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Arresting Ambiguity!

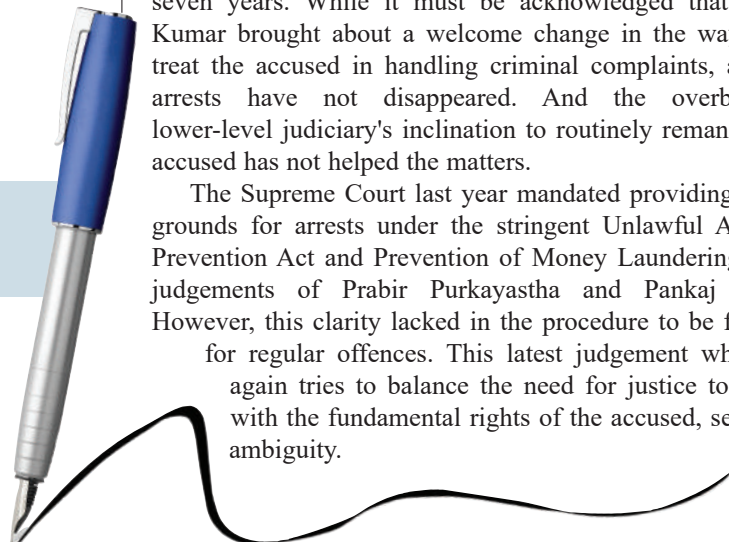
The recent judgement by the Supreme Court of India imposing mandatory safeguards to be followed in the event of police taking citizens into custody by arresting them, in order to ensure compliance with protection of fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution, is a welcome development. The apex court ruled that arrested persons must be informed of the grounds of their arrest in writing before the arrest for any offences under the new Bharatiya Nyay Samhita (BNS) and other laws.

This is an important milestone in the jurisprudence of fundamental rights as the ruling attaches unignorable and significant weight to the value of right to personal liberty guaranteed under Article 21. More importantly, the Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice B.R. Gavai and Justice Augustine Masih also said that the communication should be in a language that the recipient understands. In exceptional circumstances, the bench said, grounds can be conveyed orally at the time of arrest and the same must be given in writing within a reasonable time; at least two hours before remand proceedings.

If the landmark Arnesht Kumar Judgement by the Supreme Court in 2014 laid the foundation for safeguards against arbitrary arrests and protecting personal liberty, the latest ruling buttressed that foundation. In Arnesht Kumar, the court mandated the police to serve a written notice under Section 41A of the Code of Criminal Procedure for offences punishable up to seven years. While it must be acknowledged that Arnesht Kumar brought about a welcome change in the way police treat the accused in handling criminal complaints, arbitrary arrests have not disappeared. And the overburdened lower-level judiciary's inclination to routinely remanding the accused has not helped the matters.

The Supreme Court last year mandated providing written grounds for arrests under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and Prevention of Money Laundering Act in judgements of Prabir Purkayastha and Pankaj Bansal. However, this clarity lacked in the procedure to be followed for regular offences. This latest judgement which, yet again tries to balance the need for justice to victims with the fundamental rights of the accused, settles the ambiguity.

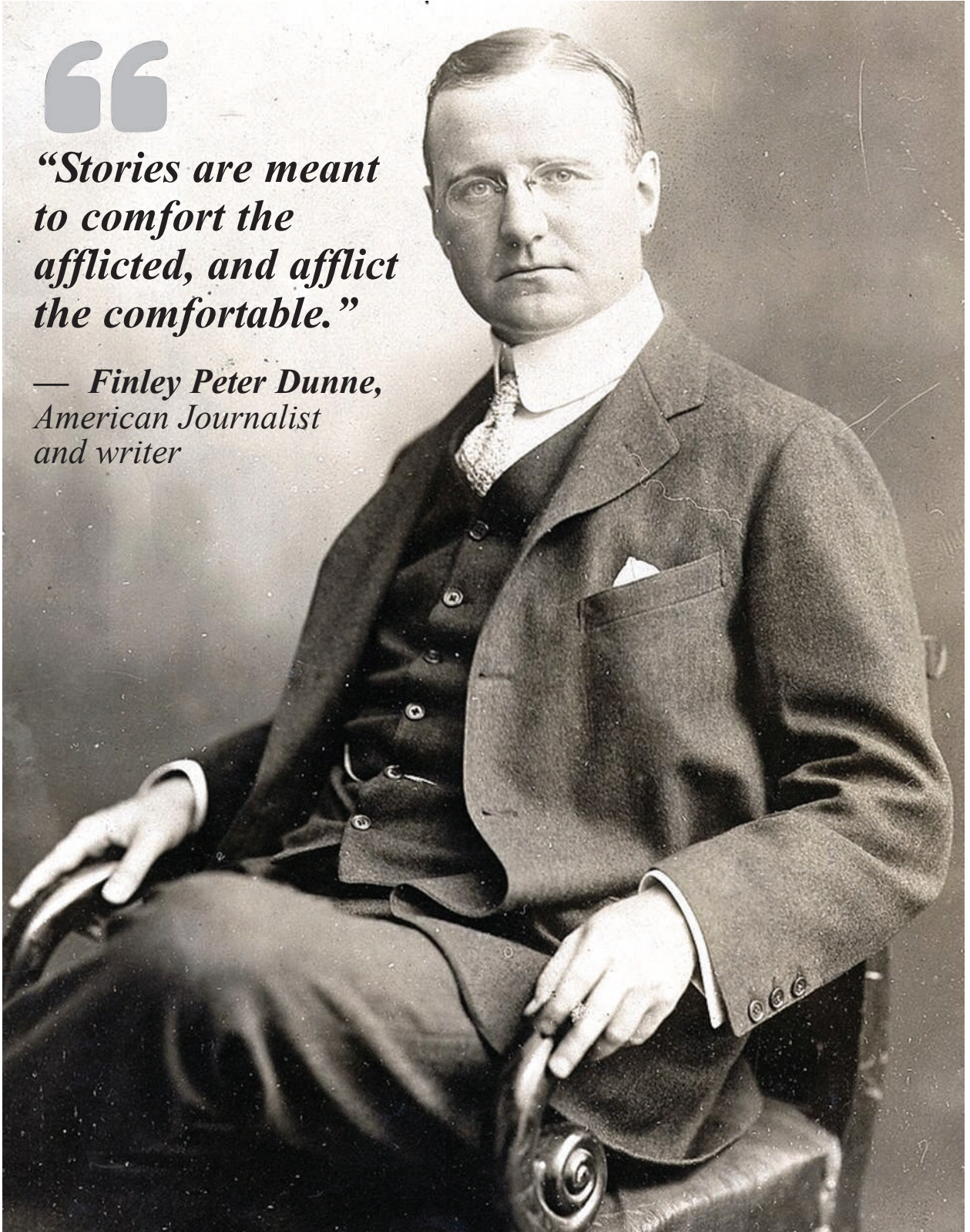
Free Frank Fearless



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*“Stories are meant
to comfort the
afflicted, and afflict
the comfortable.”*

*— Finley Peter Dunne,
American Journalist
and writer*



Space donated by a well wisher

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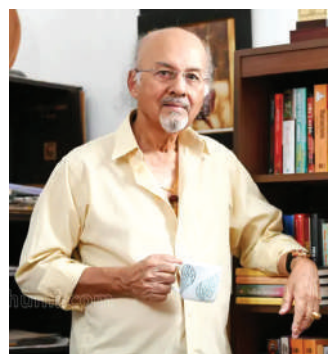


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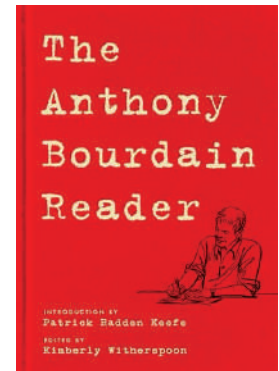


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PCI With No Effective Committee For One Year !



Nava Thakuria

The writer is a Guwahati-based independent journalist.

Now it's official: the Press Council of India (PCI), assigned to safeguard the freedom of the press in the world's largest democracy, remains non-functional for one full year. It may be astonishing for many that the billion plus nation's statutory and quasi-judicial body has no effective committee after the term of PCI's 14th council expired on 5 October 2024. No pragmatic initiatives have been taken to constitute the 15th council of the PCI. Terming the delay in the constitution of a new council as surprising, various journalist-bodies urged the concerned authorities to do the needful. Many of them also demanded to empower the PCI with bringing the news channels, radio and digital platforms under its jurisdiction and, if necessary, rename it as the Media Council of India.

Needless to mention that the PCI is an autonomous body, which was initially set up in 1966 under the Press Council Act 1965 and later re-established in 1979 following the Press Council Act 1978 with the primary objective to ensure press freedom and also improve the standards of newspapers and news agencies in the south Asian nation. The council enjoys a three-year term and the continuity broke last year as the chairperson did not initiate to constitute a new council. The PCI comprises a chairman (by convention a retired Supreme Court judge is assigned) and 28 members where 13 individuals represent the professional journalists out of whom 6 need to be editors of newspapers and 7 working journalists.

Another 6 members represent the management of newspapers (including the owners), 2 each taken from the big, medium and small newspapers, whereas 1 member represents the news agencies. Two houses of Parliament send 5 members, and 3

The Press Council of India (PCI), meant to protect press freedom and ethics, has remained defunct since October 2024. Journalists fear the absence of this watchdog weakens accountability. Media unions urge the government to reconstitute the council and expand its scope to include digital and broadcast platforms under a "Media Council."

individuals are nominated by the University Grants Commission, Bar Council of India and Sahitya Academy from the fields of education, law and literature respectively to the council. But the PCI can overview the functioning of newspapers, periodicals and news agencies only. Moreover, it enjoys limited power for enforcing guidelines and even it cannot penalize the news outlets as well as their editors and working journalists for violation of the prescribed guidelines.

India nurtures nearly 100,000 publications (endorsed by the Registrar of Newspapers for India) in various frequencies and languages including English. It also supports nearly 400 satellite news channels along with thousands of portals, Whatsapp channels and other digital outlets. The revenues collected (from both selling and advertisements) by Indian newspapers, periodicals including magazines continue to shrink after the Covid-19 pandemic as the other media outlets started dominating the financial market space. However, many print observers believe that the traditional media will slowly recover its abrupt loss. Readership is expected to resurge as digital fatigue soon drives consumers back to traditional media for reliable information. They argue that the print media outlets will increase the number of readers almost twice by 2030.

Lately, a number of media bodies have also opposed a change in the

PCI rules while picking up members from various press clubs instead of the national union of working journalists. They argue that the press clubs are mandated usually for recreational activities and their coverage areas normally stick to a particular region, city or town. Press clubs often give memberships to non-working journalists (like academicians, writers, film personalities and also diplomats) to enhance their influences. Moreover, the press club/press guild/media club cannot


Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Sikkim, etc., and thus supporting over 23,000 members, approached the court seeking justice for the professional scribes across the country. Meanwhile, All India Working News Cameramen's Association challenged the PCI for not including its members even after fulfilling all necessary criteria.

As the PCI discharges its functions primarily through adjudications on complaints received against a particular newspaper/news agency



have an all-India body with representatives from various parts of the vast country. On the other hand, the recognised journalist's unions are normally represented by the members from most parts of India.

Indian Journalists Union, having affiliates in the States and union territories like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry,

or an editor/working journalist alleging professional misconduct deteriorating the standard of journalistic behaviours, it needs to be in an alert mode always. It has also the authority to make observations if the conduct of the government is found not appropriate in regard to the guaranteed freedom of the press and hence the council should be reactivated and realigned. Moreover, the Union information & broadcasting ministry should initiate to include all kinds of media outlets under its purview with no delay. 



Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Prem Chand Bairwa inaugurating the NEC meeting (right); IJU members who participated in the event (left).

IJU's National Executive Meets in Jaipur, Calls for Journalist Protection and Restoration of Benefits

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he National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting of the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) was held in the Pink City of Jaipur in Rajasthan. The two-day meeting, held on October 4 and 5, saw the participation of around 60 senior journalists and union representatives from across the country.

At the meeting, members discussed the current challenges facing journalists and the media industry, including issues of safety, wages, and press freedom. The event was inaugurated by Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Prem Chand Bairwa, who described journalists as the fourth pillar of democracy. He stressed that the credibility of print media remains strong even in the digital age.

Urban Development Minister Jhabar Singh Kharra and Finance Commission Chairman Dr. Arun Chaturvedi attended the opening session as special guests. Dr. Chaturvedi said that in the era of social media, delivering truthful and reliable news has become a major challenge for professional journalists.


IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy

presided over the meeting and emphasised the need to implement the Majithia Wage Board across all states and demanded that the Centre restore the Working Journalists Act. IJU General Secretary Balwinder Singh Jammu reiterated the union's long-pending demand for a Journalist Protection Bill to ensure safety and security for media professionals. The meeting, hosted by the Rajasthan Journalists Council, included representatives from Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tripura, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and other states. Rajasthan Journalists Council President Rohit Kumar Soni, Executive President Giriraj Agarwal, and General Secretary Ramesh Yadav welcomed the guests with traditional turbans and shawls. The delegates discussed the need for health insurance, pension, and provident fund facilities for journalists, besides fair wages and working conditions.

Three major resolutions were passed during the meeting. The first condemned the growing trend of false or motivated

cases being filed against journalists for performing their professional duties and called upon state governments to stop the harassment of working journalists. The second resolution demanded the immediate restoration of railway travel concessions that were withdrawn during the Covid period.

The facility had earlier allowed working journalists to travel at 50 percent concessional rates.

The union urged the government to resume it, calling it a symbolic gesture of support to the media fraternity. The third resolution proposed a uniform pension policy for journalists across states, ensuring a minimum monthly pension of Rs 20,000 to veteran journalists. During the concluding session, IJU Central Election Officer Mahesh Babu Sinha announced the results of the recent elections. Balwinder Singh Jammu from Punjab was declared the new IJU President and D. Somasundar from Andhra Pradesh the new General Secretary. The meeting also resolved to hold the 11th IJU Plenary at Amaravati, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh, in early 2026, which will see the participation of around 250 delegates from across India. Speakers from various states shared updates on local union activities. The Jaipur NEC meeting ended with a call for unity among journalists and stronger coordination between state and national unions. 




Participants at the TUWJ conference held near Hyderabad

Telangana Journalists Union Warns of Statewide Stir Over Unresolved Issues

The Telangana State Union of Working Journalists (TUWJ) has warned that a statewide agitation would be inevitable if the government continues to ignore the problems faced by journalists. At the state executive meeting held on November 6 at Pragati Resorts in Shankarpalli on the outskirts of Hyderabad, state union president K. Virahat Ali chaired discussions on the main issues confronting journalists, including housing, health schemes, and the delay in issuing accreditation cards.

The meeting expressed disappointment that nearly two years after the current government assumed office, little progress has been made in addressing long-pending demands. Members recalled that under the previous government, the union had launched several movements to draw attention to similar concerns. Addressing the meeting, IJU National President and Media Academy Chairman K. Sreenivas Reddy said the government had shown a positive approach toward resolving journalists' problems, adding that high-level discussions were already underway. He also announced that preparations are underway for the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) National Plenary, to be held in Vijayawada in the

first week of February. Ahead of the plenary, state-level conferences will be organized in Hyderabad, Warangal, and Karimnagar in January to mobilize participation and awareness. The executive reviewed union activities since the last meeting and congratulated the newly elected Hyderabad Press Club committee. State General Secretary K. Ramnarayana presented a report on various activities undertaken by the committee since the last executive meeting. Members also observed a moment of silence in memory of 16 journalists who passed away recently.

Former IJU National President Devulapalli Amar, Steering Committee member M.A. Majid, National Secretary Y. Narender Reddy, National Executive Member K. Satyanarayana, State Vice Presidents B. Sampath Kumar and Gadipalli Madhu Goud, Secretaries Kompalli Srikanth Reddy and G. Madhu Goud, Treasurer Mote Venkat Reddy, as well as leaders of the State Small and Medium Newspapers Association Yusuf Babu and Ashok, alongside executive members, presidents, and secretaries from 30 districts, participated in the meeting, which was hosted by the Rangareddy district branch of TUWJ. 

APUWJ to Host IJU 11th Plenary in Amaravati After 32 Years

D. Soma Sundar

IJU Secretary

Preparations for the successful conduct of the 11th plenary of the IJU in Amaravati (Vijayawada), the new capital city of Andhra Pradesh, are now underway. A reception committee has been formed with eminent personalities from different walks of life in the Amaravati region.

Mr. Kesineni Shivanadh, Member of Lok Sabha from Vijayawada and Chairman of the Andhra Cricket Association, will be the Chief Patron, Alapati Suresh Kumar, Chairman, CR Media Academy, Andhra Pradesh, will be the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

I. V. Subba Rao, President of the APUWJ, will be the General Secretary, and K. Jayaraj, General Secretary of the APUWJ, will be the Treasurer of the Reception Committee. The Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ) decided to host the IJU 11th Plenary in Amaravati (Vijayawada) at its extended State Executive Committee meeting held on 4 November 2025 in Vijayawada. The committee decided to hold the plenary in the first week of February 2026. The meeting was presided over by I. V. Subba Rao, President of the APUWJ. All EC members, district presidents, secretaries, convenors of all 28 district units of the APUWJ, and presidents and general secretaries of the affiliate state unions of the APUWJ participated in the meeting enthusiastically.

IJU President and Chairman, Telangana Media Academy, K. Sreenivas Reddy; Chairman, CR Media Academy, Andhra Pradesh,



IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy addressing members of the APUWJ at the extended State Executive Committee meeting in Vijayawada on November 4.

Alapati Suresh Kumar and IJU Secretary, D. Soma Sundar were present at the meeting.

APUWJ General Secretary K. Jayaraj presented a report on the activities of the union since the State Executive held on 26 July 2025 in Eluru.


K. Sreenivas Reddy, speaking on the occasion, briefed the meeting about the decisions taken at the NEC meeting of the IJU held recently in Jaipur. He informed the gathering of the NEC decision to hold the 11th plenary in Andhra Pradesh.

He recalled that the 2nd plenary of the IJU was held in 1992 in Vijayawada, where he was elected for the first time as Secretary General of the union. He also recalled that the 7th plenary of the IJU was held in 2011 in Hyderabad. On both occasions, the APUWJ was the host and had organized the plenaries efficiently, he noted.

After a gap of 32 years, it is now the turn of the APUWJ, after the state bifurcation, to host the 11th plenary of the IJU. He expressed confidence in the APUWJ leadership, noting that it has the organizational strength and experience to handle such responsibilities. He further said that around three hundred delegates from affiliate state unions from 27 states will attend the plenary.

Sreenivas Reddy added that during the three-day plenary, delegates will discuss issues concerning changes in the profession, media freedom, ethics, professional standards, attacks on media persons, working conditions, wages, and other matters.

CR Media Academy, Andhra Pradesh Chairman Alapati Suresh Kumar, addressing the meeting, advised the formation of different sub-committees to handle tasks related to the successful conduct of the plenary. He also asked the Vijayawada Committee to make all-out efforts to ensure the plenary is a grand success. After thorough deliberations, the meeting decided to form a Reception Committee with prominent citizens of Vijayawada, including people's representatives, civil society leaders, and media personalities. The committee will co-opt eminent personalities from various fields as vice presidents, secretaries, and executive members of the Reception Committee. The meeting also decided to bring out a souvenir on the occasion of the 11th plenary of the Indian Journalists Union. A Souvenir Committee was appointed with D. Soma Sundar, Secretary, IJU, as the convenor.

The IJU and APUWJ leaders approached several prominent personalities on 3 and 4 November. 



Kashmir Journalists Alarmed by New Govt Order on Background Checks

Kashmir journalists demand withdrawal of order seeking salary slips and personal details amid surveillance fears.


J

Brijesh Singh

Journalists across Kashmir have expressed alarm over a recent directive issued by the Department of Information, Jammu and Kashmir, requiring media professionals to submit detailed background information and six months' salary slips. The order, dated October 31, issued by the Joint Director of Information, Kashmir, demands all District Information Officers maintain a verified list of accredited journalists and monitor misuse of media credentials or attempts to malign officials.

Many journalists describe the move as a new form of harassment targeting independent and social media reporters, who fear it will intensify restrictions on press freedom in the region. Anonymously, some journalists revealed being questioned about their workplaces, income sources, and alleged

"anti-national" reporting, despite asserting they only report facts. Several pointed out that payment from grants or foreign media might now be misconstrued as acts against the state. The directive mandates submission of extensive documentation, including Aadhaar and PAN cards, appointment letters, bank or salary statements, academic certificates, and social media links affiliated with journalists or their organizations. Independent journalists worry this could deepen mistrust and place them under heightened scrutiny.

Speaking on the issue, the Press Club of Kashmir condemned the directive, calling it a reaction to a "one-sided article" and warning that it will worsen the atmosphere of distrust within the Valley's media circles. Efforts to justify the order cite protecting journalism's sanctity and combating fake journalists, but critics argue it may undermine independent voices crucial for democratic reporting. 

— Courtesy The Indian Witness



Bihar Elections Take Centre-stage

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Shaukat H. Mohammed

The writer is a senior journalist based at Hyderabad

The Indian TV news media got a load of ed meat in the past one month with the elections to the Vidhan Sabha in Bihar. The media got to work since the polling days were announced by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in early October.

As was to be expected, most of the election coverage was slanted towards the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which includes the JDU, the BJP and other smaller regional parties. It was as if the TV news media had decided that the NDA would be winning the election even before the first vote was cast.

There were almost endless debates, right from October, focusing on the alleged "jungle raj" of the Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi era from

1990 to 2005, with the attempt being to link Tejasvi Yadav, who has been nominated as the chief ministerial candidate of the Mahagathbandhan (MGB), to the alleged dodgy actions of his father. Tejasvi had been 8 years old when his father Lalu Prasad left office in 1997, but that did not detain the TV news media from trying and link him to the alleged corruption of Lalu Prasad while in office. Guilt by association.

The media was equally dismissive of the grave allegations levelled by Rahul Gandhi, MP and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, against the ECI. Gandhi accused the ECI of creating thousands of bogus voter IDs in the elections to the Haryana Vidhan Sabha last year. In his presentation at a press conference in New



Delhi, Gandhi claimed that a Brazilian model's image had been used multiple times to create fake voter IDs. Over 20 votes had been used to cast fake ballots in the Haryana elections, using the same model's image on the cards, he claimed.

The media did its best to shift attention from the questions about the integrity of the electoral process in the Haryana election, making only a passing mention of Gandhi's accusations while giving more airtime to Kiran Rijju, a Cabinet minister, who made light of the charges.

Soon the Brazilian model who was apparently given a starring role, without her consent, of course, on Indian voter ID cards, made an appearance on a personal video vlog. Speaking in Portuguese, she demanded to know why the EC in India had used her image. The news media turned that around to say that the model was questioning Rahul Gandhi's motivations on exposing the alleged EC fiddle.

The TV channels also made light of the fact that Rakesh Sinha, a professor of political science at Motilal Nehru College in New Delhi, had voted both in the election to the New Delhi Vidhan Sabha on 5 February and in the first phase of the Vidhan Sabha election in Bihar on 6 November.

Voting in two different elections is a cognisable offence, per the CEC Gyanesh Kumar, but the media led with Rakesh Sinha's in-your-face declaration that he voted in the Bihar election because he is originally from Bihar.

Reporters did not ask the former Rajya Sabha member, Rakesh Sinha, whether he had relocated to the Begusarai in Bihar, after quitting his job in New Delhi. They did not ques-



tion the ECI whether there were hundreds, if not lakhs, of Rakesh Sinhas voting in elections in different states. It was as if Rakesh Sinha and others like him had impunity to break the law without legal consequences.

Another topic which exercised the TV news media in India was the election of Zohran Kwame Mamdani as the mayor of New York City (NYC) in the US. NYC is the financial capital of the world and is home to 8.5 million people.

It has an annual budget of over USD 110 billion, which is equal to the annual budgets of Maharashtra and Odisha combined. Much of the Indian media highlighted only his identity as that of a Muslim, and not the fact that he had won the mayoralty by defeating most of the Democratic party machine, and the pressure from US President Donald J. Trump who called upon New Yorkers not to vote for Mamdani.

There were constant "debates" on TV highlighting Mamdani's past remarks on Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu, to drive home the point that he is "anti-India" and "anti-Hindu". To no one's surprise, they also roped in Netanyahu's name into the "debates" because Mamdani

had said he would "arrest" the indicted war criminal if he set foot in New York City. Mamdani will have no such power, because visits by foreign dignitaries are handled by the US State Department, which also provides security to them jointly with the NY Police Department.

The media did not cover itself with glory when ABP News, a Hindi TV news channel, deleted an explosive interview with R.K. Singh, a former Union minister for power in Modi's Cabinet.

Singh, a former bureaucrat and MP, who lost the Lok Sabha election from the Arrah constituency in Bihar, claimed in the interview that the Bihar government had signed a sweetheart deal with Gautam Adani, under which Adani would build a 2,400 Mw thermal power plant in Bhagalpur district of Bihar.

Singh claimed that Adani had been permitted to get windfall gains of Rs 62,000 crore over the 25-year lifespan of the Bhagalpur plant. ABP quietly yanked the interview from its online edition and social media handles, because apparently NDA did not want the interview to be widely disseminated, possibly affecting the electoral outcome in Bihar. ❏

B A C K S T O R Y :

As Bihar Votes, Does Media Care About the Shadows Over India's Electoral System?

This lack of media interest in unpacking the full implications of SIR reveals by extension their indifference to the flourishing of democracy in the country.



Pamela Philipose



What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow, or so goes a much cited adage. But really, it should be: “If Bihar sneezes, the whole country catches a cold”. What happens in Bihar impacts the entire country in direct and indirect ways. Even India’s demographic transition is crucially dependent on Bihar.

While most of the country has reached replacement levels in terms of population growth, it will take Bihar another decade to catch up. Yet the state remains one of our most intriguing, not just because two religions – Sikhism and Buddhism – have deep roots there, but also for its capacity to throw up endlessly intriguing curiosities. How, for instance, does a state with the poorest literacy rates in the country enjoy such high levels of political awareness? This must have something to do with its vibrant media scene. While both newspaper readership and television viewership have been declining in the rest of the country, Bihar has bucked the trend.

The Audit Bureau of Circulation

figures put newspaper circulation growth at an impressive 3% in the first six months of this year, which is perhaps why BJP swamped newspapers in Patna with their ads on November 6 when the first phase of polling began. This period, according to the model code of conduct of the Election Commission of India (ECI), is part of the 48 hours of pre-election silence, but does the ruling party care?

How does a state close to some of the largest swathes of Hindutva-soaked regions in the country remain true to the multiplicities of its social multitudes?

The fact that the BJP, with all its bottomless resources, has been forced to use an ailing Nitish Kumar as its political prop for more than three terms, a crutch which it has not been able to discard in all these years, try as it might, tells you a great deal about the peculiar DNA of this state.

It should not surprise us then that the ECI chose this state to introduce its special intensive revision (SIR). Bihar’s unusual recalcitrance to BJP’s charms over the years has certainly something to do with it. Could SIR then essentially be a surgery to neatly excise those elements that stand in the way of the party’s grabbing the third most populous state in the country for

itself and thus, insert that frustrating missing bobble into its jigsaw map of the Hindi heartland?

Despite the indubitable importance of SIR, despite being the backdrop against which the present election was staged, it has remained a mere footnote, if even that, in mainstream media coverage thus far. This silence reflects disturbing media complicity with the stratagems of a discredited ECI.

As former Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa observed in a piece for the India Forum: “It is hard to recall any other decision by the ECI that sparked as much controversy as its move to conduct the SIR in Bihar to check voter eligibility... announced in a press note on 24 June 2025.”

This lack of media interest in unpacking the full implications of SIR reveals by extension their indifference to the flourishing of democracy in the country. In any case, at least a third of what goes by the term “media” in India today is owned by oligarchs, so why should they?

Their response to the third press conference (November 5) that the Congress President Rahul Gandhi conducted on ‘vote chori’ or the ‘stolen vote’, slid off their screens like water off a duck’s back. The central issue here was that 25 lakh votes in Haryana could have been manipulated, ensuring that the BJP got to rule the state once again. The seriousness of this charge did not stir them. Instead a familiar template was set into motion.

It had three dimensions: one, the first responders were not so much the media or the ECI, but the BJP rushing to the defence of the latter. This was followed by a competitive drive among media houses to charge Gandhi with having lied. The BJP



spokesperson’s line became their cue: “Rahul is cooking up excuses for the impending loss in Bihar”, which was then amplified ad nauseam in show after show; newspaper report after newspaper report.

The third element was all about diversion. The story now became about the “Brazilian model” whose face was used to create false electoral ids. It was her shocked reactions that filled a lot of air time and newsprint, and proved exceedingly useful in taking audience attention away from the serious charge that dummy candidates were being used for fake voting.

If the most important element of the Bihar election – the possible mass manipulation of the electoral rolls – did not create a resonance with the media, neither did actual realities playing out in the field. The coverage followed an old, worn-out formula: saturation coverage of the prime minister’s campaign. This cult building began early.

In July, joint posters of Narendra and Nitish appeared, with the former’s face in the foreground and inflated just that little bit. By September, a film on Modi’s early life, *Chalo Jeete Hai*, was shown in all 243 constituencies of the state. By early October, the election sched-

ule was announced and attention was now on the October 24 rallies of Modi in Samastipur and Begusarai, with all his favoured tropes from “RJD’s jungle raj” to “NDA’s vikas”.

Every one of those herded into these campaign sites had heard them before, but the media had not lost their appetite for spinning the tale. By early November, the media’s Modi mania had reached fever pitch. To get a sense of this, India Today’s coverage of the November 2 road show in Patna should suffice. It combined hyper-excited commentary with hyperbolic headlines: ‘3-Km Long, Patna Modi’s Power Parade’.

For over 11 years, we have had this blind, cult-building being passed off by the mainstream media as “election coverage”. If any serious reporting has taken place on these elections, it is because of the under-resourced, often targeted YouTuber, with mike and camera in hand. Some of the most striking soundbites from this election have come not from the noisy NOIDA channels but from real journalists like Ajit Anjum, whose brilliant and courageous exposure of how the electoral roll revision in Begusarai was being manipulated on the ground won him a FIR.

— Courtesy The Wire

Martyr Kartar Singh Sarabha: Pitamah of Punjabi Journalism



artyr Kartar Singh Sarabha was a fearless and unique Punjabi journalist who exposed the truth in an extraordinary way, earning him the title of the Pitamah of Punjabi journalism. He was not only a young revolutionary but his satirical writings in Punjabi about the Ghadar Movement elevated Punjabi journalism to its pinnacle. He was a writer, editor, and publisher, and he brought his life to such a point that he became immortal.

Early Life and Education

Kartar Singh Sarabha was born on May 24, 1896, in the village of Sarabha in Ludhiana district, Punjab, to mother Sahib Kaur and father Mangal Singh Grewal. His father died in his childhood and he was raised by his grandfather Badan Singh. He started his early education in the nearby village of Gujjarwal and studied up to the eighth grade at Malwa Khalsa High School in Ludhiana. In 1912, at the mere age of 16, he went to America for higher studies. He was admitted to the Berkeley University of California. He also worked in a factory in Astoria, Oregon. Here, the racial discrimination faced by Indian labourers deeply shook him and he joined Berkeley's Nalanda Club.

Joining the Ghadar Movement in America and the Journey in Journalism

A historical note by Baba Jwala Singh mentions that when he went to Astoria, Oregon in December 1912, he found Kartar Singh working in a mill. At just 16 years of age,



Santokh Gill


*Organising Secretary,
Panjabi and Chandigarh
Journalist's Union*

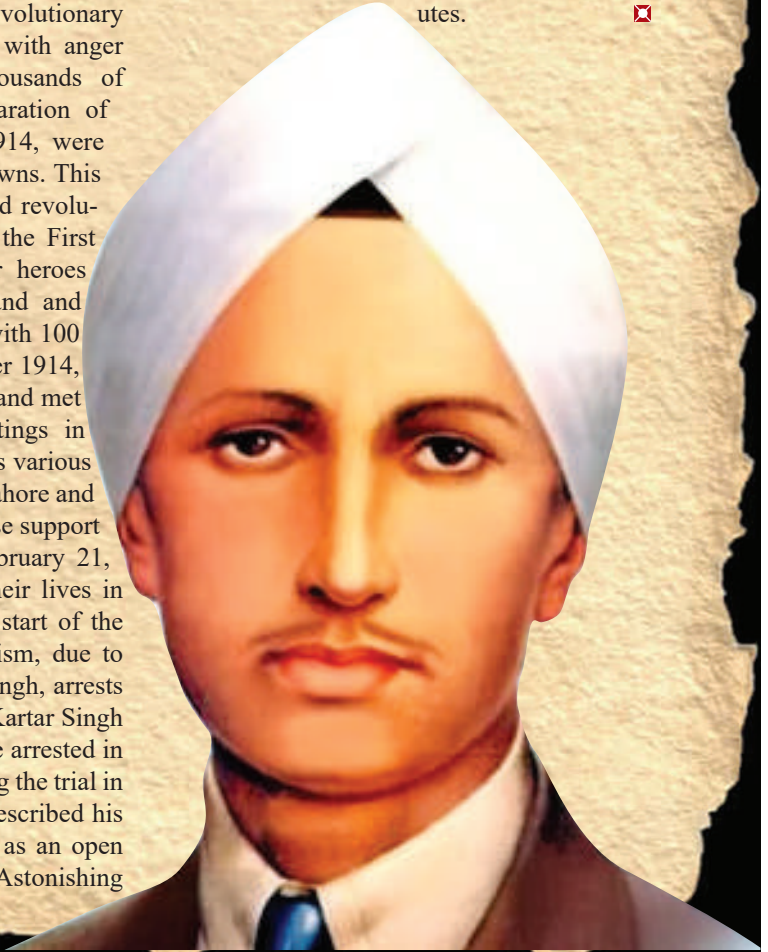
MEDIA MEMOIRS

Kartar Singh came into contact with Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, the president of the Ghadar Party and secretary Lala Hardayal and joined the Ghadar Party. This laid the foundation for an armed struggle against British imperialism in India. Baba Bhakna addressed Kartar as "Bala Jarnail" (Young General) and trained him in handling weapons, making bombs and flying aeroplanes. Kartar Singh Sarabha entered the field of journalism as the editor of the Punjabi edition of the Ghadar newspaper. The Ghadar newspaper was launched on November 1, 1913 and was published in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, and Pashto languages. Kartar took responsibility for the Gurmukhi (Punjabi) edition and began printing the newspaper using a hand-operated machine. His revolutionary poems and articles filled people with anger against British imperialism. Thousands of copies of the issue titled "Declaration of War," published on August 5, 1914, were distributed in various cities and towns. This became the first platform to spread revolutionary ideas in Punjabi. During the First World War in 1914, the Ghadar heroes planned to return to the homeland and Kartar secretly travelled by ship with 100 pistols and ammunition. In October 1914, he reached Calcutta via Colombo and met Ras Bihari Bose. He held meetings in Ladhawal and also travelled across various military cantonments, including Lahore and Rawalpindi, attempting to galvanise support for an uprising scheduled for February 21, 1915. As some Ghadarites lost their lives in bomb explosions, just before the start of the rebellion against British imperialism, due to the betrayal by informer Kirpal Singh, arrests began on February 19. However, Kartar Singh Sarabha and other Ghadarites were arrested in Sargodha on March 2, 1915. During the trial in the Lahore Ghadar Case, Kartar described his actions not as a "conspiracy" but as an open fight against the British Empire. Astonishing

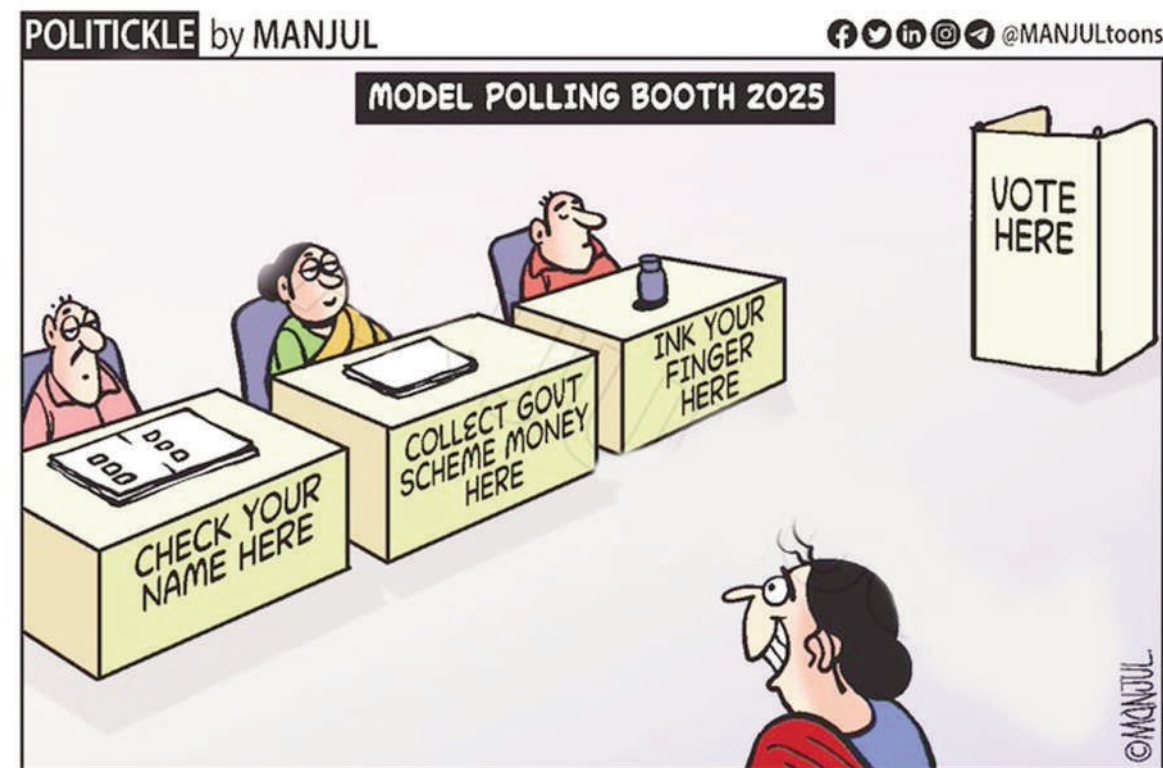
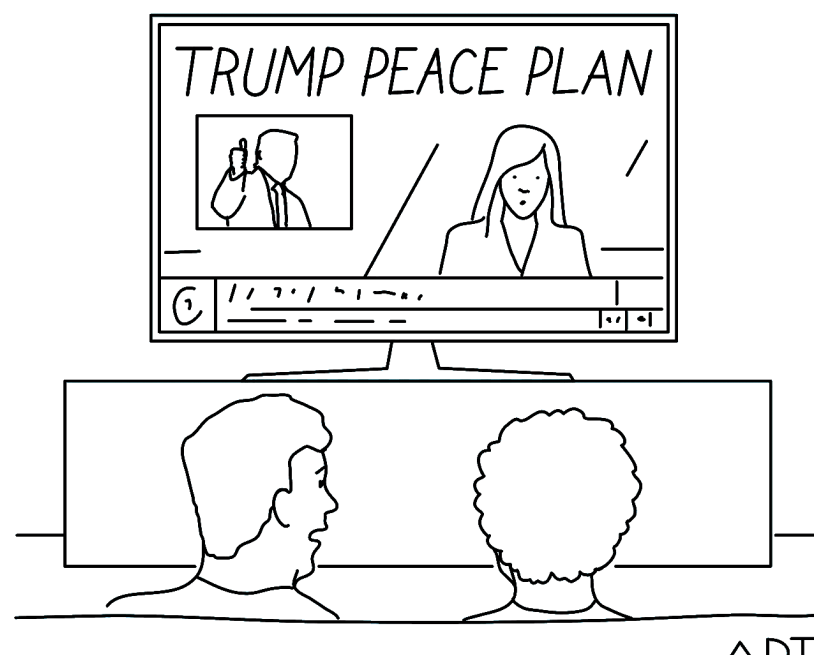
the judge, he said:

"If I had more lives than one, it would have been a great honour to me to sacrifice each of them for my country."

On November 16, 1915, at just 19 years of age, he was hanged in Lahore Central Jail. His legacy is immortal. Bhagat Singh considered him his source of inspiration and always kept his photo in his pocket. Kartar Singh Sarabha's ideas continue to inspire Punjabi journalism and symbolize fearlessly and uniquely exposing the truth. The Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union, to pay homage to Martyr Kartar Singh Sarabha's martyrdom, will observe a fortnight from November 16 to November 29 and hold its state conference on November 29, 2025, in Barnala to offer tributes. 



CARTOONS OF THE MONTH



The Silent Crisis in Journalism Education



The rapid evolution of journalism careers in recent years underscores just how much the media landscape has changed and why traditional institutions that failed to keep pace have lost their appeal among younger aspirants

T

**Kilara Vikram
Hegde**

here was a time when, if a college offered a journalism course, the entire campus would buzz with the energy of those students. The sight of students roaming around all day with a camera in hand or searching for a story to write.

Once upon a time, Mangalore University's Journalism Department was filled with the lively spirit of such students. Today, that department stands shuttered. The Indian Institute of Journalism & New Media (IIJNM) College, which was once the most

sought-after college where even average students couldn't get a seat, now struggles to fill its seats. So, where did all those journalism aspirants go?

When it became known that universities such as Mangalore University and Bangalore North University, and private institutions such as the IIJNM, had closed their journalism departments due to a lack of student applications, people thought it was a tragedy. But in reality, it wasn't a tragedy; it was simply that these institutions failed to adapt

to the changing trends in journalism.

Before the pandemic, print and electronic media dominated the field. But after COVID-19 struck, they began to lose ground in expanding their reach. Meanwhile, digital media a newer, more dynamic form sprang to life and succeeded in reaching audiences worldwide. During this transformation, some reputed journalism colleges and universities in the country were still teaching outdated lessons, such as how to write a 'letter to the editor'. During this same period, tech-savvy journalism students realised there was no real future for them if they stuck to conventional journalism methods.

However, that wasn't the full truth either. Media platforms that offered practical exposure opened new opportunities for journalism students. In these spaces, classes were not taught by people who had once been journalists and later moved to teaching, as was the case in traditional institutions. Instead, practising journalists themselves started teaching students.

Institutions such as the Asian College of Journalism (ACJ), through collaborations with The Hindu and Reuters, began offering students the chance to work on real newsroom stories. Similarly, the India Today Media Institute (ITMI) and Bennett University's Times School of Media integrated hands-on training with their media group's TV and digital platforms, allowing students to produce stories that reached



national audiences. Even newer digital platforms like The News Minute and Youth Ki Awaaz opened their virtual newsrooms to students, offering them exposure to real-time reporting and multimedia storytelling.

There, the curriculum went beyond just print and electronic media; experienced professionals from radio, public relations, social media, and digital marketing also shared their knowledge. This approach helped students open their eyes to the new world of journalism.

The rapid evolution of journalism careers in recent years underscores just how much the media landscape has

changed and why traditional institutions that failed to keep pace have lost their appeal among younger aspirants.

Journalism schools should com-

prehensively review and update their curricula to align with current industry standards and technological advancements, including integrating digital media, multimedia storytelling, and data journalism as core components to prepare students for the modern media landscape, rather than focusing primarily on traditional journalism.

Institutions must also establish structured partnerships with media organisations through guest lectures, collaborative projects, and internships, invest in continuous professional development for faculty to keep pace with industry trends, strengthen graduate employability by enhancing career services and placement opportunities, and reevaluate financial models to make education more affordable through revised fees and increased scholarships.

By adopting these measures, journalism schools can effectively address current challenges and play a crucial role in shaping a dynamic, relevant, and future-ready media industry, supported by collaboration among academia, industry, and government.

— Courtesy Deccan Herald

Before the pandemic, print and electronic media dominated the field. But after COVID-19 struck, they began to lose ground in expanding their reach.

When TJS Saw Hell and Heaven in Prison



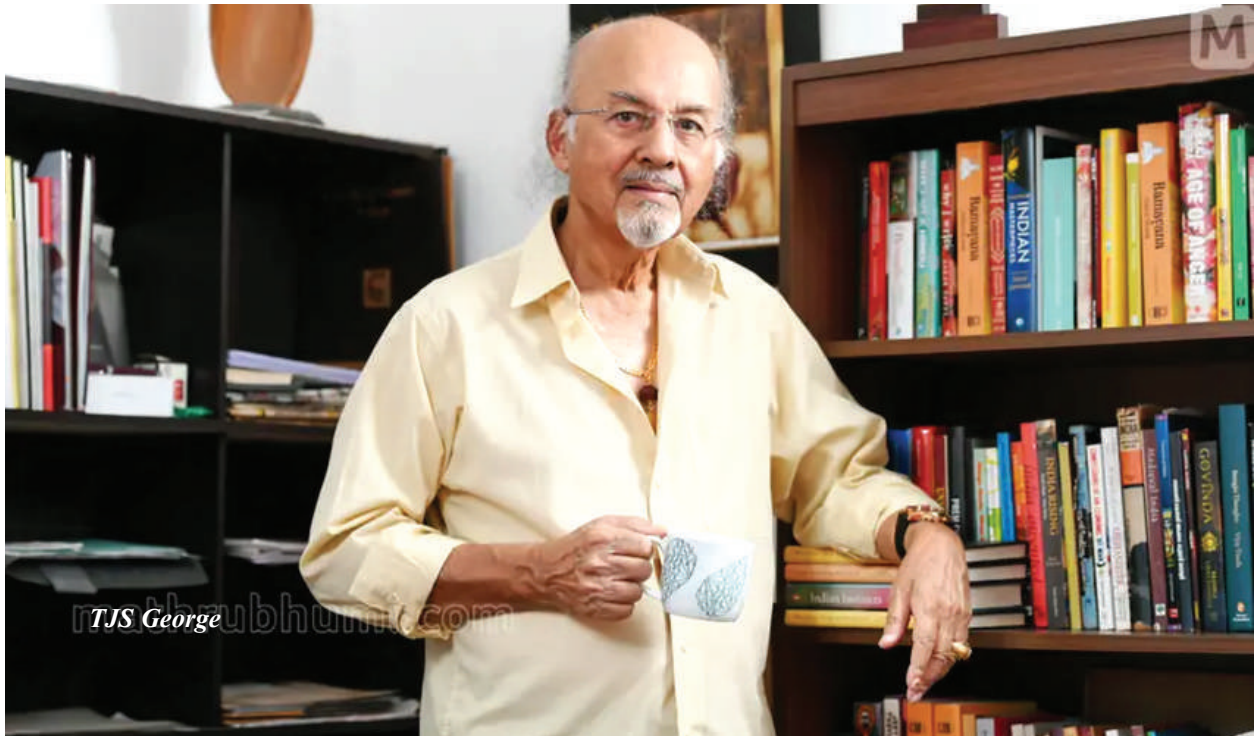
MG
Radhakrishnan

S George, who left us the other day, was perhaps the last of the great journalists from Kerala born before Independence who went on to make an indelible mark on India's national media landscape. That illustrious league had included names such as the brothers George and Pothan Joseph, Karunaka Menon, T.M. Nair, M. Sivaram, Edathatta Narayanan, Shankar, C.P. Ramachandran, B.G. Verghese, and O.V. Vijayan.

Like most in that distinguished list, TJS spoke truth to power till his last breath. His integrity—both professional and personal—was beyond reproach. Yet, he stood apart in one crucial respect: he was the first editor in independent India to be arrested for sedition. He also holds the rare distinction of having founded a publication abroad -Asiaweek- that was later acquired by none other than Time magazine. Despite a long and glittering career, TJS lacked the common journalistic vanity—the urge to talk about oneself. What he truly excelled in was writing extraordinary profiles of the innumerable people he met: presidents and prime ministers, film stars and musicians, crooks and commoners. Like a sharp-eyed detective, he explored the complex layers of their minds and lives, revealing their good, bad, and ugly sides with equal flair.

A close friend of many of my family elders and a personal hero to me, TJS often indulged me in long, generous conversations. Yet, the man with that mischievous twinkle in his piercing eyes would turn to humour whenever I tried to make him speak about his own journey. He refused to call his marvellous Malayalam memoir Ghoshayatra autobiographical. “It’s about the people I met,” he would insist. “Through them, I’ve tried to tell the story of their world and their times.” He swore he would never write an autobiography—he simply loathed talking about himself. Perhaps it is this self-effacing nature that makes the long chapter in Ghoshayatra about his 1965 arrest, while he was Editor of The Searchlight in Patna, all the more significant. Since he may never have written about it in English, let me recount that remarkable episode—with the disclaimer that my retelling can hardly match his wit or grace.

In 1965, TJS, then in his mid-thirties, married and with two small children, took over as Editor of The Searchlight in Patna. The paper, owned by the Birlas—who also ran the Hindustan Times—gave him complete editorial freedom despite their vast business interests in Bihar. This was unusual, for the Birlas were not known to



tolerate editors - CP Ramachandran and BG Verghese included - who displeased politicians. Though K.K. Birla's initial remark about TJS's Christian background had offended him, their relationship remained cordial thereafter. Birla backed him even when the Congress's Chief Minister KB Sahay proclaimed TJS an enemy. In Patna, it was customary for every new editor to pay respects to the Chief Minister. It was also "tradition" that during law-and-order crises, newspapers should publish only the District Magistrate's official statements. Having come from the Free Press Journal, TJS was blissfully unaware of such conventions. He published his reporters' accounts and eyewitness versions alongside the official handouts. Chief Minister Sahay took this as sedition—and promptly had him arrested. TJS, with characteristic humour and total absence of self-

pity, later wrote about the episode, referring to "the editor" in the third person: "It was actually a great service done to me by him. A journalist's moment of gratification is when he becomes well-known to a few people. As I was bestowed with the honour of being the first editor in independent India to be arrested, my fame spread much beyond a few people."

The arrest triggered national outrage. Parliamentarians, artists, social leaders, and unions condemned it. When the former Union Defence Minister and Parliament member, V.K. Krishna Menon, himself volunteered to file a habeas corpus petition, the case turned sensational. The Chief Justice even remarked, "See the big crowds today—they'll go out of control if the accused is present."

He was right. The court premises became a human sea the day Menon appeared alongside the accused.

Menon's words still resonate: "An editor's character is his greatest asset and his bequest to the world. Fearlessness is his hallmark. Therefore, he cannot accept conditional bail."

Bail was granted. Nearly fifty thousand people accompanied the editor from the court to The Searchlight office. The Bihar Advocate General even rushed to Delhi to have the bail cancelled, but the Supreme Court's quashing of a similar arrest order against Ram Manohar Lohia ended the matter. The three weeks in jail, TJS later wrote, offered "an unparalleled wealth of experience. I often think that no journalist can come of age without a stint in prison."

He observed wryly that one could still "come out intact from a Bihar prison in the 1960s"—unlike later years when police brutality became routine. He recalled the

"biscuit baron Rajan Pillai was kicked to death in Tihar Jail" and the custodial killing of the student Rajan in Kerala, remarking with irony and refusing to name the then Home Minister K. Karunakaran; "When answers were finally given decades later, blame was put on the police chief. What about the police chief's beloved Home Minister? Wasn't I totally innocent, Lord Guruvayoorappa!"

At Patna's Bankipur Jail, he was first locked up in a large hall with 70-80 other prisoners. "I came of age within the first night," he wrote. The next day, he was moved to a cell with a single plastic bucket. "A bucket for

Muhammad Basheer's Mathilukal. With characteristic humour, he added: "The only small mistake Adoor Gopalakrishnan made was choosing Mammooty, who had no such experience, instead of me for the film."

The multi-storied offices of the Indian Nation, a prominent newspaper, was bang opposite to the Bankipur Jail. One day when TJS came out from his cell to enjoy some breeze to the prison's open courtyard, he saw the journalists standing crowded on the Indian Nation's office balcony. They waved at him excitedly. Much later, Janardan Thakur, the prominent journalist at


and German, Lohia insisted on speaking only in chaste Hindi-much beyond TJS's grasp as he was familiar only with Bombay's "street Hindi". He admired Lohia's choice to remain a socialist despite his wealthy background. Journalist Nikhil Chakraborty, "who knew everything about everyone," once told TJS, "Lohia's father owned 35,000 rickshaws in Calcutta." Though Lohia's knowledge was awesome, TJS wrote that Ramakrishna Hegde, a Lohiaite, told him that the fiery Socialist was intellectually arrogant and intolerant of all others.

Among his fondest memories of those days was of a humble fish-netholi (anchovy). His close friend, RSP leader N. Sreekantan Nair, had rushed from Delhi to console his family. When a fisherman arrived selling only netholi, TJS's wife, Ammu, hesitated to buy it for such an eminent guest.

Overhearing her, Nair cheerfully insisted: "Netholi? Buy the entire stock-it's delicious!"

After his release, TJS published an open letter in The Searchlight challenging Chief Minister Sahay to resign and contest an election in Patna against him. Sahay never responded. In the 1967 elections, he contested from both Patna and Hazaribagh-to ensure victory-and lost both.

TJS George represented a generation of journalists who believed that truth-telling was a moral duty, not a professional choice. His courage came wrapped in wit, his conviction tempered by humility. "Fearlessness," he once wrote, "is a journalist's hallmark."

By that measure, only very few ever matched him. 

— Courtesy Mathubhumi

TJS observed, though lamenting that his bond with Lohia was thwarted by language. Despite knowing English and German, Lohia insisted on speaking only in chaste Hindi-much beyond TJS's grasp as he was familiar only with Bombay's "street Hindi".

my exclusive use! I accepted it as the most invaluable luxury ever gifted to a human. Suddenly, the prison turned into heaven."

From nearby women's cells beyond a twenty-foot wall behind his own, he often heard wails-and once, a sweet voice singing film songs with haunting beauty.

"Her voice was sweet enough to make me spend whatever time possible near the wall," he wrote. "The heart of the political prisoner across the wall pined to meet the blessed singing gem at least once. He made many attempts to including an adventure, but they were all in vain".

The experience reminded him of his favourite author, Vaikom

the Indian Nation told TJS that they all used to come to the balcony every day to try catching a glimpse of him. "Their excitement was a big solace to me. From then, coming out to the courtyard became a routine. Even such small things are a big solace for prisoners," TJS wrote.

Later, TJS was shifted to Hazaribagh Jail, which he found "almost a luxury resort." The lush campus housed several national leaders, including Ram Manohar Lohia, who "reigned like a Sultan".

"Prison is an ideal place for cementing friendships," TJS observed, though lamenting that his bond with Lohia was thwarted by language. Despite knowing English

Prominent Indian Journalist Rana Ayyub, her Father Face Threats



I

ndian authorities must take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of journalist and Washington Post columnist Rana Ayyub and her family, after she received multiple threats via her phone from someone who knew her home address, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.

“The threats of violence made against Rana Ayyub and her father from an unknown international number are deeply concerning,” said CPJ’s India representative Kunal Majumder. “Authorities must act swiftly to identify and hold accountable those responsible and ensure the safety of all journalists in India so they can work without fear of intimidation or violence.”

Ayyub told CPJ and stated in a November 3 police complaint, reviewed by CPJ, that she received multiple video calls, phone calls, and messages via WhatsApp over a 20 minute period on November 2, demanding that she write a column on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, in which some 3,000 Sikhs were killed following the assassination of the then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards.

The caller stated Ayyub’s home address and threatened to send people

there to attack her and to kill her father, who lives with her, if she failed to publish the article, according to Ayyub and the complaint, which she filed with Kopar Khairane Police Station in Navi Mumbai, in Mumbai Metropolitan Area.

In her complaint, Ayyub noted that the profile image of the caller matched a photograph of Indian gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, who is currently in a prison in the Indian western state of Gujarat. CPJ has not been able to identify Bishnoi’s lawyer or independently verify the link between the caller and Bishnoi.

Ayyub said police officers were sent to her residence for protection following the threats.

Navi Mumbai Police Commissioner Milind Bharambe did not immediately respond to CPJ’s text message requesting comment. Senior Inspector Umesh Gawli declined to comment as he was in the process of recording Ayyub’s statement.

The prominent journalist’s personal number was leaked online last year and her reporting has previously led to online trolling, official intimidation, criminal investigations, and rape and death threats.



— Courtesy CPJ

“
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Hindi Visual Media is in a Meme Trap

Visual mediapersons are often celebrated as content creators. The difference is telling. News is gathered; content is created. A long ago some English newspapers had turned their pages into business models. It's the Hindi content creator now.



**Ashutosh
Bhardwaj**



Illustration: Pariplab
Chakraborty

journalist from Bihar recently posted on Facebook that the election coverage of Hindi media's visual journalists visiting his state feels like 'poverty porn'. Hindi media is not alone - many look at Bihar not as a society but as a spectacle. What the journalist wrote is true for a large section of Hindi media which - thanks to the public response it generates and the influence it holds - has become the representative journalism of the language.

Hindi may have had some of the largest selling newspapers in the country but its glittering icons over the last few decades have arrived from the visual form earlier on TV, and now on YouTube.

Today, the most prominent Hindi journalists - and you can choose the ones according to your political inclination - belong to the world of the screen.

It is a unique phenomenon where the most notable journalists of a language which is spoken by over 600 million people in India and sees numerous print publications, have eschewed the written platform.

In contrast, the English journalism space in India offers an entirely different landscape populated by countless bylines, faces you might never recognise, and voices that are not always

found on camera.

English media anchors have a massive social media influence but face sufficient criticism for their theatrics and loudness. These anchors, several of them carrying a badge of secularism, may struggle to find a place among one's favourite journalists. The similarly shrill Hindi anchors somehow escape scrutiny as long as they carry a copy of the constitution and cite Nehru.

The last 10 years have seen several independent media organisations emerging in both Hindi and English - the former has largely taken to YouTube while the latter mostly focuses on text stories, at once attempting to find a footing in video. While English journalism still nurtures long-form reportage running into several thousand words, the genre appears to be vanishing from Hindi.

Don't blame it on lack of funds. It's the sheer approach towards journalism

Of late, the matrix of the gamut of visual journalism in Hindi has rested on three broad genres. First, extract a clip out of someone's misery or a person's wisecracks and make it viral. This is a form of reporting in which going deeper into an issue has no rewards. Just step out with a camera, replace rigour and precision with

rhetoric and arrive at a viral clip. A witty remark by a villager can alone offer you a video that trends all day on social media and earns you a handsome revenue. But this form of journalism turns the countryside into a circus and the citizen into a clown.

Another popular method is to lift an investigative report and read out its summary in spicy Hindi before a camera. To add some authenticity, some Hindi YouTube channels invite the English reporter who broke the story. Since the Hindi anchor likely commands a bigger presence on social media by virtue of the language's numerical strength - and since the English readership is minuscule compared to the vast audience that understands spoken Hindi - the story spreads. In public memory, the investigation now belongs to the Hindi anchor.

Third, is the popular option of chitchatting with celebrities. Conversations about their secrets, struggles and love lives make for more viewership.

To be sure, journalism in English has its own dark alleys, compromises, and collusions. And enough is being written about it. My point is simply this: Hindi journalism - which once had some of India's most respected newspapers, journals and editors - is now becoming devoid of nuances and complexities. The Hindi audience is offered pieces no longer than 600 words, and instead served videos of unfiltered entertainment dressed up as journalism.

Video journalism is a fine art; the camera is an extraordinary creative instrument. But the camera of many YouTubers remains mostly confined to the noises and gestures on the surface. Could it also be that because

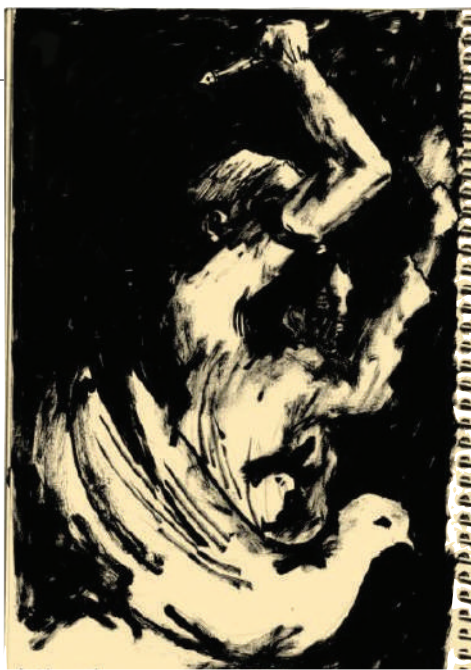


Illustration: Pariplab Chakraborty.

the YouTube model, rooted to reward extreme behaviour, is designed and deployed to harvest likes and retweets? It may bring easy revenue, but I believe it damages journalism in the long run.

It perhaps began with the search for an alternative business model around the time the governments stifled the media. Social media platforms provided an easily and readily available alternative. But the need for revenue has made rigour and discipline irrelevant.

Chasing easy views on the ground, Hindi journalists on YouTube have abandoned crucial issues like shady business deals, coal allocations, wrongful allotments of mines, defence, international politics, economy, science and technology, geostrategic affairs.

Perhaps because these issues can't be covered by a parachute visit with the camera. It requires perseverance to build an ecosystem that enables such reports, that prepares a team of dedicated reporters who can work on documents for weeks and

months, and that mandates a disciplined editorial desk to craft stories out of raw material.

In a country, where regional journalists are killed or arrested for focusing on corruption at the ground, the indifference of bigger names in Hindi towards reporting on national issues is appalling.

The surrender of what is now called *godi media* are well-documented. But the failings of the independent Hindi media have somehow escaped scrutiny. These journalists must know that the models they have employed often take the viewer for granted, weaken journalism, and consequently damage democ-

racy.

A few years ago, it was the threat of *hashtag journalism* that had been killing hard-earned reporting and rewarding idle influencers. The YouTube model has carried forward the game several notches ahead. How this phenomenon is transforming the Hindi society, its politics and democracy, is for sociologists and historians to assess.

All I can say as a journalist is that it is also damaging journalism in the language. As a resident of the Hindi belt, it's making my fellow citizens complacent. And as a citizen, if journalism doesn't make you a better participant in democracy, if it makes you an idle viewer of a spectacle, it benefits the ruling dispensation.

Visual mediapersons are often celebrated as content creators. The difference is telling. News is *gathered*; content is created. A long time ago some English newspapers had turned their pages into business models. It's the Hindi content creator now.

— Courtesy The Wire

THE ANTHONY BOURDAIN READER REVIEW:

Undiscovered Gems from the Charismatic Chef Turned Writer

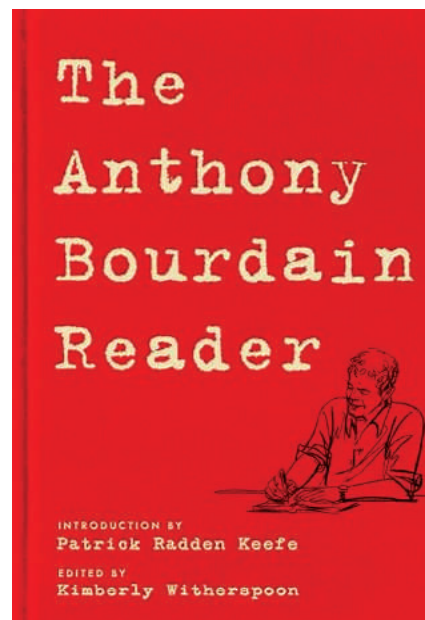
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hink Anthony Bourdain and a whole rush of TV memories flood back. There he is – in shows such as *Parts Unknown* and *No Reservations* – a gonzo gourmand trekking to backstreet nooks and favela hideouts in parts of the world where celebrity chefs fear to tread. In Beirut and Congo; savouring calamari and checking out graffiti in Tripoli; slurping rice noodles and necking bottles of cold beer with Barack Obama in Hanoi, Vietnam. One course follows another, evenings drift past midnight and he's still chewing the fat with locals, hungry for stories – about drugs, dissidence, gristly local politics.

But Bourdain, who killed himself aged just 61 in 2018, had always seen himself as a writer. His mother was an editor at the *New York Times*, and his youthful crushes were mostly beatniks and outlaws – Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Lester Bangs, Hunter S Thompson. (Orwell too – especially his account of a dishwasher's life in *Down and Out in Paris and London*.) A college dropout, he later signed up for a writing workshop with famed editor Gordon Lish. His earliest bylines

appeared in arty, downtown publications; two crime novels (*Bone in the Throat*, *Gone Bamboo*) got decent reviews but sold poorly. Things turned around after the publication in 2000 of his best-selling memoir *Kitchen Confidential*. It portrayed New York's restaurants as sweatshops, military trenches, last chance saloons for a whole bevy of social misfits. For Bourdain they were refuges. A teenager who'd been into Abbie Hoffman and Eldridge Cleaver, he later became a heroin

C Uday
Bhaskar



BOOK REVIEW

addict, a fan of the Ramones and the Voidoids, a dive bar denizen. Week by week the city was getting Bloomberged, mom'n'pop stores giving way to salad bars and frozen-yoghurt parlours: with its swaggering, screw-faced evocation of a rawer, less pasteurised New York, his was a book of mourning as much as it was one of celebration.

By 2011 HarperCollins had given Bourdain his own publishing imprint. By 2016 *The New Yorker* was describing him as “not actually a star ... a nebula”. Now his agent Kimberly Witherspoon has compiled *The Anthony Bourdain Reader*, drawn not only from his best-known books, but also handwritten short stories, chapters from unfinished novels, something he calls “Another Pointless Journalistic Play” and ghost-themed comics featuring Japanese spirits with a fondness for preying on balls of flesh located inside human anuses. There’s even a travel diary entry from 1973: “My stomach and intestines hurt. I have contributed more shit and more vomit to the Florence sewer system than I did at home in a year.”

This head-to-tail editorial approach won’t be to everyone’s taste. Bourdain’s fictional writing lacks the urgency and gamey flavour of his journalistic dispatches. “Good food, good eating, is all about blood, organs, cruelty and decay,” he once wrote, and some of the most memorable passages involve noshing on a braised bat (“imagine braised inner tube, sauced with engine coolant”), sampling the still-beating heart of a cobra (“like chewing on a rubber dog toy”), watching farm workers plunge a knife into a pig’s thorax (“the screaming penetrated the fillings in my teeth, echoed through the valley”). Is this the “food and travel



porn” that at one stage he fears he may be guilty of producing?

At his worst, Bourdain’s carnivorousness and his screeds against vegans, Peta supporters or anyone campaigning against toxic chemicals read like libertarian shtick, manna for *Top Gear* stans. Complaining that people can no longer smoke in bars, he huffs, “it’s only a matter of time before some well-intentioned health Nazi busts into your bedroom and yanks that post-intercourse cigarette right outta your hand”. Then again, Christopher Hitchens might applaud his anti-Kissinger diatribe: “While Henry continues to nibble nori rolls and remake at A-list parties, Cambodia, the neutral nation he secretly and illegally bombed, invaded, undermined, and then threw to the dogs, is still trying to raise itself up on its one remaining leg.”

Some of the loveliest passages come when Bourdain writes with just-so tenderness and precision about his family: a journey with his brother to *La Teste-de-Buch* in France among whose sand dunes

they holidayed as young men; the outsize pleasure he takes in his five-year-old daughter nibbling on Pecorino and an anchovy. I suspect Bourdain will be read in years to come less as a writer about food than of food work. Everywhere he lands – whether in struggling bistros, mob joints or midtown nightclubs – he warms to the subaltern caste of underpaid toilers slicing and sizzling and sweating away.

One of them, a century ago, was Irish-born Mary Mallon, later demonised as Typhoid Mary. In his passionate defence of her, he talks about what it’s like to grow old as a cook. The pains in the back, the knees. Perhaps the heart. “Where once you would have turned your head to cough, you turn no longer. Wash your hands after going to the bathroom? Maybe ... Unwashed hands, an errant cigarette ash, a roasted chicken dropped on a dirty kitchen floor and retrieved on the bounce ... We’ve been there, you and me and Mary.”

— *Courtesy The Guardian*

A Spirited Attack on Blind Faith



Nipun Dharmadhikari's Marathi show stars Sajiri Joshi and Kshitee Jog, Siddhesh Dhuri, Shivraj Waichal, Vibhawari Deshpande and Anil More.

I

t's 1992 in a fictitious village in Maharashtra, but attitudes date back to about a century ago. Although the residents of Vesaicha Vadgaon worship the goddess Vesai, they carry out ungodly acts in her name.

Girls who attain puberty are immediately yanked out of school and married, often to men much older than them. The ones who rebel are publicly humiliated, their families ostracised.

Vesai is regarded as the fearsome protector of the village's prosperity and honour. Why then does this goddess, in whose temple only virgin girls

can pray, test her young devotees? That's the question faced by Ahilya, her mother Lakshmi and her father Aaba (Siddhesh Dhuri).

The brightest student at her school, the teenaged Ahilya (Sajiri Joshi) wants to be a doctor. Since she's betrothed to the barely educated but hugely ambitious aspiring politician Jaysing (Shivraj Waichal), Ahilya is expected to announce the start of her menstrual cycle, duck her head in modesty and submit to tradition.

But she doesn't. Keen on studying further, Ahilya man-

Nandini Ramnath

MOVIE REVIEW

ages to fool Lakshmi (Kshitee Jog) for a while. The deception plays out for long enough to get a measure of the mother-daughter bond, which is also one of the most memorable aspects of the ZEE5 series *Baai Tujhyapaayi*.

The Marathi show has been adapted from Muthukumar's acclaimed Tamil series *Ayali*, which is also available on ZEE5. While *Baai Tujhyapaayi* follows the reformist roadmap set out by *Ayali*, director Nipun Dharmadhikari and writers Nikhil Khaire and Mukta Bam successfully localise the material. A bunch of fine actors enacts sharply written scenes that cogently lay out the difference between blind faith and rational thought.

Adolescent marriage is the most extreme version of other restrictions on how women should behave, think and pray, the seven-episode series reveals. The Taliban-like menstrual police who closely monitor the girls are only a part of a larger culture of discrimination. The cult of the goddess provides refuge to the women but shackles them too - especially since the chains are held by the men.

The intent is always noble, the examination of religious beliefs that are exploited for temporal agenda fearless at times. But more effective than the rousing speeches is the exploration of the relationships between people, and the ways in which superstition keeps women down.

One of the quietly odious Jaisingh's sycophants is the school teacher Gopal (Anil More), whose interest in menstrual cycles borders on the indecent. Gopal's barbs are contrasted by the advice of the progressive teacher Mangala (Vibhawari Deshpande), who supports Ahilya in her academic dreams.

But Ahilya's real battle is at



home. There are moving scenes between Ahilya and her parents - Lakshmi terrified of the consequences of Ahilya's insurrection, Aaba deeply caring of his brilliant daughter. Ahilya's progress affects Lakshmi too, reminding the mother of the sacrifices she has made.

Sajiri Joshi, who made a sparkling debut in Rohan Mapuskar's charming coming-of-age film *April May 99* earlier this year, is terrific as Ahilya. Even though Ahilya often speaks like a grown-up and comes off as far too wise to be a muddled teenager, Joshi brings palpable feeling to her performance.

Kishte Jog is a wonderful tough love-exuding matriarch. Siddhesh

Dhuri is very good too as someone who is frequently described as a "modern farmer", but struggles to accept change in his own household.

Like some of the better Marathi shows, *Baai Tujhyapaayi* has enough powerfully written scenes and a convincing milieu to overcome the disappointment of its ending. Some of the best scenes have already taken place - Ahilya's uncommon bravery, Lakshmi's fearful empathy, the plight of Ahilya's friend Saraswati (Gautami Kachi), the dependably creepy Gopal. Rama Nadgauda plays a temple priestess who embodies the goddess Vesai in all her glory and wiliness.

—Courtesy Scroll.in

Fight for Respect of Women Journalists



Last month, like every year, we celebrated Durga Puja and Deepawali with fanfare, reaffirming our commitment to 'Nari-shakti' (women empowerment). But this spirit of nari-shakti was insulted in the capital by the visiting Taliban delegation, led by Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, who excluded women journalists from his media briefing at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The Taliban FM addressed a "men-only" press conference of selected media organizations, where women journalists were not allowed. Some women journalists who reached the Afghan embassy on Shantipath in Chanakyapuri were kept out and denied coverage.

As per information, our Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) leaned on the current staff representing the earlier regime of President Ashraf Ghani to let the Taliban FM hold a media briefing in the embassy and helped the delegation select only male journalists. The Taliban regime, which calls itself the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, used the new Talibani flag placed on the table, with a painting of the destroyed Bamiyan Buddhas on the wall behind.

The acceptance of this Talibani medieval mindset on our soil by any authority or individual must be opposed by all of us. Unfortunately, some of our male journalists, who accepted this mindset under pressure or diktat, forgot that our nation stands for gender equality and respect for Indian women journalists. This same mindset surfaced during Muttaqi's visit to Deoband's Darul Uloom, where a cleric distributing food packets to journalists questioned a woman photojournalist on how she had "managed to come in," and abruptly cancelled the media interaction minutes before it was to start.

The Talibani government has largely dismantled the rights of women and girls established by the last elected government. As per the UN, Afghan women are being denied opportunities to join the workforce, and girls are deprived of education. During the all-

male press conference, when asked about women's rights being violated in Afghanistan, the FM said, "It is all propaganda. We have the Shariah there and everybody has rights. Each country has its own tradition and customs."

Media bodies like the Indian Journalists Union, All India Working News Cameramen's Association, Editors Guild of India, and Press Club of India have condemned the exclusion of women journalists as highly discriminatory. Opposition parties also raised strong objections. Amid the controversy, the MEA disowned responsibility for the Taliban press conference that kept women out. Interestingly, one foreign correspondent known to the Taliban FM was told that they had no say in deciding the invite list for the press meet.

After the backlash, Muttaqi, in damage control mode on MEA's advice, cancelled his Taj Mahal visit and held a second press conference attended by several women journalists at the embassy, blaming their earlier exclusion on a "technical issue." Muttaqi faced tough questions about the erosion of Afghan women's rights and exclusion from education and work, to which he replied, "Afghanistan has an Islamic government and under Islam, everybody's rights are protected."

Reporters Without Borders found that four out of every five women journalists in Afghanistan had lost their jobs. Those who remain face threats, harassment, unpaid work, and censorship. In at least 19 provinces, no woman journalist is officially working.

We are proud that our nation's Constitution gave universal adult franchise based on gender equality and non-discrimination. We should not allow anyone to dilute this progressive principle on our soil. Unfortunately, our male journalists who attended the male-only press conference forgot it and did not show the courage to boycott it and stand for their women colleagues.

THE LAST PAGE



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