaving, colours and the embroidery," says Dipti Gada, a native of the Kutchi community. "While the Rabaaris went all out with the embroidery, Ayer community kept it simple. The people of the community are nomadic, which means that they require their clothes to be highly functional."

Currently, as more people gravitate towards the glocalised 'good life', the art of traditional embroidery usually gets its appreciation and appropriation from upper class 'art connoisseurs' and runway designers or a few people of the community, while what was once a sweet expression of aesthetics, is only practised by the artisans in heart of Gujrat who continue to embroider away, in hopes of sending their kids to school.



# How far have we reached walking alone?

*Sukanya Deb follows the lyrics of Tagore to voice her dissent.*



**Jodi tor daak shune keu na ase/  
tobe ekla cholo re these words** have resonated in the minds of every Indian ever since they were given to us by Rabindranath Tagore in 1905.

It is beyond my capacity to translate the song but its essence is: Even if no one responds to your call, walk alone along the path you have chosen. If there is silence about an issue that needs to be addressed, you should open your heart and speak up even if yours is the only voice breaking the silence.

The song was initially titled Eka and recorded by Tagore himself in-cylinder record format (under the label H. Bose Swadeshi Records), which is now lost. Since then artists as diverse as Suchitra Mitra (who recorded it for the first time for the 1948 film Ardhendu Mukherjee's Sandipan Paathshala) to A.R. Rahman (who composed a version for the movie Shyam Benegal's 2004 Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero) many artists have recorded the song. Even though written and sung in Bengali, the lyrics have travelled across the nation with every patriot, irrespective of their native tongue.

Tagore's literary contribution to the freedom struggle of India has been revolutionary as they gave shape to the anti-British emotions. Ekla cholo re was one of the 22 protest songs that were written during the Swadeshi period of the Indian freedom movement.

Is it just the tune of the song or the words? That is a question I have

always asked myself. As a kid, I always liked the music more than the words, because the lyrics never struck me as much as they do in the current scenario.

When I watch a film like Kahaani (directed by Sujoy Ghosh in 2012) or watch the music video of Ekla cholo re by Adiacot on YouTube the Bengali in now gets emotionally provoked by the lyrics.

In Kahaani, the unfolding and climax of Vidya Bagchi's (played by Vidya Balan) journey touched the audience as the song Ekla cholo re amplified her inner strength and her triumph as she single-handedly not only took revenge for her husband's death but brought justice to all those lost their loved ones in the metro massacre in the film. The movie hit the theatres during a phase in Bollywood when filmmakers were working hard to break the gender stereotype of the idea of "hero". The emotional relevance of the song is not really talked about, but Ekla cholo re in Amitabh Bachchan's voice is the song which sums up the entire journey of Vidya is accomplishing her motive, fighting against the odds in an unknown city, coming from the "secondary gender" of the community.

The lyrics of the song are powerful and thought-provoking. The music video of Ekla cholo re by Adiacot, launched in December 2019, is voiced by Epr Iyer. This rendition has a totally different sound mix and tunes compared to the original version. But it talks about the farmer suicides in India. It shows the discriminatory brutality in the Indian system and provokes the citizens to think about the crisis faced by the society, which is intentionally overlooked.

The song continues to inspire minds. Its current relevance was signified when Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal addressed the state assembly about the Citizenship Amendment Act using the lyrics of the song. Using the words of the song, Mamata Banerjee directly pointed out the intention of the nation's "second partition" that she said would arise from the Citizenship Amendment Act. (Originally, the song became popular

during the Anti-Partition Movement in the Bengal Presidency in 1905.)

Ekla cholo re has always been about choosing your battles and fighting them even when no one supports you. It provides a strong sense of self-empowerment, that is what has made the song stay alive in the Indian hearts. India became independent in 1947 but the price of freedom has always been eternal vigilance; the Indian citizen, like citizens all over the world, has had to wage a constant battle against the forces that would like to take their hard-won freedoms. The struggle of the citizens to claim equal rights and their fight against unconstitutional discrimination gets channelized in a revolutionary poetic manner through the lines of Ekla cholo re. And, this song will keep on resonating with the masses until the end of time for it speaks of the motivation required for human survival.



## Bottled Up!

*Karen D'souza relooks at her mother's tradition of making 'Bottle Masala' at home.*

**The month of March brings forth the cherished memories of the** aroma of red chillies and teel, khus-khus, naikesar, wheat, nutmeg, kababchuni, cloves, cardamoms, turmeric, tirphal, raw gram, maipatri, anise-star, shahjeera, zaipatri, bay leaves, cinnamon, pepper, coriander and other spices. My house transforms from a home with human beings and other associated creatures into a spice store. By the first week of February, my mother runs around the area to find a store that sells the perfect chillies at the best price. After years of searching, she had found a shop that gives her chillies that met with her requirements. Even then, she inspects the chillies carefully before placing an order. In order to keep the accumulated spices safe from the nocturnal creatures who think of our home as their own, she always stores them in the bedroom, filling our noses with the smell of pungent spices.

Every day, throughout the month of April, she takes all the chillies out and puts them on a tarpaulin sheet in the backyard to dry under the blazing hot sun. She does this in the morning and at noon she rearranges them so that the sun's rays will not miss a single chilli and then takes them back into the bedroom before sunset. The other spices also receive the same sun

treatment, making the whole thing a tedious and continuous process that has to be followed.

And then the family chorus begins. "Make me a pack of that bottle masala," everyone says.

My mother makes the masala that we will need and then calculates the additional amount of masala that she will have to make for others who want it. Whether it is a close relative or a random acquaintance she has made in the church, she believes that she has only to be asked for others to receive. She makes an effort to make the masala for as many people as she can.

The traditional way to grind the spices is by hand. But it is difficult to find people who still follow and do it through that method these days. By the end of April, she goes early in the morning and takes an appointment in the spice grinding mill for all the spices. She goes as per the appointment and goes to pick up the spices back in the evening. After getting the masala home, she brings to make packets of masala for everyone who requested it.

In the market, Bottle Masala is sold for more than ₹1000 per kg. Despite the price, it sells well in East Indian stores and even on Amazon. That's because the masala is used extensively in East Indian cuisine. However, a teaspoonful of the bottle masala can find its way into almost every dish, whether it's a spicy omelette or a bhaji cooked in a hurry.

The rate of the Bottle Masala depends on the effort and the quality of the masala being produced. You judge a good Bottle Masala first by its colour. It should be a brick red. Then you open a bottle and take a deep sniff. You should feel a tickle in your nose and a burn in your mouth, and the first springs of saliva at the thought of all the goodies to follow. Finally, there is the taste.

Each family has their own recipe which makes their masala special and different, although the basics are the same. Differences will lie in the relative amounts that are used and the quality of the ingredients.

As my mother grew up without her mother, her relationship to the culture grew only when she got married. And so my mother's Bottle Masala is the result of years of trial and error. She has borrowed recipes and consulted The East Indian Association Cookbook, and so has perfected her own recipe. You won't find it here. If you want a recipe, you haven't understood the mystique of the Bottle Masala.



# Powada : The heroic ballads!

*Tanisha Lele recollects her attachment with the powadas of the reigns of Shivaji Maharaj.*

**The powada is a form of poetry that dates back to the time** of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the Gondhal community of Maharashtra is said to have created it. The battles were many and the exploits were heroic. These poems are narrative descriptions that create heroes and villains. They were meant to be bardic songs but they often also commented on social situations.

I was first introduced to this art form in school when I was studying the history of Maharashtra. The term 'powada', I remember, felt splendid on my tongue, almost like magic. Our music teacher, Purva Pethe, particularly wrote and composed us a powada that glorified Shivaji Maharaj's grand stature called 'Shivrajyabhishek Powada'. As an eight-year-old, it was the most thrilling experience to have had actually recited the powada along with having it acted out for everyone to watch.

## The Powada:

### शविराज्यअभधिक पोवाडा

करू वंदन गणरायाला  
तसे करू शारदा देवीला  
आठवुणा तुळजा भवानीला  
यऊनीकिलिले रायगडाला  
गाऊ आज शविबाच्या  
राज्यरोहणाला हो जी जी जी ।

रायगड छान सजवला  
सडा रांगोळ्यांचा घातला  
शामयाना पैठण्यांचा केला  
त्यावरी मोतयांच्या माळा  
मशालीच्या ज्योतींनी  
गड आज ऊजळला हो जी जी जी ।

सर्व लोक सज्ज जाहले  
गागा भट्ट तयारनि आले  
धरमराज शविबा शोभले  
आश्रीष जजिऊनी दलि  
लाख मुजरे घेत  
शविराय पुढे आले हो जी जी जी ।

शविबांना आठवण झाली  
कति जण सोडून गेली  
घातले जीव धोक्यात  
सांडले रक्त राज्यात  
तेव्हाच लाभले  
आम्हा हे स्वराज्य जी जी जी जी ।



## The Saransh:

The title 'Shivrajyabhishek' refers to the coronation of Shivaji. The powada begins by paying homage to God Ganpati, Goddess Saraswati and Goddess Bhavani, and says that we have arrived at the Raigad fort. We have all come here to sing the praises of Shivaji Maharaj, on the day of his coronation. Raigad has been decorated with different varieties of rangolis, and several shamianas have been set up using beautiful paithani sarees and dazzling lines of pearls. The fort has been brightened with torches everywhere.

Gaga Bhatt, a famous learned individual, has been called all the way from Kashi for the coronation ceremony. Shivaji is the most suitable candidate to become the leader of Dharma. Jijabai is showering her blessings and affection on her dearest Shivba.

Finally, when Shivaji comes forward to greet everyone, lakhs of people pay their respects to him. But amidst all this fanfare, Shivaji remembers all his companions who lost their lives and shed their blood in order to attain Swarajya. He thinks of his brave comrades who risked their lives. Their kingdom came into existence only because of these sacrifices.

This powada definitely shaped the way I looked at Shivaji as a kid. It also made me remember all the details with clarity. Although there is no mention of the enemy clans of Shivaji here, the mention of bloodshed points out to the subtle undertone of wars with the Mughals, Nizams and the British.

This piece stayed with me all these years. A few years back, I watched a Marathi film named Mi Shivaji Raje Bhosle Boltoy, that also made use of a powada; composed by Ajay-Atul, it is called 'Maharajananchi Kirti Befam' and describes the episode between Shivaji and Afzal Khan. What an impactful way of passing down one's history!

Mahatma Phule also wrote powadas, but for a different purpose: to educate people.

Such is the power of the powadas, they can make you relive history. They can also make you live something that never happened to you.

## Drumming out the divide

*Prabhat Nambiar looks at the art of Chendamelam in Mumbai and how the artist Ajayan Nair has transformed it from a traditional notion of 'only men playing the chenda'.*

**The vigorous beat of the Chendamelam**, a percussion ensemble, is something that Malayalis keep close to their heart. It is a quintessential part of Hinduism in Kerala. A Chendamelam lineup comprises five instruments, namely the edanthala (treble drum), valanthala (bass drum), ilathalam (cymbals), kombu (trumpet) and kuzhal (a reed instrument). The men are lined up... Yes. It's only men who play in the ensemble.

As tradition has it, Chendamelam is traditionally performed only by Hindu men. Even in this, for major poorams (festivals), the primary positions in the lineup is reserved for the Ambalavasi community. In all these, the women do not factor in at all. However, in Mumbai, one man has taken a step away from tradition.

In the hall right opposite to the Sabari Giri Temple in Vasai Road, chenda artist Ajayan Nair sits at a table on which sits a block of wood while in his right hand, is a thick wooden stick. Seated around him on the floor are his students— each with a thick stick and a block of granite right in front of them. Following Ajayan's lead, the students play on the block with one hand and one stick—learning the rhythm and the subtle movements of the wrists along with There is no discrimination here—age, gender or religion—nothing matters. All that is important is their passion for learning.

Ajayan Nair was born in Thrissur, he is the son of Pulakode Manikantan Nair, a chenda artist himself. Ajayan considers Chendamelam as the

greatest art forms in the world. This is because for poorams, there are over 200 artistes performing but unlike a conventional orchestra, there is no conductor, the lead artist assumes the role of a conductor. However, Nair did not perform much in Kerala as the art form is not a particularly great source of income. So, after graduation, he moved to Mumbai to make a living. It was here he decided to impart the knowledge he had gained in his childhood to others.

"The inspiration is actually the students', not mine. I have performed in this temple for the last 30-35 years. Their parents would come and say 'Please start a class', 'My daughter, she is very eager to learn this.' They only forced me to start this class."

The class started about 10-12 years ago, but Ajayan was unable to continue it. In a traditional setting in Kerala, the aspiring artistes live with their gurus and may even go through nilaavu sadhakam (practice in the moonlight). This strenuous exercise lasts over a month until the next full moon, which may mean practising for over 12 hours straight. However, in a city like Mumbai, where everyone is rushing about their jobs and studies, Nair says it is simply impossible to train students in the same way. So, he settles for teaching his students the essence of Chendamelam. Also, most students are not from the Ambalavasi caste, so the city born-and-bred have never seen the instrument before.

Staying true to one aspect of tradition and the fact that he never paid to learn chenda, Nair refuses to accept

fees from his students. This means that some of the students take the class for granted. So, the temple committee gives him a fixed amount as fee.

"...till today, I have never counted what amount they give me. The envelope I put in my pocket and at home, my wife will take away that money saying 'Why you are carrying it? I'll spend it.'"

Women playing chenda has always been frowned upon and can be considered a topic of potential controversy. Ajayan, with his firm belief that the passion for the art trumps everything else, rubbishes the possibility of controversies emerging for teaching women and also Christians.

"In the second batch, 60 applied. Out of these, 14-15 were from other religions and more than half of them were girls...as a teacher, my greatest and brightest students are all females. So I appreciate them...here there is no bifurcation of Hindu or Muslim. This is an art—anybody can learn it...I don't foresee any problems pertaining to caste."

Women are traditionally prohibited from entering the temples during menstruation. Not intending to let that particular barrier stop women from indulging in their passion for chenda, Ajayan has arranged for the classes to be held in a hall just outside the temple complex. So he has managed to strike a balance between traditions and modernity! With the students now practising for an hour thrice a week, he is making preparations for their arangettam (the debut performance) on the 29th of December, 2019. The female students are particularly excited.

"Chenda is my life," says Soorya Pillai, 17, "I met Sir in Bandra and then I started learning. Then I became crazy about chenda. My cousins started playing as well. The committee has been very supportive. The best thing is that you don't have to worry about noise (while practising) here. I hope to make this a part of my life and learn Thayambaka (an advanced aspect of Chendamelam) if I get the opportunity."

Sreelata Nair, 24, an MBA student, has always been passionate about dance and music. This led to her developing an interest in Chendamelam. "There are people who have a set of beliefs that they had for years. It cannot be changed. We people, as young generation, do not believe in such things. So nothing can be said as right or wrong. As you can see in our batch, females are equal in number as males. After my arangettam, I would definitely want to perform in temples and functions."





## Who has the right to grieve?

*Sweekriti Tiwari remembers the lessons from **Dukh Ka Adhikaar**.*

“मनुष्यों की पोशाकें उन्हें वभिन्न श्रेणियों में बाँट देती हैं। परायः पोशाक ही समाज में मनुष्य का अधिकार और उसका दर्जा नश्चित करती हैं। वह हमारे लिए अनेक बंद दरवाजे खोल देती है, परन्तु कभी ऐसी भी परस्थिति आ जाती है कि हम जरा नीचे झुक कर समाज की नचिली श्रेणियों की अनुभूतियों को समझना चाहते हैं। उस समय यह पोशाक ही बंधन और अडचन बन जाती है। जैसे वायु की लहरें कटी हुई पतंग को सहसा भूमि पर नहीं गरि जाने देती, उसी तरह खास परस्थितियों में हमारी पोशाक हमें झुक सकने से रोके रहती है।”

Translation - Our appearances divide us into class and caste. Very often, our appearances also decide our rights, privileges and status in society. They open many doors and opportunities for us. But at times, empathy urges us to bow down and understand the feelings of those beneath us. It is then, our appearances hinder and hold us back. Just like the winds do not let a broken kite fall swiftly to the ground, our appearances do not allow us to keep status aside and feel what the downtrodden feels.

It is with these pure and honest lines that the short story ‘दुःख का अधिकार’ or ‘The right to grieve’ by renowned Hindi novelist Yashpal begins. The story is about an old lady who had no choice but to sell melons from the very next day she lost her twenty-three-year-old son and the sole earner, Bhagwaana.

Bhagwaana dies after a venomous snake bites him. He was a farmer who used to farm melons and sell them. Being the sole earner of the family,

losing him means losing the means to buy basic necessities for his mother, his wife and two children.

With two kids and an ailing daughter-in-law, Bhagwaana's mother decides to sell melons even though she has lost her son the previous day. Deprived of choice, she sits down to sell her basket of melons in the market but the only thing her circumstances allow her to do is to cry profusely.

Yashpal narrates the tale of the tormenting comments Bhagwaana's mother has to endure from people nearby. “क्या जमाना है! जवान लड़के को मरे पूरा दिन नहीं बीता और यह बेहया दुकान लगा कर बैठी है।” (What times are we living in! Not even a day has passed since she lost her son and this shameless woman is selling melons today.) The writer witnessed abuses and slurs being hurled at the woman while she sobbed constantly, forgetting that she had a family to feed. Unlike other people around him, he had sympathy for the woman. But his appearance, his status and other constructs of his mind did not let him talk to the woman. He could not gather the courage to cross the barriers of society.

He has been labelled superior on his appearances. “उस सूत्री का रोना देख मन में एक व्यथा सी उठी, पर उसके रोने का कारण जानने का उपाय क्या था? फुटपाथ पर उसके समीप बैठ सकने में मेरी पोशाक ही व्यवधान बन खड़ी हो गई।” (Her cries caused me utter pain. I wanted to know the cause of her pain, but the question was how? My appearances stopped me from sitting close to her on the footpath, they stopped me from understanding her pain.) He finally gets to know about the state of her being through the tainted opinions of others around him. Her story throws Yashpal in a state of anxiety. He remembered the time when his neighbour lost a son. The only difference between her and the poor old lady is that the expression of her grief and agony was validated. The validation of her miserable state was by virtue of her appearance, her status in society. Nonetheless, the poor lady doesn't have the privilege of getting her grief validated, as she has a family to feed.

The Padma Bhushan winner in 1970 and Sahitya Akademi Award winner for the novel *Meri Teri Uski Baat* in 1976, Yashpal, always had a leaning towards the socialist issues' short stories like *Dukh Ka Adhikaar* (The Right To Grieve) deal with. He was a political commentator and had participated in the Indian Independence movement alongside independent thinkers like Shaheed Bhagat Singh. Yashpal's *Dukh*

*Ka Adhikaar* is an ugly but an authentic reflection of the society. A socialist and a believer of Arya Samaj just like Bhagat Singh, his work was representative of his ideology. The award-winning novel *Meri Teri Uski Baat* (Mine, yours and their sayings) is based on the Indian Independence movement, highlighting the ideologies and events that led to Indian independence. Similarly, another of his critically acclaimed novels is *Jhootha Sach* (The Lying Truth) is a novel written in two volumes about the partition of India and what it meant for people of different caste, class and religion.

I encountered this heart-wrenching story when I was fourteen. Like anyone else, I was aware of the fact that the rights of the poor only exist on paper—whether it's justice, education or even basic necessities like access to clean drinking water. The echoes of his story can be heard even today. Be it a poor family being excluded from NRC list of Assam or the lynching to death of two Dalit kids for defecating in the open in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh. However, the most startling revelation for me was how we as a society tend to control what its members are allowed to feel. This truth was there all the time, but I was either naive or narrow minded to acknowledge it. The kind of thoughts or feelings, we as a society permit one to have depends on the factors often, he or she has no control over.

The class, caste, sex, background, family members, circumstances are somethings we are just thrown into at our birth, as perfectly described by existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. The quality of those feelings or thoughts further depends on how privileged you are. An Indian upper caste and upper-class man is allowed to feel entitled to the care and service of any woman present in his life. Whereas a woman like Bhagwaana's mother is afflicted with disgust and guilt. The expression of sadness in the given circumstances will never be approved. Even if she had decided to not sell melons just after the death of her son, she would have been deplored for some other action of hers. Yashpal makes a poignant statement, he doesn't question her actions. Instead he questions the core of his society and rightly points out that to be validated one must have the right to grieve.

I realised that the world outside can make or break the world within. I became aware of the privilege I have. Most importantly, it taught me how good art has the power to shape mindsets and broaden horizons.

# SCM begins with an adventure!

*Karen Dsouza tells us how the year began with the SCM-ers getting lucky.*

Within the first five days of getting into the course, on 29 June 2019, the students at SCM were challenged with a treasure hunt to break the ice and know the city better. The day began unlike any other day in the city during monsoon -- raining cats and dogs. The students were divided into teams of four and were given hints to follow and find the locations across Mumbai.

"The treasure hunt that SCM organized was like the first Mumbai Darshan for me and it was my first-time real journalism. We took umbrellas in our hands, talked to people, and shot them with good audio quality as well. We went to Marine Drive, Crawford Market and then we had to find Mukesh Ambani's house," said Sakshi Sharma. For Sakshi, the treasure hunt was a reality check of what journalism was going to be and what SCM was going to be.

"We were given clues and with those clues, we had to find out the places. For us the first location was Haji Ali, the second location was Dhobi Ghat and the third one was Palladium Mall. Actually not a mall but the mill. There was a mill before the mall was constructed in its place. It was a rainy day. But all of us had

bikes. We had three bikes and we went two on each bike and we roamed around," said Prateek Gautam.

It was a day full of chaos. Since it was the first week of SCM, the students barely knew each other. "We were asked to make teams, choosing people at random. Just go out explore, talk to people and make videos. Even then we did not get to the end of the treasure hunt. I remember how frustrated we were after we were informed that we had reached the wrong place. We had ended up reaching Bhendi Bazaar," said Prabhat Nambiar.

Akansha Negi said that the toughest part of the treasure hunt was that they were supposed to identify a café based on the clue given: "So we went to Banganga, then from there, we had to go to Cafe Naaz. But we couldn't spot it anywhere. It wasn't anywhere and on the destination that the map gave; we reached there but there was no café. No one knew about it so we went to and fro from there. Then we finally met a person who was a mango seller who informed us that the café had shut down. So we searched a lot for a café that didn't even exist anymore. We went to Banganga, Hanging Gardens and Queen's Necklace. For a fact,



we did not even know what Queen's Necklace was." They were standing right in front of Marine Drive when they asked for the location of the Queen's Necklace. And then it was told that Marine Drive is actually called Queen's Necklace."

For Nambiar, the most memorable part was that they went to Haji Ali Juice Centre and tasted the amazing shakes after which we went to Worli Koliwada which was absolutely beautiful. "In a way what the treasure hunt made us realize was how inexperienced we are in the field of media and you realise it is difficult just to talk to people. It's a challenge in itself. But, now you can do it without any hesitation. It was a very good learning experience; we did not realise it at that time," said Nambiar.

## Into the mud

*Nayna Agrawal on SCM getting down and dirty with rice transplanting*

"Mother nature needs a little bit of helping hands," says Dinesh Balsavar, the 88-year-old organic farmer we met on the day that we went out to transplant rice saplings in a beautiful valley in Kamshet, a village in Pune district of Maharashtra. This is part of the Social Communications Media department's attempt to make us understand the hard labour that goes into our food and perhaps also a way to encourage us to stop wasting it.

Balsavar has had many years of experience as an organic farmer and explained to us why organic farming needs to be adopted by one and all. It is beneficial to eat organic which reduces the toxic materials from our body. It is also kinder to the soil and kinder to the Earth. And when we are poised on the brink of an ecological disaster, every little bit helps.

But that wasn't the only learning we took away. Although we started in high spirits, we



soon realised how back-breaking the labour is. You stand ankle-deep in water because the young rice sapling is a thirsty plant and needs that much rain. We worked side-by-side with women who have been doing this forever. Their rhythms were natural and unstrained. They moved effortlessly

while we huffed and puffed besides them. And then they sang and worked which was even more amazing.

"We met villagers who made us realise how being hardworking and close to our roots can keep us fit and healthy forever," Anjali Awasthi recalls. Many of us were facing language issues but the heartfelt welcome and love made us understand a bit and parts of the farming and life lessons they tried conveying to us. It was indeed a beautiful moment. "An escape from city life is all you need to calm your senses," says Anuradha Nagar, which is what we did.

"We understood the lives of farmers who are the most underrated labourers of the society," says Sukanya Deb. No amount of rain can hinder their spirits. The field they create with its patterned crops is a work of art. Karen Dsouza wondered whether the workers were being adequately compensated for their labour. Or whether they can ever be adequately compensated for the kind of labour that they put in when it feeds the hungry. "The message really sank in. When someone has put that much effort into the growing of a crop, we should never waste food," Nirmiti Kamat said.

## Finding the story-teller within

*Sukanya Deb provides an insight into the batch's first foray into filmmaking*

Two months into the course, we, the students of Social Communications Media, were divided into six teams and competed in a '100 hours of film making' challenge named #ibelieve. It was spread over the Independence Day week, from 12th to 17th August 2019. We were to make a film, a three-minute long film, and we had just three days in which we had to do everything from gestating the idea to shooting it and post-production.

Shreya Khare, who is looking at a career in luxury public relations, found the whole thing exciting: "Most of us had just been introduced to the whole world of filmmaking and editing. We didn't even know how to use an editing software and we were completely flustered about the whole process. They said we had to shoot and edit within the span of just three days. So, the department had conducted a two-day workshop to enlighten us about the processes involved in making a film prior to the shoots."

The whole idea of 'a hundred hours of filmmaking' was introduced by Parth J Vyas, who teaches Radio and Television, in the curriculum of the Social Communications Media department as a rolling trophy competition. It aims at giving students first-hand exposure to filmmaking even before getting into the fiction film project.

The first two days of film-making workshops involved watching numerous short films and interactive sessions with the makers of those films. Sweekriti Tiwari, an aspiring filmmaker says, "The opportunity to be able to ask them questions about their craft in person and seeing such diverse work in the category of short films was absolutely amazing. Watching a film like *Tungrus* (by Rishi Chandna) made me feel like there's so much to talk about the short film industry and how we tend to overlook it. If given a chance I would love to work with Rishi Chandna. It was such a surreal feeling and I am extremely grateful to my mentor, Parth, for this opportunity."

Natasha Badhwar, an independent filmmaker and writer, who is also one of the founding members of *Karwan-e-Mohabbat* (a journey that speaks about atonement, solidarity, conscience and justice), which makes films on hate crime against the vulnerable, also came for one of the workshop sessions. Her experiences ignited the spark of human consciousness and duty that one must deliver to his or her surroundings. "She showed us how we can still find a way out to voice dissent and question everything that is wrong in our system through documenting the actual stories of the sufferers. It touched me to a point where there were tears in my eyes watching some



of her films. It taught me the literal meaning of 'solidarity' and I couldn't have been more grateful to SCM for the experience," said Anuradha Nagar, who wants to start off her career as a production head.

The sessions not only included documentary films and fiction, but also had people like Arko Provo Bose from Lowe Lintas, a leading advertising company, coming and discussing the whole process of ad filmmaking. Post the interactive sessions began the real work. On the morning of 14th August, all the teams were given four separate topics to choose from as the theme of their film. They had to prepare the script and shoot within three days, i.e. from 14th to 16th August. "It was a challenging yet exciting job. As most of us had almost zero knowledge of dealing with videography and shooting proper film sequences, we all were panicking a bit. But we sailed through it till the last stage came, editing," said Anjali Awasthi, who is focused on becoming a journalist.

Anjali continued, "On 17th, we had a whole day session with Parth, where he taught us how to access editing software like Vegas Pro and Adobe Premiere Pro. We learned the basics but still had absolutely no idea about how to make the already shot footage work together to tell a story in a comprehensible manner. Yet we managed to produce decent films, at least that's what I would like to believe."

The moment of truth was when the panel of judges, namely Nirmita Gupta (Head of the department, Social Communications Media), Shyma Rajagopal (lecturer), Jeroo Mulla (lecturer of films and photography) and Parth J Vyas sat down to watch the films on 19th August. Their verdict was all the validation that the students had

put in their efforts for. "I am not really interested in filmmaking but the whole process of ideating and executing with my friends was absolutely thrilling. We were so invested in making our small film that at the end, I too wanted to win applause for our work. Our film was named Faith and our theme was 'secularism'. While we were scared if the message would be correctly portrayed or not, the feedback from the rest of our batchmates and the judges made our day," said Prabhat Nambiar, who is planning to join the advertising industry.

The team that won the #ibelieve challenge was the one who made a film on plastic and pollution, titled *Thaili* (a term commonly used for plastic bags in Hindi). The relevance of the film with the change in global climatic situation and the use of filming techniques like montages made it the winner in the first view. The judges handed over the trophy to the winning team, Char Log Production, consisting of Navya Sahai Bhatnagar, Nirmita Kamat, Arshi Khan and Sakshi Sharma. "Who won and who didn't was really immaterial, to us and the rest of the batch, we made our very first films and that was it," said Navya Sahai Bhatnagar, who wants to be a director after graduating from SCM.

We worked on our films the entire week, including on Independence Day. Even though we were all upset about one less holiday, at the end of the week, we were elated to see our growth and learning as filmmakers. The sense of accomplishment in every student after producing their first independent film was priceless. The whole contentment and joy of getting our films played on the screen in front of all the students and teachers was worth the struggle of giving it our all for seven days.

## SCM HAPPENINGS

### Empowerment at Your Fingertips!

*Anuradha Nagar covers the launch of Chhaa Jaa in SCM Sophia.*



For over fifty years, SCM Sophia has been the champion for the rights and education of women. As a platform for women's development, the department hosted the launch of Chhaa Jaa in India. Chhaa Jaa is the digital brand initiative of Girl Effect, a creative international non-profit organisation that works from nine global locations and is active in over fifty countries. This organisation employs the power of communications technology to reach out to the marginalised and vulnerable girls. Launching the event were Jessica Posner Odede, the CEO of Girl Effect, and Kanishk Kabiraj, Girl Effect India Lead who were interviewed by noted journalist Faye D'Souza.

Girls often feel uncomfortable talking about issues of sexuality, menstruation or the effects of patriarchy. This is where Chhaa Jaa steps in. By creating digital content that is

relatable for young women, it helps the girls form a link between their needs and resources. Thus, Chhaa Jaa tied up with the Children's Investment Fund Foundation and the Vodafone Foundation to ensure that the girls benefit from the power of the Internet to foster their own development and raise self-awareness. "It is aimed at making girls independent and help them understand that they can not only recognise a choice but also act upon them, the girls can aspire to be something," says Jessica. She also mentioned that Chhaa Jaa will provide the girls a platform to ask personal questions and have a safe place for conversations. The main focus of the discussion was on consent and how important it is for women to understand that they have all the right to refuse and it's okay to say no. Also, Chhaa Jaa ensures that the girls are connected to at least two government helplines. The videos were full of human moments such as choosing between sports and a boy; or going to the gynaecologist for the first time. It has been structured keeping in mind the Indian audience and issues that adolescent girls face in their surroundings.

### Bachi Karkaria: How to ace an interview

*"The pen is much better," said the veteran journalist. Karen Dsouza and Anjali Awasthi listened in.*

Bachi Karkaria, a senior journalist and a columnist for the Times of India, writes two widely followed columns: the satirical 'Erratica' in the Times of India, and 'Giving Gyan', playing 'Agony Aunt' in the Mumbai Mirror.

Bachi gave the students at SCM tips about the process of interviewing someone. Her session was called 'Bowl- A- Google-y'. She explained the must dos and don'ts for the interview. She

emphasises on being alert throughout the interview and to be ready with the next question.

We would have never learned the art of interviewing in such a way. It was an interactive session filled with imperative learning. She shared her valuable experiences which she gathered through her journalistic journey.

Nayna Agarwal says, "Having sessions with professionals like Bachi Karkaria helps us understand the real functioning of the media industry. It increases our work proficiency when we head out in search of jobs. Also, it equips us with skills to cope up with the changing guidelines and curriculum standards of the workplace, it is important to have the knowledge of some relevant and tailored instructions from such a legend of the industry."

Ten tips we learned from Bachi Karkaria:

1. Ask questions openly (Make sure questions are crisp and clear)
2. Do your homework well (Read up the interviews of the person and research about the person well.)
3. Ask impromptu questions based on responses. (Read between lines)
4. Always bowl a 'google-y'
5. Always be updated about recent happenings to ask relevant questions
6. Use the wildcard: press the right button to get better response
7. Ask 'why', and not 'how' questions

8. Never ask them how they started
9. Respect content, vocabulary and tone
10. This pen is much better.

On asking questions which are beyond the obvious ones. Sakshi Sharma says, "The session that she took was enlightening towards the process of taking interviews in journalism. We were always confused where to stop asking questions and where to draw the line. But her session gave us inputs to be used in journalism."

The session went more interesting after an assignment given to us in class, where we framed questions for the people we wanted to interview. Keeping all her tips in mind we discussed each question in the class. It was insightful to see how her art of interviewing gave us a new direction of interviewing people.

Arshi Khan says, "She taught us about the risk of taking a risky or controversial question, if you know that the question can get yourself an interesting answer and then you should not hold yourself back."

Today's recording equipment can turn faulty at any moment. Nirmithi Kamat says, "Even though you take your recorders along with you for an interview, it is crucial that you take notes and always have a pen and paper with you."

Anjali Awasthi emphasises on the importance of research. Awasthi says, "It is important to access backgrounds, explore new lines of enquiry or angles, avoid what is already known and always press the right button on the interviewee."

The session with her gave us a new perspective, though many of us don't want to be journalists but this session helped us to learn to get information from the people.



## Strictly Speaking

*The batch's afternoons of unwinding, laughter and deep conversations with Vikas Kumar and Prabhat Raghunandan, as narrated by Tanisha Lele*

Strictly Speaking, an organisation founded by Vikas Kumar, works towards strengthening one's oratory and communication skills and helps one develop one's personality. They conducted a workshop at SCM, in August 2019. "I aim to let the students break out of the academic grind. That's why most of these exercises are done in a group. What may seem like just having fun is helping you open up; people will talk about really personal things that they may have not told others before and these get as diverse as they can be," says Vikas Kumar.

The session was interactive and surprising. Nayna Agrawal, 23, says, "This was the first chance given to us to open up so personally with each other that even the darkest of our secrets were revealed."

Initially, we were asked to do some warm-up exercises. Prabhat Nambiar, 24, says, "I'd expected a very serious session on how gruelling the media world will be once we get out of SCM. But, Vikas Kumar and Prabhat Raghunandan of Strictly Speaking were an absolute joy! We played games that were aimed at improving our communication skills. I thought it pretty silly at the start, but by the end of it, the whole class was sitting in a circle with them. We shared funny and tragic life stories which, I believe, brought us batchmates together. So yeah, communication is key!"

After this, we were instructed to do a few other exercises which would help us channel our energy into our voice and then modulate it. The first of those exercises being when we were told to scream out swear words, the dirtiest that we know of, irrespective of language, as loudly as we could. A wave of shock rolled over all of us and we thought maybe they were pulling our legs. When no one took this seriously, they told us that they weren't joking. As a result, each one of us then shouted out the most offensive swear word that we knew of. It was later that it was explained to us that this helped us get rid of bottled up emotions and unexpressed feelings. Nirmiti Kamat, 21, shares her experience by saying, "It was liberating and open. I loved how I felt so free after that session. Like some pile was taken off

me. When they asked us to shout out the worst insults out loud, it was such a different moment. All these years we girls have been told to be quiet and not be vocal about our frustrations, but at that moment shouting out those frustrations made me feel light and free."

Then we proceeded to play a few games. We had to scatter around in the studio, with music playing continuously, and when the music was paused, we had to freeze in a way that expressed some emotion. This game was selected to make us aware of the kind of emotions we chose to express and then help us understand as to why we chose those in particular. It also helped us relax our restless body and increase our concentration power. Next, we were divided into three groups and each group was to act out a given scene, but through frozen poses. If anybody moved at all, they would be disqualified. The time duration given to us to put this together was as short as thirty seconds. But it was the pressure that made it fun. Each group managed to act out their situation well.

The next activity changed everyone's equation with each other. We were asked to sit in a huge circle and speak about one experience, good or bad, that changed us. Through the course of this sharing of experiences, all of us said things out loud that we had kept buried deep inside us. Bhoomi Mistry, 22, says, "I will always remember that session as the first time we opened up to each other as a class. Till then, everybody knew of each other but didn't know the other person. Those exercises helped us get close." Inevitably the whole exercise made most of us emotional as we were letting go of unsaid, bottled up thoughts

and worries that had been accumulating inside us all along. Sukanya Deb, 22, says, "What I loved about the session was people coming out of their shells and sharing their stories, stories of brave hearts chasing their dreams. We all sat down together, learning from each other's lives and getting inspired. It brought us all much closer."

In January 2020, we had another session with Vikas Kumar which was just as energetic and surprising as the previous one. Each of us was asked to take lead and dance, and the rest of the class would follow. Such exercises help to build one's confidence. They help us lighten up and express ourselves. Another exercise was to get down on all fours and scream out a variety of sounds, from different parts of our body like the stomach, throat and the chest.

Next, we were asked to select a dialogue from any film of our choice, and each one of us had to act out or even choreograph that dialogue. This was again to be done individually first, then the class would follow twice. After this, we played a game called 'Ankhiyon se goli maare' in which each time one of us was to play the role of a murderer and blink or wink at a random classmate to kill them. Others had to guess who the murderer was and catch them in action, if possible. As the rounds of the game increased, the number of murderers per round also increased. It so happened at times that two murderers would unknowingly wink at one another!

The session then came to an end with an energetic dance performance by the class. Sessions like these are truly treasured, as they make us feel alive.



# Catalysts of Change: Fifty Years and Counting!

*Anjali Awasthi was backstage at an event that showcased the Social Communications Media department's role in being champions of change.*

The Social Communications Media (SCM) department of Sophia Polytechnic celebrated the golden jubilee on 24 September 2019. On this day, we celebrated the lives and works of fifty years of alums and learned the stories of our Changemakers.

The speakers of the event were the prominent faces of SCM Sophia, including faculty members Jeroo Mulla, Jerry Pinto, P Sainath, and alumnae Richa Chadha, Minnie Vaid, Maya Mirchandani, Durga Raghunath, Shalini Singh, Aparna Shukla, Kajri Babbar, Paromita Vohra, Poulomi Basu, Dilshad Master and Aniketh Mendonca.

"The most difficult task was choosing those who would talk about their work since we have so many talented and successful alums," said Nirmita Gupta, Head of Department, SCM. "So we decided to leave the process to our event partner, AVID Learning."

The day of the event saw a crowd of over 600 people gather at the Sophia Bhabha Auditorium. The event was hosted by Suresh Venkat, a leading anchor and also a faculty at SCM. Going onstage, the guest speakers shared insights of their lives -- their struggles, their time at SCM, the lessons learnt here and how incorporating them helped them reach where they are now. More importantly, how their time at SCM changed them not just as media professionals, but also as humans. "Regressive notions can be shattered by

progressive ideas," said Reema Kagti, director and screenwriter, SCM Sophia batch 1994-95.

The actor and now producer Richa Chadha who has carved a swathe for herself with her on-screen performances and her feisty activism off-screen talked about her journey. Journalist Maya Mirchandani put her life on the line for news stories. Dilshad Master was into television but then changed course after a bout with cancer and followed her heart to become an adventurer while journalist Aparna Shukla overcame cultural shock when she was posted in Tamil Nadu where she helped develop a community radio station. Minnie Vaid chronicled the lives of successful women and worked on a book about the women rocket scientists at ISRO while Poulomi Basu talked about her journey in photography.

The event also included the launch of *Lives of the Women, Volume III*, a book written by ex-students and edited by Jerry Pinto. It talks about the lives and achievements of Honey Irani, Shama Habibullah, Madhusree Dutta, and the late Rekha Sabnis. The lead writers on this book were Mayanka Goel, Suryasarathi Bhattacharya, Jovita Aranha and Dalreen Ramos. We were delighted that Ms Irani and Ms Habibullah made it to the show and received their copies of the book.

No event at SCM Sophia would be complete without Jeroo Mulla, who has been teaching films and photography at the institution for over 40



years! The entire hall went crazy when she was ushered onstage. The batch of 2019-2020, getting its first taste of event management and busily running around all evening also managed to put aside their duties for a while to get a glimpse of her. She made it a point to thank everyone who has been a part of her long journey at SCM, including her students who have made it big in their lives.

Another highlight of the event was Smruti Koppikar, our Journalism teacher, receiving the Changemaker Award from P Sainath for her 25 years of honing aspiring journalists. "Usually when women get acknowledged for their achievements, it's because they are women who did something. But during the Changemakers event, it was so empowering to see a woman-dominated panel get felicitated for their accomplishments and its significance beyond patronising women's category awards," said Bhoomi Mistry, a student.

The event was followed by a dinner where we got to interact with them and shared their SCM stories. They were warm and friendly to our curious minds. Everyone complained about the stress of assignments SCM gives, to which Sameera Khan laughed and said: "Been there. Done that. I can only say this: you will not die of it!"

"It gave me a perspective of being more than a student and being an integral part of a full-fledged event," said Arshi Khan, from the golden batch of SCM. For us students, Changemakers came as a great learning experience at multiple levels. Despite all the chaos during the initial planning, Changemakers was a success and the sense of satisfaction was unparalleled. Who knows, maybe in a few years, we may be on the stage sharing our own stories onstage; for author and SCM faculty Jerry Pinto defined a Changemaker and said: 'You are a change maker if you are simply kind in the next human interaction you have.' This struck a chord in every heart.





# In the Eye of the Storm

*Anand Patwardhan shares what it takes to make potentially controversial films. By Prateek Kumar Gautam and Simran Dang*

We spent a full week watching documentaries made by the legendary documentary filmmaker, Anand Patwardhan. Each time a documentary was screened, the entire class was left in a state of shock and surprise with the kind of information that was revealed through the documentaries and the fearlessness of the director with which it was shot.

Sakshi Sharma, a student, says, "Watching his films, I had always wondered how he shot and how much time did it take for him to make this and many more questions." Prabhat Nambiar was left shocked and amazed after watching the documentaries. "I kept wondering what would happen if a budding filmmaker today took his camera and started shooting on the streets like that," says Nambiar.

Anand's films focus specifically on social, political and human rights related issues, and so we were very excited when we were told that he would come to interact with us after the screening of his latest film: Reason (Vivek). A nervous excitement ran through the class as Anand arrived. But contrary to the fierce nature of his works, he turned out to be quite light-hearted and insisted that we have a casual Q&A session.

Encouraged, we barged him with an onslaught of questions!

The session began with the most obvious question that popped in almost everybody's head: What was his approach towards documenting political issues pertaining to right-wing ideologies? Was he worried about his safety? Did he fear retribution from those who did not agree with his views?

Anand was casual: "I've been doing it for forty years, no, forty-five years so, so far so good. We'll see what happens. I don't worry

about it because whatever it is, there's no way to be safe in a society like this. I can ask for police protection but it isn't going to help because who does the police belong to? So how can you trust the police in this particular circumstance?"

He further talked about things that inspire him to keep making such movies despite the increased difficulty and hostility he faces while shooting such movies in the current political scenario in the country. "The reason I make films is because they can change people's minds. And I don't only mean the fence-sitters. I mean people who have been going to shakhas from the age of four and five and who have been getting brainwashed every day. This means that they have not been exposed to anything. So, when they come across such work, sometimes, it wakes them up."

We asked him about the difficulty while shooting chaotic scenes such as riots or fights. "There is no proper way to get out of such situations where riots are happening. You just keep filming and if situations get bad, we take evasive action. Right now, we have one advantage. No one in the situation is sure whose camera it is. It might well be a camera from 'their side' which is intent on capturing footage so that they can gloat later. So, those who get confused don't easily react that quickly. You could be NDTV or could be Arnab Goswami's channel."

He adds: "The approach is to be forthright to say about what you want to say and see what happens because if you're afraid of them it will get worse. And once you start worrying about that kind of safety then you'll end up doing nothing. And then our country will go in the direction that it is going because people are too afraid to speak up. Because right now not enough people are speaking that we reach that

stage. But slowly people will start speaking; they have already started to speak."

The session then moved to discuss censorship and the difficulty he faced with each of his films and how he had to go to court for almost every movie he has made so far. For the movie Reason, for example, the Censor Board did not allow it to be released in the country and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Sanatan Sanstha tried their best to get it removed from the Kerala Film Festival. But Anand persevered and won the court cases and it was finally shown at the festival.

Reason, an award-winning documentary, is divided into eight chapters; each chapter talks about a different issue like the murder of left-wing politician Govind Pansare, the establishment of Sanatan Sanstha, PhD scholar Rohith Vemula's suicide and the 2008 Mumbai attacks. These, he alleges, were connected to each other through a common thread: extremist Hindu terrorism.

A film like this can only be built as history unfolds; they must take a long time to shoot and then to construct. Anand said, "I don't have a concrete script because I don't have questions in advance. You know, basically everything is an exploration. Each day, I review my own footage. If I have shot in the morning, I edit in the evening. So when the film gets on the editing table, you watch your own footage for a long time again and again. Soon, the patterns start emerging and you understand what is connected to what."

This is quite evident in the movie 'Jai Bhim Comrade', which took eleven years to finish and another 4 years to release because the people from Kabir Kala Manch were in jail and Anand was working to get them out of there.

"Are you planning to make a documentary on the CAA-NRC anytime soon?" asked one of the students. He said that he had not planned anything as such and might explore the issue sometime.

The session was one that was filled with enlightenment and discovery. "His craft to me is not even 'representation' of reality. To me, it is the reality. Documentaries he made two decades ago are relevant till date. It is as though he had documented everything to let us know about the true history of our country's sociopolitical and geopolitical scenario. Listening to him speak about the way he never really scripts any of his films has actually helped me discover my love for documentaries which are real, raw and hard hitting," says Sukanya Deb, who aspires to become a hardcore journalist.

Arshi Khan says, "It was surreal to see such a renowned documentarian talk about his work regime as if anyone can do it. He shared insights on what to keep in mind while approaching a topic for a documentary and the kind of time, energy and intellectual presence it demands from us."

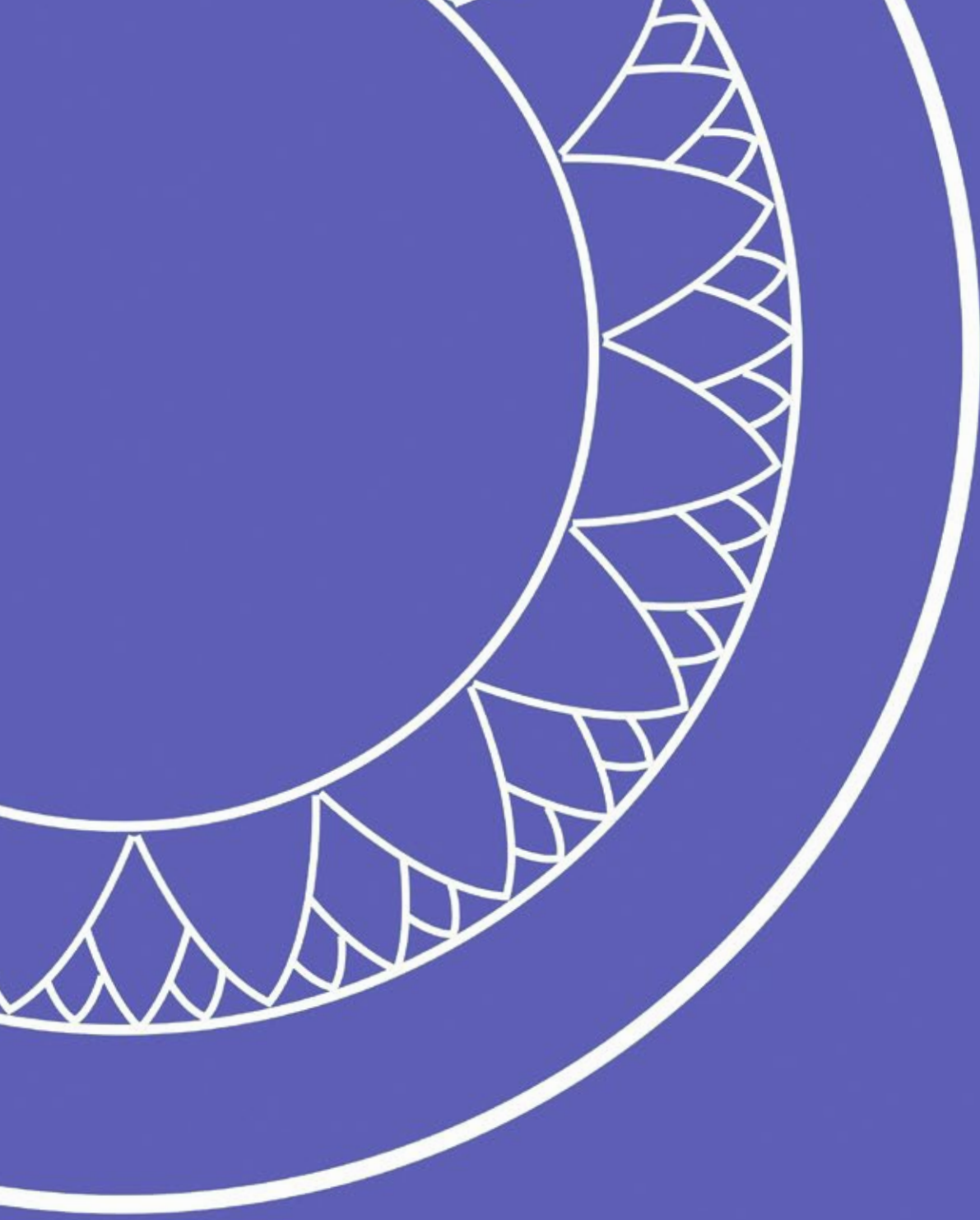
By the end of the session, the students were surely pumped and looking forward to shoot their own documentaries for the semester.



# SCM BATCH 2019-20







# scm sophia

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