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“We are asking for just one opportunity. If we don't live up to expectations, they can throw us out”

JASNOOR KAUR & DHARAMJOT KAUR

Punjab elections have drawn a lot of eyeballs, for the new players and changing dynamics after the Farm Bills were rolled back. In days leading to the much-anticipated elections in the state, JASNOOR KAUR & DHARAMJOT KAUR speak to Aam Aadmi Party's CM candidate for Punjab, Bhagwant Mann in an exclusive interview. Mann, who's meteoric rise as the face of AAP is an interesting trajectory to watch, has been questioned by many. In this candid conversation, he touches upon his political journey, and plans for Punjab. Excerpts:

You've had a very successful career as an artist before you moved to politics. Do you miss it?

My comedy was mostly political in nature, yet humorous. I was a social critic of sorts instead of a comedian and

was labelled as anti-establishment and pro-people. Then this thought occurred to me, people will only find my comedy funny agar ghar ke chulhe mei aag jalti hai. If people do not have basic means, what is the point of that comedy? I saw farmers killing themselves, youth dying of drug abuse and did not hold the power to implement changes officially. When I entered politics, my previous career juxtaposed well with the current one. Even now, I believe, I do the same work of making people aware of their rights and understanding the meaning of democracy. I am vocal in the parliament as well, so I don't think I have changed. But now I hold the power of making a tangible difference.

Do you believe it is your satire that has helped you connect to the youth and the population of Punjab?

In the parliament, I barely get two or three minutes to speak. I choose poetry or satire to deliver my message and say what I must. I believe it is more impactful as compared

that he had arranged for me for the Oath Ceremony. The security guard recognised me, and I made a comment that today I am here because of this pass made for me. Soon I will get passes made for people, too. After I won in 2014, I met the same guard again and he reminded me of our first meeting where I had told him I would make it big. Now, Sidhu Sahab is the president of Congress in Punjab, a very significant post, so I wish him good luck.

In the recent Chandigarh Municipal Elections, AAP won with 14 out of 35 seats and interestingly BJP won 12 seats. People are saying that the BJP is out of the political scene in Punjab, but it clearly is not. What do you have to say about this?

We were fighting these elections in Chandigarh for the first time. So, it was a very big achievement for AAP to win. The population of Chandigarh is intelligent and educated and so people would say that they won't even vote but now they are AAP's voters. So, the turn-out and the results encouraged us a lot that AAP got a favourable response from the city's voters. This will have a good impact on state elections as well.

Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu was a judge on The Great Indian Laughter Challenge in which you were a participant. Looking at your respective political careers, how do you feel about being on opposite sides?

I have been Sidhu Sahab's fan since his cricketing days. I would switch off the TV whenever he got out and asked others for match updates. We spent a lot of good time together at the show. Then he became a BJP member of parliament. I went to Parliament for the first time carrying the pass

direction towards the public treasury, it will get filled. In Delhi, the first budget was 26k crores, 73% of Delhi gets electricity for free, medical

We can see people have made up their minds. Iss baar Jhadu phirega.

treatment is free, 20k litres of water is free, many clinics have been opened, and free education in govt schools. According to CAG's report, Delhi is the first state that is making profits and is using it to give back to the people because corruption and mafia leakage was fixed. So, I would not call these things freebies. In the US and Canada, the government gives you money and you call it social security. The politicians in India get so much: 5000 units of free electricity, free aeroplane trips, railway trips free for life, so why can't the common person get 300 units of electricity for free? We are not taking any sort of loans for it; we are giving people their money back in this way.

Why should Punjab vote for Bhagwant Mann?

Don't vote for Bhagwant Mann, vote for Punjab. Since 1967's first election in the state, Congress ruled for 25 years; then came the Badal family who ruled for 19.5 years. Almost 45 years they had, yet they ask people for one more chance. We are asking for just one opportunity. If we don't live up to expectations, they can throw us out. We can see the people have made up their minds. Iss baar jhadu phirega.



Uttar Pradesh Elections: Web of Communal Polarization

APURVA ADHIKARI

Elections in Uttar Pradesh will be a long-drawn affair starting on February 10 and ending on March 7th. With the highest population and maximum number of assembly seats, this is an election that the whole country is watching.



UP regions and its Political Divide

Western UP

The Farm Laws and MSP are one of the important issues here as the Bharatiya Kisan Union headquartered in Muzaffarnagar, is a major factor in these elections. This area has dominant Muslim, Jats and Non Jat voters (Dalits).

Rohilkhand

The voters here include small scale industrialists and big farmers. In Rampur state, fifty percent of its population are Muslims. The issues of demolition of the Urdu Gate, Triple Talaq laws dominate the region.

Awadh

SC's (schedule castes) have a substantial presence, along with Muslims, Yadav and Kumris who are also dominant voters. One fourth of the population belongs to the upper caste.

Bundelkhand

The main concern here has always been the economic and social backwardness. The region mainly has a condensed population of Farmers, Dalits and OBCs.

Purvanchal

This region has seen all the three shades of UP politics. In 2007, BSP painted it blue. In 2012, SP painted it red and in the 2017 elections it was BJP here with its saffron shade.

A PERSPECTIVE ON UP ELECTIONS

INK recently interviewed journalists, Rajeev Mullick from Hindustan Times and Aarti Yadav from All India Radio who have closely witnessed UP elections. Along with them, Shivam Singh Virat, Jilla Karya Samiti Pradhan from Bharatiya Janata Party and Amitabh Bajpai, MLA from Samajwadi Party were interviewed.

ARE THERE ANY INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE STATE IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS?

Rajeev Mullick: UP has seen no remarkable changes as such. The state could have emerged as a well-developed area a long time back, but none of the governments took development seriously. The metro projects in Lucknow and Kanpur have definitely been initiated and completed by the government but there is still a lot to be done. The state wants advancements in education, employment, health sector etc., and not just highlight cultural and religious differences. **Shivam Singh Virat:** Akhilesh Yadav and his Government has only taken grants in the name of development but never implemented it on the ground. They have only inaugurated projects that never started. We have built public toilets in several villages of the state under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan by our Prime Minister Modi. Apart from this, we have started projects like the Purvanchal Expressway, Ganga Expressway and Bundelkhand Expressway. **Amitabh Bajpai:** Land acquisition was done by us. We got the tender. The developmental projects were started by us, but now BJP has taken all the credit. As usual, they are trying to fool the public.

WHY ARE THERE COMMUNAL ISSUES AND RIOTS IN THE STATE? WHAT ABOUT OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES LIKE LAW AND ORDER OR WOMEN SAFETY?

Aarti Yadav: In recent years it is evident that there have been communal issues but this even happened during Akhilesh Yadav's government. There was a divide within the society. We all thought that after the Ram Mandir verdict there would be riots in the state, but everyone welcomed the decision with peace. Law and order are better

nowadays. People are aware of their rights, but if we talk about women safety - the Hathras rape case, Kathua Rape case and the Unnao Rape case clearly show that some people in the system still don't fear the government. A lot has to be done for women's safety. **Shivam Singh Virat:** Post 2017, there have been no communal riots in the State. People have a fear of the government unlike the Gundaraaj that persisted during the Samajwadi governance. The protesters who damaged the public property during the CAA and NRC riots were taken into account and strict actions were taken against them. Our sisters are safe in our governance, and actions for their safety are taken rapidly. **Amitabh Bajpai:** Why did BJP take so long in the Hathras case? Why did the government support the policemen? Why did the Union Minister's son kill the farmers who were protesting? The law and order have drowned in the state.

HOW DID THE STATE MANAGE THE COVID-19 CRISIS?

Rajeev Mullick: Uttar Pradesh faced a huge blow during the second wave where there was lack of hospital beds and oxygen supplies, but we can't ignore the fact that UP has a huge population, so managing such a highly populous state is difficult. The political rallies at that time added on to the whole situation. Politicians and their politics worsened the whole situation. **Shivam Singh Virat:** UP has a huge population, more than many countries of the world. We all saw how the USA could not manage it. When rich countries like these couldn't handle this pandemic with highly advanced technology, then UP with its limited resources was much better. The pandemic was a big blow to the entire world and not just Uttar Pradesh. COVID affected all our officers and party workers who worked during those times. Many hospitals which tried to keep oxygen illegally were shut down. Yogiji, in spite of being isolated, went into the

public and helped people. I didn't see Akhilesh Yadav coming out for once. **Amitabh Bajpai:** During COVID-19, when people didn't even step out of their houses, BJP came up with the tagline "Jaan Hai To Jahan Hai". Many people posted photos of banging plates and utensils and lighting diyas but they didn't meet anyone because the main focus was surviving. But instead of staying at home, the SP party helped the poor and the needy. Twenty-two kitchens were run for 60 days, 10,000 crore cooked meals and raw food materials were supplied. We distributed oxygen cylinders and medicines from our own funds which were collected from the warehouse that BJP tried to shut down. If you still believe that the public won't support us, we have enough work to show for ourselves, and remember one thing, politicians can be wrong but not the public.

WHAT ABOUT THE OPINION POLLS?

Rajeev Mullick: The opinion polls are sold. They're completely biased. The propaganda by the media sets everything in favor of the ruling party. However, unlike the previous elections where BJP had a clean sweep, this time the Samajwadi Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party are in a close competition. **Shivam Singh Virat:** We will definitely win over the state once again. People have seen our work and have trust in us. This time definitely we'll have 300-plus seats." **Amitabh Bajpai:** People, the youth especially, want better governance. This time the SP shall win 400 seats. Apart from the political schism, the state seeks a neutral government in which the homeless and poor are cared for, young are employed, and residents live in a clean and sanitary environment. Women must have a sense of security, and justice must triumph. False hope and promises have left many hungry.

(Inputs by Shashwat Garg)

Punjab Elections may throw up surprises

Punjab's 13th assembly election has been making waves like never before. For anyone who has remotely followed electoral updates in the state, knows that these polls are more just a state election.

DHARAMJOT KAUR



SSM Rally in Punjab

Instagram

As India struggled to survive several variants of Covid-19, Punjab was fighting another important battle that threatened its existence and livelihood. The year-long protest on the border of Delhi resulted in an emphatic win for the agrarian community, in November 2021. It marked the beginning of a new era for Punjab, which directly reflects in the current political atmosphere of the state. As days lead up to one of the most strategically important state elections this year, Punjab finds itself braving through a chaos of identity politics, fresh faces, unlikely alliances and regional populism.

Farmers' protest and emergence of SSM

One can safely say that 2021 was the year of the farmer. While the agriculture sector is far from its path to recovery, a political win through mass protest made history on the roads of the national capital. But for Punjab, the battle is far from over. Agriculture has been a touchy subject in the region for decades now. Though it is an issue that always found itself a spot in party manifestos, it is also one of India's biggest failures at the state and national level.

However, the most important, direct ramification of a hugely successful agrarian revolt, has been the formation of Samyukt Samaj Morcha (SSM), a farmers' party led by Balbir Singh

Rajewal. The strategic move made by several farmers' unions has received mixed reactions across the state, which has led one to question the success of this lateral shift. With the umbrella leadership of Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) distancing itself from the party and dearth of popular faces in the proposed candidature, the political stint of SSM does not look very promising.

According to Dr. Jamshid Ali Khan, Political Science Professor and Dean, College Development Council, Punjabi University, the party cadre seems to have only scattered consolidation of pro-farmer voters across the state. "A lot of leaders in SSM have a history of allegiance with traditional parties of Punjab, which severely hampers their acceptability among people because of the accumulated anger towards these parties." He also believes that closing doors on potential alliances with seasoned parties, will nullify whatever little chance that SSM has, in partly forming the government in Punjab. He fears that this political marginalisation will end their power struggle before it even begins.

New Players, Political Alliances and Pressure Groups

Punjab's elections have always been a duel between Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which previously was allied with BJP, and Congress. But several fragmentations and new alliances have made it a five-corner contest for

the land of five rivers. While Capt. Amrinder's new party, Punjab Lok Congress allies with BJP, Congress and SAD's power struggle might yield political advantage to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). However, the SSM, with its dispersed but somewhat inconsequential farmers vote-bank, is speculated to cause a probable dent in AAP's numbers.

Amongst all the changing landscapes of political affiliations, the emergence of a pressure group in Punjab has drawn some eyeballs. "Jujhda Punjab", a committee created by noted Punjabi celebrities Amitoj Mann, Babbu Mann, Gul Panag, Ranjit Bawa, Jass Bajwa and food and policy analyst Devinder Sharma, has come out with a 32-point agenda for the welfare of Punjab. On being asked what makes this committee different from other pressure groups in the past, Sharma, who is also a former founding member of India Against Corruption, says, "To date, all pressure groups are created by normal people from civil society. But Jujhda Punjab is a result of noted faces from the region, who have a sizeable following, coming together to form this pressure group. This changes some dynamics as it makes famous people more open to accountability from the Aam Janata."

What's in store for Punjab

For a state that has always been ruled by a clear-cut leadership, this state election seems to be headed for

uncharted territory. With no clear mandate in sight and all three districts of Punjab showing differing allegiance to political parties, the road to CM's chair is a convoluted one. Interestingly, Sharma believes that a coalition is the best thing for Punjab right now. "Personally, I am always in favour of coalition in politics, because one party keeps a check on the other. In case of a clear majority, there is no system of answerability or checks and balances to keep the ruling party under the scanner."

But Anil Joshi, ex-BJP leader now a part of SAD, believes that the party will achieve a landslide victory in Punjab. The Amritsar candidate strongly feels that SAD's cadre has always been consistent and clear in its leadership, unlike other parties. Taking a dig at AAP's Bhagwant Mann, he says, "Punjab is very critical and emotional about who leads this sacred land. It doesn't want an alcoholic as its chief minister. Everybody knows what Bhagwant Mann's reputation is; so many videos are also viral. That is not what Punjab wants."

The winds in Punjab seem to have changed their course this time. As identity politics along with equitable developmental needs become increasingly apparent, the onus lies on the people of Punjab to ensure that simmering problems of the state are not forgotten by those fighting to rule its fertile lands.

(Inputs by Jasnoor Kaur)

Political parties try to woo women in UP with promises

The female constituency has become very important in elections. The addition of women members hugely impacts the governance, not just the elections.

TAPASYA IYER



Women have become increasingly influential in election outcomes

Polstrat - Medium

One of the new things that is getting bandied out at election rallies in Uttar Pradesh is 'gender'. There is a sudden increase in the number of tickets for women and women-centric manifestoes of the parties. Will gender-centric slogans encourage women-policy makers to voice their opinions?

With an aim to regain its position in the state, the Congress has given 40 percent tickets to women.

Additionally, Priyanka Gandhi announced a woman-centric manifesto titled 'Shakti Vidhan'. This manifesto includes reservation of 40% of 20 lakh new jobs, more than 25% women police-officers, and Rs. 1000 pension for every woman senior citizen and widow in the state.

Samajwadi Party led by Akhilesh Yadav has also promised a 33% reservation to women in government jobs, free education to girls from kindergarten to post-graduation, and reinstatement of Kanya Vidya Dhan Yojana. The ruling state party, Bharatiya Janata Party also tried to woo the

women voters. It has promised free rides to women in public transport and free higher education. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced setting aside Rs. 1000 crore to form women self-help groups in the state. The BJP has also appointed 60,000 women 'vistarak' (expansionists) to

“Each women member gave a completely fresh and unique perspective in the assembly. They were people from different religions, castes and socio-economic backgrounds bringing a diverse spectrum of ideas.”

-Nitish Nawsagray, Professor of Constitutional law, Indian Law Society

propagate the party's goodwill and schemes to women. The main reason for this change in the Indian political sphere is the increasing number of women voters.

According to the Election Commission's office, enrolment of women voters is larger this year. Women voters in UP have outvoted men since the last three elections. Pallavi, a voter from Kanpur, said: “Both at the Centre as well as the state assembly, men dominate the discourse. There is a need for women candidates. So, if there is a deserving woman candidate from my constituency, I will vote for her, irrespective of the party.”

In the 2017 assembly elections,

a record of 40 women candidates had won the seats, the highest ever proportion of female members in the Uttar Pradesh House. Tara Krishnaswamy, co-founder of 'Shakti- Political power to women', a non-partisan group that works for increasing women representation in government, remarked: “India needs to have a critical mass of women in Parliament and state assemblies for proper representation. The addition of women members in the political process hugely impacts governance, not just the elections.”

The slight inclination of political parties towards women issues is a welcome change. However, this should not end with tall promises and hollow schemes. Richa Som, a policy maker in Madhya Pradesh's health department, who has

closely watched the Indian state elections said: “These political strategies do affect the mob mentality. However, in my experience with Indian politics, such trends come and go like a wave.”

The political parties join the ef-

fort, a change cannot be brought. Tara explained: “We have had 41% tickets given to women by TMC in West Bengal and 33% tickets given by Biju Janata Dal in Odisha. These are all good indications of change but only some opposition parties are providing opportunities for adequate electoral politics. The long-overdue women reservation bill which provides 33% seats for women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies, is still not passed by the government.

The long conversation around gender representation in politics has begun. The emerging women-policy makers and large number of voters look like a positive step in the feminist movement.

“Women form one half of the population of this country and, therefore, men cannot go very far without the cooperation of women.”

-Hansa Mehta, President of the All India Women's Conference

Tara concluded: “Women must join the governance and

law-making in great numbers. Hope for better policies for women is not our plan. Action for change by everyone should be our plan.”

(Inputs by Shashwat Garg)

Students pay a heavy price by Covid-19 induced learning gap

RHEA LODHIYA

The coronavirus induced lockdown forced a colossal change in schooling. Just like the rest of us, students experienced huge and sudden changes. Swati Chowdhury, a child psychologist from Kolkata, noted, "The kids had no time to process the sudden change from offline learning at school to the online mode of learning at home."

According to the Unified District Information on School Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-20 report, there are 26.4 crore school students in India. Post lockdown, countless aspects influenced their schooling through shifts from offline to online modes and vice versa. INK spoke to psychologists, educationists, teachers and parents to understand how these factors have affected upper primary students (grades six to eighth). Over four lakh schools cater to this age group which forms 6.48 crore students, according to UDISE+.

Learning through transitions

The pandemic altered the primary environment of students. A clinical psychologist, who insisted on anonymity, explained, "Children are not used to learning in isolation. There is no motivation to study alone." Their understanding abilities have also been immensely affected. Shreya Jaokar, a Mumbai based child psychologist added, "In this constant change, consistency is lost." "Every student has a different pace of learning which affects online learning more," explained Prashanthi Hegde, a grade six teacher from Bangalore. The Covid 19 induced house arrest has changed the traditional mode of learning for school going children. Several aspects

contribute to this. Ashwin Kumar Medidi, a school administrator from Kolkata, pointed out, "Typing has taken over writing, making students lethargic and dull." Another important aspect is the shift itself. Ranjot Oberoi, an English teacher from Chandigarh, explained, "Resumption of offline classes became a means to connect, participate, resolve doubts and interact better. When online classes returned, fatigue, more absenteeism and frustration was noticed."

This led to certain schools deliberating their course structure. Deepa Avashia, a school leader from Ahmedabad, said, "We re-evaluated what we wanted to teach children both in the online and offline mode of education. Concepts which required a hands-on approach were pushed for later."

Constant conversation around the virus has also escalated the situation. Hegde further added, "Students are confused with the ongoing scenario of Covid and lockdowns."

Focus and Cognitive Ability

Primarily, two factors have caused a dip in the attention span of children. Firstly, fear around the pandemic has caused anxiety. Mahasweta Mukherjee, a counsellor from Kolkata, explained, "Anxiety slows down cognitive activity. Students fail to concentrate and understand what is taught to them in various classes."

Secondly, students are now studying in a more comfortable setting. Anil Kumar, parent of a grade seven student from Patna, said, "Due to the home environment, complacency sets in and kids are not as serious as they were during the offline mode of schooling."

Health is another casualty. Excessive use of electronic devices and massive screen time harms the eyes. Samanvithaa

Adishesan, a clinical psychologist from Chennai, said, "Memory capacity is being compromised, and attention spans are lowered. Eventually, functional changes will occur in attention and memory."

Holistic Growth

Present changes in schooling will have an important impact on holistic development. "Serious issues like anxiety, depression, and hypertension have become more common due to constant switches," explained Mukherjee. This is an important age for students to develop skills outside classrooms. A psychiatrist from Delhi, Dr. Lokesh Shekhawat, said, "In schools, children also learn interpersonal and communication skills. Lack of participation in sports may affect psychological aspects like strategic planning and competitiveness."

Blurring Boundaries

Rathod-Bodawala mentioned the changing divisions between home and school, "Earlier, there was a marked division in playtime, dinner, and school time. Now, that is not the case."

In the online mode, students seem to have become lazier. Munmun Bhar, a parent of a grade eight student in Kolkata, shared, "My son used to be an attentive and active child, but I don't know if I can say the same now. He misses going out to play, and he misses his cricket practice. All this is crucial for his development. I don't know how much of a help we are to him."

The pandemic has also caused some more severe repercussions. Avashia informed, "Some children have lost people around them; they have gone through some kind of trauma. This ordeal impacts their learning capabilities."

However, most teachers are of the opin-

ion that once people go back to their daily life routine, it will take about a year and a half for things to go back to normal. Physical interaction with teachers and peers will help students settle back in the real world and experience schooling as they did in pre-covid times.

The Digital Divide

Modern schooling and the pandemic has created a huge rift in India, with inaccessibility of technology being a major factor at play. Kamaljeet Kaur, Level Coordinator, Middle School, Chandigarh noted, "The disparities in access to technology and the internet are far more pronounced for many minority groups, low income groups or homeless individuals and individuals with disabilities."

According to a survey by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and LIRNEAsia, 20 percent of school children had access to online education between March 2020 and November 2021. Furthermore, 38 percent of households had to pull one child out of school.

Arshia Ambareen, a school principal in Bengaluru, said, "Many students dropped out as their parents couldn't meet the technological demands. This might have an impact on the social struggle of underprivileged students."

Those who did receive access to e-devices are also facing some problems. Renuka Kesarikar, a school teacher in Thane, shared, "Some students who are not accustomed to electronic devices are finding it more difficult to adapt to change."

Inputs by: Aditi Shekar, Angana Pal China, Caroline Druz, Jasnoor Kaur, R Nidharshana, Nitin Singh and Tapasya Iyer.



Resumption of offline schooling benefited students

Bulli Bai, Sulli Deals, and Tek Fog: Cyber-Bullying on a Rise in India

SONALI, SHEYA KURIAN, RUCHIT RASTOGI and POULAMI BHANDARI



The pandemic has brought about a rise in cyberbullying cases

In a world where cyber-bullying is a pattern of repeated behavior that aims to scare, anger, and shame the ones that are being targeted, India has witnessed a rise in such cases with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One in ten adolescents are victims of cyber-bullying in India and more than half of them don't even report it. Even though there was a steep rise in the number of cyber-bullying instances during the pandemic, only 887 such cases were only reported in India during the last year, according to data released by Statista.

Not many cyber-bullying cases have come under the limelight even though such instances continue to wreak havoc. These cases are either solved internally by the individual or worse, are not talked about at all.

Anita (name changed), a 23-year-old student from Kerala, spoke about her experience facing cyber-harassment by someone known: "He wouldn't stop texting me. He tried to talk to me on all platforms and started sending all my friends' requests on Instagram. He would put up my pictures and videos as his stories even though I repeatedly asked him not to. Even after threatening

him with legal consequences, he did not put a stop to his actions. At this point, I was not very sure about the specific laws, but some laws probably exist that wouldn't allow a person to put up my pictures without my consent."

Just like Anita, several people face cyber-bullying and harassment regularly and do not report the cases as they don't know what laws can help them or fear their image in society.

A Delhi sub-inspector told INK that less than one percent of the total cases filed under the cyber crimes unit are of cyber-bullying, as most of the time, people are not aware of the procedures of filing such cases. He added that those who file cases are hesitant to take the matter to court and ultimately withdraw it. This might also have to do with the fact that cyber-bullying cases fall under civil litigation and not criminal, which does not guarantee stringent legal action towards the accused.

Recently, there have been various cases around cyber-bullying and cyber harassment where apps like Sulli Deals, Bulli Bai, and Tek Fog have gained traction. The people suspected of developing and carrying the practices through these apps were primarily teenagers or young adults.

Data released by UNICEF shows that 36 percent of Indians below the age of 18 have acknowledged being victims of cyber-bullying and 11 percent for perpetrating the crime.

Sulli Deals and Bulli Bai are two applications created by engineering students that have sparked several discussions around cyber harassment and bullying. The apps are alleged to have put up pictures of Muslim women, putting a price on their dignity.

Niraj Bishnoi, a 20-year-old student from Assam was identified as the alleged creator of both the apps. The portals created by him hosted pictures of Muslim women without their consent with the purpose of 'auctioning' them by describing them as 'deals of the day.' Hosted by a platform named GitHub, Bulli Bai targeted several female Kashmiri journalists for being outspoken about the Sulli Deals controversy earlier in 2021.

The trend of targeting female journalists was also observed in the activities of Tek Fog, an app used by online operatives affiliated with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to push right-wing propaganda. The operators used databases containing

personal information to harass these individuals. Sexualized trolling is now a standard tool to silence them.

Rutuja Thete, a journalist at Zee Entertainment, told INK, "I have received inappropriate comments for fact-checking a story that I did. This was based on a religious narrative. Even though I took the matter to higher officials in my organization, no effective action was taken."

There is a serious lack of awareness of the laws governing cyberstalking in India. Anubhav, a Delhi-based lawyer told INK: In some of the cases, the clients have told us that whenever they have gone to the police station to file an FIR, the police have told them "Bahut difficult hai inko dhund ke pakadna aur koi fayda nahi hoga kyunki yeh log chhoot jaayenge." (It is very difficult to find and catch hold of the accused and there is no point because they will be let go after a while).

He further added that till the time there is no specific section defining cyberstalking as a crime under the IT Act or till the time an abuser under Section 345D gets the chance to justify that his actions were reasonable, the fight for justice of the people who go through the ordeal will be a long-drawn battle.

R-Day Scrolls Showcased India's Art and Culture

RITIKA SINGH



Preparation of the huge scroll at Rajpath showcasing the unsung heroes of India's Freedom struggle

On this Republic Day, India witnessed an unique collaboration between the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Culture. This rare opportunity brought together a plethora of artists that exhibited their passion for the nation. Kala Kumbh was organised which showcased 'Unsung Heroes of the Struggle of India's Freedom'. These workshops gracefully added on the grand celebrations of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav through rare art forms and paint scrolls.

Payal Priyadarshini, one of the artists who painted the scrolls at Kalinga Institute of Technology, Bhubaneswar, said, "For a developing nation like India, as important, it is to grow in technological and economical fields, it is just as important to grow in cultural fields like art and literature."

These scrolls examine the potential of art to express national pride and achievement through a variety of art from multiple geographical locations of the country. More than 500 young and professional artists were part of the event organised in KIIT University in Odisha and Chitkara University in Chandigarh. The scrolls were 750 meters long and divided into two parts. The upper portion was reserved for modern art, which was used to paint portraits of unsung heroes. The lower part was reserved for folk art to depict cultures, stories, and traditions from different parts of India. Artists gathered from different states were asked to paint the heroes and cultures of their respective states for the sake of authenticity.

Ritik Verma, a painter from Chit-

kara University, tells us that some of these unsung heroes and art forms are so unpopular and rare that they aren't available on the internet. Having artists from different states and cultures paint different personalities and depict stories from their region, put the spotlight on these forgotten stories and the impact they had.

In an attempt to preserve and promote endangered art forms the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi, held regular and rigorous discussions between the artists on these art forms, stories, archives, and history to ensure the scrolls carried vibrance, diversity and details. Adwaita Gadanayak, director-general of NGMA, said, "This event will have a profound impact on Indian culture. It has been covered by media channels and it

will help create an atmosphere for both contemporary and indigenous artists to work together and change society."

Gadanayak pointed out that those involved got national recognition and helped the spread of art and culture. More such events will not only help the art and creative industry to flourish, but will help people to get back to their roots, he said.

Inputs from DEVLEENA DASH,
SPRUHA PANDA and
PRAJAKTA MHATRE

R-DAY PARADE: A SHOWCASE OF CULTURE AND PATRIOTISM

NISHTHA GUPTA AND SHASHWAT SWAROOP

For India's 73rd Republic Day, more than 480 participants among 36 teams from 15 different states participated in the annual RD parade on Rajpath. As many as 16 marching contingents from different departments and armed forces took part in the annual ceremony.

The National Cadet Corps (NCC) has always been an integral part of the Republic Day Parade as well as the PM Rally. Cadets from all over

the country train rigorously for months to get selected for the marching regiment.

Lance Corporal Shreyaa Raj. D told INK about her first appearance in the RD Parade, "Perseverance always pays

off. I feel proud of myself for being the only person who was selected from my battalion. I know the importance of



REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS

being a part of something like this and it gives me immense joy to experience it."

Col. Amitabh Kumar, who served the nation for 24 years is now a Commanding Officer in NCC. He told INK,

"When it comes to the parade, selection of cadets is a stringent process, as only the best from each state are selected for the



parade regiment. They train extremely hard in order to make the cut and it is our responsibility to give them proper training for the parade."

The Defense and Culture Ministry of India organized a cross country

competition, 'Vande Bharatam' to filter top dancing troupes to perform on 26th January. But, being a part of the R-Day



DD NATIONAL

parade is a hard fought dream. For Shubhneet, Captain of the Bhangra Team from Chandigarh University, Punjab - the process of selection was stretched over three levels- Zonal, North Zonal and National. "We

were ecstatic when we got a call from the Ministry that we made the cut," he said.

Due to the Covid scare, rehearsing was a difficult task. "Before starting our rehearsals, half of our squad turned out to be COVID positive. This hampered our practice sessions," said Prabhnoor Kaur, a team member.

Practice starts early at 4 AM and goes on till evening at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in New Delhi.

The annual RD Parade is an opportunity for people to represent their cultures with pride. It is a reminder of our heritage and a time-honoured celebration of India's diversity.

“Freedom is when every Indian will understand the pain Kashmiris are experiencing”

AASHIKA JAIN and RIDDHI OZA

When India celebrated its 73rd Republic Day, how many of us thought of our fellow Kashmiris who continue to battle curfews, internet shutdowns, surprise body-searches and lack of basic amenities due to the conditions there? The Kashmiris feel unheard and are pessimistic about their future. They crave for the same kind of freedom that fellow Indians have.

How do they feel when there is celebration all over India as it inches towards completing 75 years of Independence? Everyone INK spoke to insisted on anonymity which speaks for itself. Even though the Kashmiris are finding the courage to reach out to people, their voices are still distinct and are yet to be assured of justice. A student said, “The day Kashmiris will feel free, I will be the first person to hoist the Indian flag.”

Another post-graduate student said, “January 26 is a day of fear. It usually begins from January 10, 2021 as curfew announcements are made. Parents start asking us to stay at home. We have to always carry IDs with us, to avoid troubles.”

Talking about frequent frisking, a resident from Anantnag district, said, “In Kashmir, we are stopped, our vehicles

are frisked and guns are pointed at our heads for no reason. Men are asked to put up their Pheran, which is a Kashmiri traditional dress, to check if we are hiding anything underneath. We fear leaving home after 8 pm as there



is a chance that we might not return.”

A Kashmiri weaver added, “Sudden curfews on Republic Day is a tradition since ages. To avoid any unexpected disruption, we start accumulating food stocks six months ahead of time.”

There have been numerous attempts to gag the press in Kashmir over the years. It just got highlighted recently when the Press Club was closed down.

It has around 300 members. Among them, 12 are women. Says a Kashmir based journalist, “We have always worked under strenuous conditions. Since August 2019, the situation has only worsened as the state has escalat-

ed censorship efforts to curb any discussion on Kashmir. The shutdown of Press Club is a latest major blow on the ongoing efforts to suppress honest and ethical journalism. It was an important institution that provided a space for the media community to fraternize and find support in distress. This irked the state leading to shutdown.”

The general chaos in the state hurts

not just civilians, but school children as well. They are afraid of curfews and often stay at home. A Kashmiri Principal pointed out, “School kids are unaware about the significance of this day as they never got a chance to celebrate.

Republic day for them only means internet shutdown and more curbs, which has instilled fear in them.”

When the condition of a state becomes like this, people feel suffocated. Their definition of freedom is bound to be different from the rest of India. A student from Srinagar mentioned, “Freedom is when we connect with the rest of India. Freedom is when every Indian will understand the pain that Kashmiris are experiencing. Freedom would be when the government stops making rose beds out of the graveyards of Kashmiris. Freedom is when people are not dying everyday in fake encounters, killings and other ways. Freedom is when our voices will be heard. Kashmir then will no longer be a warfare state.”

Even though we claim to accept the Kashmiris, our actions fail to support our claims as individmir before things get worse.



Heavy Frisking done ahead of Republic Day in Kashmir

Tales of Indian Valour in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War

TAPASYA IYER



Vijay Diwas is celebrated on December 16, every year to commemorate the victory of India in the war

OneIndia

To commemorate the Swarnim Vijay Varsh of the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, India's 73rd Republic Day parade featured the grandest fly-past of 75 aircrafts by the Indian Air force. The IAF replicated the formations of the victorious war. As a tribute to the unsung heroes, INK documents colorful experiences of military veterans who were a part of the war:

"The entire war is unforgettable!" Inspector Megh Singh (Rtd.), third battalion in the Border security force, says as he recalls the 13-day-long war, with a proud grin and sparkling eyes. Bangladesh's pro-liberation struggle against Pakistan was in full swing even before the war began. Inspector Singh told INK: "Seeing the possibility of the attack on the Indian border, we had begun training months before the actual war. We used to train in poor conditions with no means of communication and limited food supply. Despite regular flooding due to rainfall, we continued to train intensely."

Winning the war was not easy. Pakistan began its pre-emptive air strikes on Indian borders on December 3, 1971. On the same day, India rendered its crucial support to Mukti Bahini, the liberation front of Bangladesh. The IAF re-

taliated first on the war front. Sergeant Raghunath Pal (Rtd.), who worked in the team flying MIG21 of the Indian Air Force, shares: "We had to move to an unknown location before the attack which was Chandigarh, which was our base. By the time our AN-32 Aircraft took off, we were attacked by the Pakistani air force. The Indian pilot immediately switched off the lights. As we reached Chandigarh, there was a complete blackout. So, we could not land. We flew to Ambala, which was also attacked and so we chose to land in Delhi."

Though the war is known to be one of the shortest campaigns in military history, the forces' united efforts were intense. Subedar Nishikant Bhattacharjee (Rtd.) who was a part of the 62nd tank regiment in the Indian Army said: "We were instructed to start a three-sided attack at 3 am, but suddenly the situation became tense. Hence, we were ordered to launch a surprise attack at midnight."

Pakistan suffered heavy losses on the Eastern and Western front in the war. The surprise attacks by the Indian military forced the Eastern Command Chief of the Pakistani Army, Lt. Gen AAK Niazi, to sign the instrument of surrender. Though the war ended on paper, it was not over yet.

Remembering the year after the war, Megh Singh said: "The Border Security force had captured Pakistan's Diplo post near Gujarat. Until proper negotiations and the Shimla Agreement were made between the governments, we stayed there. For one year, the attacks continued every day. But, we knew Maarna hai ya fir marna hai!" (Fight or die)

While the soldiers were battling for the country's security on the borders, the families back home were fighting their inner fears.

A son of a former naval officer who fought in the 1971 war said: "Since Baba was on the frontlines, there was no way of communicating with him. The news only talked about the horrors of the war. This made us anxious if Baba would come back alive or wrapped in the tri-color. It was a very stressful time for my family."

In addition to the military's valor during the war, the locals contributed as a support system to the former. PC Saha (Rtd.) who was a part of the Indian Air Force Technical Squad said: "Punjabi families near the posts used to come to the main gate to provide food and clothing daily. I still possess one sweater sewn by one of those la-

dies. Their affection made us feel like we are a part of a larger family."

The operation's success could have never been possible without diplomacy, political astuteness, and most importantly, the spirit of the Republic. Officer Nishikant adds: "In a Republic, the welfare of the people builds on the foundation of unity."

The victory of the war came at a price. Nearly 3,900 Indian soldiers were martyred, and nearly 10,000 soldiers suffered life-long disabilities. This year the government has put out the eternal flame of the Amar Jawan Jyoti and merged it with the one at the National War Memorial. But, the flames of the war and its martyrs' sacrifices will always be alive in the minds of India's citizens.

Inputs from Hridya Shrivastava, Ruchit Rastogi, Anikaa Singh and Apurva Adhikari

Democracy is gradually crumbling leading to the disintegration of our constitution: Datta Gandhi

AASHIKA JAIN and RIDDHI OZA

The India we know today came at a human cost, in varied forms of sacrifice. While we remember the pillars of this independent nation who gave us the freedom to write a constitution, we must also remember the pillars of this sovereign nation who gave us the freedom to build a constitution. Ram Puniyani, a former professor of IIT Bombay and the author of *Ambedkar and Hindutva politics* stated, "The constitution represents the value of the freedom movement and shows the aspiration of the founding fathers. It is revered because of our freedom fighters, and the only way to honour them would be by bringing their values of fraternity and equality."

Who can narrate the story of India's freedom struggle better than Mumbai-based Datta Gandhi, a 99-year-old who was honoured with several awards like the Jeevan Vradi award in 2012 and Jeevan Gaurav Puraskar by the Rashtra Seva Dal in 2015? He played a major role in the freedom movement that happened in several parts of Maharashtra. He continues to follow Gandhi's teachings by serving society and contributing one month's pension to the Chief Minister Fund for Covid relief in 2020. He is a living inspiration to the youth and believes in youth power.

In a candid interview with INK, Gandhi spoke of what it was like, his dreams and how he looks at it today. Excerpts:

As we celebrate the 73rd Republic Day, do you think the dreams of our freedom fighters, like yours, have come true?

The great leaders of our country implemented the framework of the constitution well for the welfare of the Indians. However, the ministers these days are trying to make a lot of amendments in the federal structure of the preamble for their propaganda. The success of the constitution will happen the day it will be rightly perceived and understood by everyone, and when youth will stand against any propaganda.

What was your role in the freedom struggle?

On August 9, 1942, I launched my struggle by closing a school in Mahad

during the course of my struggle.

How was the first Republic Day celebrated in 1950?

The success of the constitution will happen the day it will be rightly perceived and understood by everyone, and when youth will stand against any propaganda.

as girls were not allowed to benefit from education like boys. After sailing down the Savitri river, other freedom fighters like Kamalakar and Dandekar hoisted the flag at the treasury of a court. We finally staged a satyagraha after a protest by another freedom fighter, Nanasahb Purohit's failed. I also spent 16 months in Visapur Jail in Maharashtra

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on January 26, 1950, said that the constitution was made for the citizens of India and it was served to them. On this remarkable day, the Indian flag was hoisted in school playgrounds. Even the outsiders became a part of this historic movement. We hoisted the Indian flag on buses, trains, and houses. Every leader was delivering freedom speeches in every

corner of the country. The heroes of the nation had built an infrastructure that would reverberate the nation's struggle and ideals, and there was a sense of pride and happiness everywhere.

What is the relevance of Republic day to you?

Mahatma Gandhi said on the Independence Day of 1947, "Swaraj is never dropped from heaven. It is built by self and corporate efforts." This is how I see Republic Day as a day of commemorating the great constitution of India that was built on ethics and moral values.

How has the celebration of Republic day changed over the years?

Even though people chant slogans of Vande Mataram, and hoist the tricolour in a patriotic spirit, as the day ends, their spirit, too, diminishes. The rising tide of corruption, crooked politicians, and unlawful activities has substantially diminished the significance of Republic Day.

After 73 years, how far has India come in terms of democracy and sovereignty?

The root of democracy, which resonates with the principles of a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic, is getting eroded from place to place. Despite the youth's efforts to raise their voices, the foundation of democracy is gradually crumbling leading to the disintegration of our constitution.

On Martyrs' Day, India remembers Mahatma Gandhi's supreme sacrifices. What relevance does it hold in your life?

Mahatma Gandhi's death meant the end of humanity. Towards the end of May 1944 in Pune, Gandhiji placed his hands over my shoulder for two minutes, making it the most memorable day of my life. I hope that when I am at the end of my journey, I remember the spirit of Gandhiji.



US cardiologist moves from farm protests to Punjab elections

American cardiologist Dr. Swaiman Singh's journey from New Jersey to the borders of Delhi is nothing short of a heroic tale. From the farmers' protest camp to political campaigns in the plains of Punjab, his life sure has taken an interesting turn.

DHARAMJOT KAUR



Swaiman with volunteers at Tikri Border

When thousands of farmers clashed with police forces around Delhi and broke barricades to revolt in the capital on 26th November 2020, Dr. Swaiman Singh was following the daily updates from his home in New Jersey. A Summa Cum Laude (i.e., highest distinction) graduate from Drexel University, Philadelphia, 35-year-old Singh was born in 1987 in Amritsar and migrated to America with his parents, when he was 10 years old. With family roots ingrained in agriculture, the movement held a lot of significance for him, even though he was thousands of miles away. However, a personal loss at the Delhi border and the dire need for medical attention at the camps compelled him to visit India. As he left his wife and two-year-old daughter behind, his original plan was to stay for five days and help set-up a medical facility at Tikri Border, which was suffering from severe lack of medical attention. Weeks went by before he realized he was incapable of going back home. The needs of vulnerable elderly at the protest camps and his emotional attachment to the cause, to Punjab, forbade him from leaving.

Life at Delhi's Borders

Dr. Singh's tryst with Tikri border began by setting up a small medical camp that slowly grew into a structured organization called Five Rivers Heart Association. Over the duration of the protest, he played a pivotal role in providing logistical support to the farmers. He also emerged as a popular face that took to the stage, to keep the spirit of his people alive. Additionally,

he drove a social media campaign through his personal handles and became a key bridge between Delhi's borders and the rest of the Indian diaspora following the movement. But life at the protest sites was far from rosy, unlike the narrative that many media groups played out for the unsuspecting public. As we sat in the make-shift office that his team had set-up in an under-construction bus stand at Bahadurgarh Chowk, Singh talked about the day-to-day problems they faced. "One night, the dirty water from the gutters got mixed up with the water supply in the building's pipeline. Since so much was happening, we bathed with that dirty water for three days before realizing what had happened. It took months for my skin infection to subside. This is just one of the many things we've had to endure."

The point of no return

Although the rise of this NRI-return star sounds like a Bollywood film, Singh's journey has been replete with adversity and moments of realization. One such milestone experience was the 26th January Kisan Tractor Rally last year. Along with his team of doctors and nurses, Dr. Singh was on medical duty for the Tikri border route of the rally, which was majorly peaceful. But as the tractors headed back to the camps, chaos broke out near ITO, Delhi. The police threw tear

gas shells, lathi-charged farmers on foot and even shot at a tractor, which led to the death of a young protester. As Singh and his team scurried to help injured farmers, locals and policemen, they were attacked by the police forces and thrashed relentlessly. The events that transpired over the next few days cast a shadow over the legitimacy of the protest, which only strengthened his resolve to not abandon his people. The farmers won the battle on November 19th 2021 with Prime Minister Narendra Modi announcing that the farm laws would be repealed. However, Singh was convinced that much work was yet to be done for the agrarian community and for his homeland.

The dream that is Punjab

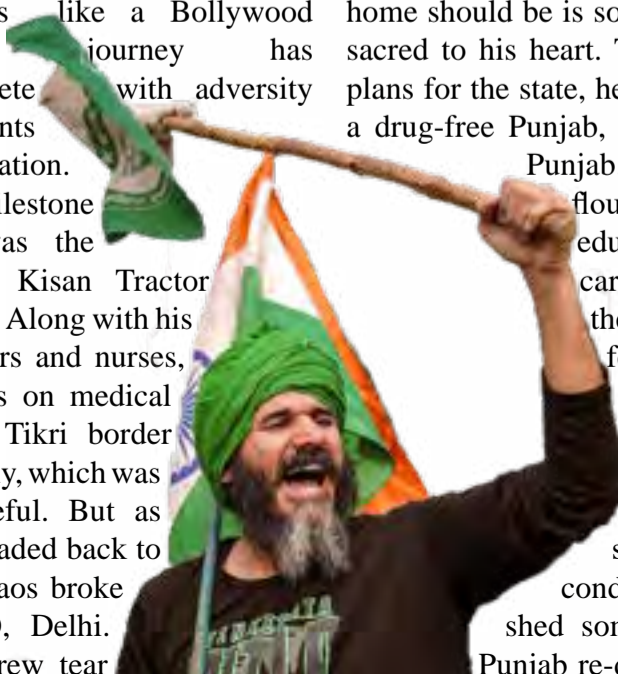
Singh has lofty dreams and aspirations for Punjab. For a man who reinstated his physical attributes and embraced the Sikh identity after years of not wearing a turban, the idea of what his home should be is something he holds sacred to his heart. Talking about his plans for the state, he said "I dream of a drug-free Punjab, a corruption free Punjab. A Punjab that flourishes with good education and health care systems so that the youth does not feel compelled to go abroad anymore." Voicing his concern for the state's financial condition, Dr. Singh shed some light on how Punjab re-directs 75% of its

waters to other states, but gets nothing in return. "The state is being run dry and polluted water tables have been a major cause of concern for decades now, with no political party caring enough to mitigate the situation," he quipped.

Political allegiance and the road ahead

Singh's alliance with Samyukt Sangharsh Morcha (SSM), the newly created farmers' party in the state, has raised some eyebrows. Although he says his role is limited to external support for the right candidates, questions have been raised around the true nature of his intentions and plausible vested interests. But he says his support is not blind and unconditional. "I will only support the people that issue a signed notarized document, to fulfill their duties, should they come to power and encourage people to vote responsibly," he said.

As he looks back at everything that has transpired over the last eighteen months and talks about what lies ahead, one can gauge that his story is far from over. But there is uncertainty in his voice as he ponders upon his future. He says he was a career-oriented man knowing what he wanted. But now, doubts have crept in. However, he is clear that he will hereafter go wherever he is wanted and do whatever it takes for his country. Heading home from yet another long day on the road, Dr. Singh exuberates the energy of a young man who has gained experience beyond his years. But his work towards a "Sunehra Punjab" has only just begun.



73 years of the Constitution: A Dalit Perspective

ADITI SHEKAR AND YUKTA BAID



Cynthia Stephen, Dalit Activist

Source - The Quint

On the 73rd year of the existence of India's Constitution, we often look at how far the ideals written down in it have managed to make a difference when it comes to Dalits. The Republic is a hierarchical structure with deep foundations in the caste system. Caste remains to be a tool used for segregation politics in social structures and the bureaucracy.

According to the 2011 cen

in positions of power, only a mere nine percent are from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India.

This lack of agency and authority translates into the landholding opportunities presented to the Dalits. According to a report by the Agricultural Census done in 2015-16, Dalits have access to a mere nine percent of the land available for use in India (1571.4 lakh hectares). In proportion to their population share of 18.5 percent in rural areas, most of the Dalit community still suffers from landlessness.

Regulations on land-holding like the UP Land Revenue Code Rules of 2016 are governed by discrimination, which also indirectly impact basic rights like education for Dalits. The literacy rate among them is 66.1 percent as opposed to the national rate of 73 percent.

Cynthia Stephen, a Bangalore-based Dalit activist and social policy researcher, pointed out, "The constitutional intent of equality, knowledge dissemination, justice, fraternity, it's still unattained with regards to the Dalit community. The system deliberately excludes marginalised people from spheres of achievement and this causes a lack of representation."

In terms of economic standpoint, the community bears the effects of social exclusion. The Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index highlights the lagging of the Dalit community's economic scene by 6 to 48 percent compared to the national mean. These observations come from successive

census rethat specify that scheduled castes stand second in high multidimensional poverty at 65.8 percent.

Elaborating more on the community's struggles to survive financially in the country, Stephen says, "Grinding poverty of people from the community without any fallback, forces them into a life of foraging and begging door-to-door even for water. This is how you can best describe it. Something sparks with in you when you see this at a very young age. I have a Dalit filter su

perimposed on my privilege of education and language and not class." On Gandhi's approach to caste, she said, "He did not succeed in integrating the marginalised into the political space because of the ideological weakness in his approach. He tried to retain the dharmic, caste principles and operate within them."

Gandhi was against the concept of divided electorates, believing that this was an attempt of the British to divide Hindus, but after discussion and compromise, the Poona Pact was signed.

The Poona Pact of September 1932 was the agreement signed between Dr B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi for the upliftment of depressed, and marginalised, communities in public services and educational institution through reservation. The Constitution recognizes the right against discrimination on the basis of caste [Article 14 & 15 (1)] and the freedom to work in any

profession [Article 19(1)(g)], but the laws that have protected these rights are vague and not enforced properly.

Stephen points out that the goals and ideas of the Constitution are not attained yet due to feudal elements and thought affecting our polity even 73 years down the line saying that: "Legislation goes ahead, and social change follows. There has been a vast gap between the ideals of the constitution and their achievement. In 75 years of Independence, we could have achieved a lot more. Ambedkar's fears regarding the lack of a social democracy continue to stay relevant till date."

Designed to be dynamic, the Constitution needs to cater to the changing needs of the marginalised groups of the country. Even after these drawbacks, the community persists in the fight to be heard.

The Dalit community's perspective on the Constitution continues to be skeptical as they are deprived of basic rights like land holdings, education, and representation in

"I'm weeping as I say this, but the brightness of the tricolour has begun to fade because of the pain it has caused."

—Cynthia Stephen, Dalit activist

sus, 20.14 crore people belong to scheduled castes. Hence, the Dalit community constitutes 16.6 percent of India's population. However, as observed in an RTI application filed by The Print, the ratio of their representation in the government remains unsteady. Out of 81 officers

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: NFHS Data Contradicts Claims

SONALI AND AARYAMAN DAHIYA

Is the provision of improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities throughout the country adequate?

In October 2019, recounting the achievements of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared India an open defecation-free country.

But what is being said and the measures that follow seem to contradict each

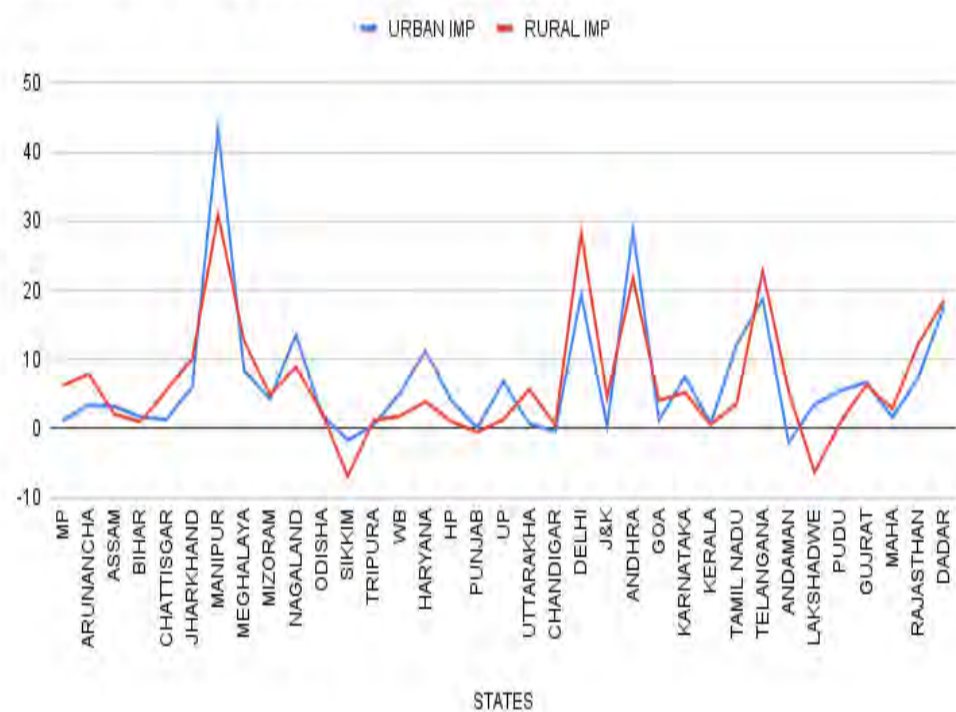
funding in SBM (Grameen)-Phase 2. The circular categorically mentioned various incentives to construct Individual Household Latrines (IHHL), including water storage facilities.

Pronab Sen, the former chief economist of India, told INK, "The recent initiatives launched by the government with a fair amount of fanfare, goes against what the claims

mortality are caused mainly by a lack of domestic water systems and toilets in most states. The urban parts of the northeastern states

"About 94% of households across the country have access to safe drinking water, which leaves minimal scope for improvement in this field".

Urban Vs Rural Improvement (Water Supply)



Urban vs Rural Improvement in Water Supply

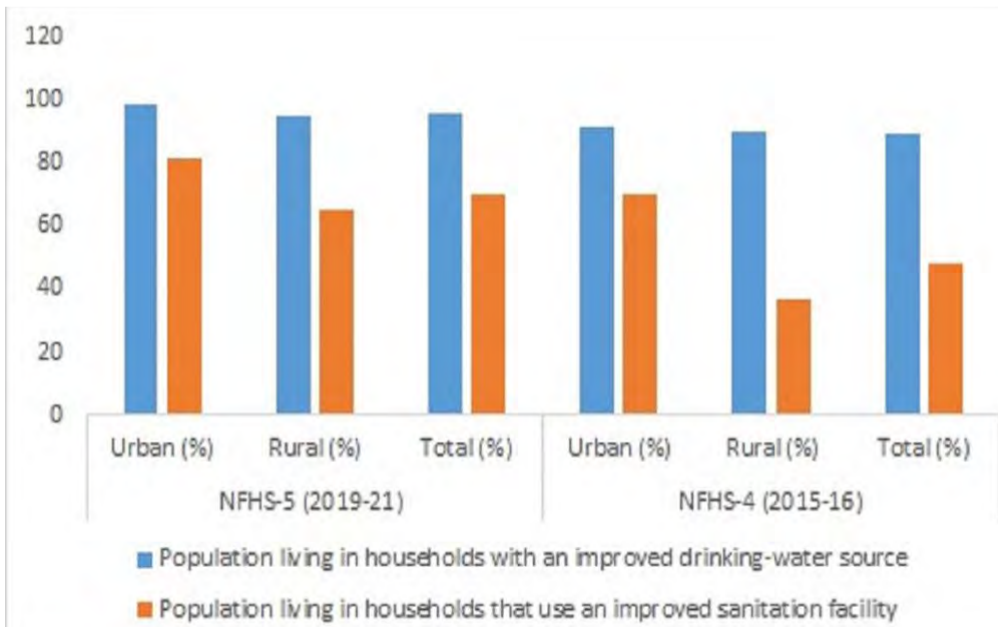
other. PM Modi announced the second phase of the SBM 2.0 on 1st October 2021. Like the previous mission, this also aims to make cities garbage-free and ensure safe water for all citizens.

The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, which falls under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, released a circular on 17th January 2022, stating that it will be increasing

are. NFHS 5 contradicts the PM's claim that India is free of open defecation."

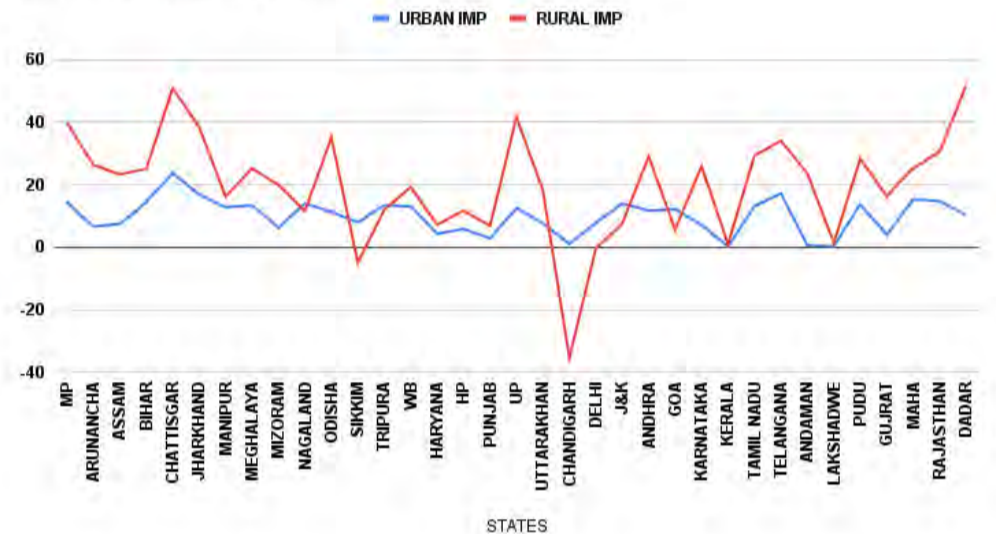
The facts and figures released in NFHS 5 throw light on the availability of improved drinking water and sanitation across urban and rural regions of all states.

Around 15% of India's population defecates in the open. Water-borne diseases, malnutrition, and



Change in the status of households in terms of access to water and sanitation. Source - Down to Earth

Urban Vs Rural Improvement (Sanitation)



Urban vs Rural Improvement in Sanitation

like Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Nagaland and other states like Kerala Bihar, West Bengal, Northern Karnataka and Western parts of Maharashtra and Gujarat were the most affected.

Rural regions throughout the country seem to have shown a phenomenal improvement from NFHS 4 to NFHS5 regarding sanitation. Bihar seems to have made significant improvements in the last five years, but it still ranks amongst the lowest in all the states. Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Dadar, and Nagar Haveli have been on top of improved sanitation.

According to research conducted by UNICEF in India, 50 million people in 15 Indian cities do not have access to clean and inexpensive drinking water. Overall 6% of the people lack access to safe drinking water. Manipur, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura and Ladakh were the states that recorded below 90% when it comes to having access to safe drinking water.

The Longitudinal Ageing Study of India, identified sources of water utilised by households in each state and UT, classifying three categories: piped water on the house's premises, other sources of improved drinking water, and to better the households' condition, with a minimal percentage of families using unimproved drinking water.

A key employee at India Ratings and Research, a rating agency, who insisted on anonymity, told INK,

The importance of having improved sanitation and drinking water can only be realized if there is access to a better drinking water supply for all and if proper hygiene habits are followed. Lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene — collectively known as WASH—has serious socio-economic and health impacts, particularly for women and children.

If official claims are to be believed, the data from NFHS-5, while only partially accessible, clearly demonstrate the need to reinforce the transformations that the government intends to maintain during SBM 2.0. These findings further emphasize the necessity of using external sample surveys to cross-validate administrative data.



15% of India's population defecates in the open Source - Gram Vikas

Yamuna river struggles to stay alive

AASHIKA JAIN, CAROLINE DCRUZ AND RIDDHI OZA

Plans for Yamuna purification looks good on paper, but its implementation is tardy.



NGO Workers cleaning the polluted Yamuna

(Source - National Mission for Clean Ganga)

The Yamuna River is on the verge of dying. The toxic pollutants and untreated waste in the river are suffocating locals, leading to the poor health of thousands staying along the banks.

It is the second largest tributary of the River Ganga, it flows through seven states and merges with the Ganga. It enters the capital from Palla to cover 54 km of Delhi's territory. Delhi's 22 km stretch which extends from Wazirabad to Okhla, accounts for 80% of the total pollution in the river.

Monthly water quality status reports of the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) shows that the fecal bacteria level in Yamuna has been 14 times higher than what existed three months ago. This report also mentions how ghats of the Yamuna are severely affected with Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) mg/level ranging from 2.5mg/l to 77mg/l, which is required to be less than 3 mg/l, making it hazardous in nature.

The reason behind increased pollution levels includes several pollutants being excreted from 42 industrial units of Delhi and 39 units of Haryana and UP, that are untapped, and untreated. This turns the Yamuna in Delhi into

a river full of dangerous toxins.

Many sewage treatment plants are non-operational, and effluent treatment plants that are not functional only add to the problem.

This also leads to an accumulation of industrial and domestic waste, mainly liquid waste. Construction demolition waste and underground water extraction also disrupts the balance of water channels.

In the past three months, the river's condition deteriorated severely. Vikrant Tongad, an environmental activist, said, "Some natural reasons like weather and a reduction in temperature have also worsened its condition. Apart from this, chemical based farming has affected the ecological balance of this river as the chemicals are flushed into it."

Furthermore, detergents having ammonia also contribute to industrial waste. According to the Bureau of Indian Standards, the recommended maximum level for drinking water is 0.5 parts per million. The Delhi Jal Board is capable of treating only 0.9ppm. Unfortunately, the ammonia level in Wazirabad is 5 parts per million.

Poonam, a resident of Yamuna Khadar, told INK, "We cannot use water from the river as it is too salty and dirty."

Reshma, another old woman from the area complained, "When kids drink this water, they suffer from cough, cold and sometimes their ribs ache." Moolchand Parma, another local resident, said, "The stinking river makes us feel suffocated and nauseated. The pollution has hampered our livelihood as well."

These pollutants have also impacted marine life. Bhawna Badola, CEO of TREE Craze Foundation, explained, "Dissolved oxygen left in the Delhi stretch is minimal and in summers can also go up to zero which means survival of aquatic life is difficult."

Various community efforts to save the river have been launched like the Yamuna Foundation for Blue Water Inc, Meri Yamuna Mere Ghat, Maa Shri Yamuna Seva Samiti or Friends of Yamuna are some of the initiatives that focus on improving the ecosystem in New Delhi. The government also worked on several projects such as the Yamuna Action Plan in three phases that have been underway since 1993, among India's largest river rehabilitation projects. Though these projects look good on paper, implementation is abysmal. The river has suffered due to bureaucratic neglect.

An official of East Delhi Municipal

Corporation, who requested anonymity, said, "Shortage of land, funding, poor waste processing facilities and involvement of multiple agencies, has made this a tedious process. Effective solid waste management can resolve this crisis which includes a 100% implementation of door to door garbage collection system to avoid open dumping."

Further, immediate action should be made to improve the situation. It is critically important to construct new sewage treatment facilities, as well as expand the capacity of current plants, and clean the city's major drains.

Mohit Relan, another environmentalist, talked about some other effective measures: "Heavy fines should be charged for residential waste and polluting industrial units must be sealed. A separate ghat should be allotted for religious activities. Biofencing should be brought into action for maintenance purposes. Agroforestry, and native medical plants must be encouraged. A website should be made to connect various departments and NGOs effectively for river projects in India."

Yamuna, which once saw civilization flourish along its banks, is now struggling to stay alive.

Taking the Electric Turn: A little too early?

AARYAMAN DAHIYA

In another step to combat Delhi pollution, the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party government became the first in the country to draft an aggregator's policy to mandate an electric vehicle (EV) fleet. It remains to be seen whether other states would follow suit.

Electrical vehicles are not a new concept in India. The first electric vehicle was developed way back in 1996 and it was a Three Wheeler Vikram Safa and was made by Scooters India Pvt Ltd in Lucknow. Roughly 400 were made and sold.

In 1999, Mahindra launched its first three wheeler that was electric and also launched a new company in 2001 to make and sell electric vehicles in 2001. But they were forced to shut shop after three years, i.e. in 2004 due to lack of demand. A lot of players entered the market even after that but were not successful.

According to the newly implemented policy 10% of all the new two wheelers and 5% of all new four wheelers need to be electric in the next three months. The long term goal is to adopt 50% of all new two wheelers and 25% of all new four wheelers electric vehicles by 2023.

Arun Sharma, the branch manager of



Electric taxis charging in a station

Source - News 18

International Travel House, Delhi, told INK, "There are mainly two problems with implementing the electric vehicle policy. Firstly, better charging facilities need to be ensured and backup for the same needs to be streamlined. Secondly, the initial investment is high and electric vehicles are a new concept. It is not all bad as low running costs and zero pollution is definitely a major attraction towards electric vehicles."

There are several reasons why buyers do not want to shift to electric vehicles. Firstly they feel there is a lack of infrastructure. The number of charging stations seems to be very limited and they should be increased according

to many. Secondly it seems to be a very time consuming process. For any electric vehicle to charge, it takes about 3 hours which is much more compared to any other fuel. Thirdly, the maintenance cost is a major worry. They are apprehensive that battery replacements would be expensive.

Sharma's fear about costs is a common one. "The initial investment is very high - about Rs. 12 to Rs. 15 lakhs even with government subsidies. Along with that, the battery costs about Rs. 2.5 - Rs. 3 lakhs and it needs a replacement every two years which proves to be expensive," he said.

Surender Kumar, a cab driver with

General Taxi Stand, R.K. Puram, Delhi, said, "It will be a beneficial policy if implemented properly. Something that needs to be taken care of is how much time charging might take because if we are stuck with a customer while charging our vehicle, it is a loss for us and the customers as well."

There are practical problems that cannot be overlooked. A Zomato delivery boy who requested anonymity has been using an electric scooter for the past one and a half years. He said: "The battery, which can run only for about 50 kilometers, drains out in about two or two and a half hours which cuts down on daily earnings. Even charging this vehicle takes three hours. Another problem is the amount of chargers that are available."

The practical implementation of this policy is hindered by the lack of charging infrastructure, high investment and low mileage of the EVs for commercial use. Alternatively, governments are also looking at increasing ethanol percentage with petrol and even using hydrogen as a replacement for fuel altogether.

Inputs by Mrinalini

Kumbalangi is India's first village that introduces sanitary cups to replace sanitary napkins

MALAVIKA SURESH, SHEYA KURIAN AND ANN MANOJ

Kumbalangi, a village in the Ernakulam district of Kerala, has emerged as the first village in India to become sanitary napkin free.

Women of the village are replacing sanitary napkins for menstrual cups. Unlike sanitary napkins, menstrual cups are small silicon based cups that collect the blood flow instead of absorbing it like pads and tampons.

Leeja Thomas Babu, the President of the Kumbalangi Grama Panchayat, said the initiative received positive responses and hoped that other panchayats would soon follow suit.

This environmentally friendly move is part of a scheme called 'Avalkayi' (for her), being implemented in the Ernakulam constituency of Kerala. Under this initiative, more than 5,000 menstrual cups have been distributed to women aged 18 and above.

The initiative is being led by Ernakulam MP Hibi Eden, in collaboration with Hindustan Latex Limited Management Academy's 'Thingal' scheme and Indian Oil Corporation. It aims to provide a safer, more affordable, and hassle free alternative to sanitary pads and tampons in the form of menstrual cups.

Dr. Krishna Rejeesh, a Public Health Specialist from the HLL Academy, led the team of doctors, heading the awareness programme in the village. She said, "Pad disposal is a growing concern in the district due to its coastal location. The switch to cups will not only help in waste management, but also help women keep a tab on how much they bleed every month. This would in turn, help them take better care of their menstrual health."

In some parts of India, women still use poor quality sanitary pads and



Representative Image - Women of a village in Kerala. Source - Istockphotos

clothes which will in turn increase the rate of infection. Most women in the village were apprehensive about using these cups since it is still considered to be a taboo nationwide. They got over their initial fears once they understood the idea behind the cup and its benefits. Several training sessions by medical experts were conducted

over three months to ensure a smooth transition from pads to cups. Doctors were available during this period to deal with any qualms that these women faced during the insertion and removal of the cup.

Dr Manju George, a Gynaecologist at Lakeshore Hospital, Ernakulam, views this initiative as empowering. She said, "Kumbalangi being a small village is the last place I would have expected to do something like this. They are setting a great example for the rest of the country. Menstrual cups are the best choice environmentally as they can be reused over five years."

The switch to menstrual cups has been lauded by doctors and health practitioners across the state. In a country where girls often drop out of school due to lack of menstrual hygiene facilities, the introduction of such budget-friendly cups is a game changer.

Subhas Rachanabali: A saga of Netaji's rare speeches hits stores

SHREEMOYEE ROYCHOUDHURY

On the occasion of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's 125th birth anniversary, two volumes of the Subhas Rachanabali were reprinted, including Bose's unedited speeches from 1916 to 1945 along with some of his rare photographs.

In 1978, eminent historian Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar collaborated with revolutionary freedom-fighter Sunil Das, Dr. Asok Nath Bose, family members of Subhas Chandra Bose, Sri Satya Ranjan Bakshi, Harivishnu Kamat, and Professor Samar Guha to document a book about the principles and statements of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

Six volumes of the book were published by Jayasree Prakashan, a publishing agency owned by Jayasree Patrika Trust. Jayasree Patrika was a monthly magazine named by Rabindranath Tagore, which soon evolved into a publication house with the intention to capture the 'Voice of Netaji'. While Rachanabali managed to achieve this goal, the book was otherwise an unfinished account which the reprinted version completed with unedited versions of the leader's famous statements.

"Subhas Rachanabali is the most authentic collection of speeches

delivered by Bose. Reprinting it will pay homage to Netaji, and ensure that his unedited statements will be available to the public," said Indrashish Bhattacharya, Program Coordinator, Trustee of Jayashree Patrika Trust.

The strong demand to reprint Rachanabali was another reason for its republication, which was out of print for the last 35 years. Ms. Kankana Ghosh, Member of Netaji Birth Anniversary Celebrations Committee, points out: "The book was reprinted to unveil and strongly communicate to the people about the ideals that Netaji left behind."

A section of the book includes a speech spoken by Netaji on May 3, 1928 at the sixth Maharashtra regional conference in Pune. The excerpt reads:

"I acknowledge my indebtedness from my heart at the decision to confer me with the position of the chairperson on the occasion of the sixth Maharashtra regional conference. I was initially reluctant to accept this invite, but some of my friends have reminded me of the deep association between Bengalis and Marathis in this freedom struggle for a long time. On this occasion, I remember those days when the people of Bengal and Maharashtra



Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's principles and his unedited speeches will be published in the reprinted version of Subhash Rachanabali

did unite under the same flag and fought for independence. After I was released from prison, it was my desire to see all Bengalis and Marathis united for this common cause. We maybe some people not having much worth as of today, but leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, Deshbandhu, Chittaranjan Das have set a legacy for ourselves that is vibrant and which we should try to remember it in these days of deep despair."

The speech was made in context of Netaji's persuasion to the youth to follow the footsteps of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh to boycott British goods in order to topple the then-British government in India.

(WITH INPUTS FROM APURVA ADHIKARI)

Pandemic saw many pets in India being adopted and then abandoned

SONALI, RIA ARORA AND RUCHIT RASTOGI

As COVID 19 confined people to their homes, this led to a significant increase in the adoption of a furry 'lockdown partner' during the first wave. Like Dalgona Coffee and other online trends, pet adoption of mainly cats and dogs became a trend too. Tragically, many of them were abandoned soon after offices reopened.

Through various cycles of the COVID-19 lockdown being lifted, reinstated, and eased out again, work from home has come to an end for a lot of working professionals. This has directly impacted pet adoption and led to numerous dogs and cats losing their homes again.

During the first lockdown, 52-year-old Diya Jain (name changed), remembered how she and her sister adopted a puppy when they were kids. She wanted one again and thought it would also be great for her two sons. There

was great excitement when the pup was brought in but sadly, that did not last long. She realised that her family was not ready to take the responsibility of being a pet parent again and returned the pup back to the shelter. She said, "I was not ready to curtail my freedom on a daily basis. The guilt of abandoning the dog was eating me up leading to emotional turmoil but it had to be done as I had no other choice."

Suvarna Pasare, founder of Pune-based animal shelter, Make New Life, told INK: "The second wave of COVID 19 in India left the families devastated; making it difficult for them to take care of their pets. They also found it hard to bear the daily expenses of their pets after a point in time as the expenditures amounted to 400-500 rupees a day." She also claimed that Make New Life received 100 such abandonment cases over months.

The first-ever State of Pet Homeless-

ness Index Report, released by Mars Pet-care, a leading provider of animal care services in Washington, estimates that 80 million cats and dogs are homeless in India – living on streets or in shelters. According to the report, abandonment statistics in India are greater than in the rest of the world, with owners saying they had abandoned

a pet in the past, compared to 28% worldwide. Around 34% claimed they had abandoned a dog on the street, while 32% had abandoned a cat.

Animal shelter advocates hope that people will understand the value of an animal's life before adopting. "Taking care of an animal requires as much care as a baby would," reiterates Pasare.



Thousands of dogs were abandoned during the first and second wave of the pandemic. Source - HT

Will the Indian Women's Team pick up their maiden World Cup Trophy?

We always talk about Australia, England and New Zealand. Especially New Zealand, since they are the host team, playing in home conditions. They would be the most prepared and equipped for this. I think they will pose a threat to the Indian team.

—Jaya Sharma, Chairperson, Women's Senior Selection Committee, DDCA

MRINALINI



Indian Women's Cricket Team Celebrating

ABWorld News

The 12th edition of the ICC Women's World Cup, will now be played in New Zealand from the 4th of March, 2022. The tournament which was due to be hosted in February 2021, was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Women's cricket is acquiring traction in India. Last year proved to be remarkable for the Indian team. Mithali Raj broke the past record to become the leading run-scorer in international women's cricket during the England tour in June-July 2021. In the seventh Women's Big Bash League, brilliant talent was showcased by Harmanpreet Kaur, Jemimah Rodrigues, Deepti Sharma and Smriti Mandhana; who was recently named the ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year. Winning the World Cup will prove to be a vital cog in the cricket machinery. To get insights into the approaching World Cup, INK interviewed Jaya Sharma, the former Indian opening batter hailing from Delhi. She has played 77 ODIs as well as the 2005 ICC Women's World Cup for Team India during her career from 2002-08. She is currently working as the Chairperson of the Women's Senior Selection Committee in Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA).

Excerpts:
1. Do you think the Women's National Team is ready to perform in conditions prevalent in New Zealand?

From my experience, it will be challenging because if you talk about Australia and New Zealand, they do have very difficult pitches. Wind velocity is so high, that if you aren't technically sound, you will face some problems. Another challenge might be that it's the longer version of 50 overs. We have seen Indian players perform in the Women's Big Bash League which are shorter T20 formats. So, it will certainly pose some challenges for India.

2. Since Team India will be touring New Zealand in February, right before the World Cup, what else do you think is important in order to be equipped?

The most important factor in preparation is experience. Experience is something which the senior players already have. Bringing that into play and



sharing it with the youngsters in the team is crucial to work on collective effort.

3. In the 2017 ICC World Cup, we were finalists. Is the current squad capable of lifting the cup?

Yes, definitely! In terms of exposure to the international arena, most of the players in the Indian team are playing in different countries and leagues. These opportunities will help them in upgrading their ability to make runs and take wickets during matches. Ultimately, in any sport, you have to gain experience. We have got a good bunch of experience and young talent in the team. In the current squad, we have experienced players like Mithali Raj, Jhulan Goswami, Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana and emerging players like Shafali Verma and Taniya Bhatia.

4. Which team should India look out for?

The World Cup is an event in which every team is good on their given day. We always talk about Australia, England and New Zealand. Especially New Zealand, since they are the host team, playing in home conditions. They would be the most prepared and equipped for this. I think they will pose a threat to the Indian team.

5. Do you think the team's performance in this year's World Cup will impact the chances of Women's IPL happening?

Things are in the pipeline as a while ago, Sourav Ganguly mentioned that the women's IPL's framework will be out in 3-4 months. It will happen, that's for sure. When we talk about the Indian men's cricket team, everything changed for them after the 1983 win. Hence, I think there is also a need to have a trophy in order to create a ripple effect in coming generations. It will change the whole scenario of women's cricket in India.

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