



**Much ado about virtually nothing**

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## Covid vaccines receive mixed reactions in city

*People scared of vaccine efficacy as Phase 3 trials have been skipped.*

GAUTHAM S

CHENNAI: People here have not fully welcomed the vaccine for Covid-19 even though it has been nearly a month since the vaccination drive began in India. Some people are not even aware that vaccines for Covid-19 exist.

An auto driver said that he does not know anything about the Covid-19 vaccine. He said he avoids reading any messages or news regarding it.

"Since nobody in my family got affected by Covid-19, I'm not interested in knowing anything related to it," he said.

R. Balachander (24), who works at Chennai Metro said, "If the vaccine is really effective, then everybody should get themselves vaccinated."

He said that he heard about the vaccines on news channels and if everything that is being said about them is true then the vaccines will help a lot of people.

A security guard at a government hospital in Chennai who did not want to identify himself said that even though he was scared, he was strongly advised by the doctors to get himself vaccinated.

"I did not want to get myself vaccinated because I was scared of

the side effects that some people were talking about. But after I got myself vaccinated, luckily, there were no side effects," he said.

He said that before they vaccinate a person they check his sugar levels, blood pressure, heart rate and other vital functions of the body. If there are any abnormalities in these readings then the person will be told to come the next day and again their readings will be taken, and only if the readings are normal the person will be vaccinated, he added.

He said, "I was made to wait for 30 minutes after getting the vaccine to check if I showed any side effects and only after half hour they gave me mango juice to drink. I've gotten my first dose and the second dose is due on February 26, I have put all my worries at God's feet, he will take care."

Speaking about the public's reaction to the vaccine, Dr. A. J. C. Mohan, who runs a private clinic at Alandur said, "Even experts in the medical field are suspicious about the vaccine let alone the general public."

He said that the reason people are skeptical is that the vaccine was brought into use in a hurry. For a vaccine to be fully ready, he said, it takes at least 3-4 years but this vac-



Health workers getting vaccinated. Photo: Business Today

cine that is being used was made ready within six months.

Dr. Mohan, also an assistant professor at the Tagore Medical College in Chennai, said, "I would advise people above the age of 50 who have other issues such as BP, and diabetes to get themselves vaccinated. But younger people, and people who are healthier, can wait till we get to know the full potential of the vaccine."

According to The Wire Science (Jan 4, 2021), published before the vaccination drive began in India, the Central Drug Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO) and the Union Health Ministry said that restricted use of Covaxin would be permitted in this emergency situation, in public interest and, in clinical trial mode. This meant that the

phase 3 trials have been skipped. This has added to the doubts about the vaccine's efficacy.

A BBC report (Jan 22, 2021) says between Covaxin and Covishield, Covishield seemed to attract a lot of people because the efficacy of Covaxin was questioned by medical experts.

Media reports have quoted, G. Prakash, Commissioner, Greater Chennai Corporation, as saying the vaccine will be delivered in four phases. Phase 1- healthcare workers from government and private facilities; Phase 2- Frontline workers such as corporation staff, police officers, revenue officials; Phase 3- Elderly people above 50 years and people below 50 years with other issues such as BP and diabetes; Phase 4- General Public.

## Seriousness of the pandemic lost?

MONA PACHAKE

CHENNAI: The lockdown imposed to stop the spread of Covid 19 is slowly being lifted with a few relaxations but in Chennai's most important shopping hub Thyagarayanagar, it seems as if the pandemic is over for the crowds there.

"There is no use of wearing a mask as the Corona virus has gone," said a roadside shopkeeper, Sahul Hameed (34)

The public, the roadside shopkeepers and even the big business houses are not following the Covid protocols like asking people to wear a mask, use sanitizers and follow social distancing. Hameed added that the vaccine has been found and so there is no more Corona in Tamil Nadu.

However media reports said Tamil Nadu continued to record new cases. The State reported 479 cases on February 10 and Chennai had 149 new cases. Compliance with the mask rule has declined over the last few months. It has become a common sight to see many not wearing masks or have one pulled down to the chin in public places, such as markets and shops, and while commuting in buses and share autorickshaws.

Health Secretary J. Radhakrishnan said the main challenge was in crowded places.

"In parts of Chennai and many other districts, except for some organised places, there is a distinct lack of adherence to the mask rule. Through our campaigns, we have been repeatedly pointing out the importance of wearing masks. When we had high positivity, particularly in Chennai, strict adherence to mask wearing was one of the critical reasons the chain of transmission was broken," he said.

"A textile shop was sealed here for not following the norms after which many shops were alerted," said Velmurugan (45), a mask vendor at Pandy Bazaar. He also added that the public do not buy masks to wear it but just to show that they have it with them.

**GCC IMPOSES FINE**

The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has announced that fines up to Rs. 2000 will be imposed on those who violate the safety norms. There are barricades at Ranganathan Street to ensure orderly movement of the crowd but people do not follow social distancing norms.

"As there is no air conditioning in any shops, wearing a mask while shopping and carrying heavy bags is a very difficult task for us as well as the old people," said Sathyanandham (27), a customer carrying out his wedding shopping with his whole family.



Social distancing protocols being flouted at T. Nagar. Photo: Mona Pachake

Sukanya Devi, Regional Health Official in Adyar Zonal Office of the GCC, said, "We have done a lot of field trips with our staff and we are still doing it to educate the shopkeepers and the public about the Covid norms every week in different places." But the shopkeepers here in T Nagar alleged that no one from the government came to educate them about the norms.

Devi said the fall in the number of cases made people think that the virus had gone. Around Rs. 21 lakhs had been collected as fines from the public for not wearing masks, she added.

Devi said "Some listen but most of them will not but we are not going to stop educating them about the seriousness here."

## More vegetables, less prices

ARPIT PARASHAR

CHENNAI: Excess arrival of vegetables at Koyambedu market has led to a decline in the price, said D. Rajasekaran, member of Market Management Committee of Koyambedu on Tuesday.

The market receives 4000 to 5000 tonnes of vegetables every day and this has resulted in a drop in prices in the retail and wholesale market.

According to a wholesale vegetable seller, Arumugam Venkatesan (55), more than 400 trucks of vegetables arrive at the market daily with each vehicle unloading 10 to 15 tonnes of vegetables.

Unlike as in other vegetable markets in the State, prices in Chennai are on the decline; the prices of the most commonly consumed vegetables such as tomato, potato and cabbage have not exceeded Rs 50 a kg, the trader added.

A former member of Market Management Committee of Koyambedu Wholesale Market Complex, V. R. Soundararajan, said Tuesday prices of potato were the lowest when compared to the rates since

2018 and the cost of potato was hanging between Rs 20 and Rs 40 during the past 4 months.

According to a report in The Times of India, about 30 per cent of potato sold at Koyambedu went to chips units, hotels and restaurants. One reason that kept the potato prices low at the wholesale market was the shrinking demand from the chips manufacturers.

Soundararajan said, "About 450-550 tonnes of potato largely from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Karnataka are received at KWC daily. The total volume of arrivals two months ago has pegged the price of potato at Rs 40 a kg. The volume of almost all vegetables arriving at Koyambedu has increased, which resulted in prices decline."

Last week the price of onion - (first grade/ big in size) was Rs 48 a kg and onion - (small in size) was Rs 110 a kg.

The price of first-grade onion dropped by Rs 4 a kg compared to the previous week and the prices of the same quantity of small onions dipped by Rs 8 to Rs 12, said Arumugam Venkatesan, a retail seller at the KWC.

Whereas the price of vegetables like tomato, cauliflower, green capsicum, brinjal and beans was between Rs 45 and Rs 53, but now with increased supplies the price hangs between Rs 38 and Rs 46.

A banana leaf wholesale seller, Selva Kumar, said "I used to buy one stack of banana leaf for Rs 300 and after selling in retail I used to get Rs. 400. But after an increase in supply and decrease in demand from restaurants, I sold the stacks for Rs 200 to Rs 250."



Selva Kumar, wholesale seller of banana leaves. Photo: Arpit Parashar

ESHAN KALYANIKAR

KOLHAPUR: Hawkers within the 100 meter radius of the Mahalaxmi Temple, who've worked here for about 50 years, are on the verge of being evicted by the city municipal corporation.

While the Kolhapur Municipal Corporation has not evicted hawkers as of now, it started its anti-encroachment drive today by clearing the boards of the shops encroaching upon public roads.

The Anti-Encroachment Department Head, Pandit Pawar, said that the corporation was marking spaces where the hawkers can conduct their business at Tarabai Road, Mahadwar Road and Papachi Tikti.

A banana seller near the temple, Jyotiba Naik (38), said there is a threat of eviction even though he was a registered hawker with the KMC.

When asked if the corporation was going to rehabilitate the unregistered hawkers, Pawar said, "Why should we? They [hawkers] will sit anywhere anytime and we should keep giving them new spaces? They can go home."

Many hawkers are advocating self-discipline to conduct their business without hindering traffic. Pawar said it was not the corporation's wish that hawkers "starve" but no hawker in the area maintained order.

Under the Street Vendors Act, 2014, a Town Vendors Committee is to be formed to identify vending and non-vending zones. A survey has to be conducted and the hawkers will then elect their representative for the committee. The hawkers believe that not all of them are included in the survey and the authorities missed out many. As of now, there is no Town Vending Committee in Kolhapur.

City Engineer Netra Deep Sarnobat said, "We formed one committee but they wouldn't give the list of 8 members chosen amongst them."

"We held a meeting last month but we still haven't got the list. Even while conducting the survey, we gave them enough time to be included. The survey will happen again in five years. We are only asking them [registered hawkers] to stay within the markings."

Saeda Aslam Zamadar (48), a



Hawkers meet NCP leader and All Party Hawkers Action Committee member RK Pawar. Photo: Eshan Kalyanikar

fruit seller, said the corporation decided to delay eviction after a protest on Monday.

A meeting was held by the All-Party Hawkers Action Committee on Tuesday where it was decided by hawkers to not move away from the area whatsoever.

The convenor of the meeting and the Nationalist Congress Party leader, RK Pawar, said "There are about 12,000 hawkers. Many are left out of the survey. Many don't have biometric cards."

He said, "We will keep protes-

ting the move to evict until it is cancelled."

Congress MLA, Chandrakant Jadhav, said the temple was the prime spot for the hawkers and that they wouldn't get customers beyond 100m radius.

He added that if hawkers were rehabilitated from the area, traders from other areas wouldn't let them conduct their business smoothly.

The KMC Commissioner, Dr Kadambari Balkawade, declined to comment on the matter, even after multiple attempts.

## Almost 100 % attendance as schools reopen

GARIMA SADHWANI

CHENNAI: Schools here are seeing almost full attendance with offline classes resuming after 11 months of learning on Zoom. They've installed sanitisers and thermal check-up booths, following strict Covid-19 protocols.

G. Tulsi Raja, Manager and PRO



Markings on the ground for social distancing. Photo: Garima Sadhwani

at Sri Sankara Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Thiruvanniyur, said, "We have a total of 337 students in classes 9th-12th, out of whom only six were absent on the first day after reopening; it was because they had moved to their native places during the pandemic."

A few teachers take online classes in the evening, after the other students go home, for two children who moved to Madurai.

Raja added, "Since only four batches are coming to school right now, there is ample space to conduct the classes smoothly, following all the norms of social distancing. Once the school reopens for other batches as well, we might call the students on alternate days."

A parent, whose son is a 9th standard student in the school, said, "Children do need their own companion to have fun with. The online mode was good so far as the pan-

demic was there, but now since the number of cases has fallen, it's great that schools have finally reopened. They are anyway only allowing 20 students to sit in a class." She added that she had instructed her son to drink hot water every 10 minutes.

While all students are coming to school regularly at Sri Sankara, the Chennai Higher Secondary School, Taramani, is calling the 9th and 11th standard students only on alternate days, and focusing more on the students who are set to appear for their board exams in April-May this year.

Kalai Selvam, Principal of the Taramani school, said, "We've removed all co-curricular activities from our schedule to accommodate more lectures and finish the syllabus on time."

She added, "We have more than 700 students in our senior section, and we didn't have any absentees

on the first day [after reopening]." While the students of classes 10th-12th had online classes during the pandemic, no classes were held for the other standards.

Selvam said that the students were very happy to resume classes after nearly 11 months, and were being cooperative. She added, "Most of our students have working parents, the safety of the children is a question mark when the parents are not at home."

While these students are being called daily, their timings have been changed so as to avoid any ruckus.

However, S. Damodaran, Headmaster of AJS Nidhi Higher Secondary School in Alandur, said that while all government-laid SOPs are being followed, the school is facing a new problem of lack of teachers, as students have been divided into sections to accommodate only 25 students in each class.

## No private tempos on bus routes

BHARAT SHARMA

UDAIPUR: Tempos that ferry passengers across the city will not be allowed to operate on some bus routes, according to a municipal corporation official.

Lakhan Bharwal, Superintendent, Municipal Corporation Garage Office, said these tempos would not be allowed to run on the seven routes where city buses will start operating.

Bharwal said of the 26 buses that will start operating on the seven routes, two airconditioned buses will be allotted for the airport route, two hop-on-hop-off (double deck) buses for tourists and the remaining 22 buses will run on five routes. Dainik Bhaskar reported that the bus fares will range from Rs. 5 to Rs. 40.

Bharwal said the Municipal Corporation has already been running 12 buses around the city for about

five years.

A tender has been issued for building 100 bus shelters.

Bharwal said, "Of these 50 have been built in phase one but we are yet to confirm if they are in ready-to-use condition and the construction of the remaining is yet to be completed."

Initially 10 buses will start running by March 15 on two routes and the remaining will be started within two months.

Meanwhile, Praveen Rao (name changed) a tempo driver said these drivers would become unemployed when the buses start operation.

He said, "Companies that have got the tenders for bus services and shelters will benefit. The government will benefit from the revenue from bus services, and people will get a new alternative to commute so they will also be benefited. But we will go unemployed."

Rao who operates his tempo on

the Shastri Circle to Pratapnagar route five times a day said he earned around Rs. 1,500 a day of which he pays Rs. 500 for diesel and Rs. 200 as rent for tempo.

Rao said the drivers did not have a union. However, when they usually conveyed their grievances to Lal Jhanda Dal which fights for helpless people.

Rao said that there were around 3,000 tempos that ran on 12 routes in the city on a daily basis.



Tempo drivers complain of having to pay fines to police. Photo: Bharat Sharma

## Violations of rights: internal matter?

The Ministry of External Affairs has slammed 'sensationalist social media hashtags' after international attention on the farmers' protest, ironically ending its note with a hashtag of its own. Following over two months of protests, the 'Kisan Gantantra Parade' tractor rally on January 26 turned violent at the Red Fort, Delhi. The incident left scores of farmers and policemen injured and one protester dead. Amidst the mounting tension in the capital city, the BJP-led government did what it does best: blocking internet connection at the protesting sites. The issue drew international media attention after popstar Rihanna, who has a 100 million following on Twitter, asked why no one was talking about it. The tweet gained global support, encouraging Swedish activist Greta Thurnberg, media personality, porn star Mia Khalifa, and niece of U.S. Vice-President Meena Harris to stand in solidarity with the farmers. What followed was the brutal trolling these celebrities encountered. Laced with misogyny and racial slurs, the trolls berated Rihanna, Thurnberg and Khalifa for speaking out of turn. While some justified American singer Chris Brown's domestic assault on Rihanna in 2009, others challenged Khalifa on her knowledge of farming, shaming her for being a pornstar. Trolls got away with patronizing women for having a different opinion, conveniently pegging 'their lack of knowledge' on their profession or age. New Delhi, however, believed the tweets were sponsored by the Opposition.

Whether it's the anti-CAA or farmers' protests, the government holds a track record of labelling every dissent as propaganda. Yet again, these tweets were called the same, with hashtags like #IndiaAgainstPropaganda initiated by Home Minister Amit Shah, followed by other high-profile faces like cricketers and film stars. This was further supported by the MEA issuing a statement against the tweets of Rihanna and other celebrities. It opened with an intrinsically untrue claim that the farm bills were passed after 'full debate and discussion'. As seen in the recordings of the Rajya Sabha, the rights of MPs were abridged despite their constant demands for a division. The voices of the Opposition were not heard and the bills were passed on the notion that the measure had enough number of votes. The government's reluctance to accept international attention on the farmers' protest was unfortunate, but not surprising. Even Indian twitter users trended #internalmatter and condemned foreign celebrities commenting on the internal matters of the country. An ironic statement, considering the number of times India has commented on other countries' 'internal matters'. The most recent one was Narendra Modi criticizing the violence at the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters, months after he tweeted, 'Abki baar Trump sarkar'.

It is but natural for the international media to cover violations of the government of human rights which it has otherwise sworn to respect. If India were not conscious of its image internationally of its democratic values, there would possibly be no external interference. Moreover, news is consumed internationally and opinions on global networking platforms are inevitable. Calling such issues an internal matter, is therefore, not an option. Consistent act of human rights violation executed by the current government regime has time and again attracted criticism from around the world. Starting from the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, to the anti-CAA protests and farmers protests, there seems to be a repetitive pattern. Each time, labeling dissent as propaganda, suspending internet connections under the garb of 'safety' or swiftly denying international interference by calling it an 'internal matter', the Modi government has slowly crippled the democratic fabric. The barricading of the highways leading to Delhi to prevent farmers from blocking the space resembles a war-zone. The clash on the 26th of January has given the government the opportunity to take a route that perhaps the farmers of the nation do not deserve.

## 'Social media has brought out hate'

It is something that exists in people, you cannot eliminate it, says founder of The Indian Idiot

Social media is growing as a platform for content creators. Instagram is now seeing a surge of influencers trying to make their way up through intense competition. With the culture of social media beginning to spread hatred and increasing government surveillance on the platform, it is becoming difficult for organisations to stay in the game.

In a conversation with Sanskriti Falor, founder of 'The Indian Idiot' Charansh Juneja, handling a social media account with 700k+ followers, talks about an array of subjects such as the importance of change in content with changing times, use of social media for introverts and the hatred spread across the platform.

How did you start 'The Indian Idiot'?

Growing up in school, I didn't have many friends, the internet was my friend. I literally grew up on Facebook, and I made an account in Class 7. I was known as the 'Facebook guy' in school. So in 2015, my sister was a successful blogger, and I used to see her collaborating with brands and going to events, which influenced me.

When I told her I wanted to do something similar, she taught me how to write articles and blogging. She came up with this name, 'The Indian Idiot', which made sense because I loved this album by Green Day, American Idiot.

Since you had no friends growing up, did you use the internet as a substitute?

I didn't have friends in real life, so I invested my social energy online to make some friends.

Having been bullied in school, I liked the internet because I could talk to anyone and be myself without thinking twice. I believe social media has led me and other introverts to be themselves.

What was the turning point in your journey?

There were two turning points. When I started 'The Indian Idiot,'



AIMING HIGH: Charansh Juneja, who has 700k+ followers, has been part of social media culture for five years.

used to just curate content for a few years and not create anything on my own.

One day, a friend tagged me in a post attacking 'The Indian Idiot,' saying all we do is copy tweets and memes, instead of creating any-

### INTERVIEW

thing original. That hurt me, and it helped me transform 'The Indian Idiot.' I removed all the curated content from the page.

Second, 2020 was a bad year for many reasons, but I believe it was a good year for the internet. Last year was a turning point because it was economically and socially a difficult yet transforming time. 'The Indian Idiot' family expanded, the workforce grew, and the content quality got better.

What would you say about the 'toxic' social media culture?

The toxic social media culture

exists, and there is no denying it. It is getting scarier day by day. I think there are layers to this culture. The first one is the political layer, as there exist IT cells of political parties which create hate.

The second one is the lack of accountability since on social media, people don't have to face any consequence for anything they say/do. The hate exists within people - social media has only made it accessible.

How significant is political influence on social media?

All political parties have these groups with thousands of people they can raid up and take down any page whenever they want to. So if a page is problematic, they can just post it in a group, and if enough people report the page simultaneously, there are chances you can take it down.

So I'd say the political influence is continuously growing. So I have to be really careful about that by

trying to be objective while doing political content, stating facts and not taking sides.

How do you cut the hate out?

It is difficult to remove that part out altogether. So, whenever I post Daily News or other content, there is always someone who'd take a hit on me. Whenever I see someone abusing or spreading hate on the platform, I ban them from the page.

In your journey with 'The Indian Idiot,' what have you done to grow as a platform?

I have been part of the ground reality, I have created content on my own, and I understand what's selling and what isn't.

One gap I have noticed is that usually there are managers who don't understand social media culture and the meme culture, but I believe I have been able to cover this gap because I have been a part of this culture for five years.

What are your future plans for the page?

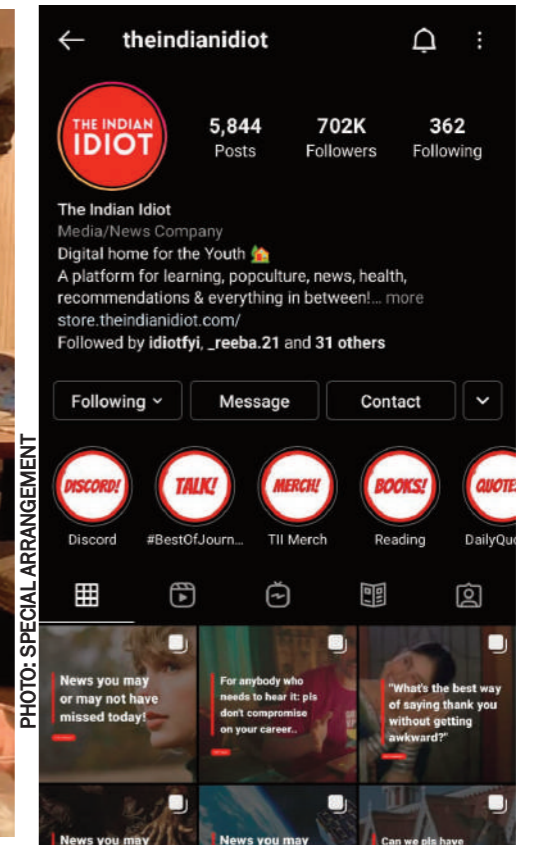
I am moving towards video content, and that's what we are working on. As I think the static content will die in a few years, Instagram is already preparing for it by introducing reels.

What advice would you give youngsters who are now entering the social media world with aspirations of becoming significant?

Firstly, it is imperative to have unique content. If you don't, you cannot survive in the market today. You have to bring something new to the content, something that hasn't been done before. People should target innovation.

Secondly, it is essential to be consistent in changing your content. You have to be adaptable because you can't stick with the same old techniques.

(Charansh Juneja can be reached at info@theindianidiot.com)



## Much ado about virtually nothing

Myntra logo issue may not be a big problem but it bares the social fabric underlying corporate & public world.

SAYANI DAS  
TANISHQ VADDI

Recently, fashion e-commerce portal Myntra saw a popularity that its flash sales have never been able to fetch. An activist, Naaz Ekta Patel, lodged a complaint at the BKC cybercrime police station in Mumbai on the "insulting and offensive" nature of the brand logo that supposedly depicted a "naked woman". The logo must be removed, she demanded in her December 2020 complaint. In a month, the brand released its new logo. But why are netizens abuzz with this news?

Both consumers and brand experts are perplexed at the haste with which Myntra relented on the complaint. The brand is being accused of snapping at a frivolous demand — changing its logo "without batting an eyelid", as Business Insider India puts it. Experts are left to wonder whether or not one of the largest online clothes retail stores in India is strong enough to deal with consumer activism.

Caved in

This is a process when consumers actively seek to influence the goods and services produced by corporate companies through a consumer-centric ideology. The commonest way this is done these days is through social media. Many experts have commented on the way Myntra handled the logo issue. As reported by The Hindu Business Line, Jessie Paul, CEO, Paul Writer said, "While the noise levels of a social media drive against the brand can be high, it can be countered by investment in a customer community and influencers." Anisha Motwani, founder and director of Storm the Norm Ventures, said, "Let the brand believers and brand lovers silence the voice of brand critics."

But did Myntra relent due to a lack of a strong base of brand lovers? The way social media users defended the old logo after the rebranding paints a different picture. One of the popular tweets is by Eeshi Pancholi: "I mean what's wrong with this logo? Only a



person with dirty mind could see such lame things." Another user on Quora by the name Ashank D'Souza wrote, "Only prudes and immature teenagers would find anything wrong with the old logo."

### PERSPECTIVE

Most consumers are offended by Patel's interpretation of the logo. Some are empathising with the brand for incurring an extra cost on unplanned rebranding. As promised to the police, Myntra will change its logo across media platforms, packaging boxes, labels, store-fronts, etc., in a month. While logo creators are rather pained by how a form of art has given way to a skewed interpretation, empathisers reason that the quick step was taken for the company to be controversy-free. Meanwhile, experts agree on the risky and costly side of such a rebranding process.

At the same time, another school of thought is too sceptical to look at Myntra as a scapegoat trapped in a whirlpool of consumer activism. An article in The Daily Eye acknowledged that Patel's complaint was based on one of the many possible interpretations (for some the logo was as innocent as surfboards stacked on one another, inviting

senior citizens, had been raising this issue on forums and platforms across social media for almost three years, but in vain. According to a report by the Deccan Chronicle, she had asked "a couple of people" about their opinion and "they agreed" with her view. "I immediately spoke to my legal team and DCP Dr Rashmi Karandikar and realised they also had an objection to the logo. So we sent a notice to the company," she said. However, Myntra responded only after Dr Karandikar sent a mail from her email address.

Meanwhile, trolls have launched an attack campaign on Patel, lashing out at all 'pseudo-activists' and 'pseudo-feminists'. Tweets accuse her of not focussing on the real threats to women's safety in the country. While her complaint sounds trivial at a time when the country registers 88 rape cases per day, most of the trolls do not know that Patel's NGO has also rescued and rehabilitated numerous women and children who survived some kind of abuse. According to Patel, as she spoke to the Deccan Chronicle, "I am sure the logo was not done deliberately, but I felt it wasn't right."

On this front, the problem is multilayered. While trolls suggest that Patel blew a trivial matter out of proportion, by attacking her inability to discuss the bigger problems faced by the women of India, many of them are re-

customers to surf through its store). However, one would suspect from Myntra's haste to change its logo that it had been guilty of mischief. Perhaps the brand had been keeping up with a naughty little secret, only to be shaken by one complaint. Perhaps that's why it caved in so fast.

But this, too, isn't as accurate as the facts at hand suggest. The brand wasn't as quick to respond as it seems. Some media sources reported that Patel, who runs the Avesta Foundation, an NGO, that takes care of abandoned children, had been raising this issue on forums and platforms across social media for almost three years, but in vain. According to a report by the Deccan Chronicle, she had asked "a couple of people" about their opinion and "they agreed" with her view. "I immediately spoke to my legal team and DCP Dr Rashmi Karandikar and realised they also had an objection to the logo. So we sent a notice to the company," she said. However, Myntra responded only after Dr Karandikar sent a mail from her email address.

sorting to sexist comments against her to stand their ground. While social media users are busy accusing an activist for her 'narrow-sightedness', most of them are following double standards, failing to use their own judgments unto the comments they are publicly making.

Apart from the comments, various theories are doing the rounds either in flippant tweets or in serious Quora discussions. Once, a Quora user referred to the whole Myntra controversy as one of three possible advertising campaigns that the brand could've launched for this season. That left many speculating on whether this was only a desperate move of the brand to pitch itself high across media platforms.

"Only prudes and immature teenagers would find anything wrong with the old logo."  
Ashank D'Souza

Speculation aside, how important is this issue when the nation is in the midst of a massive farmers' protest, when comedians and journalists are being arrested on charges of sedition and when people are grappling with the coronavirus? The Myntra controversy may not be a large problem at hand, but it just bares the social fabric underlying the corporate as well as the public world. On the one hand, we see that the brands, no matter how big, cannot ignore the public opinion and interpretations any more. On the other, the growing impatience and intolerance of the citizens is apparent as we see them jumping to troll anybody who poses a view contrary to their pre-formed opinions. Most of their reactions are uninformed. Perhaps, for companies and consumers alike, it's high time "we sat and contemplated on the impressions we are leaving on the world with our game of words and symbols."



Multi-lingual Bahubali set the box office ablaze

## Historical movie that made history

TANISHQ VADDI  
UJWALA POTHARAZU

After *Magadheera* (2009), S.S. Rajamouli once again tried his hand at an ancient war movie, *Bahubali*, which in two parts proved to be a masterpiece, with a bigger cast and budget. *Bahubali* was the second time that actor Prabhas and film maker Rajamouli worked together, after *Chatrapathi* (2005), which was a huge success.

However, the *Bahubali* plot doesn't seem to be as strong as are the other elements of the movie. Like all Rajamouli films, it is another revenge drama, where Amarendra Bahubali (Prabhas) claims back his throne of Mahishmathi from Bhalladeva (Rana Daggubatti), who killed his father Mahendra Bahubali (also played by Prabhas) with the help of a loyal army general, Kattappa (Sathyaraj) and captured Devasena (Anushka Shetty), wife of Mahendra.

One of the highlights is the performance of Prabhas and Rana, taking on each other, considering the hulks they are on the screen. There are pretty good scenes that elevate both of them. Sathyaraj is fantastic.

Ramya Krishnan's performance as Shivagami, mother of both Ma-

hendra and Bhalladeva, is strong. Nasser as Bijjaladeva, a physically challenged husband of Shivagami, has done justice to his role. Avanthika, played by Tamannaah Bhatia, seemed important in the first part but her role tapers off in the second.

The film and cast clean swept all national and State awards. The film also made its mark in the dubbed versions in Tamil, Marathi and Malayalam, winning many awards in the respective States.

*Bahubali-Part I*, made at a cost of Rs.180 crores, raked in Rs. 600 crores worldwide in 2015. In 2017, the second part of the film, made with a budget of Rs. 250 crores, collected a record-breaking Rs. 1,810 crore across the world.

The first part, released on July 10, 2015, ends in a shocking way with Kattappa killing Mahendra Bahubali, but it triggered curiosity among the fans as to what would happen next. Amid high expectations, *Bahubali 2* trailer was released on March 16, 2017 and it broke records, with 150 million-plus views in 24 hours. The second part was released on April 28, 2017 and it turned out to be a bigger hit.

All in all, *Bahubali* was among the films that put Indian cinema on the global cinema stage.

# COVID-19 in India

## Fear no longer the dominant emotion

## Frontline workers get vaccinated



Asia Pacific Hospital's lab for COVID-19 sample testing

RAGHAVI GARG AND RIMJHIM SINGH

CHENNAI: In the crowded lanes of T-Nagar, Chennai, men, women and children jostle one another without wearing masks.

"Nobody is wearing a mask. Why should we wear a mask?" said Ramesh (27), a street vendor here, on Wednesday. The numbers seem to bear him out. Chennai has seen a decline in cases from about 6000 for a day in September 2020 to 500-2000 a day now in February 2021.

He added that people are getting vaccinated and are now immune to the virus.

Suganya Devi, Regional Health Officer of Adyar, said, "We send our field workers to conduct education and awareness drives in crowded areas like T-Nagar every week".

Jayalakshmi Shreedhar, a doctor said that there has been a change in public attitude towards the virus after the introduction of the vaccines. "People tend to forget that the

vaccination necessarily does not protect one from infection entirely. It only prevents one from having severe complications," she said.

People must adhere to all COVID norms such as sanitizing, wearing masks and social distancing and must accept the "new normal," Shreedhar added.

Devi said that the number of COVID cases are not dropping because of reduced testing or reduced reportage. "Cases are reducing because of the flattening of the coronavirus curve," she added.

A lab technician, from Aara Clinical Laboratories, Mount Road, who did not want to reveal his identity, said that the number of people who come to get tested has increased post lockdown and majority of the people belong to the age group of 20-40. "It is mainly students and office-goers who come to get themselves tested to show the negative report to their respective institutions," technician added.

Dr. M. Jagadeesan, City Health Officer of Chennai said that more than 10,000 tests are being done on

a daily basis including both private and government hospitals and labs. He added that the present number of cases per day usually falls around 2000. "This is because of the government's constant efforts and introduction of various schemes like weekly education and awareness drive," said Dr. Jagadeesan.

In Tamil Nadu, as much as 8.6% of the 64, 86, 810, were corona positive. As many as 10,566 people of those died.

Speaking about fatalities and public behaviour, Rakshdeep Singh Tomar (61), a retired Public Health Officer, said that the carelessness on the part of people is leading to fatalities. "As cases increased in our country, people became less attentive and violated social distancing norms. But, the current state of worry is about people's disbelief in vaccination."

He said that the second phase of Covid-19 vaccination has begun in the hospital in Punjab's Kapurthala, which is one of the four vaccination centres set up in the district. "Al-

most all frontline workers and central security staff have received their vaccination shots." He added that the public registration has begun but he noticed that the general public is a little hesitant to get vaccinated.

Speaking about changes in testing done in the State, Tomar said, "Testing rate in most cities of Punjab has increased but there remain many small districts like Barnala and Moga where the testing has mostly stopped."

Dr. Yash Gupta (42), senior surgeon at the Asia Pacific Hospital, Kapurthala, said that testing has increased but there has been a sudden change in public attitude. "People have started taking the pandemic lightly and are seen flouting rules and regulations." He added that people now associate Covid-19 to normal cold and cough and feel they can recover within a week.

Punjab reported as many as 1,74,838 cases. The State has around 2112 active cases. The total death count stands at 5653.

DELHI PALLAVI KESWANI

► Total number of tests conducted on February 9th 2021 were 56,410

► Out of these, only 100 tested positive for COVID-19

► There were no COVID-19 fatalities in the last 24 hours

► This brought the total number of active cases in the capital to only 1,052

KERALA R KAMALA MENON

► Total number of tests conducted on February 9th 2021 were 69,844

► Out of these, 5214 tested positive for COVID-19

► There were 19 COVID-19 fatalities in the last 24 hours

► This brought the total number of active cases in the capital to only 64,133

KARNATAKA S. N. THYAGARAJAN

► Total number of tests conducted on February 9th 2021 were 60,485

► Out of these, 366 tested positive for COVID-19

► There were only 2 COVID-19 fatalities in the last 24 hours

► This brought the total number of active cases in the capital to only 5,785

DELHI: The excitement of receiving the Coronavirus vaccine early is being watered down by concerns over the possible side-effects, as Delhi looks to vaccinate medical, city utility and teaching staff in the state.

Jagdish Jha (51), a municipal sanitation worker who will be vaccinated within this week is a case in point.

"The government is providing us with a suraksha kavach (protective shield). It's about time that we are given our due," Jha, who stayed away from his wife and three children for months for fear of infecting them, said.

The overall turnout for vaccination in Delhi tell a different tale, though.

Of the 6 lakh workers identified, only 3.5 lakh have registered for the vaccine. According to a report in Outlook, on Monday, at 9,740 vaccinations, only 54 per cent of the target was fulfilled. However, by Wednesday, Delhi clocked its highest vaccination numbers at 14,700, still achieving only 80% of its daily target, and bringing the total figure of the city at 1,37,885

The continued low turnout, had forced Satyendra Jain, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, to clarify in January that since the exercise is voluntary, public confidence in the vaccine will rise slowly.

But the case of people like Satish (44), also a municipal sanitation worker show that the drive may not be entirely voluntary.

After his data was sent for the vaccine drive registration, early last month by his boss, Satish was instructed to get vaccinated when his turn comes. What if he doesn't want to? "They have said that my salary will be impacted if I don't go," Satish explained. "I don't really have much of a choice," he continued.

Some of Satish's colleagues who have received the vaccination be-



A municipal sanitation worker in Delhi

fore him have complained of fever, dizziness and headache. The father of two children, Satish, a patient of high blood pressure, has been following media reports relating to adverse effects of the vaccine. "I hope that my experience is better and I am able to continue to work the next day," said Satish.

Mange (40), who works alongside Satish has also received orders of similar nature. Last year, Mange suffered from an asthmatic attack and has recovered since then. "I will carry my medical history with me when going for the vaccination because the doctor needs to know about it," he said.

A similar feeling is echoed by Babu Ram (56), a driver working with the Delhi Jal Board, waiting to be called in for the vaccination.

"If I was a private employee, I might have taken a more independent decision after thinking about it," said Ram. The lunch break, every day, for Ram and his co-workers is inundated with speculations about the possible side-effects of the vaccine. "I am happy to be receiving it. I also feel nervous but I can't do much about the situation, I will get vaccinated when I am asked to," said Ram who is a patient of diabetes.

## Ritchie Street suffers due to anti-China sentiment and COVID-19

An area which experts say makes Rs2000 crore a year is affected by the anti-China sentiment pervading the nation.



V Shanthy, sets up her shop with goods brought from a nearby complex and starts her day

R SAI VENKATESH

CHENNAI: Chennai's so-called Ritchie Street exists in the grey area between anti-China sentiment (driven by that country's attack on Indian soldiers in June last year) and an urge to buy cheap.

The area popularly known as Ritchie Street is actually four streets, none of them called Ritchie, housing about 2000 stores and pavement outlets selling cheap electronic accessories, from mobile phone covers to cheap garden lanterns.

Here, you can buy phones from the Korean manufacturer Samsung. You could also buy a knockoff called Samsing. Over 10000 people visit every day, retailers at Narasingapuram Road, one of the four roads that together make up the Ritchie Street area, say. And most of the stuff here is Chinese.

That is the problem. The anti-China sentiment so soon after a strictly enforced lockdown has meant trouble for the area's retailers.

Prabhav Malhotra, a retailer talks on the behalf of most retailers in the area. "I used to have a turnover of about 60-70 lakhs during 2007-2008 but over the last few years it barely touches 13 lakhs. It will be far lesser this year," he said. Saifudeen, who owns Global electronics, also imports his goods from China-supplied wholesale markets. Expressing discontent in the continuing delay of supplies to his shop, he states, "We usually order once a month. The supply happens anytime between three-four weeks. The weeks are now months". And it isn't as if there is an end in sight.

It is not that easy to procure from other sources because supplies from China are getting delayed said R Chandalia, the secretary of Chennai Infotech and Electronics Association and the owner of Sun technologies in the street, states.

Any reduction in supply would adversely affect business, as retailers will have to procure from other sources at a higher rate. That increase for which the consumer will

have to pay more will hurt Ritchie Street's cheap market tag, the retailers feel. Data from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics says that China contributes a third of the Rs1.15 lakh crores India imported in 2019.

Several small retailers like V Shanthy, an elderly woman who sells earphones and other electronic accessories from a small footpath stand bear the brunt of the anti-China sentiment.

She buys her goods from a nearby complex and sells them on the street "If I buy an earphone for 150 rupees, I sell it for Rs 180. But people sometimes buy it for no higher Rs 150 and I get no profit", she said. One way to reduce the dependence on China is to strengthen the local Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises(MSME). V Sankar, the Vice-President of All India Radio and Electronic Association (AIERA), quotes how the government must pour in effective funds to facilitate production and also support entrepreneurs who are willing to enter the manufacturing sector. He recalls China's outstanding facilities from his visit and narrates how China even had capacity to supply technology for electronic lock systems when India did not even have a state of the art facility for it, in 2010. "China succeeded because of their government support. We failed because the government did not support."

However, things might be changing, Chandalia said. The government is moving in the right direction of self-reliance even as anti-China sentiments have grown well, especially in northern India.

## In Kerala, removing unauthorised hoardings difficult in election year

When municipalities try to remove party 'illegal' hoardings, they have to answer their seniors and hence, such hoardings are conveniently ignored.



A political party hoarding on the Perinthalmanna- Nilambur roadside.

R KAMALA MENON & S N THYAGARAJAN

MALAPPURAM: The Kerala high court in January ordered the municipalities in the state to remove illegal hoardings. But one municipality in north Kerala is finding that this is easier said than done, especially in an election year.

The hoardings in the order refer to advertising signboards, banners and huge billboards hawking all manner of products, near to the roadside. "With a proper team and with the help of the police, we have tried to remove the unauthorised hoardings. However, the organizations and corporations show reluctance to remove the hoardings. We give them a notice as a warning

but if they fail to comply even after that, we seize the hoarding and place it for auction," said Reji P.R, Assistant Engineer PWD (roads), Malappuram.

When it comes to getting license for the hoardings, political parties "don't care to get the license as they erect such hoardings during the election which only lasts for a few days. But even after that, those banners, hoardings, flags and placards will be there," added Jobin M, Secretary, Malappuram municipality.

"In the past few years, during elections, with the help of anti-defacement squad and election expenditure monitoring teams, the municipality has removed a number of hoardings of political parties,

which are unauthorised and also which didn't tally the expenditure of the party," Jobin said. But the more he removed, the more appeared, he said. In Malappuram some 1892 hoardings that are classified as illegal and unauthorised have been removed till February last year.

"If we try to remove such hoardings, we then have to answer the seniors. Since we are in the lowest level of the government, we are weak to exercise our full power. So mostly we only remove unauthorised hoardings that are complained by people or those that may cause road accidents," added the municipality secretary.

Different high courts have during the later half of the last decade

ordered the State governments to remove illegal hoardings. They have had to interfere even though the fact that each state has a separate legislation dealing with defacement of property. However despite the intervention of the courts and a legislation the authorities have time and again failed to remove the illegal hoardings. The Madras high court in 2018 said that it had lost faith in the Tamil Nadu state government after a 23 year old woman died in an accident involving an illegal hoarding. The government had not complied with the order of the previous order of the court directing them to remove the illegal hoardings. Similarly, in 2017 the Bombay high court warned the political parties that it would initiate contempt of court if they continue putting up illegal hoardings despite its order.

The Delhi high court in 2019 advised the corporations to be vigilant in removing the illegal hoardings while warning the contestants of Delhi university elections not to erect illegal hoardings.

However, despite the courts insisting time and again that the illegal hoardings be removed both the executive and the legislature continue to ignore the threat it poses.

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# Art, politics and university walls

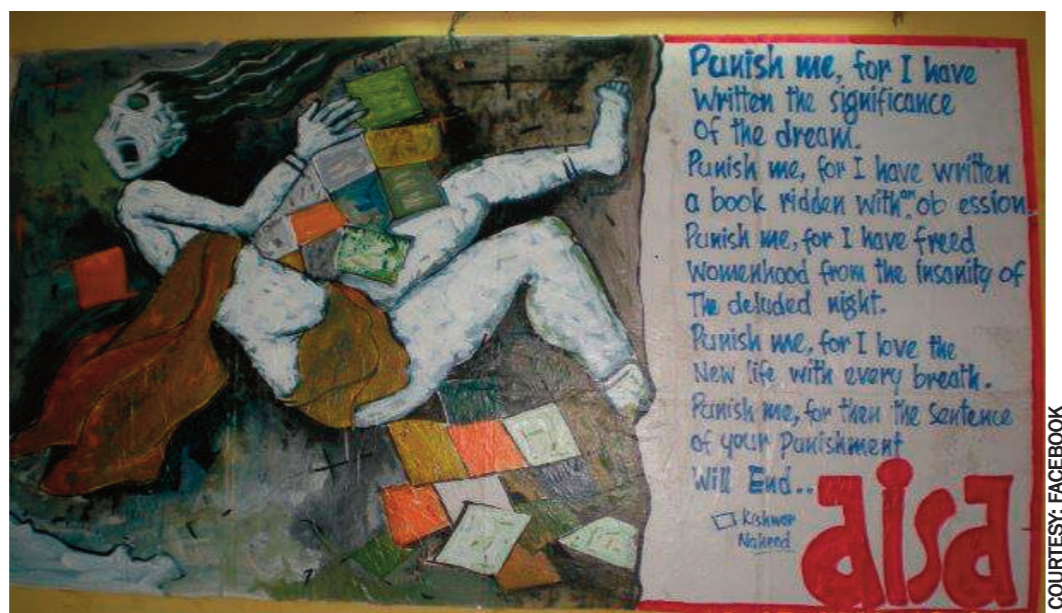
ABHIJEET KUMAR

When political artist, Anupam Roy, first came to JNU to design posters, he was against Left politics "because of Singur and Nandigram," he said. His disillusion with communist politics was too personal. "It was when I began to read that I understood the different dimensions of Left politics; it started shaping my designs."

Roy sees posters and paintings in universities as students' claim on their academic spaces. "We all come from different backgrounds. And the moment we set foot inside the campus, we are forced to forget our lives," he said. Thus, the college walls serve as a reminder of the places students come from and the uphill fight for equality.

Academic institutions have long been modelled in the ancient "guru-shishya" tradition, a unilateral transmission of knowledge and a clear hierarchy. Roy, through his art, has attempted to subvert that. When he entered JNU in 2009, he discovered that the walls could speak. "My drawings are aimed at dismantling the institution as temples and show that the ugliness in the society has a mirror reflection in these institutions as well."

Sandip K. Luis, 34, adjunct faculty in the School of Culture and Creative Expressions at the Ambedkar University, Delhi, agreed. He pointed out that art in academic



A poster by Anupam Roy

institutions is vital for students. "Protests and demonstrations are short-lived and can fall out of memory. But art remains like a consistent protest throughout the years and thus in a way is a more sustained way of dissent," he said. "That is why all institutions are afraid of it."

## A syncretic relation

"Art is not individualistic but only a representation of the collective," said Roy, who hails from a small

village in West Bengal. But he didn't always have these views.

When he began painting seriously during his undergraduate, he used to play with abstract concepts. It was only after he arrived in Delhi that his art began to take a political shape.

Roy believes that art is not a linear process, an object that we just keep staring at. It stares back at us, and thus art becomes a symbio-

tic relationship where we recreate ourselves through our creation. When he began creating posters for the Left student organisations in JNU, the walls started transforming his self in return. Recounting one such incident, Roy said, "Once, I was having a debate with a girl, and I got annoyed and started shouting. She immediately pointed to the poster behind me, which I had made. The poster was of a woman holding a sickle in one hand and a book in another. I reali-



Anupam Roy

# Blurring lines of gender binaries

Braving odds, people and fashion brands are coming up with more gender-neutral clothes

AMRIN NAAZ

"I used to keep getting upset about being misgendered - which is totally okay and valid but after 7 years of being 'out' you get tired and stop caring anymore," said Sasha, 21, an independent artist who does not conform to binaries. Sasha's wardrobe—as showcased on Instagram—is fluid, diverse, non-conformist: a dark-green shirt and black camisole; the same shirt paired with trousers; a slinky black saree. "Everything I wear is gender-neutral. It makes me feel like me," they said. Although gender-neutral clothing has existed for decades, there has been a recent upswing in its popularity, countering the compartmentalisation.

Brands are trying to do better by becoming conscious of their customers and producing clothes that don't fit into rigid boxes of social constructs. Shalini Shah, who has written extensively for Vogue India, said that, for her, gender-neutral clothing is the dissolution of the aesthetic barrier between what constitutes men's and women's fashion.

Talking about global market, she said that increasing fashion brands are becoming conscious of gender as a social construct. "They are going way beyond it. It is not sudden and only right now. Influential



Harry Styles on Vogue

brands like Gucci are joining the -movement of non-binary clothing, and other brands are following suit. But it has been there for long—Comme des Garçons started it decades ago," she said.

In India, labels like CHOLA By Sohaya Misra, Jaywalking, Antar Agni by Ujjawal Dubey are championing gender-neutral clothing. The Glossary Magazine reported that for the first time, all London Fashion Weeks would be digital, with womenswear and menswear merged together to cultivate a gender-neutral platform.

## A need for consciousness

In 2020, singer-songwriter Harry Styles broke the internet when he posed on the cover of Vogue wearing a dress. Opinions were divided. Perhaps Style's biggest detractor was Candace Owens, an American conservative author. It is an outright attack. Bring back

manly men," she tweeted. Jamila Jamil, feminist, model and writer, rose in defence to Styles tweeting. "Harry Styles is plenty manly because manly is what you want it to be," she tweeted, pointing out that wigs, makeup, tights and frills were once deemed manly too. Sasha must agree; they believe that every clothing is inherently gender-neutral. They said that it's easier to wear anything now after their top (gender affirmation) surgery as they don't feel as dysphoric as before. Talking about the existing compartmentalisation, they said, "Let them keep the binary, it doesn't bother me anymore. If I like something under a binary label, I will ask myself 'why am I offended over that?'"

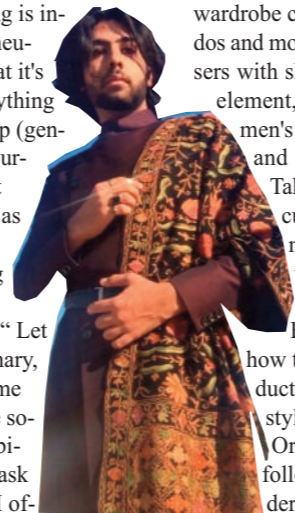
## Wearing what one wants

Viren Tak, a popular content creator on Instagram, remembers eyeballed while strolling down Udaipur's old lanes wearing a dupatta as a bow. The glares that followed him gave him confidence. "I realised that if they are seeing me in a bad light but I am also showing

them that this could happen. If done over and over again it might normalise it," he said.

Making a statement takes on a new dimension with androgynous clothing. Pooṁā Joshi, a queer person, began wearing gender-neutral clothes last year when she recognised her own gender fluidity. Now her wardrobe consists of blazers, tuxedos and more and more baggy trousers with shirts. "I feel more in my element, truest to myself. Even men's footwear would appeal and fit me better," she said. Tak believes that popular culture and advertisement can go a long way towards eradicating these boundaries.

Brands can improve how they portray their products using a male model to style a saree, for instance. Or launching a line that follows the concept of gender-fluid fashion, says Tak who seeks to dismiss binary in clothing. He believes in coexisting. "When I style my mom's closet then I get comments like why are you asking us to wear sarees. I do not preach every man wearing women's clothes. It is about letting others wear whatever they want without asking questions, mocking and looking at



Viren Tak

# Cholamandal Artists' Village: A Unique Commune of Art

The artists and sculptors at the village work at their own pace and are immune from the fast paced life outside the Chennai city

ADARSH B PRADEEP

P. Gopinath, an award-winning artist, recalls a famous critic's comment about the Cholamandal Artists Village. "Those who are responsible for starting this utopian idea can be put in a catamaran and thrown into the Bay of Bengal with three coconuts to survive."

He smiles and adds, "We are still here and very much alive."

Gopinath is the current secretary of the village, India's largest self-supporting artists' commune and one of the most successful in Asia.

The village now spans across 10 acres along the East Coast Road at Injambakkam. But the beginnings were humble, consisting of 30 to 40 artists led by KCS Paniker, an award-winning painter and founder of the Progressive Painters' Association, who came together in 1966 to buy half an acre of land for Rs. 4500.

"During that time, there was no electricity, roads, telephone lines or hotels. We dug the first bore well in the village and opened it to the villagers and there started our close relationship with them," recalls Gopinath, the youngest founding member, sitting inside his studio



Cholamandal Artists' Village

filled with acrylic, oil and watercolour paintings.

Even today, the village retains much of its rusticity. Its sandy roads are strewn with leaves; the houses are still thatched and its compound walls littered with sculptures and paintings on display in the compound; old wooden fences separate the various artists' studio cum houses.

However, much has changed too. There is now a museum and an artists' gallery for the exhibition and sale of their work, an open theatre for the congregation of musicians, singers, theatre artists and dancers, and studios for rent that the public

can access to learn under any artist.

"We want to expand our community. We invite singers and dancers to the open theatre, and we are also experimenting on some new architecture styles in the village," says Gopinath.

P.S. Nandhan, an award-winning sculptor, who resides in the village, explains its rationale. Like artist movements in the west, the village started off as a commune for artists to sit, eat together, discuss art and make it a financially viable career choice. "The idea was to create an independent village, free from any interference so that the artists can work at their pace and on a theme

of their choice," he says.

Not everyone has stuck on to the dream, however. He adds that many artists left the village, thinking that the experiment would fail and shifted to other jobs. Today, these very people are retired and confused about how to earn a living, he says. "The artists in the village do not retire or work in some other fields that they despise," says Nandhan, walking around his living room filled with paintings and sculptures made from terracotta, metal and brass.

The shared community values have held them in good stead all through the pandemic, adds the octogenarian. "We have always worked at our own pace and we are immune from the fast-paced life outside," he adds.

Not everyone, however, shared their opinion says Gopinath and Nandhan; the new generation artists of artists think differently about art. "It is true that today the artists just try to copy things. They create artworks based on trends or those that are saleable. Where is the creativity in that?" asks Gopinath.

He fondly recalls his younger days when he worked with water colours before experimenting with other materials in painting. "Today

sed that the fiery independent woman that I had drawn was still only on the wall and never in my reality."

In 2019, he received the Charles Wallace fellowship and completed Masters in Fine Arts in De Montfort University where he was exposed to the lucrative option of gallery art. However, he continues to call himself an artist of the working class and despises art studios. "I was very young when a poet in JNU told me that if I create art for art galleries, at most a hundred people would see it. But if I do it here, every year thousands of young minds would see it. And that changed my whole outlook towards art," he said.

For students who come to campus, posters and wall-paintings are the immediate steps into a reality where they become socially aware. Prashant, 22, who is in his first year of Master's degree, said that when he came from Patna to JNU, he was astonished at the posters on the walls. "I was immediately struck by it and became interested in the politics in the campus," he said. For Roy, the art and the artist are both for the people, and he unabashedly accepts the propagandist function of art. He said, "art is not only for the rich in the galleries. It is an expression of grief, a grief which binds the poorest to us and yet blinds us all from the poor."

# Documenting the protests

ANUSHKA JAIN

Guurdeep Dhaliwal once used to be a typical cinephile. He usually watched Tarantino movies, consuming mostly pop culture. Studying abroad changed that. He spent his time in London with passionate friends, trawling through the city's art galleries and museums. It changed the way he thought, exposing him to parallel cinema and

documentaries.

Now, he runs Trolley Times, an independent newspaper documenting—both through words and pictures—the farmers' protests taking place on Delhi's borders.

"When the protest started I came to it with others from my village, on tractors. I kept taking pictures. I just wanted to be a part of it," says Dhaliwal. At first, he didn't think of documenting it, he remembers. But then things began to happen. "Like a guy got killed because of the barricades. So I thought it's important to document it," says Dhaliwal, who runs the newspaper—with his team of filmmaking and activist friends—through donations. The newspaper—blue and grey

colour scheme, rich illustrations and neatly laid-out text—that comes out every week contains reports and analysis of the protests' events from contributors far and near. A team of around 15 volunteers take care of the entire process, including printing, design, curation, distribution and editing.

Another founding member is Jasdeep Singh, a software engineer-turned-scriptwriter, who has worked on films like Gurvinder Singh's Punjabi AnheGhore Da Daan, which was screened at multiple film festivals including the Venice International Film Festival and

ChauthiKoot.

"Whatever we do at Trolley Times comes from my experience of reading literature and watching cinema," says Singh who edits their Gurmukhi or Punjabi content. While Gurdeep now handles the design and layout of the newsletter the initial design was created by renowned artist duo Thukral and Tagra, known for including socio-political commentary in their work. "We contacted them early in December, and within a week they set the design and mailed it back



Farmer's read the newsletter at protest site

JASDEEP SINGH

# A city, film festival & hues

Decentralised screenings have made IFFK an inclusive space

AISWARYA RAJ

December is a month of jamboree for Malayalees, especially the cinephiles. Trivandrum swarms with strangers, zeal in their eyes and fervour in their words as they exit cinema halls. However, this year, the festivities came late: the festival was postponed by two months. The 25th edition of Kerala's International Film Festival was finally kicked off on February 10.

The IFFK always attracts cinephiles from all around the world. And the locals revel in it, taking pride in this unique opportunity offered to the city. The event, conducted by the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy under the Government of Kerala and held annually in Thiruvananthapuram since its second edition, is a platform for the locals to explore the nuances of the world of films.

"I have witnessed the city wake up from a stupor of mundanity to exuberance, found only during December," says Krishna Priya, a postgraduate in Arts and Aesthetics from the JNU. For Priya, "growing up in Trivandrum, the curiosity to fathom the culture, politics, language of people across the world invigorated me into exploring the art form," she says, adding that the films she had watched during the festival had broadened her perspective and helped mould her understanding of the world. The IFFK is

also a time for a reunion—for people who have left the city to get together, have reminiscence about the days of old and make more memories, she adds.

## Film in phases

As the pandemic broke out, there were uncertainties about the current edition. News spread that the film festival would not be held, leading



COURTESY: IFFK WEBSITE

to dejection among the film nerds. Later, the government decided to conduct it in phases in February in four cities: Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Palakkad and Kannur, drawing flak from the locals in the capital.

Among the famous people to react was Shashi Tharoor, the MP from Thiruvananthapuram. Calling the move "deplorable" and tweeting #IFFKMUSTSTAY, Tharoor said, "Thiruvananthapuram offered IFFK not just a great venue, but tradition, facilities; above all a passion-

nate population of knowledgeable cinephiles..." Twitterati exploded thanks to these tweets, calling out the regionalism in his tweet.

Beena Paul, director and chairperson of Kerala film Academy, said that the tweet was misinterpreted. "The city has always been associated with IFFK. People feared that the identity of the city would be in tatters if the venue changed," she says, over a telephone call. Besides, this is not a permanent decision. "Thiruvananthapuram has always been the hub where people can visit easily," she says, adding, however, that having four venues across the state came with its advantages. The screenings made the festival more accessible, especially to those who could not travel.

vShyam Sasi, a student at the JNU, admits that the screenings' decentralisation was a good step. "Many people might be going for the event for the first time," says . Although he agrees that Thiruvananthapuram was the best place to host the film festival because of the cinema halls' proximity, the phases are preferable under the current situation. "Even though most of the things barely feel like IFFK—due to the restrictions like the reduction of days and conforming to the protocols,—I am glad that it is happening."

# 18th CIFF to commence SOON

ABIRAMI RAMESH

The 18th edition of the Chennai International Film Festival will take place this year, from the 18th of till the 25th of February 2021. The festival, which Minister Kadambur Raju will inaugurate, is supported by the government of India and the whole film industry.

"Despite pandemic, the event will be conducted with blessings of the God," says the film festival's director, E. Thangaraj.

Only feature films will be showcased on this occasion at several places across the city, including Sathyam Cinemas, PVR movies, 4 theatres and Casino.

Some of the key highlights include The Girl with a bracelet, I was, I am, I will be and The Slaughterhouse.

Additionally, the festival will showcase films from all over the country.

The festival will culminate in an award ceremony in 7 different categories. The process of hunting for the jury is still going on.

The registration fee for this event is Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 500 for students.

the artists want money and immediate fame. More the selling price, more the value of the artist," he la-



Artist P.S. Nandhan in his studio

ments.

Nandhan, too, has fond memories of his younger days. "We were inspired to paint from the smallest of observations; like the pattern created by water splashed across the floor," he says, adding however that new artists' only seem to create commercial work, today. "If we ask them why they painted a line or used a colour, they go blank."

Can market forces ever not impact artistic inclinations? No, admits Nandhan. Pointing to the

bright paintings adorning the walls of his living room, he says, "I paint these for my health. He then points

ARBIT PARASHAR