

Sadbhavana

DIGEST



for
and
by
the
Youth

Sadbhavana Digest

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1. Editorial

“Youth is the only thing worth having”, Oscar Wilde had claimed once. Keeping aside his usual penchant for humour as well as his provocative temperament, one can still assume some sincere value that he must have invested in this statement- a value, not only around what it means to be young, but also, the dangers of buying into that singular meaning (elsewhere, he says that “a passion for pleasure is the secret of remaining forever young”). In that way, his ‘The Portrait of Dorian Gray’ can be read as a cautionary tale about youthful vanity.

And yet, we see the celebration of youth everywhere. We see it as the ‘target audience’ in various media, as the ‘target community’ in business programs, we see them mentioned in politics, in religion, celebrated in almost all facets of life around us. They become the subject of discourse in philosophy, and the foot soldiers in various social/political movements.

But being young is so many things- it is also carrying the burdens of generational traumas, it is responding to a world that you didn’t essentially participate in building, it is being handed over the baton of ideologies and continuing the relay-race, it is finding oneself, losing oneself, and reinventing oneself. It is learning, and un-learning.

And amidst all of that, is everything from self-image, self-reflexivity, to self-care. The attempt of the Hamlets and Ophelias of this world to not succumb to the ‘filial obligations’ and just ‘to be’.

This issue of Sadbhavana Digest is unique in that way. It is the collective outcome of conversations and efforts from three out of our six apprentices who participated in an apprenticeship program, organized in collaboration with Christ (Deemed University), Bangalore. The three apprentices-Kanishk Sengupta, Parth Joshi, and V. Dhruv worked at our Delhi office from 6th June to 7th July 2022, and participated in the compilation of this volume, while actively participating in various events, as well as making their own short films on Sadbhavana.

Their perspective on Sadbhavana really made me open up to social media platforms, and discover communities and projects that were using the new media and technology towards this objective. We are already aware of the Arab Spring, Occupy, and #MeToo movement, where social media played a strong role in bringing about change. These interactions expanded my understanding even further.

Merging these with various other 'offline' movements was an attempt of mapping the social landscape of this nation- in probably the most updated format. It also made me understand the utility of this methodology. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, published 'Young India', Shri Rajiv Gandhi's famous declaration was 'I am young, and I too have a dream...'; if the value attached to the youth is of hope, then we can safely assume that the future of human civilization is as hopeful as the youths are.

This Digest, in that way, is an exercise in Hope.

As the Bharat Jodo Yatra is going on and is becoming a mass movement, where a majority of the participants are young, we are giving below links to just two of the videos from it:

The first video captures a discussion that Rahul Gandhi had with the Bharat Jodo Yatri, which though in a lighter vein, captures the purpose and spirit of the Yatra.



<https://youtu.be/Z7jW4eAo3nw>

The second video is a talk by Yatri Kanhaiya Kumar to the media persons in Telangana, where he explains the purpose of the Yatra.



<https://youtu.be/A5YTpLyQM7o>

An abstract painting featuring a dense composition of thick, expressive brushstrokes in a variety of colors including deep purple, bright yellow, fiery orange, and cool blue. The background is a dark, textured charcoal grey. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and complex layering.

2. How to deal with self?

2.1 Slam poetry culture in India - Breaking shackles of traditional performances

Richa Nigam

Slam poetry culture has become popular over the last few years. Performer-audience interactions, lack of age restrictions and creative liberty it provides, makes slam poetry a hit among new generation artistes.

“Slam poetry provides the kind of freedom of expression that written poetry doesn’t. Slam poetry is unique in the sense that it depends equally on written words as well as on the performance of the poetry. Slam poetry is a performing art. Unlike traditional poetry, slam poetry is easier to decipher. Usage of simple words and metaphors make it easy to understand and relate, and that is exactly the motive of slam poetries,” says

Over the past decade or so, slam poetry has become popular in India mainly due to the telecom boom and the sharp increase in the number of smartphones in the country and the resultant boom in consumption of digital content on these telephones. Soon enough the demand for slam poetry expanded beyond the digital universe and popular slam poetry artistes began performing at cafes, literary events and open mic competitions. Though still confined to metro cities mainly, slam poetry has been a sensation among the millennials in the last five years.

“I started getting calls from cafes and literary event organisers in the town since 2016, asking me to perform at their events. It was the first time I felt recognised and appreciated for my poetry and performances. I had been waiting for this recognition for last five years,” says Aakarsh Aanand, 24, a slam poetry artiste based in Patna, capital of the eastern state of Bihar.

“The payment for each show and overall demand is still not good in comparison to cities like New Delhi or Mumbai but it is gradually catching up in Patna too,” Aanand adds.

Process of evaluating slam poetry also adds to its uniqueness. There is no special panel of judges. Slam poetry performances are usually evaluated by a certain number of members from the audience, chosen randomly. Members are asked to assign marks to the performer. The total marks received are added in order to calculate final marks of a performer. Likewise, all performers are marked by audience members and a winner is chosen.



Artistes have been vocal about their traumas because it is cathartic and liberating in nature

(Photo: Tanisha Saxena)

“Few organisers come up with their own panel of judges for evaluation but the standard process is to leave it to the audience. Random selection of people from the audience makes the evaluation process of slam poeties fairer than any other way to judge performance. A dedicated panel of judges could increase the chances of biases. The primary goal of slam poetry performance is to make sure that the audience connects with the performer and enjoys. Hence, I think the audience is the best judge for whether a performer could connect with them or not,” says Tanisha Saxena, 21, a Delhi based freelance writer and slam poetry artiste.

Slam poetry competitions break the barriers of traditional competitions. There is no age limit for participation and the traditional barrier that exists between audience and performers is minimal in slam poetry.

“I have seen teenagers, young adults and even people aged 60-70 perform on the same stage and at the same event. An artiste isn’t judged on the basis of age but only on the basis of talent. This arrangement makes it possible even for senior citizens to follow their passion, by providing them with an equal opportunity and stage. As the audience evaluates the performances, there is no stage fright in most of the new aspirants who wish to perform,” explains Saxena.

The art form has no specific rules to follow and can be moulded according to the poet’s style. The platform gives the poets the freedom to express their takes or opinions on the political scenario around them. Today, it has fanned out to their personal experiences, funny anecdotes, and even history with violence and abuse.

“Artistes are free to recite their poems in free verse format, a story format, with music in the background or even on the beats of popular songs. One can choose and develop their own style. When the audience nods along and snaps their fingers, it provides a sense of validation to the performer. It makes one think that they are not isolated in their experiences. The audience relates and shares their experiences too,” says Chhetri.

“Artistes have been vocal about their traumas because it is cathartic and liberating in nature. A feeling of liberty is also reinforced from the feedback of the audience that we face in an event. Almost everywhere I’ve performed, the audience has been very accepting, responsive and understanding,” Chhetri sums up.



Image Courtesy-

<https://mediaindia.eu/culture/slam-poetry-culture-india/>

2.2 Eight Indian books on mental health you need to read

Usri Basistha

Stories have a way of holding our hands in the most difficult times; and if the narrative brings with it the visibility some of us need to make sense of our struggle or that of our loved ones, it can be empowering. Mental health has been seen through a miasma of stereotypes and taboos for the longest time, more so in India, but stories with their hearts in the right place can change that. Here are some powerful books by Indian authors that help us locate the humanity in mental health narratives.

“Em and The Big Hoom” by Jerry Pinto

Em and the Big Hoom by Jerry Pinto is about a woman with bipolar disorder. Credits: Penguin Books

Simply put, Jerry Pinto’s debut novel is about a woman with bipolar disorder and her family, as their lives unwind in a small flat in 20th-century Bombay. But Pinto’s honest and humourous storytelling makes it relatable to anyone who has ever had an argument with their parents. The book, told from a caregiver’s point of view, will take the reader through a spectrum of emotions and leave them with empathy for those living with mental health illnesses and those who care.

“I’ve never been (Un)happier” by Shaheen Bhatt

I’ve never been (Un)happier by Shaheen Bhatt recounts her experiences with depression. Credits: Penguin India

First-time author and mental health advocate Shaheen Bhatt’s memoir is a very quick read. She effortlessly juxtaposes the puzzle of being born privileged and growing up with depression. This startlingly perspicacious book talks about the unpredictability of mental health in the most matter-of-fact way. Anyone who wants a moving personal account and an honest perspective on mental health can start with this gem.

“Sepia Leaves” by Amandeep Sandhu

Sepia Leaves by Amandeep Sandhu tells the story of a young man coming to terms with his mother's schizophrenia. Credits: Rupa Publisher

Amandeep Sandhu's novel is an evocative take on a young man's understanding and acceptance of his mother's schizophrenia as he goes through old family pictures. Readers looking for a sense of closure for unresolved trauma left from a troubled dynamic with a parent can find solace in this poignant coming-of-age tale.

“How To Travel Light: My Memories of Madness and Melancholia” by Shreevatsa Nevatia

How To Travel Light is a memoir by Shreevatsa Nevatia after she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Credits: Penguin Random House India

Shreevatsa Nevatia was 23 when he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. This is his memoir, highlighting the highs and lows of his life as a journalist. The deeply personal book is not only a profound insight into what bipolar disorder entails, it can also be picked up by anyone going through moments of doubt while trying to juggle their mental health and professional needs.

“A Book of Light: When a Loved One Has a Different Mind” (Edited by Jerry Pinto)

A Book of Light is a collection of 13 real-life accounts by caregivers to mental illness patients, edited by Jerry Pinto. Credits: Speaking Tiger

As the name suggests “A Book of Light” shines a spotlight on topics that are usually left untouched. It is a collection of 13 real life accounts of caregivers who supported family members with mental health illnesses. The accounts are raw and honest, and will resonate with anyone who has had a similar experience and emerged stronger on the other side.

“Maine Mandu Nahin Dekha” by Swadesh Deepak (Hindi)

This book by playwright Swadesh Deepak is heavily inspired by his own journey with bipolar disorder. Credits: Juggernaut Books

The memoir of Swadesh Deepak, a famous Hindi writer and playwright, is a fascinating look into a troubled mind, grappling with mental health challenges, but unyielding in its creative prowess. Unlike the classical memoir, Deepak's narrative does not follow a chronological sequence but leaves a strong impression as a tale of a grit and survival against substantial odds.

“The Crazy Tales of Pagla Dashu and Co” by Sukumar Ray (Bengali)

The Crazy Tales of Pagla Dashu & Co. is a collection of humourous short stories about a schoolboy by Sukumar Ray. Credits: Hachette India

Sukumar Ray's collection of humorous short stories about a schoolboy's adventures is a classic among Indian kids. But it was way ahead of its time. The book focuses on a different way of thinking through Dashu, a clever, perspicacious child, whose eccentricities are portrayed as funny escapades. His character can be a positive role model for children who can grow up to see mental health as a spectrum instead of a binary of good and bad labels.

“Side Effects of Living: An Anthology of Voices on Mental Health” (Edited by Jhilmil Breckenridge and Namarita Kathait)

Side Effects of Living is an anthology of voices on mental health by Jhilmil Breckenridge and Namarita Kathait. Credits: Speaking Tiger Publishing & Women Unlimited

An anthology of accounts, this book primarily holds space for those who have lived with a mental health condition and wish to gain more perspective. Through stories, poetry and art, the stories offer a panoramic view on the different shades of mental health. Anyone who has felt isolated and alone, or has cared for a loved one will benefit from the book and its insights on the conversations around mental health in India.

These works are a good starting point for those who read Indian literature. Readers will find many more books that lend their voices to this discussion, especially when digging into regional literature.

[Eight Indian Books on Mental Health You Need to Read - Re:Set \(resetyoueveryday.com\)](https://resetyoueveryday.com)

2.3 He threw acid on my face, not on my dreams

Laxmi Agarwal



Watch Video-

[He threw acid on my face, not on my dreams | Laxmi Agarwal | TEDxJaipur - Bing video](#)

2.4 Apun ka time aayegaa...

Manasi Shah

They might be Dalit rappers but their music should not be boxed as Dalit rap. We are all ears, you could tune in too



Duleshwar Tandi aka Rapper Dule Rocker

Picture Courtesy: Duleshwar Tandi

*Bas jumla hi jumla hai
System yeh khokhla hai
Bhrastachari, atyachaari, gaddaari, makkaari
...Woh kisan kyun bhookha rota hai, sota hai, tadapta hai*

Those lines are from Duleshwar Tandi aka Rapper Dule Rocker's *Farmer Rap*. It got two lakh views on YouTube alone, not to mention the countless social media shares. Dule, 27, belongs to a Dalit family of Borda village in Odisha's Kalahandi district. A migrant worker, he was working as a waiter in Raipur when the lockdown happened last year. When he saw the plight of stranded migrant workers — he himself took a train home right before the PM's lockdown announcement — Dule wrote *Hashtag Lockdown*. Since then he has also written *Telling The Truth* that questions the efforts of political leaders during a crisis such as Covid-19.

Dule knows nothing of the history of rap, or the struggles of the African-American community; it is unlikely he would know of New York of the 1970s, the Last Poets or the Black Panther Party. He began writing lyrics when he was still in high school. But he never got around to doing something about what he wrote until the lockdown happened and he was stuck at home. He decided to rap about the ongoing crisis and he hasn't stopped since. "I rap for myself," says Dule.

Sumeet Samos too has been singing challenges to established social hierarchies and caste injustice. He too is from Odisha — Tentulipadar in Koraput district — and belongs to the Dom community, a Scheduled Caste. While Dule has a BSc degree from a government college in Kalahandi, Samos has a postgraduate degree in Spanish and Latin American literature from Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University or JNU. He says he is inspired by Joyner Lucas, Tupac Shakur, Childish Gambino — all American rappers — Savitribai Phule and B.R. Ambedkar.

While Dule's final push to rap was the lockdown, for Samos it all started in 2016, around the time of Hyderabad University student Rohith Vemula's suicide. "It was then that I got exposed to anti-caste student protests, anti-caste literature and writing," he says. He started participating in protests, and attending cultural events and talks. He became an active member of the Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students' Association or Bapsa. "I used to post my compositions/thoughts on my Facebook wall or rap alone in my room," he says with a laugh before going on to narrate the incident that turned Samos to Da-Lit Boy.

It happened in a mall in Delhi. Samos says, "I had been stopped from entering malls and clubs before, but this time it hit me hard. I felt extremely humiliated and I couldn't stop thinking how despite wearing branded clothes, I was judged by my facial features and skin colour. When I returned to my room, I started rapping and on a whim uploaded What it means to be a Dom... It was basically about my background. How people reacted to even the visual markers of it. The security guard at the mall didn't know what caste I belonged to, but just by looking at my face he knew I didn't belong there, I shouldn't belong there."

The following morning Da-Lit Boy woke up to more than 10,000 views and 100-plus messages.



Duleshwar Tandi aka Rapper Dule Rocker

Picture Courtesy: Duleshwar Tandi

Samos's single *Ladai Seekh Le* from 2018 is even more hard-hitting. Here he raps about Dalit student suicides across the country, harks back to the Bathani Tola and Laxmanpur Bathe massacres of the late 1990s that led to the killing of many Dalits in Bihar. Samos wrote it when the Dalit student from JNU Muthukrishnan committed suicide in March of 2017. Though police said he was depressed, it was alleged that he had faced discrimination. Samos says, "We were in the mortuary for two days. We were all Dalit students... He was a friend and we had spoken just the day before. All of a sudden I didn't want to see this overwhelming grief and out of that feeling this song was born." Later, the music video was shot in bastis of Delhi where Dalit and Adivasi migrants live.

Samos's songs are in Hindi, English and Odia. The backdrops — mostly empty touristy places, dingy by-lanes, slums, darkness. He says he tries to shoot in places reminiscent of locations where he has grown up. He says, "I am a Dalit as well as a convert to Christianity. I know all about religious tension in everyday life."

Most of Dule's songs are in the Kalahandia dialect and Hindi. In May, he made a powerful three-minute rap video called *Sun Sarkar Sat Katha*. One of the lines goes thus: "Corona kana marba tar agru ame mari jimu boo... We will die of hunger and poverty before coronavirus kills us."

His songs Hashtag Farmer, No Corruption and Kranti The Revolution also took the Internet by storm. His raps are about corruption within the government, in his hometown, about farmers' rights and so on. Dule doesn't address the caste issue directly but it is a looming presence in his musical expressions.

Samos's Desia Pila is a rap about the existing crises and challenges faced by the Dalit community in Koraput. It talks about where he comes from, the CRPF-Maoist conflict, caste violence, corporate land-grabbing, forceful displacement, lack of education, lack of health facilities, life without land and resources. A line from Desia Pila runs thus: "If you are pure 24 carat gold, then I am hard pure coal from the land of Koraput. I rap not for myself but for my community."

In the rap Jaati he chides, "Jaati toh yahaan jaati hi nahi hai." Samos hammers away at how his own are stereotyped, those who wash gutters and railway tracks, he hammers away at those in the country who will talk about black lives matter but not about jaati with its baggage of prejudices.

Dule recalls how his childhood was. "I remember how we would be made to sit separately in school and we were treated differently." Says Samos, "As a child one cannot process many things. But I knew it meant something when you are not supposed to enter someone's house or a residential colony, or drink water from a particular handpump. Or when you go to an area and people start chasing you." He recalls that while travelling in a bus, even when there were empty seats, he knew he wasn't allowed to sit.

Talking about his JNU experience, Samos says, "It was different but I knew who I was and who they were... Someone will tell you I am from Rajasthan or I am a Rajput, or I am from Bihar and I am a Bhumihar; then you didn't know what to say. Do I say I am a Dom or a Dalit? I didn't even know the word Dalit, I only knew I am a Dom. Could I take pride in that? I didn't know."

Samos points out that around 2016, just like him, a lot of Dalit students started choosing different ways of expressing themselves. Someone painted, some started making illustrations, Instagram pages came up, as did memes.

Dalit Memers is a Facebook page that was launched eight to nine months ago; it has 7,000 followers now. The memers refuse to reveal their identity but they are happy to talk about their mission. "There are many Dalit pages but they are busy discussing politics and ignoring social realities. We want our people to discuss caste and social issues," they tell **The Telegraph**. Currently, 15 people run the page; most of the page administrators are women.

One of the administrators said, "We want to expose Savarna (or upper caste) hypocrisy, casteism and the discrimination they practise in day-to-day life, media's role in discussing topics around Savarnas, the over representation of Savarnas in all fields due to nepotism and casteism. We want to make the Savarnas think about the real on-ground issues, about Brahminical patriarchy, Adivasi patriarchy, Shudra patriarchy, Pasmada patriarchy and Dalit patriarchy."

Dalit Memers mostly make informative or satirical memes and some that highlight Dalit/Adivasi/Shudra leaders whom they say mainstream media ignores.

Neither Dule nor Samos nor the Dalit Memers are scared of the establishment. Dule says, "Why should we be scared? They should be. We have faced enough atrocities." The Dalit Memers claim that those from other castes also follow their memes. "Through these they are seeing things from our perspective and shedding old baggage." None of them thinks an individual or group can end casteism. Says Samos, "I speak about changing laws, having stricter laws, better schemes, land for Dalits, better education, basically feasible goals."

But at some point they just want to be themselves, free of labels. Dule says, "Why are we identified as Dalit rappers when no one brings up Honey Singh's caste?"

Samos says, "I am neither proud of my Dalit identity and nor am I ashamed of it. I want to use it for political purpose. But at home, I am not a Dalit. I want to party, chill, wear nice clothes, watch Netflix, have chicken wings, just like anybody else."

One of Samos's rap songs goes thus: "*We were spectators before, now we are the players.*"

2.5 Red Brigade Lucknow helps women defend themselves

Naandika Tripathi, Forbes India



Image: Vikas Babu for Forbes India

USHA VISHWAKARMA

AGE: 33 • FOUNDER

Red Brigade Lucknow

Usha Vishwakarma knows it is an uphill task for survivors of harassment or assault to regain their self-confidence and bring their life back to normalcy. The founder of Red Brigade Lucknow, a survivor of attempted rape herself, has devised indigenous techniques to help women defend themselves when under attack. Her non-profit has trained over 1.57 lakh girls in India since 2011, and the activist is on a mission to reach out to as many girls as she can in the coming years.

The 33-year-old believes that while a lot of women choose not to report harassment or assault for various reasons, they need to be able to defend themselves if such incidents occur. She herself had chosen to remain silent fearing that her family would impose restrictions on her.

At the time of her assault, Vishwakarma, then 18, had just completed her intermediate education from a government school in Madiyaon district in Lucknow, and was working with a non-profit to teach children in the nearby slum areas. The person who attacked her was a colleague.

“He forcefully grabbed me, held me down and tried to rip off my clothes. I was in shock and was shivering. But I managed to kick him, slap him twice and escape. I used to be a strong woman but this incident broke my self-confidence,” she says.

She had always grappled with her choice of remaining silent, so when an 11-year-old girl who she taught in the slums told her that she had been molested by her uncle, she was triggered to take action. She realised education meant nothing if one’s personal safety was not guaranteed, and decided to empower girls through self-defence and counselling.

Data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) indicates that 32,559 rape cases were reported in India in 2017, and in 93.1 percent cases the accused were known to the victims. In order to embolden young girls and women physically and mentally, Vishwakarma organised awareness campaigns, street plays and workshops in schools, colleges and other public spaces. She works with girls over 12 and also helps women with legal assistance if they are ready to file a case.

She initially worked with 15 other girls, most of whom were survivors. Their group did not have an official identity back then, and the girls wore red and black attire, the colours representing danger and protest respectively.

“Men used to make derogatory remarks whenever we performed in public. One day in April 2011, a boy called out, ‘Powerful red brigade ja rahi hai’ [a powerful red brigade is on its way],” Vishwakarma recollects. “My girls and I liked it so much that we decided to name our group Red Brigade. Thanks to their catcalling, we got a name.” The non-profit is run purely with the donations they receive and has about 100 members now.

The group initially took to conventional martial arts training, only to realise they might be largely ineffective when someone is under attack. “When you are under attack, there is no time to use conventional martial arts moves like elbowing, punching or kicking, as everything happens in just a few seconds,” Vishwakarma explains.

With the help of inputs from survivors, the Red Brigade Lucknow went on to develop 15-20 of their own techniques. “We have named this Nishastrakala (unarmed combat),” she says. These techniques, designed keeping various possible situations of sexual harassment or assault in mind, can be executed in less than 20 seconds. For example, in the event that a girl is grabbed from behind, she is taught to use her hands to push the perpetrator from the hip, turn around, kick him and scratch his face. The efficiency of the techniques is routinely tested with the help of men in the group, and Vishwakarma keeps developing more techniques as and when new cases come to light. She also encourages girls to think on their feet.

Kavita Bharti (22) has been a member of the group for the last four years. As a teenager, she was molested by a member of her own family and was asked by her mother to keep quiet about it. Bharti was a state-level gold medalist in karate in Uttar Pradesh, and realised that just the martial art form could not equip her to fight her perpetrator. “I completely lacked confidence until I joined Red Brigade Lucknow and started learning to get back on my feet from Usha didi. My family continues to oppose my decision to work with this group because there are no monetary benefits,” says Bharti.

Vishwakarma's own family and friends were opposed to her activism. “My neighbours used to mock my mother saying that her daughter has gone out of control and her actions will impact the family negatively,” she says. The opposition continued for about two years, until one day in 2013, the family of a rape survivor that Vishwakarma had helped recover from trauma landed up at her doorstep. They thanked her parents profusely, saying that the daughter of their house had taught theirs to fight back. After that, her family started supporting her.

“Usha is a lioness and a go-getter,” says radio jockey Rakhi Kishore from the FM Rainbow channel of the All India Radio. She had interviewed Vishwakarma for Doordarshan in 2014. “The Red Brigade’s Nishastrakala is very practical. Two years ago, the group decided to teach these techniques to 100 schools in 100 days. I was part of some of these training sessions and was thrilled to learn that you can successfully prevent an assault using these simple self-defence techniques,” she explains.

Vishwakarma believes if women want to realise the power within them, they must go back to history and take inspiration from the women who fought to empower themselves and each other. “We must be aware of our collective past and take pride in being a woman because this world would not exist without us.”

(This story appeared in the 13 March, 2020 issue of Forbes India.)



Image Courtesy- <https://www.dw.com/en/indias-red-brigade/a-19100226>



3. How to deal with others?

3.1 “बापू, आज आपके भारत में आपके विचारों को मानने वालों को देशद्रोही कहा जाता है” मरहबा

प्यारे बापू,

मेरा जन्म गुजरात के एक मुस्लिम परिवार में हुआ था। तो ये स्वाभाविक है कि आपके प्रति अपार प्रेम और सम्मान मुझे अपने पिता और दादा की तरफ से विरासत में मिला है। गुजराती होने का एक फायदा यह भी था कि हर कक्षा में आपके जीवन से संबंधित पाठ पढ़ाए जाते थे। मेरा बचपन आपकी कहानियां सुनते-सुनते गुजरा है। पापा को किसी भी चीज की मिसाल देनी होती वो हमारे पैगम्बर मुहम्मद साहब और फिर आपकी कथनी सुनाते। इसलिए महानता की सीढ़ियों पर मैंने हमेशा आपको ऊपर के स्थानों पर रखा है।

जब स्कूल में हमें आपकी महानता के पाठ पढ़ाए जाते तब ऐसा नहीं था कि आप सारे विद्यार्थियों को पसंद थे। मुझे याद है गुजराती विषय की वो क्लास, जिसमें मैंने अपने साथी विद्यार्थियों की बातचीत सुनी। वो एक दूसरे से कह रही थी कि उनको गाँधी इसलिए नहीं पसंद क्योंकि उनके मुताबिक गाँधी की वजह से मुसलमान पाकिस्तान जाने की बजाए हिंदुस्तान में ही रह गए। वह साल 2007 का था। 9वीं क्लास के विद्यार्थी की वो बातचीत सुन कर मुझे हैरानी हुई लेकिन लड़कपन था।

दोस्ती की खातिर मैंने उस बात को नज़रंदाज़ कर दिया लेकिन मुझे वो बात आज भी याद है। मैंने कुछ पल के लिए सोचा भी कि भला कोई गुजराती होकर महात्मा को बुरा कैसे बोल सकता है और उनके बाकी योगदानों को कैसे भूल सकता है? लेकिन भूलना तो इंसान की फितरत होती है, मैं भी तो भूल गई थी कयामत का वो दिन, जिस दिन आपके सम्मान, आपकी विचारधारा की धज्जियां उड़ाई गईं। जब हज़ारों बेकसूर मुसलमान मौत के घाट उतारे गए। ऐसा लगा जैसे आपके संदेश का महत्व सिर्फ पाठ्यपुस्तक तक सीमित हो गया है।

बापू, मेरे बचपन की वो सबसे दर्दनाक याद थी, जिसको मैंने पूरे बचपन नहीं याद किया क्योंकि मुझे आपसे मुहब्बत थी और मुझे एक कौम या किसी विचारधारा के प्रति कोई द्वेष नहीं रखना था। मुझे पता था कि आप कैसे भूख हड़ताल पर बैठे थे जब नोआखाली (बंगाल) में हिंदू-मुस्लिम दंगे हुए थे। अगर आप जिंदा होते तो आप कहां देख पाते वो आतंक, वो कयामत जो नरोदा, गुलबर्ग सोसायटी, अहसान ज़ाफरी और बिल्किस बानो पर गुजरी। वो भी उस धरती पर जो आपकी कर्म भूमि थी। जहां आपने साबरमती के तट पर आश्रम बनाया था और आपकी धर्मनिरपेक्षता के क्या कहने कि आपने तो खान अब्दुल गफ्फार खान, जो पेशावरी पठान थे और मांसाहारी थे, उनको मांस बनाने की भी इजाज़त दे दी थी।

आपके इसी रवैया से प्रसन्न हो कर खान अब्दुल गफ्फार खान ने अहमदाबाद की धरती पर मांस खाना बंद कर दिया था। लेकिन फिर भी उस धरती पर अत्याचार हुआ, उस कौम पर, जिसने आपको देख कर पाकिस्तान की जगह हिंदुस्तान को चुना। उस कौम को उम्मीद थी कि आपके होते हुए, आपकी विचारधारा के होते हुए उन पर आंच नहीं आएगी। लेकिन आपके जाने के 50 साल बाद ही माहौल ऐसा बिगड़ा, जिसके सुधरने की कोई उम्मीद नहीं।

गुजरात में आपकी विचारधारा के मानने वाले अहसान ज़ाफरी आखरी नेता थे। 28 फरवरी 2002 की सुबह, गुलबर्ग सोसायटी में सिर्फ अहसान ज़ाफरी का कत्ल नहीं हुआ था, उसी दिन गुजरात में गाँधी की विचारधारा का ऐसा गला घोटा गया कि गुजरात में वो विचारधारा मूल से मर गई। ये बातें मैंने बचपन में नहीं सोची थी, क्योंकि मेरे पास सोचने का हुनर नहीं था। इस लिए मैंने तो 2002 की उन घटनाओं को बुरा ख्वाब समझ कर नज़र अंदाज़ ही किया। लेकिन जब आप को पढ़ा तब मालूम हुआ कि कितना ज़रूरी है ऐसी घटना को याद रखना, इंसानों को मांगना, कातिलों को सजा मिलने की उम्मीद करना ताकि ये समाज फिर से हैवान होने से बच पाए।

स्कूल के बाद फिर इंजीनियरिंग में दाखिला ले लिया। मेरा सौभाग्य नहीं था कि मुझे कॉलेज में ह्यूमैनिटीज़ विषय पढ़ने का मौका मिलता, जिसमें आपका इतिहास, आप का तत्व ज्ञान, राजकरण को लेके आपकी विचारधारा पढ़ाई जाती है। लेकिन आपके प्रति इज़्ज़त हमेशा से रही थी। वह आपका ही वो विचार था कि “खुद वो बदलाव बने जो दुसरे में देखना चाहते हो”, जिसने मुझे UPSC परीक्षा के लिए प्रेरित किया। क्योंकि प्रशासन और सुरक्षा संस्थानों को दंगे भड़काते और आग को हवा देते हुए देखना मेरे बचपन की एक सबसे कड़वी याद थी। मैंने पुलिस को दंगे रोकने की जगह निष्क्रिय हो कर तमाशा देखते हुए देखा था और मैं नहीं चाहती थी कि ऐसे भयानक नरसंहार, जो मैंने देखे वो किसी और बच्चे के लिए भी बुरी याद बने। तभी मैंने ठानी की IAS ऑफिसर बन कर वो बदलाव लाऊंगी।

उसी UPSC परीक्षा की तैयारी के दौरान जब मैंने आपको और अच्छे से पढ़ा तब आपके प्रति सम्मान और बढ़ गया। वो आप ही थे, जिन्होंने आम किसान, औरतों और बच्चों को कांग्रेस के प्रतिनिधित्व में होने वाले आंदोलनों में शामिल किया। बापू, मुझे बहुत दुख के साथ ये बताना पढ़ रहा है कि आपके साथी, आपके एक अच्छे दोस्त, जिनका आज़ादी की लड़ाई में बहुत बड़ा योगदान रहा है, ऐसे नेहरू की अहमियत महज़ एक वडप्रधान (प्रधानमंत्री) तक ही सीमित है। उनको एक भ्रष्टाचारी नेता बताया जाता है। उनके या उनकी विचारधारा को सम्मान करने वाले लोगो को देशद्रोही कह कर जेल की सलाखों के पीछे डाल दिया जाता है। मुझे आपसे दुखद बातें नहीं करनी है। मेरी मां को भी डर लगता है कि कहीं मेरा सच बोलना और हक बातें करना मेरा ही नुकसान न करवा दे, जैसे आपके साथ होता था और आप को जेल जाना पड़ता था। मैं लड़की हूँ इसलिए मां हमेशा से इन सब बातों पर कुछ भी बोलने से मना करती है।

आपके जाने के 74 साल बाद भी एक चीज़ आज भी नहीं बदली और वो है सत्य से मुंह फेरना। सब फेरते हैं, महंगाई, बेरोज़गारी, भुखमरी, भ्रष्टाचार जैसे मुद्दों पे कोई बात नहीं होती।

बात तो फिर हिंदू-मुस्लिम के तनाव को लेकर भी नहीं होनी चाहिए थी लेकिन गोदी मीडिया और चंद नेता इस देश को हिंदू राष्ट्र बनाने में लगे हैं और ये लोग कभी-कभी आपके राम के राज्य की मिसाल देते हैं। नादानों को आपके राम के राज्य और हिंदू राष्ट्र में कोई फर्क नहीं दिखता। राम राज्य वो है जहां कोई मुहम्मद या मैथ्यू भी सुकून की सांस ले सके और बेखौफ रहें।

आपकी पुण्यतिथि पर आपका पुतला जलाया जाता है, आपको सारे आम गाली दी जाती है। गृह मंत्री के लिए आप सिर्फ एक चतुर बनिया है। यह लोग आपको गाली देके बच जाते हैं और कुछ तो लोकसभा में सांसद के रूप में विराजमान हैं। यह लोग हर अवसर पर आपको गालियां बकते हैं आपकी मूर्तियों को तोड़ते हैं, उन्हें जलाते हैं। मुझे पता है बापू, आपके चरित्र को इन सब के असम्मान से कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता। लेकिन बापू, इनको नज़रंदाज़ कर देने का मतलब है हिंदुस्तान को बर्बादी की तरफ धकेलना।

आपको पता है बापू, आपकी तुलना सुभाष चंद्र बोस के साथ करके आप के आपसी मनमुटाव को बार-बार सामने ला कर युवाओं को आपके खिलाफ़ भड़काने की साज़िश होती है। लेकिन यह वो बात कभी नहीं बताते की आपको 'राष्ट्रपिता' का लकब (उपाधि) खुद सुभाषचंद्र बोस ने दिया था।

यह आपकी 125वीं सालगिरह पर आपका पसंदीदा भजन, "वैष्णव जन तो तेने कहिए जे पीड़ पराई जाने रे" दुनिया के अलग-अलग मुल्कों के लोगो से गिला कर दूरदर्शन पर प्रसारित तो करते है लेकिन खुद इसके बोल को अपनी आत्मा में नहीं उतारते। आत्मा में उतारना तो दूर की बात, आपके हत्यारों और उनकी विचारधारा को खूब सम्मान मिलता है। लेकिन बापू, मुझे तब बड़ी हंसी आती है जब ये सावरकर और दीन दयाल उपाध्याय को यहां बहुत बड़े सेनानी की तरह चित्रित करते है लेकिन विदेश में जाकर सिर्फ आपके और आपके साथी नेहरू की भारत की आजादी और इसको एक प्रजातंत्र बनाने में योगदान की बात करते हैं। यह बातें आप आज के भारत में बेखौफ हो कर नहीं कह सकते। आपकी विचारधारा की गुहार लगाने वालों को देशद्रोही कहा जाता है।

बापू, अगर किसी जगह पर हिंदू-मुस्लिम एकता की आवश्यकता थी तो वो गुजरात था लेकिन यहां सरकार ने 1990 में 'अशांत धारा' नाम से कानून बनाया, जिसके तहत एक हिंदू मुस्लिम की बस्ती में और कोई मुसलमान हिंदू की बस्ती में घर नहीं खरीद सकता। उसका परिणाम यह है कि दोनो के बीच के अंतर की खाई और गहरी होती जा रही है। मुसलमान अपनी घेटो (बस्तियों) में ही रह गया है बिना किसी विकास के फिर लोग इस कौम से अब्दुल कलाम की उम्मीद करते हैं। जब आपके आत्मसम्मान की पल-पल में धज्जियां उड़ाई जाए, ऐसे वंचित समाज की तुलना आप किसी विकसित समाज से कैसे कर सकते हैं?

'आज़ादी का अमृत महोत्सव' के नाम पर भारतीय अपने घरों पर झंडा तो लगा देंगे लेकिन फिर वही लोग आपकी जन्मतिथि के मौके पे ट्विटर पर आपके कातिल के सम्मान में "गोडसे ज़िंदाबाद" को ट्रेंड करेंगे। यह एक दुखद बात है कि आपको मारने वाले लोगों की विचारधारा आज हिंदुस्तान के कोने-कोने में पाई जाती है। कभी-कभी डर लगता है, जो लोग आपके जैसे मानवता के पहाड़ को मौत के घाट उतार सकते है, वह लोग किस पागलपन तक जा सकते है।

लेकिन बापू हम इस कड़वे और अप्रिय सत्य से कब तक भागते ओर डरते रहेंगे। मेरे दोस्त कहते हैं मुझे इन सब बातों को नज़रअंदाज़ करना सीखना चाहिए लेकिन कब तक नज़रअंदाज़ करूं? मुझे लगता है जब तक हम ऐसी बातों को टालते रहेंगे, उस पर कोई बातचीत या डिबेट नहीं करेंगे और सिर्फ नज़रअंदाज़ करते रहेंगे तो किसी निराकरण पर कैसे पहुंचेंगे? कैसे एक अच्छे भारत की उम्मीद कर सकते हैं? क्या चुप रहने से देश में अमन आ जाएगा?

आज के भारत में गांधीवादी विचारधारा वाले लोग कम ही रह गए है. 2019 में मैं दूसरी बार आपके आश्रम गई थी (समझदारी आने के बाद वो पहली ही बार था), वहां एक अजब सुकून है। वहां मुझे आपकी विचारधारा के लोग मिले, उसमें से एक है श्याम सीता। जब भी मुझे आपकी विचारधारा को लेके कोई सवाल हो या वामपंथी लोगों के सवालों के जवाब चाहिए हो तो हम उनसे बात करते हैं। क्या अदभुत ज्ञान है उनको आप के जीवन दर्शन को लेकर । जब आपके खिलाफ बहुत जहर फैलाया गया तब मैंने श्यामा सीता जी से बात की। उन्होंने मुझे एक बहुत खूबसूरत बात कही,

"बचपन में हम एक पहेली खेलते थे, एक रेखा बनाकर दोस्तों से कहते थे – इसे बिना छुए छोटी कर के दिखाओ। दोस्त सोच-सोच कर हार मान लेते। तब हम उस रेखा के नीचे उससे बड़ी रेखा बनाकर उन्हें हैरान कर देते थे। आजकल यही तमाशा गाँधी के साथ हो रहा है, उनकी विशाल बहुमुखी छवि को छोटा करके दिखाने की स्पर्धा लगी हुई है, यह एक बड़ी साज़िश है।

सरदार पटेल की संसार की सबसे बड़ी मूर्ति बनाकर गाँधी को बौना कर दिया। भगत सिंह के आगे गाँधी को 'बकरी' बना दिया। सुभाषचंद्र को उनसे बड़ा देशभक्त बना दिया। अम्बेडकर को दलितों का असली और एकमात्र मसीहा बताकर गाँधी को हाशिये पर धकेल दिया जा रहा है (यह एहसान फ़रामोशी नहीं है ?) । लगता है धीरे-धीरे गाँधी को हिन्दुस्तान से दूर कर दिया जाएगा लेकिन बाकी दुनिया उन्हें याद रखेगी, हमेशा के लिए।"

बापू, आपको आज पत्र लिखने का मकसद यही है कि हम चाहते हैं कि आपको हिंदुस्तान में भी याद रखा जाए। बेशक आप भगवान नहीं थे जो आप पूरी तरह से निर्दोष हों। आपने भी कई गलतियाँ की होगी, आपकी सोच भी कई मुद्दों पर गलत रही होगी लेकिन आप हिंदुस्तान में हिंदू-मुस्लिम एकता के प्रतीक थे। आपने अस्पृश्यता निवारण के लिए रात-दिन एक किए। आप राजकर्णी से बढ़ कर एक समाज सुधारक थे, जो शहीद हो गए लेकिन गलत का साथ नहीं दिया।



कैसे गाँधी जी ने अपनी गलतियाँ सुधारी

जब-जब मेरे दोस्त मुझे ये कहते थे कि गाँधी का समाज सुधारने वाला काम भारतीय लोगों का आज़ादी से ध्यान हटाने के लिए था तब मुझे समझ नहीं आता था कि मैं उनको क्या जवाब दूँ। आज मैं समझदार हूँ, इस लिए आज़ादी के 75 साल के बाद भी भारत के लोगो को पितृसत्ता, संप्रदायवाद, जातिवाद, गरीबी, बेरोज़गारी के शिकंजे में फंसा हुआ देख पाती हूँ और तब मुझे आपकी दुरंदेशी का अंदाज़ा होता है। कितना ज़रूरी था अंग्रेजों की आज़ादी से पहले खुद अपनी ही प्रतिगामी सोच से आज़ाद होना! जो 1920 का गाँधी जातिवाद को लेके स्पष्ट नहीं था वह गाँधी 1945 में जातिवाद के सख्त खिलाफ था। यहां तक कि आपने यह तक कह डाला कि जो किताब किसी व्यक्ति के आत्मसम्मान की धज्जियाँ उड़ाती हो उस किताब के उन पन्नों को मिटा देना चाहिए। शायद आपकी यही आदत तो आपको महात्मा बनाती है की आप कैसे हमेशा वक्त के साथ अपनी सोच में और अपने बरताव में बदलाव लाए।

इस पत्र के साथ मैंने आपके साबरमती आश्रम के कुछ फोटोज, जो मेने खींचे थे, वो जोड़े हैं। ये लोग आप के आश्रम को भी बदल रहे हैं। इनको आपका आश्रम *old fashioned* लगता है (हां, लेकिन कौमवाद और जातिवाद तो आधुनिक खयाल है) और हम शक्तिहीन लोग लाचार हैं। जो घमंड में चूर हो और अंदर से खोखला उसको आप सादगी का महत्व नहीं समझा सकते। आपके परपोते तुषार गाँधी ने कोर्ट से स्टे लगाने के लिए अपील की थी लेकिन इनके लिए आपके अस्तित्व का महत्व भारतीय रुपयों की नोट तक सीमित है। उस अपील को खारिज किया गया। आप फिर से एक बार अपना आश्रम देख लीजिए। शायद अब ये ऐसा ना रहें।

अंग्रेजों से चाहे आपकी कैसी भी दुश्मनी रही उन्होंने 33 साल तक आपकी हिफाज़त की, आपको सम्मान दिया, आपको आंच ना आने दी। लेकिन आप ही का आज़ाद हिंदुस्तान आप ही के लोग आपको 33 सप्ताह भी सुरक्षा ना दे पाए। मुझे यह सच्चाई रोज़ परेशान करती हैं और नाउम्मीदी की तरफ धकेलती है।

बापू, मैंने बहुत कड़वी बातें लिखी हैं जो शायद आपको अच्छी ना लगे। लेकिन मुझे इनके जवाब और सुझाव चाहिए। क्या आप 'लगे रहो मुन्ना भाई' में जिस तरह मुन्ना भाई को दर्शन देते थे उस तरह मेरे ख्वाबों में आओगे और मुझे दिशा बताओगे? जिस तरह मैंने आप ही से प्रेरित हो कर UPSC की तैयारी शुरू की थी उसी तरह आपके जंतर, जो कोई भी काम करते वक्त वंचित और पिछड़े लोगो को याद रखने की गुहार लगाता है, को याद करके अपना रास्ता बदल लिया है लेकिन मेरा ध्येय वही है जो आपका था- एक अच्छे समाज की कल्पना कर उसकी तरफ काम करना। मुझे बहुत कुछ लिखना था फिर किसी और दिन लिखेंगे। चाहे पूरी दुनिया बदल जाए आप मेरे दिल में हमेशा ज़िंदा रहोगे।

आपकी,
मरहबा

3.2 **The theatre group whose members are all blind**

Maumita Chaudhary

Calcutta's Shyambazar Blind Opera was established in 1996 and has 30 members

You would have heard theatre artistes claim how the stage is special for the instant audience response it elicits, the instant gratification that cannot be matched by cold TRP numbers or even smart data on “views”. Theatre artistes Swapan Thakur, Pranatosh Bhowmick and Gopal Das are no different, though it would not be incorrect to say that in their entire career on stage, they have never once set eyes on their audience.

Thakur plays the sitar, Bhowmick sings and Das acts; all three are blind. They are also part of Calcutta's Shyambazar Blind Opera.

There is a two-storey tumbledown house on Nalin Sarkar Street in north Calcutta. The roof above the portico has caved in and sunlight streams in from above. To the right of the entrance is a flight of stairs leading to the first floor. There are four rooms on it. The one in the farthest corner is the rehearsal room of Blind Opera. This is where Ashok Pramanik meets his flock thrice a week.

Pramanik, the founder of Blind Opera, is sighted and a theatre veteran. He used to work with Nandikar, one of Calcutta's well-known theatre groups. It was during that time — he was with Nandikar for 25 years — that he got a chance work on a Ford Foundation project. It involved teaching street children to perform. One thing led to another and Pramanik was approached by the Behala Blind School to put up a play for its centenary celebrations. “But Ashok Chowdhury, the then principal of the school, requested me to work with the blind students instead,” says Pramanik.

Subrata Mondal, who is the treasurer of Blind Opera, has been with Pramanik from the very beginning. He too is sighted. Says Mondal, “We do readings. We have read the Puranas, we read novels, poetry, history. All of them know Braille. We also conduct workshops. Veteran actor Soumitra Chatterjee has been here to give members lessons. Poet and Jnanpith awardee Sankha Ghosh used to drop by regularly to watch their performance. Dramatist Badal Sircar would teach here.”

In 1998, a 42-day workshop was organised in collaboration with the National School of Drama.

Blind Opera has staged a mix of classics and moderns. It runs on grants from the central government. Pramanik points out that the state government has shown very little interest in it despite the fact that it is the only such theatre group for the blind in Bengal, and perhaps in all of India too.

“The previous Left Front government had helped us get this place; (minister) Subhas Chakraborty had helped us,” he adds.

The artistes start shuffling into the room, which is very stark. It has a wooden chest, three chairs, two steel almirahs — one of them with a photograph of Chekhov’s *The Sea Gull* pasted on it. There is a plastic mat covering the floor; it is torn in places and crudely taped over. Says Pramanik, “Whenever we rehearse, we use strings to demarcate the stage space. An artiste knows that touching the string means you have reached the boundary.”

The stage artistes are trained in dance and music. They also do free-hand exercises to enhance mobility. All of it helps boost confidence, not only to perform on stage but also to negotiate any kind of outdoor space.

It is time for introductions. There are only five or six of them that day but there are 30 members in all. Thakur is an alumnus of Ramakrishna Mission Blind Boys’ Academy, Narendrapur; he canes chairs for a living. Bhowmick sings and plays the khol (an indigenous drum), he earns his living as an assistant to an LIC agent. Actor Gopal Das sells milk and Kamal Kanjilal, a fellow actor, is a railways employee. Alpana Dutta Banik, Sarbani Banerjee and Ranu Pal are full-timers.

No one is particularly garrulous, though Das briefly talks about how the stage has changed his life. Pramanik does not encourage any question on their disability, the cause of it and so on. He seems to think that such talk might dilute the art talk, take away from their achievements. He says, “It is not pity that we are looking for. We are as competent as anybody else. And we are happy that nowadays we have to prove ourselves and compete with other theatre groups in order to get our shows staged. In fact, I believe that time has come when we can work alongside the sighted.”

Under Pramanik’s guidance, the students put up a play titled *Jato Durei Jai* (No Matter How Far I Go). That was 1992.

The Ford Foundation project came to an end but now Pramanik was determined to continue to work with the blind. And in March 1996 he established Blind Opera.

In the corner room on Nalin Sarkar Street, besides conducting rehearsals, Pramanik teaches his pupils a variety of things. He says, “A theatre artiste may not have the gift of sight but she or he cannot be blind to the times, to history, they have to be aware of everything — the ways of society, culture, politics...”



3.3 New wave Indian cinema in the time of Netflix

Hari Narayan

Fifty years ago, three films flagged off the 'New Cinema' movement in the country.

It's Gujarat in the 60s and we are introduced to a Bengali bureaucrat through a freeze-frame. A few minutes later, his inner voice is in dialogue with the film's narrator. In Agra, a youth, whose unfulfilled ambitions are about to be swallowed up by an arranged marriage, reminisces about his past. And in rural Punjab, a desolate housewife waits, her wide eyes lowered, for her truck driver-husband, in a spot that looks like a bus shelter. For the first five minutes, we hear only her silence.

The three scenes, all shot by cinematographer K.K. Mahajan, introduce us to films that each complete half a century this year. The trio — *Bhuvan Shome*, *Sara Akash* and *Uski Roti* — broke the established convention of linear, hero-centric narratives that had neat endings. And they led to a movement in Indian cinema.



'Uski Roti' was among the triumvirate of Indian cinema that led to the New Wave movement.

The origins of this Indian 'New Wave' go further back, to 1925, when, amid the onslaught of mythologicals and fantasy dramas, Baburao Painter's *Savkari Pash* showed destitute peasants in a debt trap. That was followed by Prabhat's films in the 1930s and 1940s, and the cinema of Satyajit Ray and Bimal Roy in the 1950s. But none of these led to a 'movement'. That wouldn't be until 1968, when Film Finance Corporation (FFC), under B.K. Karanjia, initiated a policy to encourage cinema that involved young artistes, limited budgets, location shoots, and narratives that mixed reality and fiction. Their dialogues were internal, and there was no easy, cathartic climax. The directors were often graduates of the Film and Television Institute of India, and some of them were backed by the state.

Artistic truth

Director Mrinal Sen, in a 1968 manifesto, said such cinema should have the "signature of the maker." He wanted it to pursue "artistic truth". In a special issue of *Seminar* in 1970 titled 'The Cinema Situation' filmmaker Mani Kaul called for audience involvement in the making of cinema, a radical experiment to blur the line between documentary and fiction.



The 1932 classic 'Savkari Pash'.

Many filmmakers featured in the *Seminar* edition unanimously expressed their frustration with the black money dominated structure of film production. Adoor Gopalakrishnan went to the extent of calling for the nationalisation of the industry. Speaking to *The Hindu*, he now says: "Today, I will not think of it. Not because things have improved greatly but because in a state-controlled situation, bureaucracy will destroy everything."

Filmmaker Girish Kasaravalli says the movement's influence on Kannada cinema owes to the incentives given by the government. "The idea was mooted by the [then State Finance Minister] Ramakrishna Hegde. The Navya literature movement played a part." Kasaravalli says that practitioners of other art forms, artists and writers, began making films, including artist S.G. Vasudev and poet Pattabhi Rama Reddy, who made *Samskara*, written by U.R. Ananthamurthy, into a film.



'Agraharathil Kazhuthai' (1977) was under-appreciated and condemned by many after its release.

Marathi filmmaker Jabbar Patel also credits the entry of theatre personalities for the movement's momentum. "In Maharashtra, it was Vijay Tendulkar; Girish Karnad in Karnataka; Badal Sircar in West Bengal; and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi. Amol Palekar and Nachiket Patwardhan, apart from himself, says Patel, were part of this movement in Marathi cinema. "Manik da [Satyajit Ray] and Ritwik Ghatak were a big influence on all of us."

Tamil Nadu remained largely untouched by such experimentation. Film scholar Theodore Baskaran says that besides a handful of films such as Unnai-pol Oruvan, Yaarukkaga Azhudhaan and Aval Appadithan, not many risks were taken. Also, unlike some other States, there was no film society movement here. "Any attempt at making good cinema was suppressed by producers, who were influenced by the DMK brand of films. Agraharathil Kazhuthai was condemned by minister R.M. Veerappan. There were three occasions when plans were made to broadcast it on television, but it was scrapped each time."

Casting staples

If one filmmaker emerged as the poster boy of art house cinema, it was Shyam Benegal. Using his background as an ad filmmaker, he combined non-conformism with sophistication. He got Blaze Advertising to finance *Ankur* and *Nishant*. He also introduced a coterie of actors who became a staple of such films: Naseeruddin Shah, Mohan Agashe, Smita Patil, Shabana Azmi, Amrish Puri, among others. His lead cinematographer Govind Nihalani later branched out to carve his own niche.



A still from last year's 'Soni' released on Netflix.

The biggest drawback of this FFC-initiated and multilayered experimentation in cinema was the lack of a viable distribution and exhibition mechanism. Benegal was prescient in his Seminar article: "If we are serious about developing an alternate cinema, the FFC would have to develop a distribution circuit that is able to compete for audiences with the regular so-called commercial films." That did not happen.

Fast forward to the present decade. Most of these films, which in the 90s were a regular feature on Doordarshan, found a new lease of life when the National Film Development Corporation decided to release digitally enhanced versions of them under its 'Cinemas of India' initiative. And, this year, these films were stocked in the medium of choice for many experimental filmmakers today — online streaming portals.

So is Indian cinema ripe for 'New Wave 2.0'? While it is still too early to expect a Bandersnatch , films like the Netflix-released Soni are winning appreciation. Directors are no longer bound to see their films released theatrically only. Perhaps, as Kamal Haasan once envisioned, we may soon have films released simultaneously on direct-to-home networks, streaming portals, and on the big screen. And the relationship between the filmmaker and the audience will be taken to a different plane through these many lives of a film.



Image Courtesy- <https://www.screendaily.com/news/pingyao-to-screen-retrospective-of-indian-new-wave-cinema/5139686.article>

3.4 Queer narratives from JNU

Gourab Ghosh



Jawaharlal Nehru University—a politically vibrant campus (and a strong hub of the Indian Left students' movement among others), has recently been in the news for its fierce protection of our right to dissent and celebrate. The university's academic reputation and traditions of dissent were attacked by the Indian Government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), over baseless accusations including allegations that the university had become an anti-national hub threatening national security and integrity.

The 'anti-nationals' are none other than students, faculty, and staff who have Left leanings and oppose any kind of dictatorial or fascist forces that want to curb the autonomy of universities. Almost the entire JNU fraternity has come together to resist the Right-wing government's bullying and its agenda to destroy intellectual thought, throttle young voices and spread hatred amongst countrymen with the help of a vicious bourgeois media and many nefarious outfits like RSS and VHP.

University campuses with strong student movements have always been spaces of resistance—a commune for those defying patriarchy, home to the 'deviant Other.' Thus it has become imperative for neo-liberal forces to break down Indian student movements.

The regressive and homophobic faces of university administrations and the State have been unveiled with the forced implementation of Lyngdoh Committee Recommendations, brutal state-sponsored violence on protesting students of Himachal Pradesh, the suicide of a dalit scholar at the Hyderabad Central University, and the harassments of students for their sexual choices and orientations.

The new 'tactics' of attack and the continuous attempt to control democratic spaces and curb rights by university authorities force us to ask if a university should follow regressive laws and directives of the courts and the government at the Centre, or support its students' fight for social injustice? At JNU, we are proud of the faculty and fellow scholars who stand by us in politics and life, and who protect our right to dissent, celebrate our rights, and inspire our 'nationalism.'

Several student unions across India have strongly supported the LGBTQ movement and stood by queer activists. I, being a queer activist and student of JNU, have received huge support from different sections on campus, but at the same time have faced homophobia and misogyny as well. A few questions thus arise regarding the understanding of LGBTQ issues on a campus like JNU. For instance, how do Left student organisations understand the LGBTQ movement and issues related to sexual identity, choice and identity politics? Secondly, how are non-student communities on campus made aware of concepts like sex, desire, agency, space, and individual rights.

Anjuman: JNU's first queer collective

In November 2003, after several consultations and discussions, a group of JNU students formed a queer collective—Anjuman. Like most queer collectives, Anjuman started with small discussions, meetings, and designing posters that contained basic definitions of various sexual identities, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, myths, stereotypes, and queer history in India. In 2004, Anjuman invited Roselle Pineda, a Filipina Communist lesbian, to talk about the lesbian movement in the Philippines. Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the Right-wing student body of BJP, made several attempts to disrupt the talk.

Later that year, a queer student's room was ransacked and homophobic notices were stuck on his door. Members of Anjuman, mainly its male members, were harassed and humiliated in public spaces. Anjuman survived only for a few more months. Now a question emerges about the role of the JNU Students' Union. Did existing Left student organisations on campus take any steps to register their protest of this harassment with the administration? What was the role of the administration? Sadly, though one or two posters came out against homophobia, the administration was silent. Student groups failed to put up a unified resistance against Right-wing terror. Anjuman did not die; it was forced to invisibilise itself, slowly.

'Coming out' is not a 'ritual' or an act necessary to be queer. But we have to also understand that to 'be in the closet' is not a choice, it is a forced condition due to extreme homophobia and fundamentalist mind-sets. Visibility of the 'other' also challenges the normative structures of society. Queer collectives are important because they bring visibility to queer issues as well as the identity of the other 'out of the closet.' It is thus extremely important for queer activists to understand that politicisation of activists is as important as the sensitisation of people. A queer collective is not only a safe space to find fellow comrades but also a space to politicise its occupants about the right to not be 'out'!

Though queer collectives on campus provide a safe space for LGBT people, there are problems with representation, and a culture of silence often enforced by members within the community. Homo-normative stereotypes within the community lead to transphobia, discrimination against bisexuals, and patriarchal misogyny towards lesbians. We remember Anjuman as a supportive space for many to be 'out' in those difficult times including for the late Priya Thanga, a fierce and bold queer Sri Lankan activist and thinker, whose shocking death in 2015 is still fresh in our memories.

Coming to JNU in 2006, it took me some time to find other queer students on campus. I was privileged to be welcomed by a group of queer-feminist and lesbian friends, who not only became my support group but also guided me on queer issues in my early struggle of 'coming out.' We met up often and discussed forming a group. As most of us were related to theatre and performance arts, we conceived a queer cultural and support group. Ankush Gupta took the initiative and *Dhanak*, JNU's second queer collective, came into existence in 2012.

We initially met in a member's hostel room—a 'private' space important to queer members in the closet, and we never forced anyone to 'come out.' As boys are not allowed in girls' hostels in JNU, we met in a male member's room. After a point, lesbian voices raised critical questions about the meeting location and the power dynamics perpetuating through a non-neutral meeting ground. It took some questioning of our own longstanding patriarchal socialization to understand the significance of such objections, and while consensus seemed to be reached to meet in other spaces besides those that belonged to male or individual members of the collective, it still has a long way to go before being actualised.

Rainbow beside the Red Flag

Another significant moment in the history of Indian Left student politics was when Students' Federation of India (SFI) fielded me as the first openly gay candidate for the JNUSU elections in 2013. My candidature brought a strong wave of awareness of queer rights on campus.

The administration officially took notice of my gay existence, political parties suddenly became hyper-aware of LGBTQ politics, and the media made a story out of my candidature. I was happy to see media highlighting the fact that a Left student organisation fielded an openly gay candidate, until they asked about my personal life, the 'number' of boyfriends I had had, my first kiss and sexual experience, and the most common question asked to all homosexuals: 'when did you become gay?' Being gay is neither temporal nor periodic, I was born gay! I 'came out' with SFI in one of those magic moments in 2013 to the entire Nation.

However, the Supreme Court of India recriminalized Section 377 on 11 December 2013. There was no question of going back to the closet so we decided to hold more programmes and stay visible. Dhanak significantly chose to have its first public event in January 2014 as the nation was fighting for the repeal of Section 377. Manola Gayatri, among the few openly lesbian women on campus at the time, spoke on lesbian invisibility as part of the first 'coming out' student panel in JNU.

In March of the same year, I organised a queer film festival—*Satrang*. We designed a colourful poster where one of the images from a film showed two bare chested men embracing each other. It was too erotic, too 'western' and too abnormal for the JNU administration. I was called by the cultural coordinator and informed that the administration was not supporting the festival. I was advised to be more sensitive towards undergraduate students on campus who would think that homosexuality was natural rather than a 'disease' if they see queer films. No logic, no argument was accepted and I had to ask the students' union to intervene as we had only one day left for the opening.

The festival, a closed-door screening with no support from the JNU administration, happened under prescribed conditions. The problem of the administration was two-fold: the sudden visibility of queer students was unnerving to their hetero-normative sensibility and being a central university they were very scared to not abide by the SC verdict of recriminalizing Section 377.

The second edition of *Satrang* was curated by Sappho for Equality from Kolkata. We requested Sappho to curate the festival as we wanted to build a network of queer collectives and organisations across the city and country. The 2014 edition saw a huge turn out and support from queer collectives of different universities in Delhi. Admirably the Feminist Faculty Collective and other associations/ unions on JNU campus came in support of LGBTQ politics.

Solidarity

The JNU campus continues to have strong homophobic overtones. Gay men are called 'gigolos' by fellow students; a lecturer asked a gay student how his 'animal rights' activism is going on, some members of International Students' Association regard homosexuality as a sinful act and us as criminals, and the administration is still not ready to accept our presence. Currently we await the release of our friends accused of being 'anti-nationals' from jail after being charged under sedition through a law as archaic and colonial as the one criminalising homosexual behaviour.

JNU queer activists and individuals stand at the threshold of a long battle just beginning, joining students' movements and fronts of resistances fighting for justice, freedom, and choice. It is spring in JNU and the red bougainvilleas are singing songs of solidarity. It is a different spring. We are in love with JNU—the place of rebels. Once our loved ones—the students who are arrested under sedition charges—come out of jail, the entire JNU shall celebrate with the 3rd edition of Satrang—the festival of love and dissent.

**The article is born out of a strong queer-feminist bonding with my friend Manola.*

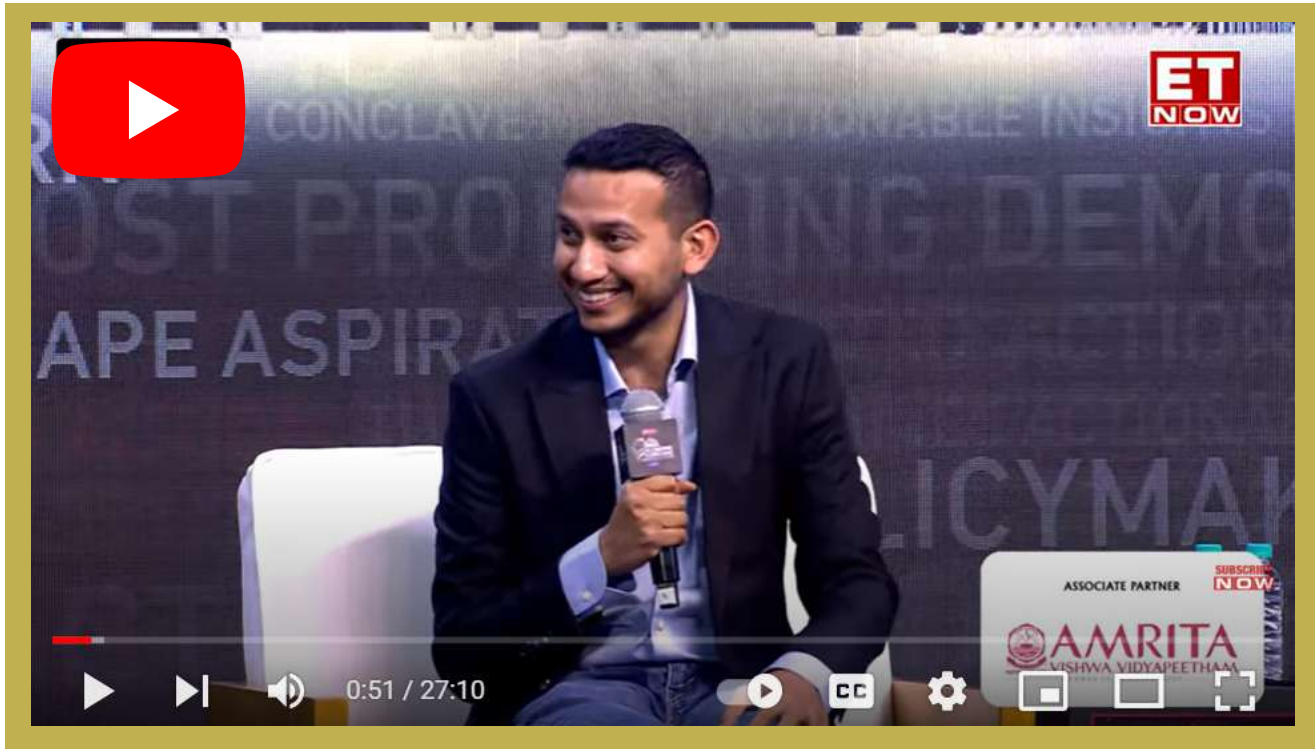
Pic-credit: Dhanak

Bio:

Gourab Ghosh is an LGBT activist and a theatre artist based in Delhi. He has been active in student politics on and off JNU campus for past seven years. He is the first openly gay candidate to have contested a university student union election in India. He is politically affiliated to the Students' Federation of India.



3.5 Ritesh Agrawal, Founder of OYO on "The Power of Perseverance in Unprecedented"



Click the link below to watch the video:

<https://youtu.be/BZbe8ZodFvU>

Interview with Hemakshi Meghani, 3.6 co-founder of the Indian School of Democracy

Hemakshi Meghani, co-founder of the [Indian School of Democracy \(ISD\)](#), is a Harvard Kennedy School graduate, where she studied as a World Bank Graduate Scholar. She began her journey as a Teach for India Fellow before working with Boston Consulting Group and two startups in the education and sociopolitical consulting space. Hemakshi is passionate about politics, bottom-up social reform, and making democracy work for every citizen of the country, and she shared some insights into her experience building ISD.

Mittal Institute: Hemakshi, our first question is two-parts: Firstly, you co-founded the Indian School of Democracy in 2018. Did you always want to go into the field of politics? Likewise, how did your experience working for two startups and the Boston Consulting Group shape your path as co-founder of the Indian School of Democracy?

Hemakshi Meghani: Thank you for getting me started and diving right in. The answer to your first question – if I always wanted to be in politics – is mostly yes. When I was in fifth grade, I remember a dinner table conversation where I told my parents that I wanted to be a politician. And I didn't want to be just any politician; I wanted to be the politician that solves poverty for India. And, of course, like in any normal middle-class family, there was silence. They thought my aspirations were going to change, and instead I would become a doctor or an engineer like the rest of my family. But I think the seed of wanting to be in public service – of wanting to be in politics, especially – was sown very early in my life.



Hemakshi Meghani.

The problem was that I didn't have role models around me. If I wanted to be an IAS (Indian Administrative Services) officer, there were role models. If I wanted to be in business, there were role models. There were people I could relate to, talk to, and learn from. But if I wanted to be in politics, it was just one of those big black holes that people didn't have access to. But I kept thinking about it. I got exposure to a lot of things while earning my undergraduate in liberal arts. And immediately afterwards, I jumped into Teach for India. My mentors said, "If you want to work on policymaking, you need to get your hands dirty! You need to know what's happening on the ground."

So, I joined Teach for India. And that, I think, really, really contributed to my understanding of the system. I saw multiple nodes of the system: what happens at various points; what an IS officer does versus a state-level bureaucrat, versus what happens in schools on the ground. Of course, all of this was in the context of primary education in the state of Maharashtra. But I kept reading to understand more and more. And so, my life choices or career choices definitely lined up.

After four or five years of working, I enrolled at the Harvard Kennedy School. And that really brought politics back into my life. In my five years of working, I got an understanding of policy – but politics itself is a different ball game.

Harvard Kennedy School has a very active ground for talking about politics. I had classmates who had worked with politicians across the world. And it just felt like politics was a lot more accessible to youth outside. At Harvard, there's a program called 'Harvard Square to Oval Office,' which trains women to enter politics. So that's where I learned the structure of what politicians can be trained to do. In some ways, these experiences contributed to me starting the Indian School of Democracy, along with my co-founder.

Mittal Institute: Could you tell us a bit about the role that you play at the organization?

Hemakshi Meghani: I think, like a lot of startups in any industry, nonprofits are not different in the sense that I ended up doing everything in those early two years. My co-founder was in the US completing his Master's and building connections and partnerships there in academia, whereas here, I was on the ground.

I spent the first year just going around the country, meeting more than 400 people, trying to decode what politics is; speaking with young people to understand their aspirations and fears; meeting seasoned politicians who had been in the highest positions of power for 30 or 40 years; and meeting academics, who studied politics in detail.

In those early years, my role was just to understand the problem, figure out what it is that we want to do, and translate that to strategy. And then we started building the team in 2019. My role evolved a little bit: instead of keeping all that knowledge in my own head, I built a small team that does that as well. And now that my co-founder is back, and we have a team of 10 people, it seems a little more streamlined than the early years.

When I now look at research programs, we are choosing the center of the work that we do. We decide what the curriculum should be, how the trainings should be delivered, and what the space should be like – all of this so that ISD acts as the political incubator that we imagine it to be. Fundraising, as every entrepreneur must do, is a very important part of my role. And then communications, as well.



Hemakshi leads a training session at ISD.

Mittal Institute: Could you tell us a bit more about your organization's goals, especially the ambitious goal of having 25% of political leaders be principled by 2047 (correlating to India's 100 years of independence). What does that mean exactly to have principled leaders?

Hemakshi Meghani: This is a heavy question, so I will try to break it down a bit.

I think our mission is to nurture principled political leaders who have the morals, courage, and imagination to work towards uplifting all. Because, currently, Indian democracy is working for few of us. I think as English speaking, educated people, we have access to services. Even if the government doesn't deliver, that's OK. The social fabric, of course, affects all of us. But we can control the amount of impact it has on our day-to-day lives.

But that's not the case for more than 90% of the country. And this is not to say the quality of democracy doesn't affect us. But I think that there's more in control in our lives, because of the privileges that we carry than most of the country. I think our theory of change is very simple: that we want the right people in decision-making positions.

If we look at history, a lot of significant changes have happened because of politicians, whether it's ending slavery, apartheid, or, when we talk about leadership, what's happening in Ukraine and Russia right now. I think it's all political. It's not just the good things, but also a lot of bad things happen because of what politicians decide. Therefore, it's important that the best hearts and minds of the country choose politicians...which is not happening right now. About 43% of our current parliamentarians have criminal records, and 29% of them have serious criminal records, like rape and murder.

Additionally, 86% of people sitting in parliament are men, whereas 50% of the country is comprised of women. There's a lot of disparity in how our democracy is functioning, delivering, and not delivering. We imagine people from different backgrounds representing the country, which is the spirit of the constitution as well. That is what we are aiming to do: We want politics to become an attractive option for the best hearts and minds of the country. We know Indian School of Democracy is not going to be able to do that alone. But just like there are law schools to train lawyers, and training for scientists or doctors, we wanted to create something that inspires people to enter politics. So that's the role Indian School of Democracy wants to play.

To answer your question about our goal of 2047, there's research that says that to shift the needle on any social issue, 3.5% of people in the system need to act differently. And research also shows that when these 3.5% act collectively, the system shifts.

If we had to apply that to Indian politics, we would be able to say, let's have 3.5% good, principled politicians, and then the system will shift. But we realize that Indian politics is murky; it's very complicated. So why settle at 3.5%? Let's have a vision of at least 25% of people in decision-making positions being principled leaders. And when I say politicians, I don't mean just members of parliament. I mean all politicians, so even the local democracies come alive as well. That's our big goal and vision.

We imagine these principled leaders who have their head, hearts, and hand aligned. People who have the skills to be politicians of future; those who can use technology, data, behavioral science, to make sure democracy is reaching the last dozen or every citizen. But we also want people who have their models in place, who have their value systems in place, who are self-aware, who have values like compassion and empathy. Because that's what you need.

I'll talk a little bit about what principled politics means to us. Firstly, we never say we want to train just politicians. We always say, we want to nurture principled political leaders or politicians. Because the country doesn't have a dearth of intelligent people. With just our population having access to higher education and primary education, we have a lot of skilled people. But if the inner moral compass is not in place, it's very unlikely that it's going to translate for policies and a kind of politics that really unites and elevates the level of society.

We imagine these principled leaders who have their head, hearts, and hand aligned. People who have the skills to be politicians of future; those who can use technology, data, and behavioral science to make sure democracy is reaching the last dozen or every citizen. But we also want people who have their models in place, who have their value systems in place, who are self-aware, who have values like compassion and empathy. Because that's what you need.

And the third pillar of our work is community. How can we have a vibrant community of these principled politicians who stand with each other and hold each other accountable to these values? Broadly, I think when we say 'principled leader,' we mean leaders who have their head, hearts, and hand aligned, and are working towards making democracy come alive for every citizen.



Hemakshi, left, with ISD students.

Mittal Institute: There are three main programs under Indian School of Democracy. One is Good Politician, a nine-month program; She Represents, a one-week program; and Democracy Express, a nine-day program. What do participants tell you they have learned from these programs, and how does this training help them become better future political leaders?

Hemakshi Meghani: I think when we started, the idea was to just run a long program. But as I was going across the country meeting young people, I felt like we needed to prepare an ecosystem to prepare people for training in politics. So that's how the shorter programs came to fruition. We set to reclaim the word 'politics' to ensure that people think of it as one of the highest forms of public service. To make it aspirational, we needed to expose young people to politics. And that's how *Democracy Express* started.

It's a 10-day traveling journey, where we go to different parts of India to meet leaders (national leaders, state level leaders, local leaders, student politicians) to understand the person behind the politician. Because, often, our idea of politics and leadership is restricted to what we see on TV debates. And I really hope our generation is not growing up with that idea of politics, because when we meet these candidates in person, a new side of them comes out. They're so much more candid. They talk about their struggles. They talk about the idealism.

I think Democracy Express essentially aims to do that: to broaden the horizon of politics, and to expose people to politics. All our cohorts have at least 50% women. Democracy Express is for beginners – people who are thinking of entering politics but want a bit more exposure first.

She Represents came about after Democracy Express. We realized that the conversations with women ran differently, because the challenges women face in politics are very different. We thought we would create a program that's only for women who want to enter politics. But again, we focus on the three skills that I mentioned: hard skills in politics, inner work, and building a community. They also meet other women politicians who overcome a lot to be in politics, and they talk to them about the challenges and opportunities of being in politics.

And the third program, Good Politician, is our flagship program. It's a nine-month executive program. This is a program for people who are slightly more senior, who are very close to contesting elections, either at a city level or at the village level. In other words, this is not their first foray into politics, but they need a structure to contest elections to do something to prepare themselves for the long haul. So that's what Good Politician does.

In all our programs, I think we are committed to at least five to 10 years of alumni support, because the gestation period in politics is long. Elections come about once in a while. You need to really build your image. You need to prepare resources. You need to connect with your constituency. So we stand with our alumni for a very long time as they figure out their journey in politics.



A cohort of Indian School of Democracy trainees

Mittal Institute: What sort of candidates do these programs tend to attract? Is it people who want to start their own political party, or members of currently established parties?

Hemakshi Meghani: I think a belief we had is that every single party needs good people. It's about really changing the people who are entering the system, who will then change the system itself. The problem is not the parties themselves, so we don't really focus on people who want to start new parties (though some of our alumni are starting a new party!). We are nonpartisan – we want to work with people across party lines. Our belief is the constitution of India. Whomever shares these same beliefs joins our programs. Right now we have people from 14 to 15 different parties. Our alumni come from overall 26 different states of India out of the 29 states. It is a pretty diverse cohort.

Our programs are not limited to people who speak English, and those who are from urban areas. We were very clear on that. Inclusion and representation are very core values of ISD. We build partnerships with grassroots organizations, who work with people of different castes, different religions, those who work with women and grassroots leaders.

The distinction I want to focus on is that we make a difference in policy and politics. There's a lot of schools and courses for policy in India. It's become a buzzword. But in India, the bridge between policy and politics is yet to be fully established. There needs to be more development of the political ecosystem, or giving structure to the political ecosystem. And we are very clearly working on politics. And our programs are not limited to people who speak English, and those who are from urban areas. We were very clear on that. Inclusion and representation are very core values of ISD.

We spread our word through social media and digital channels. But we build partnerships with grassroots organizations, who work with people of different castes, different religions, those who work with women and grassroots leaders. And we partner with them to find the people we want to work with. We have people who come from six to seven different religions. We have people from many different castes. About 90% of our people come from economically disadvantaged families. Our belief is if they've really gone through the problem themselves, they're more likely and equipped to address those challenges when they come to power.

About 60% of our audience is rural, 40% is urban. And 50% of all our programs are comprised of women. As I mentioned, we also do a special program for women. So that means 70% of the people we work with are women. The average age, I would say, is 35 in the longer program and 29 to 30 in the shorter programs that we do.

Mittal Institute: What do you enjoy most about your work? And did your time at Harvard contribute to how you work at ISD?

Hemakshi Meghani: I think I enjoy most of what I do because a lot of my time involves speaking with alumni. I'm on the road for 20 days traveling to remote parts of India, where alumni are getting ready to contest elections. I get to really understand the challenges they work with. And I learn so much about India, so much about young people, so much about the system that we are operating in.

A good part of my work also goes in organization-building, which is setting up processes, and working with the team to get them ready to orient them towards adult development and leadership. That is what I learned at Harvard, as well. I did specific courses on leadership and adult learning, which I bring to my role here as well.

Some part of my work goes to fundraising, as I mentioned. We believe that every day, Indians need to contribute to building the Indian School of Democracy. There is a price to our programs – but about 90% to 95% of attendees earn financial aid. Indians can donate to ISD, and that's what builds it. If we have large fees or a degree a barrier, then we're not going to be able to attract the audience that we work with. I make sure that my co-founder and I spend time fundraising, building partnerships.

I do think, overall, my approach towards public leadership is very heavily influenced by my time at Harvard Kennedy School. We attended forums and we learned from former presidents and politicians from different countries, so it demystified politics for me. I'm still in touch with many of my professors and friends, who are from all over the world. Even in India, I think the Harvard community is so strong. And a lot of them help in building ISD and giving the shape that it is taking right now.

Mittal Institute: Can you share some thoughts about India's democracy and its future?

Hemakshi Meghani: I think in our day-to-day experience, we can feel that the basic tenets of democracy are getting violated. And I think the one that strikes me the most is the inequality in the country that we live with. And what worries me is the apathy towards it.

I always said, of course, I work in politics. It is important to ensure that people in decision-making positions are people who are honest, skilled, and in it for the right reasons. I want to make politics an avenue that's not dirty, and doesn't force people to shy away from considering a political career.

I also encourage people to get involved in the local stuff in their day-to-day lives. If you live in an urban area, do you know when the board meetings happen? Are you in touch with your counselor or the MLA [member of the legislative assembly], and are you keeping them accountable? Do you provide your input there? Being a good citizen – an active, informed citizen – is something that all of us can do. Then, when the big stuff comes in about corruption or oppression, we are clued in and know what is being discussed, because we know the system well. I would urge people to get involved in the local issues, local structures, local systems to make democracy what it needs to be.



Image Courtesy- <https://www.indianschoolofdemocracy.org/team>

4. How to deal with Nature?



Experts talk on role of youth in sustainability

4.1 TPT Bureau | Agencies

‘COVID- 19 in a way has helped us ensure that environmental sustainability is being raised at the very highest level. The environmental sustainability awareness should be taught not only at the university level but from a very lower of education, and thus we should create awareness so that they must see sustainability as an opportunity’- Prof. Mohd. Hasan Mohd. Osman, Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School, Universiti Teknologi MARA.

Being democracy the fourth pillar journalism has a tremendous responsibility to show the leadership or to guide or give direction to the whole world. As we rarely see that sustainability, biodiversity and climate change are the prime priorities of most of the journalists or media houses globally. Thus, we have also taken sustainability and climate change as our priority and have come up with an initiative to bring awareness and advocacy in the field of sustainability climate change and all the aspect of biodiversity which are of paramount importance for the world today.

Focusing on this issue [The Policy Times](#) in association with [UTHM \(Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia\)](#) and Impact Youth Sustainability organized a webinar on **Role of Youth in Sustainability** on Thursday, July 16, 2020, from New Delhi.

During the session, **Prof. Mohd. Hasan Mohd. Osman**, Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School, Universiti Teknologi MARA, said, “How do we relate entrepreneurship with youth? If you look at the age of the entrepreneurs nowadays at start-ups it is getting younger by the years and it is very important to highlight the issue of sustainability at the start-up stage rather than wait for the growth of the company.” He also added, “This is the challenge actually, at how you take up sustainability seriously at startup, because to them sustainability is the cause, and it adds additional burden to their business liability, so it is very important to provide them the awareness of sustainability.”

Now when it comes to COVID- 19 and this is when the policy of the government comes in, and the idea to see policies being introduced is to ensure the issue of sustainability, and during the lockdown, the rivers are very clean, animals are coming out and this was something that we have not seen for many years. Thus COVID- 19 in a way has helped us ensure that environmental sustainability is being raised at the very highest level. The environmental sustainability awareness should be taught not only at the university level but from a very lower of education, and thus we should create awareness so that they must see sustainability as an opportunity.

Tiago Soares Bedin, Regional Director, America, Impact Youth Sustainability said, “It’s always about giving attention to people because there are people who just want to talk to you, the other aspect that we really need to consider is to adapt ourselves through social media and in this crisis situation it is time to think out of the box because it is important to support others. The local community sometimes really don’t match to the ideas of the government and so the most important thing for sustainability at the moment is that we start to talk among locals in the community and we start to engage on the internet or social media, and we need to break the stereotype that a country is equal to their government, but it is high time that we raise voice for the community for the people who are struggling.”

Considering the sustainable practice of emission of CO₂ should be reduced as it affects our climate change, **Ms Harshali Sanjay**, Changemaker, Country Coordinator, India, Impact Youth Sustainability mentioned, “This practice is being done from years, and on the birthday of SVIMS founder we follow the meatless day and saying that as compared to all other food the amount of carbon emission that is done by eating meat is much higher as compared to any other food. In 2018-19 the emission of carbon was calculated just by abstaining food of non-violence in just one day of a year and the emission went down by 262.457 tons.”

Another sustainable practice that was done by a handful of staff members wherein they have practised using sustainable modes of transport that includes carpooling, bike pooling, auto-rickshaw pooling using of a bicycle, walking and using of public transport. After this, the reduction of CO₂ emission was done and that came to in a year of reduction of 34.848 tons of CO₂ emissions in a year. If we look at the perspective of sustainability in India, and as more than 50% of the population is youth so if one institute is picking up this sustainable transport and this sustainable means of abstaining from meat, I feel if this is adapted by individuals the emission will reduce at a larger stage and accordingly if this is done we will be contributing a lot towards climate change and sustainability.

According to **Jam Richard**, Country Coordinator, Cameroon, Impact Youth Sustainability, “As far as sustainability in Africa is concerned, it is suffering because government policies aren’t favourable to this kind of natural and human resources are being used without thinking of preservation of the next generation and the impact they are having on the community. Now, as far as youth are concerned we’ve come together especially with the new organisation and where teams will work in different communities to sensitize the population on the impact of sustainability by eradicating poverty, next through educating young people, next on sensitizing the government on traditional and religious authorities so that the policies put ahead of them should be of the common good and should be able to preserve the environment and preserve what is good for us.”

Explicit the facts on youth sustainability **Graca Soares** Regional Director, Europe, Impact Youth Sustainability said, “The impact of youth on sustainability depends on a lot on our background, our area of expertise and also the country we come from and sometimes there are differences in terms of involvement because there are different challenges each country faces.”

Youth in terms of numbers, as well as influence, should help in promoting sustainability concepts and SDGs and implementing them and trying to positively influence the community. Often sustainability is misunderstood with climate change, sustainability is much bigger and broader than biodiversity or climate change, it is about of the ecology, economy and society.

The session was moderated by Mr Akram Hoque, Founder- Editor of The Policy Times and co-moderated by Dr.Wesam Al Madhoun, MPRC, and Faculty of Civil ENGG & Built Env. UTHM, Malaysia with excellent panellists including Prof Mohd. Hasan Mohd. Osman, Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia, Graca Soares Regional Director, Europe, Impact Youth Sustainability, Tiago Soares Bedin, Regional Director, America, Impact Youth Sustainability, Jam Richard, Country Coordinator, Cameroon, Impact Youth Sustainability, Harshali Sanjay, Changemaker, Country Coordinator, India, Impact Youth Sustainability.

[Role of Youth in Sustainability - YouTube](#)



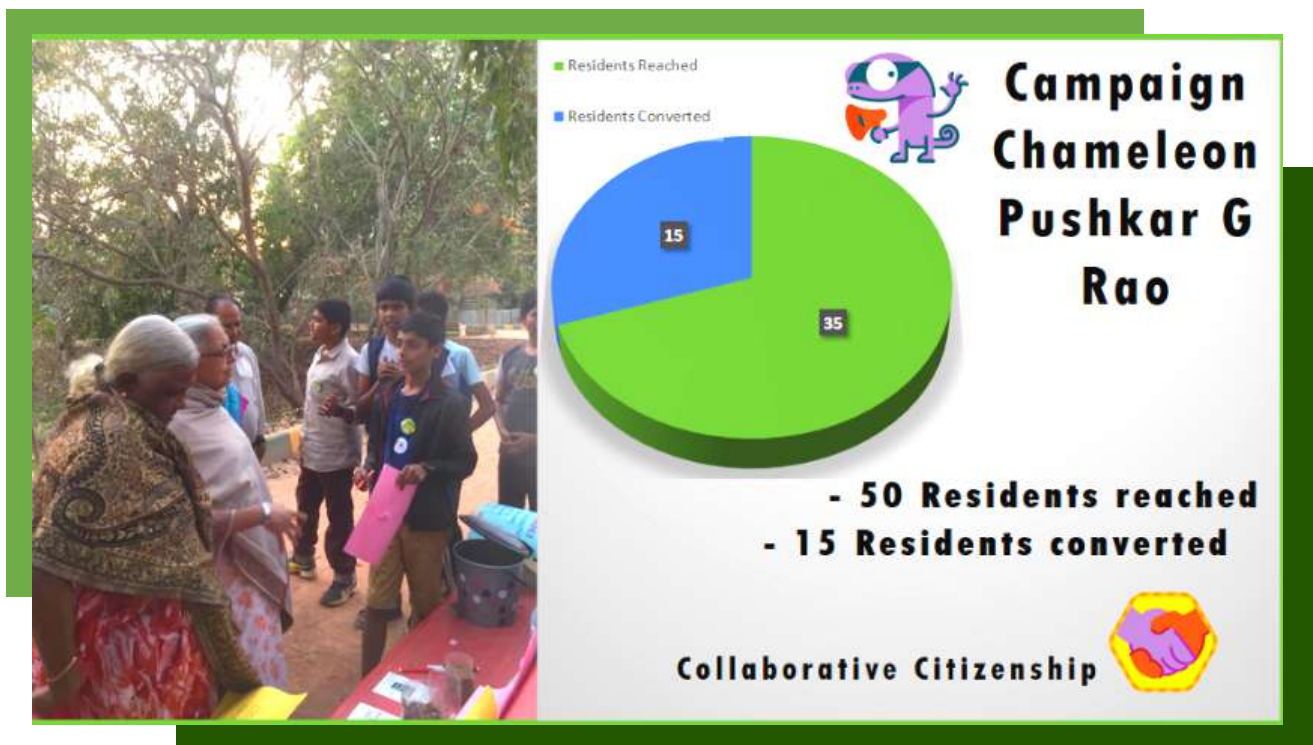
4.2 **Solve ninjas show how to tackle urban solid waste**

Kuldeep Dantewadia, REAP Benefit

Across school and community demographics Solve Ninjas have identified that waste management is both an environmental and civic problem that needs solving. While the nature of the problem may be hyper-local to communities, certain common characteristics underpin the behavior of people across multiple Resident Welfare Associations of the city. Here is a diverse range of methods adopted by Solve Ninjas to nudge local authorities and stakeholders towards finding a solution for waste management.

1) Show and tell

Pushkar G Rao, a 7th grader Solve Ninja from NPS Yelahanka along with his team mates conducted a workshop on easy home composting for 50 residents of the area. They raised awareness on the importance of waste segregation and home composting. Through the workshop they empowered 15 residents of their RWA with the tools to adapt sustainability into their way of living.



2) Getting Hands-on

Pranav Bala, another Solve Ninja discovered that waste was not being segregated in his apartment complex. He involved his friends and they got hands-on by first auditing the quantity and kinds of waste generated in their apartment followed by building their own segregating dustbin with a human centered design. Building solutions and showing the RWA how it's done, his continued efforts led to 6 households switching to home composting, and segregating dry waste.

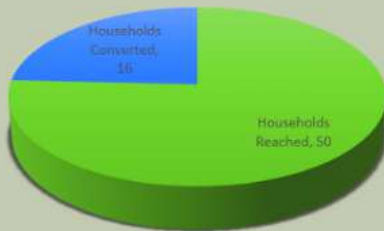


3) Grit and ground work

Pruthvik, a 7th grade Solve Ninja from GHPS Bettahalasur, along with his friends, took it upon themselves to address the wasteful and uninformed practices prevalent in his neighborhood. These campaign chameleons went door-to-door to 50 households, conducted surveys to understand the behaviour, followed up multiple times with research, reasonings, solutions and hacks that eventually helped convert 16 households to start segregating the waste. They then approached the gram panchayat with their findings.



Campaign Chameleon Pruthvik



- 50 Residents reached
- 16 Residents converted

Collaborative Citizenship



4) Innovative Interactions

Curious Challengers, a group of Solve Ninjas from TVS Hosur demonstrated how starting waste segregation can be child's play. They designed a game that let the player understand waste segregation. They took the game to 30 households across two colonies. The interactions with people translated into impact when a letter was sent to Municipal Corporation from the RWA to send the garbage collectors inside the layout. This led to change in the collection waste collection timings which was more suited and acceptable to the RWA of the Titan Township.



Campaign Chameleon



- Yashini
- Bhagyashree
- Kishore
- Divya
- Lavanya

30 Households influenced



Innovative
Entrepreneurship



5) Empathy as a tool

Ritvik, a 5th grade Solve Ninja from SKCA DKS, like many of his peers saw the waste not being segregated in his community. But what affected him more was the *pourakarmika* who tirelessly segregated the waste generated by the residents of his neighborhood, despite her old age and without the protection of gloves. He spoke to the residents of his neighborhood about the plight of the *pourakarmika* and urged them to re-think their ways and was able to reach out to 4 households.



6) Good ol' teamwork

Samith and Sanvi, 8th grader Solve Ninjas from SKCA DKS, were agitated by the multiple number of garbage dumps in their area. They formed a team of 10 Solve Ninjas and conducted a signature campaign to get the residents on the same page about two important things: a) to not dump waste in the empty roadsides and b) to start segregating waste individually in their homes. Through the combined efforts of this small community of committed local problem solvers they were able to influence 80 residents to get onboard the campaign.



Campaign Chameleon Samith & Sanvi


- 80 Households reached

Critical Problem Solving Skill



7) Fail Fast Learn Faster


Swathi S, a 7th grader Solve Ninja from TVS Hosur, took on the ambitious task of saving the lake that was being used as a grey water drain from 4–5 nearby layouts. She approached the Residents' Welfare Association with a proposal to recycle the grey water. The proposal was rejected on grounds of cost and permissions. This should have been enough to deter any adult from the task, but Swathi continued in her efforts to deal with the grey water disposal problem. Through continued efforts, she made her own organic dish washing liquid, and got 6 people to start using it in their homes. She took failure as an opportunity to innovate.



Action Ant Swathi S

- Approached RWA with a proposal to recycle grey water going to nearby lake
- Developed an organic dish washing liquid
- Converted 6 people to start using it

Critical Problem Solving Skill



Local problems will need local problem solvers if we are to envision a self-reliant India. And there are ample ways to tackle public problem. Each of the Solve Ninja's in this post have found a way to address the problem of waste management in their communities. How about we take a leaf out of their book and do the same?

4.3 Young climate activists in India

Aarefa Johari & Vijayta Lalwani

Distinct from older movements, their activism is decentralised, collaborative, fluid. But the downside is the lack of safety nets, visible in recent arrests.



A young woman at a protest over Amazon wildfires in 2019. | Indranil Mukherjee/AFP

On February 14, as the Delhi Police arrested 22-year-old [Disha Ravi](#) for her alleged involvement in preparing a Google document that Greta Thunberg tweeted in support of farmer protests in India, many young climate activists like her felt alarmed, but then came to see it as a validation of their work. In a short time, they say they have achieved enough to rattle the Indian State.

“It frightens them that young people are aware and want to call out the government for inaction on climate change,” said Joel Kyndiah. “So they claim the climate movement is propaganda against India.”

Kyndiah is just 18.

He lives in Shillong and is a national coordinator of Fridays For Future, a global organisation that grew out of Swedish teen activist Thunberg’s climate change campaign. Ravi is among its founders in India.

Since 2018, inspired by Thunberg and a global youth climate movement, informal groups of young Indians like Ravi and Kyndiah have mobilised vocal public campaigns against government projects and policies that threaten the environment, most notably the controversial draft [Environment Impact Assessment law](#) of 2020. With over a million letters landing in the inbox of India's environment minister asking for the draft law to be scrapped, the police served notices under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act to three youth climate groups and blocked their websites in July. Fridays for Future was one of them. The charges were later withdrawn after a strong public backlash.

But this year, the stakes have risen higher. Ravi was arrested from her home in Bengaluru on charges of sedition and criminal conspiracy. In court, the police claimed she was part of an international conspiracy to defame the country and spark violence in the capital during the January 26 farmer protest.

The police are hanging their case against her on the tenuous evidence of a Google document briefly tweeted out by Thunberg. The police claim it was a "toolkit" that Ravi drafted in collaboration with "Khalistani" or Sikh separatist groups abroad, with the aim of waging a social, cultural and economic war against India and "certain Indian companies".

It may sound ominous but a toolkit is simply a campaign document used by mass movements to mobilise and raise awareness on social causes.

Apart from arresting Ravi, the Delhi Police have also filed non-bailable arrest warrants against [two other young climate campaigners](#): Shantanu Muluk from Beed, Maharashtra, and lawyer Nikita Jacob from Mumbai. Jacob is a volunteer with Extinction Rebellion India, a branch of a global climate advocacy youth group founded in the UK in 2018. The Bombay High Court has granted Muluk 10-day transit bail, while Jacob has been granted protection from arrest for the next three weeks.

Ravi's arrest has triggered widespread outrage across India, particularly among youth climate activists who believe the "toolkit" case is a pretext to target them, since they have become an influential force in India in the past three years.

Campaigners like Kyndiah are aware that their youth movement is distinctly different from traditional forms of organised, institutionalised climate activism. Operating through informal networks without the safety-nets of a structured organisation, these youth groups are consciously trying to create a new, global language for mass movements on environmental issues.

Their work to oppose such projects involves raising awareness and gaining widespread public support through social media, petitioning and writing letters to government representatives and mobilising protests on the ground whenever necessary. This is achieved, say young activists, through decentralised, democratic and “leaderless” coordination that all youth climate groups are proud of.

“We don’t have designations, but a few people do take the lead in coordinating activities,” said Kyndiah. “For example, if we want to do a protest on the ground, one person takes responsibility for getting police permissions, another for posters, and others for media outreach, research, etc.”

Most of the campaigns are simple and do not require funding. In Goa, a young activist on the [Save Mollem](#) team points out that committing time to work for a cause is the most important, and often most difficult, part of informal, voluntary activism. “But our group has always focused on the mental health of the campaigners,” said the activist who did not wish to be named. “We encourage people to step back and take a break when it gets overwhelming, and they almost always come back with a fresher perspective and new ideas.”



A young boy at a Save Aarey protest in Mumbai in September 2019.
Photo: Indranil Mukherjee/AFP

The young and the old

For most youth climate groups – FFF India, Extinction Rebellion India or the Save Mollem group – it has been a conscious choice to not register themselves as formal non-profit organisations.

“By registering, we would just be giving the government more ways to trap us,” said a 29-year-old climate activist from Mumbai who coordinated with youth from different environment collectives to help mobilise support for the Save Aarey movement in 2018 and 2019. “Organisational structures have traditionally restricted NGOs from doing what they want to do, which is why a lot of young people are coming together informally. It is hard to carry out bold ideas in an organised structure.”

The Mumbai activist also pointed out a generational difference between the working styles of the new climate campaigners and older environmentalists who have been involved in formal activism for years.

“That difference, according to me, is the NGO ego,” said the Mumbai activist. “A lot of older, successful activists don’t get along with other people or other ways of doing things, and they sometimes don’t talk to each other even if they are co-petitioners in the same litigation on an environmental issue. But younger people are more understanding, more willing to cross collaborate.”

For Claude Alvares, a veteran climate activist and the director of the Goa Foundation, the difference between the young and the old is more about method. “Older activists visit government departments, lobby there, file legal petitions and use a more interpersonal approach,” he said. “The government also takes us more seriously because we have a standing for so many years.”

Recent youth campaigns, said Alvares, have been largely online, with the aim of reaching out to thousands of people. In Goa, Alvares believes the Save Mollem campaign has been successful in achieving this goal. “I have been pleasantly taken aback by the quality of the campaign. Even all these years, the Goa Foundation could not have pulled off something like that, because our reach is more limited,” he said.

According to Kyndiah, “millennials and people from Gen Z” have a stronger sense of urgency about climate change than “the Gen X or baby boomers who are in Parliament”. “For them, caring for the environment often only means planting trees,” he said. “They lack an understanding of how immediate the problem is, or why environment, politics and government policy cannot be separated from each other. We are trying to underline the implication of politics on the environment, as in the case with the EIA.”

The successes

The Environment Impact Assessment or EIA 2020 is a contentious draft law prescribing the procedure for industries to assess the ecological and environmental impact of their proposed projects before they are approved by the government. Environmentalists, however, have strongly criticised the draft EIA for doing away with mandatory public consultations for several types of projects, and creating conditions for faster approvals of projects instead of focusing on assessing their impact.

In mid-2020, youth climate groups that had largely focused on local campaigns began coordinating at a national scale to snowball and amplify public opposition to the draft EIA, successfully urging hundreds of citizens to send emails to the environment ministry with objections to clauses in the draft.

The Centre's [knee-jerk response](#) – blocking the activists' websites, slapping them with UAPA charges and later withdrawing them – was a sign of how much the youth climate movement had succeeded in unnerving the administration. Activists believe that groups like FFF have been [under the police's radar](#) ever since it was targeted in July 2020.

While the Centre is now assessing over 20 lakh public responses to the draft EIA, youth climate groups have enjoyed a number of small, incremental successes at local levels.

In Jammu, for instance, a group of volunteers – many of them children – spent weeks [cleaning up the River Tawi](#), a tributary of the Chenab, in late 2020. They coordinated this campaign on the ground despite limited Internet availability, almost no support from the government and apprehensions from the volunteers' parents.

In Shillong, FFF campaigners organised strikes, human chains and online campaigns in November 2020 to stall the construction of a mall on land earmarked for a public park.

In Goa, the Save Mollem campaign succeeded in drawing national attention to three infrastructure projects planned in the state's ecosensitive Western Ghats. One project is a 10-km power transmission line through a protected forest inhabited by large indigenous birds and other wildlife. The second involves turning a 12-km stretch of NH4A into a four-lane highway, cutting through a wildlife sanctuary and the Mollem National Park. The third involves doubling a 120-year-old railway line cutting through 128 hectares of the Ghats, which would make it cheaper for [large steel and power companies](#) like the Adani Group, Vedanta and JSW Steel to transport coal and ore to their plants in the Deccan Plateau.

The projects are now being scrutinised by a Supreme Court-appointed committee, thanks to campaigns and protests by the Save Mollem youth and legal petitions by organisations like Goa Foundation.

The challenges

But organising informal youth movements comes with challenges too, since most volunteers are urban teens having their first brush with activism.

“We don’t have resources at our disposal, so if somebody is arrested or charged, campaigners struggle with who to go to, how to save themselves,” said a Mumbai-based climate activist who did not wish to be identified.

Some groups have recently set up a board of mentors and seasoned climate activists to guide them in difficult situations. “We really rely on them to let us know when to speak and when to shut up,” said Tamanna, a volunteer with FFF India who did not wish to reveal her full name or location in the aftermath of Disha Ravi’s arrest. “All of this is mentally taxing so they have told us to take breaks and step away.”

Among older activists like Claude Alvares from Goa Foundation, there is a greater sense of acceptance about the political realities of the day and the risks involved in activism of any kind. “In the present climate of the country, there is no safety net for anybody. The authorities are targeting people at random,” said Alvares. “Today you have to recognise that if you get into activism and use your voice, you are going to get into trouble. Because the people on the other side are not democrats.”

But among young activists and their families, Ravi’s arrest has triggered a wave of fear and uncertainty. “Parents have been pressuring their children to stay away and not be a part of the movement,” said Tamanna.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the fear among the youth has been more widespread. “I can see a demoralising effect all over my organisation,” said Anmol Ohri, a young climate activist in the region who led the coordination for the drive to clean River Tawi. “They [government] can easily turn the narrative around in Jammu. We could be delegitimised.”

After enabling a movement to gather so much steam in a few short years, young activists are now worried about its future. “It would be disastrous for India’s future if this whole climate movement gets delayed,” said Ohri. “If we are politically vilified then we will be categorised as ‘urban naxals’ or ‘anti-nationals’.”

Tamanna too said she felt similarly. “Until this dies down, there could be a stigma associated with FFF,” she said. “We just hope people understand that we are a bunch of youngsters who are enthusiastic about the climate movement without any malicious intent.”

Concern for nature and environment in 4.4 Indian english poetry

Rakeshkumar R Patel

Indian English poetry is the oldest form of Indian English literature. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio is considered the first poet in the lineage of Indian English poetry followed by Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt among others. Nissim Ezekiel is considered as a pioneering figure in modern Indian English Poetry.

His first book, *A Time to Change*, was published in 1952. Some of the distinguished poets of Ezekiel's time are R. Parthasarathy, A. K. Ramanujan, Gieve Patel, Dom Moraes, Jayant Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Keki N. Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre (Wikipedia). These poets vividly capture the cultural traditions of India. They observe nature and its surroundings and become spokespersons for the current situations through their poetry. This paper intends to give a voice to the present environmental crisis through the presentation of the poetry written by some Indian English poets.

Life on earth grows in association with environment. The natural objects have therefore a crucial role to play for the sustenance of the living organisms on the earth. Trees are such a valuable treasure on earth serving as backbone for providing oxygen, foods, shelter and other raw materials for the benefits of living creatures. Human beings are selfish creatures who do not show the respect to nature and keep on moving to exploit it in the name of the development of science and technology. As a result, the world is facing drastic environmental issues which threatens the survival of all living creatures on the planet.

Literature has already started addressing the environmental issues to provide an eye-opening perspective for the humans. Eco-criticism has emerged as a new branch of “the study of relation between literature and physical environment” (Glottfelty Cheryl xviii). The main idea of the ecological writers is to bring the awareness among the people about the fact that Earth is losing its health due to the overexploitation of nature. Indian English literature show environmental concern in one way or the other. In this paper, the attempt is made to show through poetry the importance of and the need for the preservation of trees in particular and nature in general.

Ecocriticism helps the human beings have a larger view of nature, a bio-centric view to acknowledge the unavoidability of nature for the living organism on the planet. Indian English poetry showcases the human-nature relationship.

Pre-Independence poet Toru Dutt wrote many poems expressing Indian sensibilities and her consciousness for environment. Her love for nature is reflected in her works “Sita”, “The Lotus”, and “Baugmaree”. Toru Dutt’s “Our Casuarina Tree” is a nostalgic poem expressing her love for childhood memories associated with the tree. She delineates the close relationship between man and nature in the description of the tree.

*LIKE a huge Python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, intended deep scars,
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live*

(Our Casuarina Tree by Toru Dutt - Poem Hunter)

For Toru Dutt, the tree is a replica of Indian history and culture. People suffer due to the hazardous condition of nature resulted out of the exploitation of it for the selfish ends. It cannot be gainsaid that the growth and development of a society or a nation is interrelated with nature. When humans goes against the laws of nature then nature regrets like Casuarina Tree,

*What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech*

(Our Casuarina Tree by Toru Dutt - Poem Hunter).

The importance of trees for the humans and their sustenance is apparent. And therefore, trees are worshipped. In Indian mythology, especially among the Tamil Brahmins, it is believed that the neem and peepal can be reunited in wedlock and it will bring prosperity for those who worship them. In India, women used to take bath early in the morning with a view to circumambulate these trees. In other words, trees are worshiped in Indian mythology since they are equated with God. The neem is considered as a lady dreaming

*...her bygone bliss,
Of the splendor of her husband in his prime,
Whom barren women had circumambulated
A hundred and eight times the week's immediate day*

(Gokak 254).

Apart from the beauty of nature, many Indian poets writing in English showcase the harsh reality of exploitation of nature and ill-treatment of animals by the humans.

The poetry of Nissim Ezekeil (1924-2004) exhibits love, loneliness, human foibles. The poems "Squirrel" and "Sparrows" draw an eco-critical attention for portrayal of nature. According to Suresh Fredrick "Both the squirrel and sparrows are animals that live close to human beings.... But human culture devalues these animals, making symbiosis impossible" (Frederick 139). Reading of Keki N Daruwalla's poem "A Boat ride along the Ganga" from an eco-critical perspective reveals how man is accountable for polluting the holy river. A. K. Ramanujan's "Snakes" from his first collection *The Strider's* shows how the persona in the poem is afraid of the snake and therefore he kills it and feels that he is safe in the woods.

*My night full of ghosts from a sadness
in a play, my left foot listens to my right footfall,
a clockwork clicking in the silence
within my walking.
The clickshod heel suddenly strikes
and slushes on a snake: I see him turn,
the green white of his belly
measured by bluish nodes, a water-bleached lotus-stalk
plucked by a landsman hand. Yet panic rushes
my body to my feet, my spasms wring
and drain his fear and mine. I leave him sealed,
a flat-head whiteness on a stain.
Now
frogs can hop upon this sausage rope,
flies in the sun will mob the look in his eyes,
and I can walk through the woods.
(Snakes by A.K. Ramanujan-POETRY FOUNDATION)*

Through this poem Ramanujan suggests how his mind is ever obsessed with the fear of snakes. The poem begins on a note of a remark, "No, it does not happen when I walk through the wood". This happens when he is walking through museums or libraries. He is always reminded of snakes. The Poet says that the book of yellow vein, and yellow amber would often remind him of snakes. Although any creature does not harm anybody without any reason but the poet's mind is never free from his fear of snakes and ultimately kills it to be safe.

Gieve Patel, an Indian poet and playwright, is a supporter of 'Green Movement' which is a group of writers to protect the environment. According to an eminent critic C. V. Venugopal, "The poet's total social commitment, his concern for the oppressed, his ire at discriminations, above all his love for anything living, make his poetry stand apart" (Venugopal 184).

His poetry shows the ecological concern for nature and man's approach towards nature. His famous poem "On Killing a Tree" urges the readers to become serious for the conservation of the environment without which the life on earth is not possible. The tree here in the poem represent the entire nature which is being exploited by the humans. The poet admires the existence of the tree which cannot be eradicated easily by humans. The poet describes that it is not an easy task for a man to 'kill' a tree because it has its roots deep down to the soil and has grown consuming water, sunlight, and oxygen for years.

*Will do it. It has grown
Slowly consuming the earth,
Rising out of I, feeding
Upon its crust, absorbing
Years of sunlight, air, water
(On Killing A Tree Poem by Gieve Patel - Poem Hunter).*

The poem is a sarcastic account of modern man's cruel approach towards nature. Killing a tree is an act akin to killing a person which needs to be avoided at any cost.

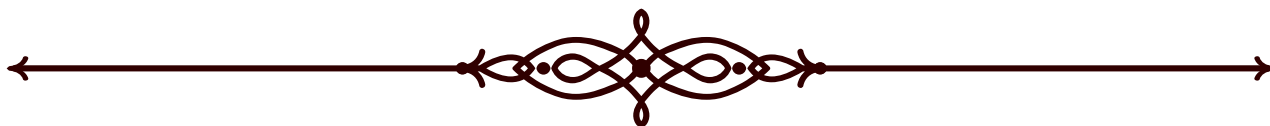
Trees are a part of our life as they provide oxygen which is inevitable for the existence of humans and other living creatures on the earth. Apart from this, the trees serve as shelter for many creatures and offer many other benefits. The poetry of Indian English poets makes us aware of the fact that "we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (Glottfelty Cheryl xviii-xix). And therefore, it is a need of the time that nature must be protected and conserved for the betterment and well beings of the next generations.

An eco-critical approach conveys the impersonal relationship that humans have with nature and environment which offer them the unavoidability of their existence. Despite giving the reverence to nature for everything the humans get, they over exploit nature and natural resources in the name of development and advancement leading to the unrepairable hazards to the environment and putting the entire planet in danger.

Many poems written in India during different periods, from diverse perspectives and tones at the end advocate the same urgency and need for the harmonious relationship between man and nature. No one can live in isolation. All living and non-living organisms are connected with each other in the ecological system. If this cycle of ecology gets disturbed, then entire universe will face a gigantic problem. And therefore, the conservation of environment and natural resources is the need of the time and the immediate concern for the betterment of the planet.

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