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Editorial Advisers

S N Sinha, New Delhi

K Sreenivas Reddy, Hyderabad

L S Herdenia, Bhopal

Balwinder Singh Jammu, Chandigarh

EditorSuresh Kumar Alapati
scribesnews.editor@gmail.com**Mail Id:**
scribesnews@gmail.com**IJU website:**
www.indianjournalistsunion.com

Worrisome Trend



A new Pew Research Center report says that a substantial number of Indians believe that government control of the media is preferable. Pew Research Center, a respected non-partisan think-tank based in Washington, D.C., in the United States, found that only 68 per cent of the respondents said that it is very or somewhat important for the media to report without prior government approval.

This is the second lowest rate among the 35 countries surveyed. Ergo, many believe in some form of government censorship. More disturbingly, 80 per cent of the respondents in India believe that the media in the country reports news without interference from the government. This means that many people are not aware of the actual media scenario prevailing in the country where press freedom has been under siege for several years, with journalists and YouTubers being booked for their trouble on the flimsiest of reasons.

A majority of Indians surveyed felt that the mainstream media enjoys freedom in India, while the country has been consistently hitting low rank on World Press Freedom Index. India ranked 159 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index in 2024, published by Reporters Without Borders. And more worryingly, many feel that state should exercise control over the media.

According to Pew Research, 65 per cent of the respondents said that fake news and information is a big problem in India. This is one of the highest rates among the 35 nations where Pew conducted its research, and places India among the list of 10 countries where this is seen as a major issue. But, many believe that misinformation stems from social media and other non-governmental actors, rather than from state censorship or suppression which is again away from the reality.

The findings by Pew Research Center are a matter of concern because it has worrisome alarms. Though many people worry about fake news they do not know the origin. And many people care less about press freedom and believe in governmental interference in media. These conclusions are surely worrisome.

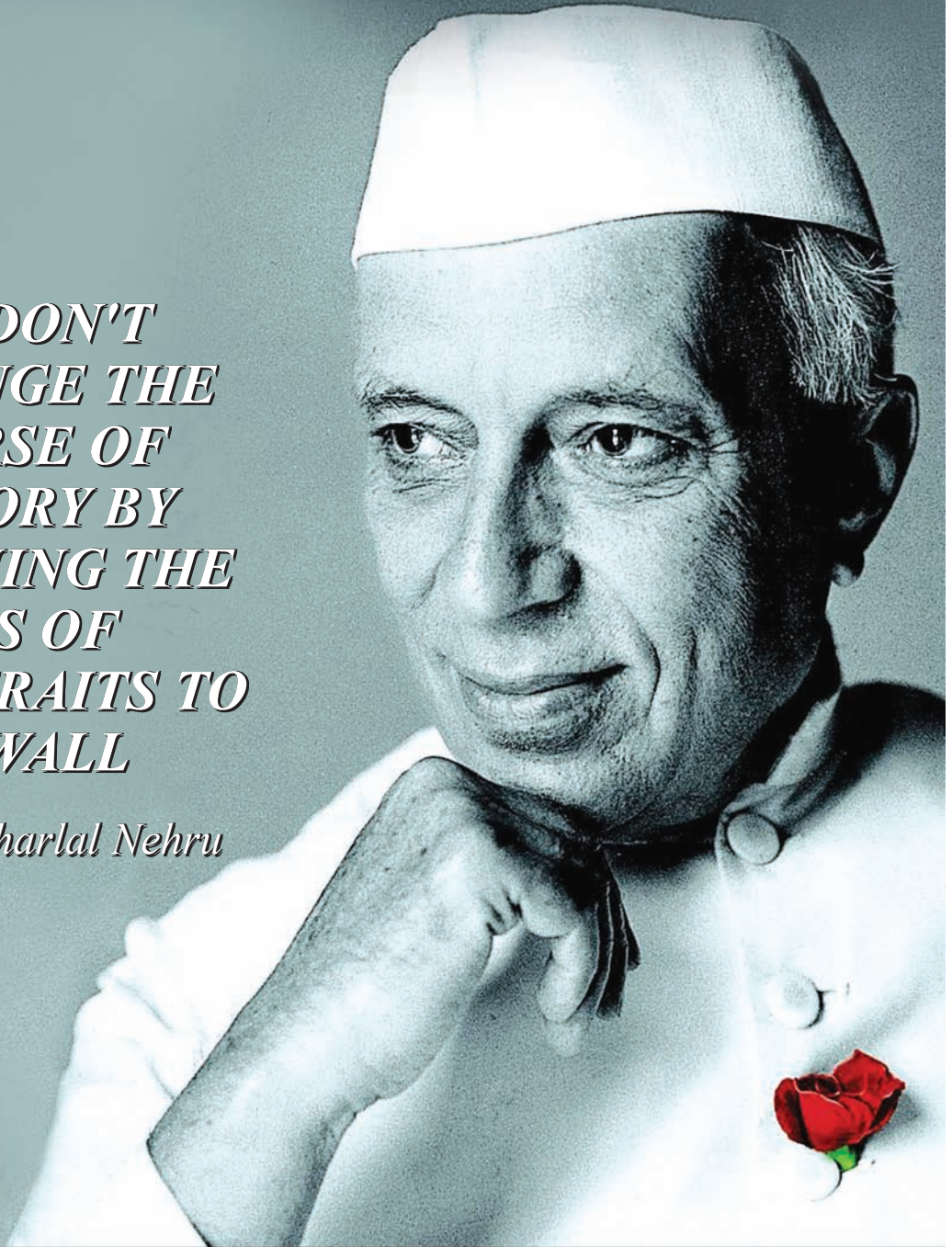
Fearless
Frank
Free



“

*YOU DON'T
CHANGE THE
COURSE OF
HISTORY BY
TURNING THE
FACES OF
PORTRAITS TO
THE WALL*

— Jawaharlal Nehru



Space donated by a well wisher

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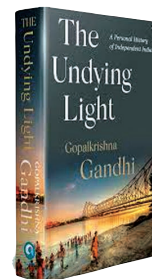


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Diluting RTI Act through DPDP Act is Retrogressive, Says IJU

T

he Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has expressed serious concern at the government's attempt to curtail the people's right to information in the name of protecting the right to privacy.

In a statement issued on April 11, IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy and Secretary General Balwinder Singh Jammu said the changes to Right to Information (RTI) Act envisaged under Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act would effectively dilute the former, thus cutting down the empowerment of people.

The DPDP Act which has already received Presidential assent would come into force once the rules are notified. A provision in the Act alters Section 8(i)(j) of the RTI Act which allows personal information to be disclosed in public interest. The altered provision disallows even that. The DPDP Act also removes a provision in the RTI Act that stated "information which can



K. Sreenivas Reddy



Balwinder Singh Jammu

not be denied to Parliament or a State legislature cannot be denied to a person."

The IJU leaders said that the RTI Act, as it is, has taken care of the people's right to privacy and altering the Section 8(1)(j) would only render the law ineffective by disallowing public to access information that uncovers corruption. They termed the move retrogressive and urged the government to discard the provision in the interest of transparency in public life. 

DPDP Act.. An Explainer

T

he Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025 weaken privacy rights, expand government surveillance, undermine RTI, and lack accountability, failing to meet constitutional standards for data protection in India.

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 is to be operationalised by the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 that were put to public consultation ending on March 5, 2025. Our sub-

mission to MeitY is premised on a constitutional understanding of data protection highlighting key issues such as vagueness, violations of privacy rights and increasing executive control.

Background

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 ("the Data Protection Act, 2023") was enacted on August 11, 2023 following years



DIGITAL PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION ACT 2023

of deliberation and several iterations. This version was rushed through parliament without any meaningful deliberation after earlier drafts were scrapped. Suffering from excessive vagueness it was reasoned at the time that these details would be operationalised by the delegated legislation in form of rules and regulations. As part of this, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (“MeitY”) after about 18 months from its passage in parliament released the draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 (“Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025”) on January 3, 2025 for public consultation. Our submission to this consultation outlines the issues with the Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025 from a constitutional perspective. It focuses on data protection as an element within the fundamental right to privacy as per the Supreme Court’s decision in Justice (Retd.) K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India and Others.

Failure to meet Constitutional Privacy Standards

Several provisions of the Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025 fail to comply with the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Puttaswamy judgment, which established clear benchmarks for any infringement to privacy and required a data protection law to be made as per a positive obligation of the state to protect it.

For instance the statute, nor the rules conform to the proportionality test, and instead grant broad exemptions to government agencies regarding the protection and access to personal data. This results in undermining principles such as purpose limitation and data minimisation. Specifically, provisions such as Rule 22 by granting the Central Government unchecked authority to demand user data from Data Fiduciaries and intermediaries without any judicial oversight, transparency or safeguards creates a parallel framework for state surveillance without any checks and balances. We have presented a tabu-

lar view of the problems with Rule 22 for which we have called for a complete withdrawal.

Undermining RTI and Press Freedoms

The right to information, along with the right to privacy

Principle	Rule 22 under draft Rules	Best Practices
Judicial Oversight	No requirement for court approval before data access	A court order or independent review before disclosure
User Notification	No obligation to inform users when their data is accessed	Users must be informed unless exceptions apply (e.g., active criminal investigations)
Scope of Government Access	Broad and vague terms like “sovereignty, security of the state” without clear reference to Article 19(2)	Data access must be justified and proportionate under clear legal frameworks.
Ability to Challenge Requests	No mechanism for Data Fiduciaries to challenge government demands.	Companies and individuals can appeal against overbroad requests.
Transparency Requirements	No requirement to disclose number or nature of requests.	Governments must publish transparency reports on data requests.

is a constitutionally protected right in India. The Data Protection Act, 2023 had already damaged the right to information, which is supposed to co-exist with the right to privacy, by amending the RTI Act. Specifically, the amended Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, 2005 prevents the disclosure of any information that is related to any “personal information”. This upsets a balance, where it previously allowed withholding of personal information if it bore no relation to public activity or interest and thereby constituted an unwarranted invasion of privacy. This change again departs from the proportionality test referenced in Puttaswamy judgment, effectively allowing officials to refuse critical information simply by labeling it “personal.” Here, the deficiencies of the principal law have neither been addressed, nor mitigated by the Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025.

Here, we have authored an extensive analysis on these changes and in addition to drawing attention to this in our submissions have joined a broader campaign to #SaveRTI.

Expansion of Government Control and Reduced Accountability

A law does not enforce by itself and requires an authority or a regulatory body to take charge. Here, the Data Protection Board was in press interactions stated by MeitY to serve as an, “independent authority” overseeing compliance principally through its quasi-judicial powers to impose fines for, “data breaches”. Its powers, while do not include the power to make regulations, do include the ability to summon individuals, examine evidence, and imposing penalties. These powers we foresee will be exercised with compromise and in a partisan manner given its structure and staffing. Rule 16 of the Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025 centralises its appointments, functioning, and decision-making within the executive branch, raising serious concerns about political influence and lack of autonomy?. Since the Data Protection Board is controlled by the executive, this creates risks of bias in adjudication when the state itself is the biggest data fiduciary and processor. We are highlighting some of the problems with this in the table below, greater detail on which is contained within our submissions:

Vague and Arbitrary Definitions Allow Misuse

Principle	Best Practices in Administrative Law	Draft Rules
Independence of regulatory Bodies	Regulatory bodies must be free from government control, with transparent and independent selection processes.	Government-controlled appointments and funding, risking political influence.
Judicial Oversight & Review	Decisions must be subject to review by higher courts or legislative oversight.	No structured appeals process beyond internal government mechanisms.
Multi-Stakeholder Representation	The appointment process should include representatives from judiciary, civil society, and industry to ensure balance.	Search-cum-Selection Committee only includes government officials and experts handpicked by the executive.
Transparency and Accountability	Regulatory bodies must publish annual reports, transparency records, and disclose decision-making criteria.	No mandated transparency requirements or independent reporting obligations.
Protection Against Arbitrary Removal	Members should have fixed terms and removal only through judicial inquiry.	The government retains discretion to dismiss members, creating risks of political interference.

The Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025 suffer from significant vagueness creating the possibility for, “pick and choose” enforcement. Poorly defined terms and a lack of clarity on key provisions enable state overreach, opaque corporate practices and inconsistent application. For instance, several critical terms remain vague or entirely undefined, including:

- ▶ "Instrumentalities of the State" – Failure to specify which government-controlled entities are exempt from strict privacy norms, granting excessive discre-

tionary power.

- ▶ "Emergent Situation" – Without a legal or operational definition, this term could justify limitless state access to data without accountability.
- ▶ "Research, Archiving, or Statistical Purposes" – The absence of specific standards allows both – prohibitions on researchers and transparency activists as well as exemptions for companies from seeking user consent by misusing it and labelling commercial work as “research”.
- ▶ "Significant Data Fiduciary (“SDF”)" – The criteria for classifying an entity as an SDF remain unclear, particularly regarding the measurement of data "volume" or "sensitivity."

The lack of specificity falls short of acceptable legal standards and best practices as set out in the table below for which we have provided further details in our submissions:

A data protection law that does not protect Indians

Issue	Draft Rules	Best Practices (GDPR, UK DPA, OECD Guidelines)
Clarity of Definitions	Vague terms like “instrumentality of the state” and “emergent situation” allow for broad interpretation.	Clear definitions for key terms, ensuring precision and preventing abuse.
Legal Certainty	Ambiguous rules lead to inconsistent enforcement and compliance difficulties.	Well-defined obligations for businesses and the state, reducing uncertainty.
Government Access to Data	State agencies can invoke “national security” without an independent review.	Strict necessity and proportionality tests for government data access.
User Consent & Rights	No clear scope for user challenge if data is collected under exemptions.	Users have enforceable rights, including appeal mechanisms against data misuse.
Data Processing for Research & Statistical Purposes	No limits on how long or how broadly data can be collected under “research” exemptions.	Restrictions on secondary data use, ensuring user protection.

The Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025 provided another opportunity for the MeitY to ensure the protection of the privacy of ordinary Indians. While unsurprising, it is indeed disappointing they end up tightening a digital leash while having poorly thought and designed provisions. They mark a continuous failure to comply and meet the constitutional thresholds as set by the Supreme Court on the right to privacy. Through our recommendations, we call for substantial changes to the Draft Data Protection Rules, 2025 in their current form for being poorly considered and increasing the trends towards digital authoritarianism.

✉
— From the Internet Freedom Foundation website

SC sets aside HC Takedown Order in ANI-Wikipedia Defamation Case

Wikimedia Foundation Inc, which operates Wikipedia, had challenged the Delhi High Court's April 8 order upholding a single judge's April 2 directive to remove content about ANI within 36 hours.



Abraham Thomas

The Supreme Court on April 17 set aside Delhi High Court orders directing Wikipedia to remove content about Asian News International (ANI), allowing the news agency to approach the high court afresh with specific defamatory claims.

A bench headed by Justice Abhay S Oka, which included Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, ruled that the previous orders were “broadly worded” and “not capable of being specifically implemented”.

“We set aside the impugned orders and allow the respondent to approach the single judge for grant of specific injunction citing specific defamatory statements,” the bench directed, adding that the matter should be considered “on its own merits without being influenced by this order”.

Wikimedia Foundation Inc, which operates Wikipedia, had challenged the Delhi High Court's April 8 order upholding a single judge's April 2 directive to remove content about ANI within 36 hours.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing Wikipedia, argued that as an intermediary, his client could not be held responsible for user-generated content. He contended that allegations of “false, misleading and defamatory” content required proper adjudication before any takedown order.

The bench noted there was “no clarity on the issue of who will decide whether the contents are false, misleading and defamatory”.

The bench was initially inclined to stay the order but asked ANI's counsel if the agency was willing to approach the HC for fresh proceedings – a suggestion the lawyer, Sidhant Kumar Marwah, indicated willingness for.

“Leaving all issues to be considered by the single judge, the court further clarified, “The matter shall be considered on its own merits without being influenced by this order.”

Marwah had pointed out that the news agency objected to Wikipedia content describing it as “a propaganda tool for the incumbent government”. The court observed that Wikipedia claimed the text was added by another user, and



emphasised that even injunctions require determining what constitutes false or defamatory content.

“Who will decide what is false and what is defamatory...It cannot be ANI,” the bench remarked, suggesting the news agency should “confine yourself to specific portions” in seeking fresh interim relief.

Close to the concluding moments of the hearing, ANI’s lawyer commented on Wikipedia getting a quick hearing within a day of filing its appeal on April 16. Sibal objected to the insinuation, explaining they had

submitted an urgency letter due to the 36-hour compliance deadline.

The bench sharply rebuked ANI’s counsel, saying, “If you are saying that we have listed this matter on our own, then have the courage to take it up with the Chief Justice of India and complain that certain matters are taken up on priority.... Making allegations that we have done something won’t help.”

The Delhi HC division bench of Justices Pratibha M Singh and Rajneesh Kumar Gupta had previously ruled that Wikipedia was obli-

gated under the Information Technology Rules, 2021 to remove “false” or “misleading” content by showing due diligence under Rule 3 of the Rules. The high court had held that intermediaries must take down content when directed by courts.

The earlier April 2 order by the single judge had held that Wikipedia has fiduciary responsibilities and obligations to prevent defamation and cannot evade accountability by claiming to host third-party content.

— *Courtesy: Hindustan Times*

ANI vs Wikipedia: What the Case is About?

The Supreme Court on April 9 reserved its verdict on an appeal filed by the Wikimedia Foundation against a Delhi High Court order directing the takedown of a Wikipedia page titled "Asian News International v Wikimedia Foundation." The page had summarised court proceedings in a defamation case filed by ANI and quoted observations made during the hearings.

ANI vs Wikipedia: What's the case?

The legal dispute began on July 9, 2024, when news agency ANI filed a defamation suit against Wikimedia Foundation in the Delhi High Court, alleging that its Wikipedia page contained false and damaging information. ANI disputed charges that the news agency was a "propaganda tool for the incumbent central government," and accused Wikipedia of misreporting and allowing fake news to spread.

ANI also demanded:

- ▶ The removal of the disputed



content

- ▶ A ban on Wikipedia from publishing such material
- ▶ ₹ 2 crore in damages

ANI further objected to the page being “protected,” which limited the agency’s ability to edit it, while anonymous Wikipedia users could still make changes.

Wikipedia, which allows for user-generated modifications supported by credible sources, defended itself by citing its community mod-

eration model and neutrality policy.

Justice Navin Chawla, who initially heard the case, acknowledged ANI's concerns while also noting that Wikipedia has the right to defend its content under free speech.

ANI vs Wikipedia: What has happened so far?

Over the months, the legal battle has widened. In August 2024, the Delhi High Court ordered Wikipedia to disclose the identities of the users who made the allegedly defamatory

edits. The court further warned that failure to comply could result in the website being blocked in India.

Wikipedia responded by agreeing to give basic subscriber information (BSI) to the court in a sealed manner while retaining user confidentiality.

Another flashpoint occurred in October 2024 when a separate Wikipedia page titled “Asian News International v Wikimedia Foundation” was created. The page summarised the legal proceedings between ANI and Wikipedia and quoted courtroom exchanges. ANI then accused the new page of interfering with the proceedings and filed a contempt application. The Delhi High Court accepted ANI's argument and issued an interim order ordering the page to be taken down. ANI's contempt petition was later dismissed once the page was removed. Meanwhile, Wikimedia challenged the order before the Supreme Court, calling it a threat to free speech and the right to document court cases.

On April 2, 2025, the high court granted ANI interim relief and directed Wikimedia to remove the page. This prompted Wikimedia to petition the Supreme Court for a stay and a more thorough hearing on the implications of such takedown orders.

What happened in the last hearing?

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan examined the high court's interim order and raised concerns about



whether such content removal could be justified without a proper legal finding of contempt.

“...we are not saying that the court is powerless to direct that some content should be removed. But there has to be first a prima facie finding recorded with reasons that what is published is contemptuous. So condition precedent is a prima facie finding giving reasons why it amounts to contempt,” Justice Oka said, as reported by Bar and Bench.

he court also reviewed specific language used in the Wikipedia article, including the use of the word “threatened” to describe a judge’s oral remark about shutting down Wikipedia. Justice Oka said that simply finding content objectionable is not enough to justify its removal.

“Suppose somebody says something about a court proceeding before this court, only on the grounds that we feel it objectionable,

or we don’t like it, we can’t direct removal. Only if we come to a conclusion that this satisfies the well-settled test of contempt prima facie finding, then we can do it.”

Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Wikimedia, clarified that the information on the Wikipedia page was not original to the platform but was sourced from LiveLaw, The Indian Express, and other reputable media outlets.

“It’s not as if we picked up something on our own,” he said. “It was authored by a visiting professor at Harvard, appeared in The Indian Express and was mentioned in a footnote.” Sibal also warned against curbing transparency in judicial reporting: “You can’t say there should be no discussion. We have an open justice system; this has a chilling effect.”

Justice Oka appeared to agree: “If somebody publishes a news item about me and my brother [Justice Bhuyan] that we threatened somebody in court, we will not get bothered... Every day we hear that we are insensitive etc. Why should we be bothered? But we can’t say that for someone else.”

The Supreme Court has now reserved its verdict on Wikimedia’s appeal. A decision is expected in the coming weeks.

— Courtesy:
business-standard.com



Indians Fear Fake News But are Less Concerned About Press Freedom

I

In India the share of people who believe that media freedom exists is higher than the share of people who believe it is important

Sambavi Parthasarathy

Vignesh Radhakrishnan

In India, while there is widespread anxiety about misinformation and fake news, people largely do not attribute it to government influence. Instead, a relatively large share do not mind greater state censorship, according to the latest survey by the Pew Research Center.

Survey data suggests that while distrust in fake news is high, confidence in systemic solutions such as a free press remains low. In fact, a relatively large share of respondents believes that the media is free from state censorship and supports greater state control over the press. In other words, the data indicates that many citizens view misinformation as stemming from sources such as social media, WhatsApp, or other non-governmental actors, rather than from state censorship or suppression.

In India, 65% of the respondents said that made-up news and information is a very big problem in the country. This is one of the highest rates among the 35 countries surveyed and places India among the top 10 nations where this concern is most strongly felt.

At the same time, only 68% of the respondents said that it is very or somewhat important for the media to report news without state or government censorship - the second-lowest rate among the 35 countries surveyed. In fact, 80% of the respondents believe that the media in India is currently somewhat free or completely free from state intervention. This is one of the highest rates among the countries surveyed and places India among the top 10 once again.

This dichotomy has serious implications for press freedom in India, which has been deteriorating rapidly. In 2024, India ranked 159 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. While India has consistently ranked below 100 since 2003, the situation has worsened significantly in recent years.

Charts 1 shows the share of respondents who said that

Chart 1: % who say made-up news and information is a very big problem in their country



DANGEROUS DICHOTOMY

The data for the charts were taken from Pew Research Center's 'Free Expression Seen as Important Globally, but Not Everyone Thinks Their Country has Press, Speech and Internet Freedoms' released in April 2025.

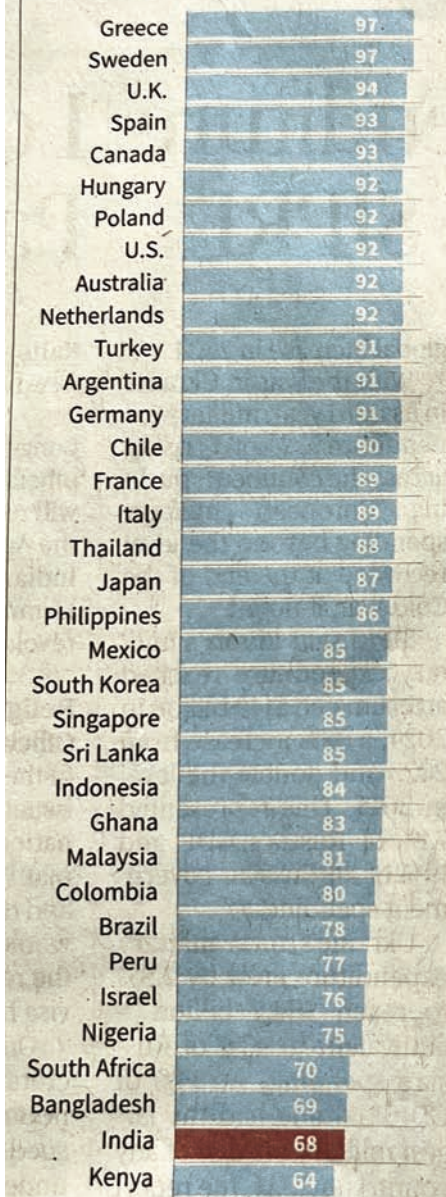
made-up news and information is a very big problem in their country. In Bangladesh, South Korea, Chile, Colombia and Thailand, over 70% of the respondents felt this. In Peru, Philippines, Turkey, Greece and India, more than 65% or more of the respondents said so. The concern for fake news was lowest in Singapore, Poland, Sweden, Netherlands, and Israel.

Chart 2 shows the share of respondents who said that it is very or somewhat important for the media to report news without state or government censorship. The share was above 90% in Greece, Sweden, the U.K., and 11 other countries; between 80% and 90% in 13 countries; and between 70% and 80% in five countries. In India and Kenya, less than 70% of the respondents emphasised the need for a media free of state censorship.

Chart 3 shows the share of respondents who said that the media is currently completely/somewhat free in their country.

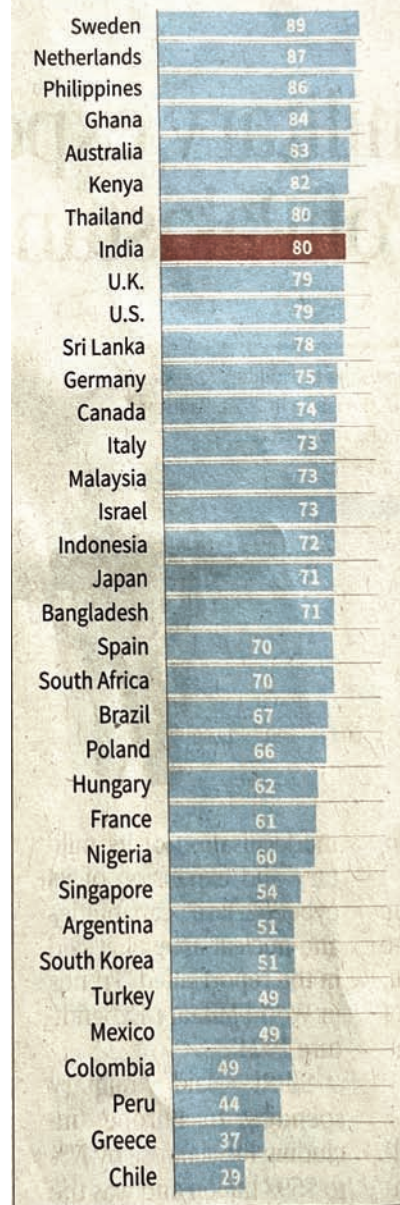
India, Sweden, Netherlands, Philippines, Ghana, Australia, Kenya, and Thailand are the eight countries where 80% or more of the respondents said that the media is now completely or somewhat free.

Chart 2: % who say it is very/somewhat important for the media to report without state censorship



In Chile and Greece, less than 40% felt so. Reading Charts 2 and 3 together offers a different perspective. India and Kenya are the only two countries where a larger share of respondents believe that the media is free (80% or more), while a smaller share (less than 70%) emphasise the importance of

Chart 3: % who say the media is completely/somewhat free in their country currently



media freedom. In other words, in 33 of the 35 nations surveyed, there is a 'press freedom gap', which means the share of people who feel media freedom is important is greater than the share who believe it exists. In contrast, in India and Kenya, this gap is reversed.

— Courtesy: The Hindu

Google Broke the Law to Keep Its Advertising Monopoly, a Judge Rules



It was the second time in a year that a U.S. court found that the company had acted illegally to remain dominant.

David McCabe

Google acted illegally to maintain a monopoly in some online advertising technology, a federal judge ruled on April 17, adding to legal troubles that could reshape the \$1.86 trillion company and alter its power over the internet.

Judge Leonie Brinkema of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia said in a 115-page ruling that Google had broken the law to build its dominance over the largely invisible system of technology that places advertisements on pages across the web. The Justice Department and a group of states had sued Google, arguing that its monopoly in ad technology allowed the company to charge higher prices and take a bigger portion of each sale.

“In addition to depriving rivals of the ability to compete, this exclusionary conduct substantially harmed Google’s publisher customers, the competitive process, and, ultimately, consumers of information on the open web,” Judge Brinkema said.

The government argued in its case that Google had a monopoly over three parts of the online advertising market: the tools used by online publishers, like news sites, to host open ad space; the tools advertisers use to buy that ad space; and the software that facilitates those transactions.

Judge Brinkema ruled in the government’s favor in two of those, finding that Google illegally built a monopoly over the publisher tools and the software system. She dismissed the third, the tools used by

advertisers, saying the government had failed to prove that it constituted a real and defined market.

Google has increasingly faced a reckoning over the dominant role its products play in how people get information and conduct business online. Another federal judge ruled in August that the company had a monopoly in online search. He is now considering a request by the Justice Department to break up the company, with a three-week hearing on the matter scheduled to begin on April 20.

Judge Brinkema, too, will have an opportunity to force changes to Google’s business. On April 17, she gave both sides seven days to propose a schedule for the next phase of the case. In its lawsuit, the

Justice Department preemptively asked the court to force Google to sell some pieces of the ad technology business it had acquired over the years. The government will now assess the ruling to determine what to ask the court to do to remedy the monopoly.

Together, the two rulings and their remedies could check Google’s influence and result in a major restructuring of the company.

“We won half of this case and we will appeal the other half,” said Lee-Anne Mulholland, Google’s vice president of regulatory affairs. “Publishers have many options and they choose Google because our ad tech tools are simple, affordable and effective.”

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi called the ruling a “landmark victory in the ongoing fight to stop Google from



monopolizing the digital public square.” “This Department of Justice will continue taking bold legal action to protect the American people from encroachments on free speech and free markets by tech companies,” she said.

The cases against Google are part of a growing push by regulators to rein in the power of the biggest tech companies, which shape commerce, information and communication online. The Justice Department has sued Apple, arguing that the company made it difficult for consumers to leave its tightly knit universe of devices and software. The Federal Trade Commission has sued Amazon, accusing it of squeezing small businesses, and Meta, for killing rivals when it bought Instagram and WhatsApp. The trial against Meta started recently.

President Trump has signaled that his administration will continue taking a tough stance on antitrust for the tech industry, despite efforts by tech executives to court his favor. His choices for the F.T.C. chair and the Justice Department’s top antitrust role have said they intend to look closely at the power that tech companies have over online discourse. The Google search case was brought under his first administration. The ad tech case — U.S. et al. v. Google — was filed in 2023 and concerns an intricate web of programs that sell ad space around the web, like on a news site or a recipes page. The suite of software, which includes Google Ad Manager, conducts split-second auctions to place ads each time a user loads a page. That business generated \$31 billion in 2023, or about a 10th of the overall revenue for Google’s parent company, Alphabet.

Part of that business stems from the acquisition of DoubleClick, an

advertising software company, for \$3.1 billion in 2008. Google now has an 87 percent market share in ad-selling technology, according to the government.

The government argued during a three-week trial in September that Google had a monopoly over multiple pieces of technology that are used to conduct these transactions. The company locked publishers into using its software, and was able to take more money off the top of each transaction because of its dominance, the government said.

That hurt websites that produce content and make it available online for no charge, the government said.



Google said it would appeal the ruling, which could force a major restructuring of the company.

For years, groups representing news organizations, including The New York Times, have argued that the dominance of major tech platforms undermines the media industry. During the trial, the government called witnesses who had worked for publishers including Gannett and News Corp and for ad agencies that buy space online.

“These are the markets that make the free and open internet possible,” said Aaron Teitelbaum, a Justice Department lawyer, during closing arguments in November.

Google countered that it faced competition not just from other ad tech companies but from social net-

works like TikTok and streaming platforms. In response to the government’s arguments that it had built its ad tech products to work better together, Google’s lawyers argued that its case was bolstered by a 2004 Supreme Court decision that protects a company’s right to choose with whom it does and does not work.

“Google’s conduct is a story of innovation in response to competition,” Karen Dunn, Google’s lead lawyer, said in her closing argument.

Judge Brinkema disagreed. She said that Google had broken the law by effectively forcing publishers that used the company’s tools to manage ad space to also use their products to facilitate transactions with advertisers. The company had changed its policies and practices in ways that “decreased product quality and harmed competition by further entrenching Google as the dominant company in open-web display advertising,” she said in her ruling.

But the government failed to prove its case on how Google’s acquisitions of ad technology companies was anticompetitive, Judge Brinkema said in her ruling.

Among the suits filed against big tech companies, antitrust experts have viewed the Google ad technology suit as one of the strongest for the government. It is generally legal for a business to grow because it is the best at innovating. But, the government argued, Google entrenched its monopolies and tied them together — a classic antitrust violation.

“The court is applying very traditional antitrust principles,” said Herbert Hovenkamp, a professor at Carey Law School of the University of Pennsylvania. “I’m not surprised the government won.”

— Courtesy:
The New York Times

Elon Musk's xAI Buys X — Here's What That Means for You



**ByKate
O'Flaherty**

Elon Musk's AI firm xAI has purchased X, formerly Twitter in a \$33 billion deal announced recently.

Musk, who bought X for \$44 billion in 2022, says the acquisition includes xAI and X's "data, models, compute, distribution and talent."

According to Musk, the move will "unlock immense potential by blending xAI's advanced AI capability and expertise with X's massive reach."

"The combined company will deliver smarter, more meaningful experiences to billions of people while staying true to our core mission of seeking truth and advancing knowledge," Musk wrote in a post on X outlining the deal.

The merger between X and xAI is Musk's latest step in building "an all-encompassing everything app," says Cheney Hamilton, a research analyst at Bloor Research. "By integrating xAI into the X platform, his aim is to turn X into a hub for real-time interaction, content, and AI-powered experiences, essentially competing with the likes of Google, Meta, and OpenAI."

Concerns were already rife about X's AI chatbot, Grok, which is developed by xAI, due to the amount of data it collects. The latest news comes as the platform suffered a massive data leak, after a hacker gave away what is claimed to be a database containing details of 200 million X user records.

So, now that xAI has bought X and the two platforms will become even more integrated, what does that mean for your privacy — and is it time to finally quit X?

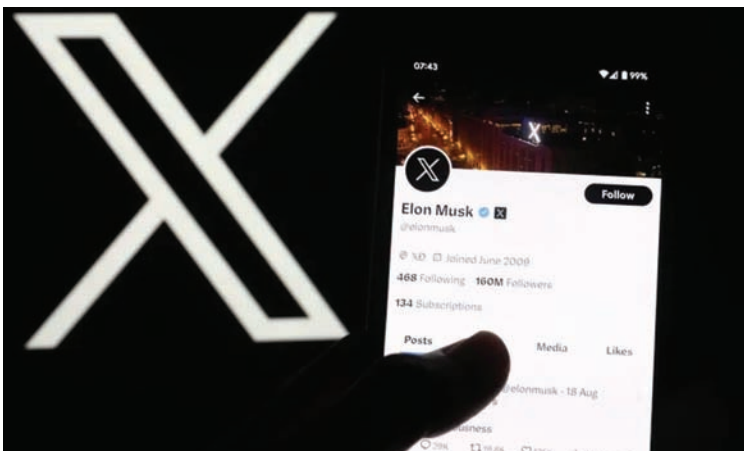
Elon Musk's xAI Buys X — What About Privacy?

To Musk, the move makes perfect sense. The merger is primarily about combining user engagement — posts, messages, comments, likes — with xAI's "insatiable need for unique training data," says Angus Allan, senior product manager at CreateFuture. "As content providers increasingly restrict access to their data or strike exclusive deals, like Reddit licensing access to OpenAI, X's wealth of user interactions becomes an extraordinarily valuable proprietary dataset for Grok."

For users, the privacy implications are "enormous," says Allan. He thinks the merger "completely redefines the established relationship between the platforms."

"Previously, Grok was essentially a tool available on X that users could choose to engage with. Now, with xAI taking over and becoming the parent company of the social media platform, that separation disappears entirely," Allan says.

He points to the November 2024 terms of service update. "This already established the groundwork by significantly expanding X's rights over user content. That update included explicit language giving X the right to use content for 'training of our



machine learning and artificial intelligence models' and expanded the license to 'upload and download' user content 'for any purpose.' The merger now brings both entities under single ownership, removing any remaining barriers between users' social media activity and AI training data." Camden Woollven, group head of AI product marketing at GRC International Group, thinks the move is "definitely a concern."

"The merger means that xAI now has direct access to all the data flowing through X—we're talking about posts, messages, images, maybe even location data, depending on what people share. That data is likely being used to train Grok and any future AI tools they build," she says.

The move combines vast amounts of user-generated data from X with the advanced AI capabilities of xAI, says Chelsea Hopkins, social media manager at Fasthosts. "This integration allows for AI-driven features to become more personalized, but it also increases the potential for extensive data collection and use, often without clear opt-out options being available to users."

The inclusion of publicly shared images in AI training is particularly concerning, says Adrianus Warmenhoven, a cybersecurity expert at NordVPN. "Photos often contain metadata, facial features, or sensitive details that could be misused. Without clear safeguards, this could lead to unintended consequences, including identity misuse or unauthorized facial recognition applications."

Can X Read My Messages?

If you are concerned that X can read your messages following the new deal, there's good and bad news. Not much will change, as X can already see your messages. That's the good news. But that's also the bad news.

"X already has access to your messages, and if this integration deepens, that data could theoretically be used to train or inform AI outputs," says Hamilton. "While Musk has suggested that xAI will be privacy conscious, there's currently no clear policy outlining limits or user protections," he adds.

With the merger, xAI now has access to everything flowing through X, Woollven says. "While we know public posts and interactions are fair game for training models like Grok, it gets murkier when it comes to private messages. If they're not being used now, there's still that open question of could they be, especially if policies quietly change or users aren't clearly informed."

Is There Any Way To Boost Privacy On X?

If you are worried about privacy, users do have some theoretical control, says Allan. European users can object to data processing for AI training through account settings thanks to GDPR protections, and anyone with an X account can opt out of future model training by going to Privacy & Safety > Data sharing and Personalization > Grok, and unchecking the training option.

"However, these settings don't retroactively remove your data from existing models, meaning your digital history remains in the system," Allan says.

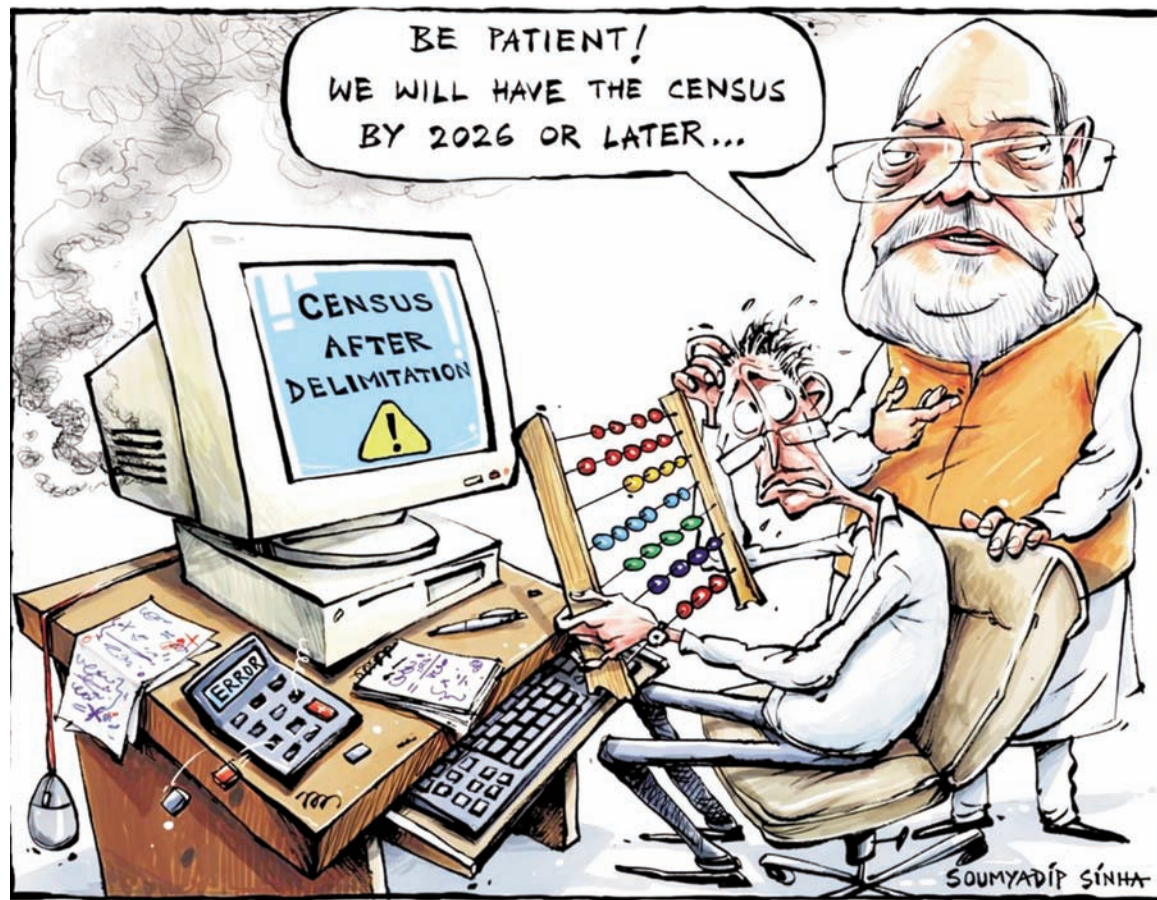
What Should X Users Do?

If you use X for public content only, there's less risk, but for private communication, especially sensitive messages, now is the time to reconsider, says Hamilton. "Stick to end-to-end encrypted platforms such as Signal or WhatsApp for messaging, and if privacy is a top priority, it may be worth stepping away from X altogether." If protecting your privacy is a priority, make use of all available settings and options, but recognize their limitations, says Allan. "They've already trained on your past data, and you can't take that back. For those genuinely concerned about privacy, the stark reality is that it may indeed be time to consider alternatives." If you don't want to quit, it's important to be mindful of what you are posting. "People should be a bit more intentional about what they're posting, who can see it and what they're giving the platform access to—especially now that AI is in the mix," says Woollven.

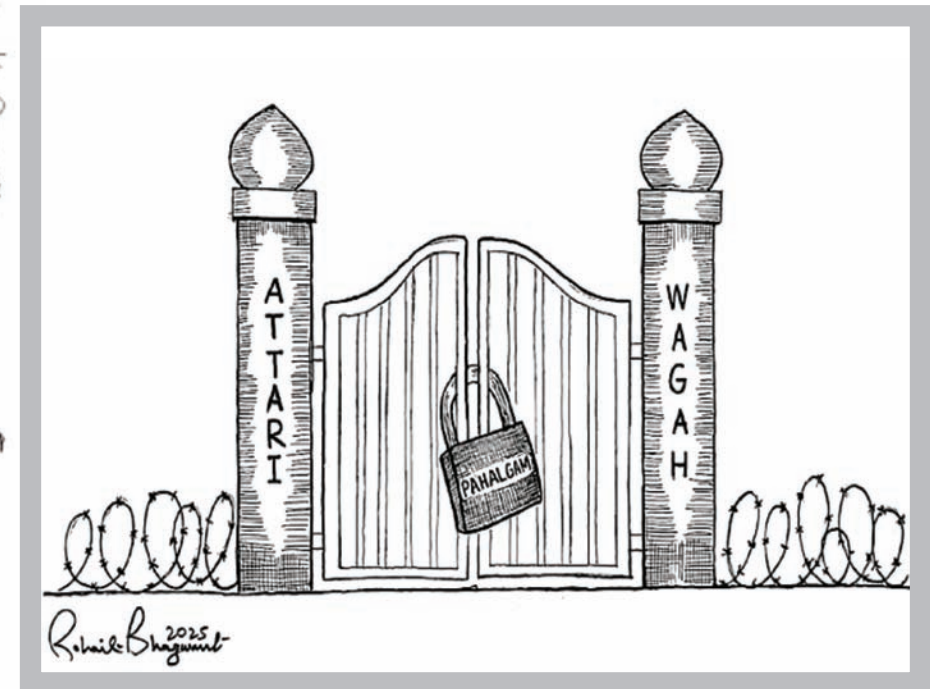
If you care about privacy, xAI's integration with X is certainly a concern. It's time to lock down your settings on the platform if you don't want to quit Musk's X just yet.

— *Courtesy: forbes.com*





Cartoons of the month



The 40-something Single dad Shaping Liberal Media from his Laptop

Acyn Torabi dominates the internet with fast-cut clips of political mayhem. Are they news, or something else?

T



Drew Harwell

he man behind the most influential progressive account on social media starts his days at 6 a.m. in front of three TV and computer screens, scanning video feeds for the gaffes and confrontations that can turn into viral gold.

Acyn Torabi isn't a Democratic star like former president Barack Obama or a liberal media giant like MSNBC. But the 40-something single dad, working from his home office in Los Angeles, has beaten them both in raw digital-attention capture, with posts seen roughly 700 million times in the last month.

Known online as @Acyn, Torabi is an industrialized viral-video machine, grabbing the most eye-catching moments from press conferences and TV news panels, packaging them within seconds into quick highlights, and pushing them to his million followers across X and Bluesky dozens of times a day.

The videos are not glitzy news-style packages, and Torabi is almost entirely unknown: Only a couple of photos of him exist on the internet, one of which shows him in a rumpled hoodie next to a pasted-in photo of his late cat.

But his videos are endlessly cited and shared, creating a first visual draft of history widely watched by journalists, news junkies and political campaigns. "I'm just one clip after another, hitting the narratives, going, going, going," Torabi said in an interview.

Torabi's rise offers a glimpse of a new



Torabi sitting in front of his screens.

generation of online journalism, in which frenetic, fast-cut video posts fuel the country's political debates. Stephen Coleman, a professor of political communication at the University of Leeds, said the videos function less like traditional news and more like entertainment or sports, because they give people something to socialize over in a short, visually compelling way.

"It's information you come across inadvertently, raw stimuli you see alongside celebrities and recipes," he said. "People want drama ... the big moments, the things they can talk about the next day."

The videos have multiplied amid social media's rapid colonization of the press, with 1 in 5 Americans — including one-

third of those under 30 — telling the Pew Research Center last year that they get their news from influencers who specialize in current events.

But they have also fueled criticism that they sometimes cut out context to score political points. When Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nation's top health official said that children with autism will never hold a job or go on a date, Torabi's excerpt from the remarks helped the controversy grow at viral speed — even as Health and Human Services officials argued that Kennedy had been referring only to “those that are severely affected.” Torabi's clip, posted on X within four minutes, has been seen 50 million times.

The risk from videos like these, Coleman said, is that they're never as impartial as they might seem. But they offer a benefit, too, in helping get people engaged in the squabbles and mechanics of civic life.

“I wouldn't want to be too snuffy about it,” he said. “It's not a choice between this and going to the library. It's a choice between this and nothing.”

When he first started clipping, Torabi had no background in journalism; he was just a software developer who spent a lot of time on Twitter. He'd grown up in California but didn't see himself as all that political: When he first registered to vote, at a gas station, he chose Republican — to match Alex P. Keaton, from the sitcom “Family Ties.” (He's since changed to Democrat.)

In 2015, Torabi was charged with computer fraud for making fake gambling accounts on a horse-racing site owned by Churchill Downs, which runs the Kentucky Derby. Torabi's lawyer told a judge at the



President Donald Trump is a common subject of Torabi's videos.

time that his client was dealing with a gambling addiction partly fueled by child custody issues and his parents facing foreclosure. A judge sentenced him to three years of probation.

Then in 2019, he tweeted a video of a confused Rudy Giuliani on Fox News that exploded across the internet. It was a rush — so he began spending his free time finding and cutting more clips, chronicling the daily twists of the news cycle, from President Donald Trump's impeachments to his pandemic response.

He did everything himself unpaid until a software company in Texas called SnapStream — whose multi-channel video feeds are used by marketing companies and newsrooms, including The Washington Post, to track and dissect live TV — started paying him for every customer he referred to the company through his viral posts. Both Torabi and the company declined to say how much he made.

In 2023, the left-wing media network MeidasTouch hired Torabi to contribute to its collection of anti-Trump videos, newsletters and social

media posts. Researchers there now help him cover some of the wayward podcasters and influencers of the conservative media universe.

Torabi often listens to multiple videos at a time and perks up when something hits what he calls his “filter” — his mental calculation of what will make a moment explode. “If I post something and it doesn't take off, I'll think, maybe my filter was a little off,” he said. “The filter adjusts by the day. It's constantly changing.”

Torabi's best-performing videos traffic in combat, from fiery CNN panels to arguments in the Oval Office. When a conservative commentator told the liberal media personality Mehdi Hasan live on TV, “I hope your beeper doesn't go off,” referencing an Israeli anti-Hezbollah operation that killed or maimed thousands of people, Torabi's video propelled the moment across X, receiving more than 70 million views. MeidasTouch's co-founder, Ben Meiselas, compared Torabi's work to the “plays of the day” segments beloved by sports fans on ESPN.

“People want to see in politics

and news and media those kinds of moments — the home runs, the dunks, the blocks, the rejections — and that never really existed before,” Meiselas said. “There is a savant-like quality to him: For sometimes 18 hours a day, he’s staring at these screens and understanding the rhythm and pace of it all ... finding these broader themes and connecting the dots.”

Torabi’s devotion has paid off: The liberal Center for American Progress’s database tracking roughly 2,000 of the top political groups and influencers across the internet shows that Torabi’s posts have been seen hundreds of millions more times in the last 30 days than news giants such as MSNBC and CNN. Ranked by views, or “total impressions,” he is the only nonconservative voice in the top 10, probably because his posts — and the ways they can help win political arguments — have bipartisan appeal.

Clips from Torabi and his biggest clipping competitor, Aaron Rupar, have faced perennial criticism from the right and left over allegations they mislead viewers. When Torabi last year posted a 17-second clip in which Trump said, “If I don’t get elected, it’s gonna be a bloodbath,” conservatives argued he had deceptively left out that Trump had been talking about the auto industry.

Some have questioned the basic value of boiling down complex political issues into sound bites — a gripe that predates the modern internet era. In 2016, the researcher Eike Mark Rinke analyzed news reports and said the growth of “morselized” news had deprived people of information about how politicians were justifying their actions, “leaving them less well equipped to make up their minds.”

But the historian Daniel Hallin,



Torabi scans the transcripts of news videos for quotes he can post on social media.

who in 1992 called sound bites “a leading cause of the low state of America’s political discourse,” told The Post that Torabi’s videos seem less like the cable-news snippets he once decried and “more similar, really, to old-style TV news, where you would hear someone speak a whole paragraph, or hear a conversation with several turns.” They did, however, work “in a similar way to set the agenda,” he said.

Short, quippy videos became a viral calling card during last year’s campaigns of Trump and his Democratic challenger Kamala Harris, as both raced to capture voters’ attention and capitalize on the other side’s mistakes. The Trump White House now employs clippers on a digital strategy team that has fired up supporters and fanned outrage for its aggressive, all-hours “rapid response.”

Graham Lampa, a director of business development at SnapStream, said Torabi’s work functions as a “scaffold for public discourse,” providing the base materials on which broader political debates are made. Though Torabi treats the work responsibly, the videos’ straightforward production

value can mask a political bent, Lampa said.

“He thinks he’s not editorializing, because he says: ‘Well, I’m just quoting people.’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah, man, but what are you choosing?’” he said. “It’s like he’s making so many statements, even if he doesn’t think he is.”

Torabi’s online fame has given him some perks, such as when the Biden administration invited him to the White House Christmas party. (He took his mom.) But there are limits: Torabi’s teenage daughter once asked if he could introduce her to DanTDM, a British YouTuber who makes videos about Minecraft. “I told her I’m not really in that category,” he said. It’s also led to some competitive tension with Rupar, a 41-year-old clipper in Minnesota with nearly 1 million X followers, who unlike Torabi started in journalism at local news outlets before gaining online fame for his viral videos covering all things Trump. “The daily mayhem” of Trump’s first presidential term, Rupar said, yielded “so many good clips.”

Rupar uses his viral clips to bring in new customers to his newsletter, Public Notice, which has more than

267,000 subscribers, and he and Torabi often race to see who can get a newsworthy moment online first. "Sometimes I'll have a clip up before him, and his will take off," Rupar said. "It's one of the mysteries of life." Torabi's ubiquity on X has been especially noticeable given how much the platform has been reshaped under Elon Musk's ownership into a central hub for conservative memes and conversation, said Waleed Shahid, a Democratic strate-

gist. But he questioned whether the videos were really breaking through as a way to teach people about the world, or just being used by those eager for something else to fight about. When clippers take things from mainstream media, "it's a way to get people talking about what the news of the day is ... and validate the political discourse," he said. "At the same time, it's just a blip on the chart." Torabi said he sees his work as a public utility for the internet,

allowing people who don't want to sift through hours of content to focus in on the most relevant or outrageous ideas. He also expects more political operators and journalists will begin moving faster, unless they want to get left behind.

"When you write an article, you're going to want to make sure everything is correct, is fact-checked, is right," he said. "By the time you guys write the article, the video is already up." ❑

TUWJ Urges Govt., to Resolve Pending Issues

Telangana State Union of Working Journalists (TUWJ) demanded the State government to resolve all long pending issues of journalists. The TUWJ State Executive Committee meeting held at Somashila in Nagarkurnool district on 21 April discussed the problems facing journalists in the state and resolved to submit memorandums to all ministers in the state urging them to use their good offices in resolving problems of journalists.

The meeting was presided over by K. Virahath Ali, President, TUWJ. K.Sreenivas Reddy, President, IJU and Chairman, Telangana media academy, Devulapalli Amar, IJU Steering Committee Member, K.Ramnarayana, General Secretary, TUWJ and Y. Narendra Reddy, Secretary, IJU, K.Ramulu, Dy. General Secretary, TUWJ participated. The Executive Committee urged the State government to act immediately on the report submitted by the



IJU President and Telangana Media Academy Chairman K. Sreenivas Reddy addressing the TUWJ State Executive Committee meeting

Committee on Accreditation Rules and issue new accreditation cards at least from July 2025. The meeting also urged Damodara Raja Narasimha, Minister for Health to convene a high level meeting to streamline the health insurance scheme for working journalists.

Addressing the meeting K. Sreenivas Reddy cautioned journalists to be alert over affects of social media and artificial Intelligence. There is a significant threat to the future of journalism including job loss and misinformation, he warned and added that to address these challenges, Media Academy would

organise a national workshop at Hyderabad shortly. He urged journalists to be vigilant, clarifying that while constitution protects freedom of expression its misuse is not protected. IJU Steering Committee Member Devulapalli Amar said that only strong movements could resolve problems of journalists.

Virahath Ali, President, TUWJ in presidential address, reiterated that the union was always maintaining political neutrality and striving to resolve problems of journalists. K. Ramnarayana, General Secretary presented activity report of the union. ❑



ABP News' Chitra Tripathi in Srinagar

TV News Studios Turn into War-Rooms

By the time you read this, India could have begun inflicting the punishment promised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Pakistan, for the atrocity in Pahalgam, J&K, in which terrorists killed 26 people including a foreign national. The people killed were tourists from different parts of the country who came to enjoy the salubrious environs of Baisaran, a verdant meadow a few km from Pahalgam.



Shaukat H. Mohammed

The writer is a senior journalist based at Hyderabad

Understandably, the Pahalgam massacre made Indians in-country and around the world angry and they were expecting the government to launch some kinetic action on Pakistan, which was blamed by the PM, without naming it. Mr Modi promised swift and terrible retribution against the terrorists and

“their backers to the ends of the earth”.

Cue the TV news media, which lost no time in baying for war. Anchors swiftly converted their TV news studios into war-rooms, where former military men and self-styled security analysts began bloviating about how India can hand out terrible retribution to the hated neighbour. Bloodcurdling “debates” with hashtags like WeWantRevenge and PakMustPay were the norm after the 22 April atrocity in Kashmir.

A former Indian Army major, Gaurav Arya, suddenly found a lucrative gig, hopping between TV studios pontificating how Pakistan can be bombed back to the Stone Age without any cost to India. He was never challenged on his prognosis. Self-styled analysts and journalists from Pakistan, with



sadomasochist tendencies, were invited on these “debates”, with the clear understanding that they would be humiliated and ground into the dust on TV for an agreed sum to be paid in US dollars.

One of the key punitive measures that the government announced against Pakistan was its decision to put the Indus Waters Treaty, signed by India and Pakistan, in 1960, in abeyance. The treaty concerns the sharing of the waters of six rivers which flow from India to Pakistan. TV news anchors immediately began shrieking that Pakistanis would soon be dropping dead like flies from thirst once India stopped the flow of river water into the neighbouring country, neglecting to mention the fact India does not yet have the facilities to store millions of cusecs of water.

It was left to the journalists running their own YouTube channels to honestly report, citing reports from Indian and foreign think-tanks, that India would need scores of billions of dollars and at least 20 years for it to build the required storage facilities to stop Pakistan from using the river waters.

A more vicious agenda of the TV news media was to link the terrorists of Pahalgam to the Muslims of India, demonising them. Dog whistles were no longer used as a camouflage to smear the minority group. The immediate fallout of this toxic propaganda on TV was that Kashmiri students in Uttarakhand were hounded out of their homes and told to leave the hill state within 48 hours or else...

Similar incidents were reported against Kashmiris in other parts of the country, which were blacked out on the TV news media. The media also blacked out incidences of



Kashmiris saving several tourists from the terrorists’ bullets.

Days after the Pahalgam massacre, celebrated TV anchors flew into Srinagar to do “ground reports”, which is shorthand for pouring more oil on the conflagration of a deeply divisive issue. Two such anchors, Rubika Liyaquat and Chitra Tripathi were hosting their “debates” from Srinagar, probably setting up a makeshift studio in the offices of the J&K Police. But, much to Ms Tripathi’s discomfiture, she was booed no end when she ventured out into a Srinagar market, so much so that she had to beat a hasty retreat with the assistance of the local police.

Meanwhile, Ms Liyaquat did not appear to fare any better than her peer because while she was in Srinagar, her guests were in other parts of the country, including semi-literate maulanas, easily identifiable by their gauzy skull caps, who gameily take the humiliation meted out mercilessly by the anchor because they get a defined sum in INR after each such verbal beating.

The drumbeat for war will surely continue whatever military action India takes, because it serves the TV

news media, which is staring at declining viewership and zero credibility.

Another issue that animated the media, before the Pahalgam atrocity happened, was the Supreme Court’s decision to hear the challenges to the Wafq (Amendment) Act passed by Parliament and signed into law by the President. TV news anchors were apopleptic with barely-controlled rage that the highest court in the land had shown the temerity to hear the challenges to the controversial act.

The media was also furious when the Supreme Court said the governors of states could not sit on bills passed their respective state governments indefinitely. The media unleashed bile against the Supreme Court by bringing in lawyers with a long history of filing provocative lawsuits to pile on in the Supreme Court, and ignored the toxic commentary against the CJI, Sanjiv Khanna, by a loose-cannon ruling party member of the Lok Sabha, who said that Khanna was responsible for the “civil wars” in the country. Plumbing newer and newer depths of depravity is something that the Indian TV news media has excelled at. 

India's Ranking in 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index Improves to 151

Increasing economic pressures serious threat to global press freedom: RSF



In the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, released by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on May 2, India ranks 151st, a slight improvement from 159th last year. Despite this progress, challenges to press freedom and journalistic independence persist.

The 2025 World Press Freedom Index, released on May 2, ranks India at 151, an improvement from 159th in 2024. Despite this shift, the country continues to grapple with substantial challenges to press freedom and media independence.

In a press statement, global press freedom activist group, Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) says that the annual report highlights worsening conditions for the press in India, pointing to increasing economic pressure on independent media, growing reliance on government advertising, and declining editorial freedom. It adds that despite the improvement, the latest ranking places India among countries with some of the most fragile media environments, raising concerns about the sustainability and independence of journalism in the world's largest democracy.

The statement adds that the report which assessed press conditions in 180 countries and territories, finds that financial instability is now more damaging to press freedom than

political repression or legal censorship.

It adds that the warning comes at a time when media outlets around the world are cutting staff, shutting operations, or becoming financially dependent on governments and corporations to survive.

The report shows that 138 of the 180 countries studied received poor scores in the economic indicator, which measures how financial conditions affect the freedom and sustainability of journalism.

RSF says that more media outlets are collapsing or compromising their editorial independence due to unstable revenue, rising production costs, and the dominance of digital platforms that take the bulk of advertising income. The shift has made it harder for journalism to stay independent and viable, even in countries where political interference is low. It adds that Christophe Deloire, Secretary-General, RSF said the core threat to journalism today is not censorship, but the collapse of its business model. He noted that even in media environments without state control, journalists are struggling to work independently due to poor funding and the growing role of financial interests in editorial decisions.

RSF's analysis shows that this pressure is present not just in low-income countries, but also in wealthy democracies.

It adds that the Index ranks countries based on five indicators, namely political context, legal framework, economic conditions, socio-cultural environment, and safety of journalists. This year's results highlight a sharp global decline in the



economic category.

According to report the findings point to major challenges in countries like Argentina, where inflation has forced major publications to reduce operations. In Tunisia, public media workers protested months-long salary delays. In Kenya, community radio stations and small publishers have shut down after the withdrawal of donor funding. Digital platforms continue to play a central role in this crisis.

RSF says that platforms like Google, Meta, and X (formerly Twitter) now dominate the flow of online news while collecting most of the advertising revenue. As a result, news publishers are left with little income to support original reporting. Many are turning to sponsored content or branded stories, which erode the distinction between journalism and public relations. This shift has also made audiences more skeptical of the media's credibility.

It adds that the financial dependence on government advertising, media ownership concentration, and legal pressure on journalists have all contributed to the weakening of press freedom. Independent digital outlets in India face difficulties raising funds, while several have shut down or downsized due to a lack of resources. The report adds that this economic fragility is often paired with political pressure, making it harder for newsrooms to operate without fear or bias. It adds that even freelance journalists, who form a growing part of the global media workforce, are struggling. Many now work under short-term contracts without job security or legal protections. In several countries, layoffs and salary cuts have pushed reporters to take on multiple roles, often with no editorial support or fact-checking. This situation has led

to a rise in burnout, self-censorship, and misinformation.

According to statement artificial intelligence is also reshaping how journalism is produced. RSF finds that many news organisations are using AI tools to replace basic reporting tasks, such as summarising press releases or generating headlines. While this may reduce costs, the report warns that over-reliance on AI could flood the media space with unverified or low-quality content. In some cases, it may also lead to further job cuts in already shrinking newsrooms.

Despite these challenges, RSF



says that solutions are still possible. The organisation recommends structural reforms to ensure that journalism remains financially sustainable and editorially independent. It urges governments to create fair and transparent support mechanisms for independent media. It also suggests that digital platforms should be taxed or required to share revenue with content producers in order to restore balance in the media economy.

According to RSF, regulation of state advertising must also be addressed to prevent political influence over media coverage.

RSF warns that underfunded and understaffed media outlets may struggle to counter disinformation and hold powerful institutions

accountable. In this environment, public trust in news continues to decline, creating space for propaganda and false narratives.

It adds that Northern European countries continue to lead the Index, with Norway ranked first for the eighth year in a row, followed by Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Finland. At the bottom are countries where the press faces violent repression, such as Eritrea, Afghanistan, North Korea and Syria. But RSF notes that this year's data shows that press freedom is no longer a problem limited to authoritarian states. Even democracies are now facing serious threats due to financial instability and the unchecked power of digital platforms. "Guaranteeing freedom, independence and plurality in today's media landscape requires stable and transparent financial conditions. Without economic independence, there can be no free press. When news media are financially strained, they are drawn into a race to attract audiences at the expense of quality reporting, and can fall prey to the oligarchs and public authorities who seek to exploit them. When journalists are impoverished, they no longer have the means to resist the enemies of the press those who champion disinformation and propaganda. The media economy must urgently be restored to a state that is conducive to journalism and ensures the production of reliable information, which is inherently costly. Solutions exist and must be deployed on a large scale. The media's financial independence is a necessary condition for ensuring free, trustworthy information that serves the public interest," says Anne Bocandé, Editorial Director, RSF. 

— *Courtesy: Media India Group*

In Gopal Gandhi's New Book, a Personal, Nuanced History of the Country he Loves

Ramachandra Guha

On April 22, 2020, I had posted a thread on Twitter (then not yet X) marking “the 75th birthday of one of the most remarkable living Indians: Gopalkrishna Gandhi, public servant, diplomat, writer and scholar”.

The thread spoke of his contributions to his country, the grace and dignity of his character and, in the end, of then personal debt I owed him. Gopal Gandhi, I wrote then, “has taught me more about modern Indian history and Mahatma Gandhi than anyone else”.

Five years on, on the eve of his 80th birthday, Gopal Gandhi has placed me (and many other Indians) even more emphatically in his debt by gifting us with a rich, nuanced, enjoyable, and immensely educative book on the progress – as well as the regress – of the Republic whose journey has run parallel with his own life.

The narrative interweaves personal memories with descriptions of larger historical events, the latter drawing on his formidable range of reading and his deep understanding of India. The prose is enriched with an array of wonderful, and often never seen before, photographs of the principal actors and incidents in the tumultuous journey of the writer and his country. And there are many tender references to individual films (made in Hindi, English, Bengali or Tamil); clearly, cinema has shaped Gopal Gandhi's life as much as literature, scholarship, and public service.

Childhood influences

The book, bearing the title, *The Undying Light: A Personal History of Independent India*, begins with a vivid account of the first, fraught years of Independence, featuring Mahatma Gandhi's last fasts and his death, and the Nehru-Patel rift and their reconciliation. The narrative then proceeds chronologically, each year marked by a short, crisp chapter devoted to it, ending with a consolidated

chapter on the last decade-and-a-half.

Born just before Independence and Partition, growing up with the Republic, Gopal Gandhi's mind was shaped by his quietly patriotic parents, Devadas and Lakshmi. Their influence on him, as of his equally remarkable siblings, Tara, Rajmohan, and Ramchandra, is sketched with love and care. Hundreds of other intriguing or influential characters people the pages of the book, from celebrated and controversial prime ministers to previously unsung teachers and social workers.

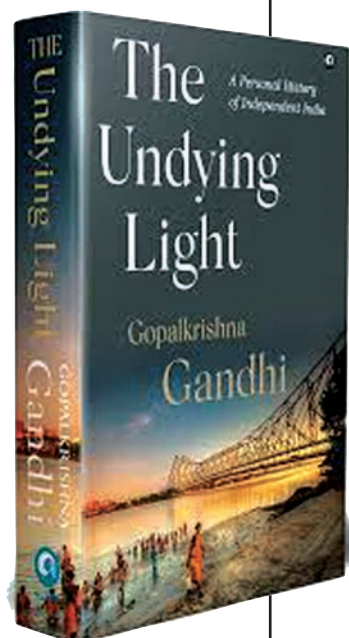
A central figure in the book is the author's maternal grandfather, C Rajagopalachari (“Rajaji”), a freedom-fighter who held high office in independent India, before leaving his once beloved Congress to found an Opposition party named Swatantra, which forcefully articulated the need to free the economy from the shackles of the state.

Gopal Gandhi terms Rajaji “the single biggest influence on my life”, from whom he “came to perceive the idea of a fair and just Constitution, a democratic republic based on equality and freedom of speech, and of a state that values above all ‘the liberty of the subject’”.

A second individual who appears at repeated intervals is the peerless classical singer, MS Subbulakshmi, a family friend whom Gopal Gandhi came to love as a little boy, and whose music and personality had an enduring impact on him.

A third major influence was the socialist and social worker, Jayaprakash Narayan, whom the young Gopal revered for “his patent sincerity, his calm eloquence, his great looks. And yes – his sophisticated English.”

BOOK REVIEW



At his admirer's invitation, JP came to lecture at Delhi's St Stephen's College at the height of the India-China conflict. "In a slow, measured, tone, he spoke extempore in the first half of what nationalism had meant in the years of the struggle for freedom – decolonization, the retrieving of self-respect, self-reliance, self-confidence with non-violent disobedience as its instrument. And in the second half of what nationalism had come to mean now – sabre-rattling, neighbour-threatening jingoism with intolerance as its fuel."

This recollection speaks directly to the present, as does the account of the government of India's attempts to eradicate English from official use in the 1960s. "I felt miserably torn," writes Gopal Gandhi: "I loved Hindi, hated its imperial pretensions. And being influenced by Rajaji's strong position on the subject, came soon to be irrevocably opposed to the proposed move."

Moving stories

The country's journey dominates the narrative, with major incidents and controversies narrated with accompanying commentary. In the background, playing the role of the violinist to a vocalist in a Carnatic concert, is the author's own journey. There is a charming set-piece on Gopal Gandhi's first posting as an IAS officer, in rural Thanjavur, where he worked with a Syrian Christian, a Tamil Jaina, and a Muslim. He writes with keen insight of his more elevated assignments (including as secretary to the president and as governor of West Bengal), and of his representing the country abroad in five separate postings, in four countries in three continents. His descriptions of South African and Sri Lankan politics are especially valuable. As the book demonstrates, Gopal Gandhi under-

stands and knows all of India, although perhaps he understands and knows the Tamils, the Bengalis, and the Dilliwalas best of all. Notably, the troubled borderlands of the Northeast and Kashmir also get their due in the narrative.

The Undying Light contains many moving stories. One relates to a visit made by Rajaji and his daughter, Namagiri, to Hyderabad after that recalcitrant feudal state finally became part of the Indian Union. The Nizam presented the daughter of the governor-general with a diamond-studded necklace. Rajaji returned it, saying such ostentatious jewellery was inappropriate to a widow, whereupon Namagiri chastised her father, saying that he should have instead told the Nizam that "we are Gandhi's disciples and do not own costly things".

Another telling tale relates to Rajaji's old friend and political rival, E Ramasamy ("Periyar"), who asked Rajaji to be a witness to his second marriage. Rajaji refused; had he agreed, says Gopal, "a great healing would have occurred in the Brahmin versus non-Brahmin discourse in the Tamil countryside."

Gopal Gandhi is deeply aware of his privileged family background, and how this often helped and occasionally hindered him. Reflecting on his childhood and the dazzling array of extraordinary individuals who came in and out of their home in New Delhi, Gopal writes that "our family with the inherited halo of 'Harijan sewa' over its head, did not count among its close friends, any Dalit. Not one. It had Muslim, Christian, and Sikh friends. It had friends from the black communities of the US, Jewish friends from across the world, but not one Indian Dalit."

The author's reflective wisdom also manifests itself in some larger

historical judgements. Here are some: "Nehru, Patel, and Ambedkar would all three be amused, dismayed, and alarmed, in turn, if they were to see how the country adulates images of them today without bothering to study their minds and messages."

"The transition from Nehru's to Indira's India was a shift from the age of earnest striving to that of fidgety acting, ... from the person – Nehru – being billeted to serve India to India being roped into the service of the person, Indira."

On Narendra Modi's tenure as PM: "He was not a new captain in the old boat, S.S. India, but a new helmsman in a new boat, S.S. Bharat. The older vessel had been powered by two jets of steam: democratic republicanism and secularism, the new one by those of majoritarian nationalism and Hindutva."

Reading this took me back a couple of hundred pages (and 30 years) in the narrative, to some excerpts from Gopal Gandhi's diary, which, with reference to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, has the comment: "After 30 January 1948 this I think is the darkest moment in India's history", and then the question: "Are we on the brink of a civilizational collapse?"

In his concluding pages, the author identifies some major problems that India faces today, among them rampant environmental destruction, sectarian hatreds, the eroding autonomy of institutions, and the weaponisation of the past. These pose enormous challenges to the ideals of the Republic that Gopal Gandhi absorbed in his youth and has so nobly embodied all his adult life. Nonetheless, the book ends with this quietly hopeful line: "India's light can dim; it cannot, will not die." ❑

— *This article first appeared in The Telegraph.*

Pratik Gandhi-Patralkhaa Film is An Inspiring Tale

Pratik Gandhi is the heart and soul of the film, Patralkhaa serves as the ideal foil



pitch-perfect Pratik Gandhi performance underwires the intrinsic authenticity of Ananth Narayan Mahadevan's Phule. But more than anything else, it is the abiding pertinence of the film's theme that sets it apart from anything that Bollywood has delivered, or is likely to produce, this year.

Phule has its share of dramatic flourishes, but it lets nothing deflect it from its resolve to bring to the big screen an essential story that is still as relevant as ever, notwithstanding a card at the end of the film (obviously at the behest of those with the power to decide what we can and cannot watch), proclaiming that the caste system is a thing of the past.

Employing unflashy but largely effective plotting devices, the film

written by Mahadevan and Muazzam Beg highlights the iniquities of the caste system and the titular 19th-century social reformer's pioneering and painstaking fight to uproot customs and practices designed to trap the underprivileged in poverty, illiteracy, and powerlessness.

Some of the film's flashpoints are elaborately staged for the camera. A few others are either only spelt out in lines of dialogue or dealt with in passing. One thing that Phule does not do is lay much store by the conventions of commercial Hindi cinema, an obvious strength that might not instantly endear it to those who are seeking more conventional entertainment.

It is the end of the 19th century. Poona, which on the screen looks more like rural than urban, is in the grip of the Bubonic plague. An ageing Savitribai Phule (Patralkhaa), wife and lifelong indefatigable associate of the now-deceased Jyotirao Phule (Pratik Gandhi), rushes to a medical camp to attend to an infected patient at great risk to her own life.

The crisis is severe but it is no more unnerving than the ones that she and her husband encountered as they went about their mission to uplift women, Dalits, and farmers. The film succeeds for the most part to capture the enormity of the task that the couple sets themselves.

In its depiction of a period of



great turmoil and a couple's concerted efforts to mitigate the sufferings of those deprived of access to social and political rights, Phule does not get ahead of itself although the temptations to do that are many and obvious.

Phule does not convey rage as much as it expresses shock and outrage. The guardians of the caste system stand in the way of the two intrepid social activists but the film makes it a point not to construct the battle in the manner of an outright good-versus-evil confrontation. The balance that underpins the film stands it in good stead.

Phule bears tell-tale signs of the modifications imposed upon it by the Central Board of Film Certification. None is as apparent as the muting (which, of course, is akin to mutilation) of the caste references in 14-year-old Mukta Salve's pioneering essay that is regarded as the first specimen of Dalit writing in Marathi.

But a handful of crucial scenes—notably one in which cow dung is hurled at Savitribai by Brahmin boys and a face-off between Jyotirao and Pune's upper caste men over the shadow that he casts in their path—are very much a part of the film.

The actors, even those that would, in formulaic cinema parlance, be designated as the bad guys (priests, scholars, and other orthodox elders who oppose the education of girls and other social and religious reforms), are allowed to largely underplay their parts.

A Hindi biopic that does not resort to distortions and selective tweaking and heightening of recorded fact is, if nothing else, a whiff of fresh air. Phule captures a time and place where those who possessed power—the British rulers, the upper caste gentry, and the religious leaders did as they wished, unmindful of

the plight of the people they oppressed.

One might fault Phule for cramming too much into its 130 minutes but there can be no denying that the film stays true to its purpose. It brings to the screen for the first time ever for a pan-Indian audience the life and times of two social reformers who laid the ground for the Dalit rights movement.

It follows the events leading up to the founding of the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth-Seekers' Society) in Pune in 1873 to address social conditions that gave undue powers to the upper caste elite and undermined the well-being of the masses.



Firm in its historicity, the screenplay extracts every bit of drama that it can from a narrative without going overboard with it.

Phule is as much about Jyotiba, whose life changes because of the Protestant education he receives, his exposure to Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, among other books, an unhappy encounter at the wedding of a Brahmin friend (this incident is mentioned, not shown), and the disagreements he has with his father Govindrao (Vinay Pathak), as it is about Savitribai, a child bride homeschooled by her husband to a point where she is ready to be trained as a teacher herself.

Savitribai's quick evolution is paralleled by that of her closest associate Fatima Sheikh (Akshaya

Gurav), a Muslim girl educated at home by her brother Usman Sheikh (Jayesh More). None of the principal characters in the film is a figment of the imagination but some of the situations that they find themselves in are often amped up for effect.

The script focuses on the many storms that the Phules weathered as they went about their urgent mission to weed out evil practices like untouchability, child marriage, and oppression of Hindu widows, and promote education for all.

Having been subjected to a flurry of bloated and shrill period dramas aimed at peddling slanted narratives of convenience, discerning Hindi movie audiences should find the factual fidelity of Phule both refreshing and surprising.

Phule tells an inspiring tale but it is not the sort of crowd-pleasing movie that could inveigle those who watch and enjoy Chhaava and Tanhaji. It is strictly for those who can separate grain from cinematic chaff. Phule has many strengths beyond the performances and the craft that has gone into its making (unflashy and to the point, cinematographer Sunita Radia and editor Raunak Phadnis do their jobs to perfection, but nothing compares with what Pratik Gandhi brings to the project. He is the heart and soul of the film and overshadows everything, and everyone else.

Patralekhaa serves as the ideal foil. Phule has notable supporting performances by Vinay Pathak as Jyotirao's conservative father, Sushil Pandey as the reformer's tetchy elder brother, Darsheel Safary as the couple's adopted son Yashwant and Joy Sengupta as a vocal Brahmin leader.

Watch Phule not only because it has something to say but also because of the way it says it—with restraint and integrity. 

— *Courtesy: ND TV*

The Sword of 'Codes'



he Central and state governments are preparing to implement Labour Codes, enacted five years back, during this financial year by notifying the rules. This long delay was due to protests by trade unions. While the notification was pending several NDA ruled states have proactively changed their labour regulations favoring the industry. But none of the states have given any thought to the demand of working journalists to restore the repealed Working Journalists and other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955 and The Working Journalists (fixation of rates of wages) Act, 1958.

Owing to the strident protests the Union government shifted the onus of labour law and governance reforms onto the state governments since 'Labour' is on the concurrent list. The states have succumbed to the industry's old demand to increase the retrenchment threshold from 100 to 300 without government approval. They also permitted fixed-term employment which gave the industry an easy tool for hiring and firing. Similarly, the number of workers has also been doubled for applicability of Factories Act.

The Working Journalists Act was brought keeping in mind the nature of work journalists do and to ensure their freedom. Certain special provisions gave special status to journalists in performing their duties. As per the Act no journalist will work for more than 144 hours in four consecutive weeks. On 'Leave' it says – earned leave with full wages for at least 11% of their duty time and medical leave at half their rate of wages for at least 1/18th of their service time. Newspaper establishments must pay gratuity to journalists who have been in continuous service for at least ten years. A key provision of the WJ Act provides for establishment of Wage Boards to fix and revise rates of wages for journalists and non-journalists. The Industrial Disputes Act 1947 applied to all working journalists with specific modifications related to notice periods on retrench-

ment.

In Labour codes, journalists are clubbed under the ambit of workers in a manner that reduces the special status with only a few of the specific protections retained. While the Codes expand the definition of 'working journalists' to cover electronic/digital media persons the existing limitation of working hours is continued. The paid leave provision is also retained. Apart from this, the Codes are fully averse to the interests of working journalists on several counts. Journalists are now wholly excluded from the ambit of Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 and they cannot claim any relief under ID Act like recovery of non-payment of wages due under the act through government.

In case of retrenchment the WJ act stipulated notice period of six months for an editor and three months for any other working journalist. Now, under the Code journalists would only be entitled to one month notice in establishments with up to 300 workers or three months in establishment with more than 300 workers. As per the WJ Act all journalists regardless of the size of the organization are mandated of gratuity payment, but now the gratuity payment is limited to organizations with ten or more workers only.

Importantly, the mandate for a wage board which decides the minimum wages after considering cost of living, the comparable rates of wages in different employments and financial health of the newspaper industry in different regions under the WJ act is done away with and the big media companies would be now statutorily mandated to only pay minimum wages.

The Labour Codes have taken away the historically achieved rights of working journalists, which will not only effect individual journalists but on larger scale the free press and thus the democracy. Now it's on all of us representing trade unions and associations to bring the government to table for meaningful discussions with all stake holders before implementing these codes.

THE LAST PAGE



By
S N SINHA

The writer is a senior journalist based in Delhi and former President, Indian Journalists Union





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