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## Faith, toil, and grace: The making of Rahul Dravid

**Merwin Mathias**

"You have got to have faith in knowing the skills, abilities, and talent, but you also need to work hard. Not everything comes easy; sometimes it takes patience, effort, and constant growth," emphasised Rahul Dravid while reflecting on his remarkable journey. This simple yet profound philosophy has been the cornerstone of his illustrious career. From the modest corridors of St Joseph's Boys High School (SJBHS) in Bengaluru in the 1980s to the pinnacle of cricketing glory, culminating in India's T20 World Cup victory under his guidance, Dravid's journey is a testament to unwavering discipline, humility, and grace.

### Early years: The foundations of greatness

Dravid's early life at SJBHS showcased his multifaceted talents. Teachers like Charles Noronha and Gowri Mirlay remember him as a quiet, focused student who excelled not just in cricket but also in academics and other sports like hockey and football. "Rahul was never the loudest in the room, but his actions spoke volumes. Whether in the classroom or on the field,

he led by example with quiet determination and an unwavering focus," recalls Noronha. Teachers and mentors often recall how his family played an instrumental role in his growth. His father, Sharad Dravid, was an active Parent-Teacher Association member, while his mother, Pushpa Dravid, a scholar and artist, instilled in him a love for learning. Encouraged by coaches like H. Shivaprakash and Gulam Samdani, he honed his skills through training and dedication. "He wasn't just a cricketer; he excelled in everything he took up. His ability to balance sports and studies was remarkable," says Mirlay. The preserved school archives reveal the many accolades he won, like the Rs 500 cash award in 1988.

### Rising through challenges

Dravid's journey was not without hurdles. In school, balancing rigorous academics with cricket practice often stretched him thin. Yet, he persisted, driven by his resolve to excel. "Rahul was always the first to arrive and the last to leave. No matter how tough the schedule, he never cut corners," recalls Noronha. Even as a professional cricketer, setbacks like being dropped from the team never deterred him. Instead, he worked harder, refining his techniques and bouncing back

stronger. "He never blame anyone; he simply focused on improving himself," notes Noronha. This resilience became a hallmark of his career, epitomised by performances like his gritty double century against Australia in Adelaide.

### Rahul's gentleman cricket: The values that define him

Known as 'The Wall' for his steadfastness on the cricket field, Dravid's values extend far beyond the game. His former teacher, Gowri Mirlay, recalls his respectful demeanor, noting how he maintained strong ties with his alma mater, even donating personal memorabilia for the school's museum. "Rahul's success never changed him and his actions spoke volumes. He remained as humble and grounded as he was in school," says Mirlay. As a player and later as a coach, Dravid's leadership focused on excellence and nurturing young talent. "He is not just building cricketers but shaping individuals," remarks Salman, a state-level player inspired by Dravid's ability to prioritise collective success over personal milestones.

*"The beauty of this journey is that you never stop learning. You are constantly growing and helping others grow."*

- Rahul Dravid

As a player and later as a coach, Dravid's leadership focused on excellence and nurturing young talent. "He is not just building cricketers but shaping individuals," remarks Salman, a state-level player inspired by Dravid's ability to prioritise collective success over personal milestones.

### Timeless lessons for youth

Dravid's life offers invaluable lessons for the youth. He champions the idea of a growth mindset:

"Constantly look to improve, open yourself to new ideas, and persevere," he advises. From learning to focus on the process rather than the results to handling pressure with poise, Dravid's philosophy is as relevant off the field as it is on it. "Patience and hard work are key," he emphasises, a reminder for today's youth.

### The enduring legacy of faith, toil, and grace

Dravid's journey rooted in the values of his alma mater is a narrative of faith in one's abilities, the toil required to nurture them, and the grace with which he has touched countless lives. Reflecting on his formative years, Dravid fondly said, "I love being a Josephite. It was fantastic for me to study at St Joseph's. I was lucky to be influenced by so many of my teachers and principals, who deeply cared about us as individuals." As he once said, "The beauty of this journey is that you never stop learning. You are constantly growing and helping others grow." From the playgrounds of SJBHS to the international stage, Dravid's story is one of quiet determination and enduring inspiration.



1983 hockey team: Dravid standing third from left SJBHS archives



1988: Dravid with his school cricket team, seated right SJBHS archives

## Women over 45 master the hoop

**Sonia K Jose**

In a world where youth and sports often go hand in hand, a group of Indian women basketball players are breaking the norm with their unwavering dedication and unmatched talent. These pioneering athletes, aged 45 to 55, will represent India on the international stage at the World Masters Games in Taiwan on 17 May 2025. Having already conquered the Asia Pacific Masters Games in South Korea in 2023, they have proven that basketball is far more than a sport for them; it is a lifelong passion.

### Overcoming hurdles, on and off the court

In a society where age is often

viewed as a limitation, these women break stereotypes, demonstrating that skill and spirit do not fade



Kerala women masters team Sonia Jose

over time. Each of them juggle multiple roles as wives, mothers, and even grandmothers, yet basketball provides them with a unique sense of joy and liberation. "At that moment, it is just us,

the ball, and the game," says Rannesa Rawoof, 57. Drawing on the team's experience, she added, "All the players in the team are individuals who have made several achievements through basketball when they were young. We may not have the same speed as we did in our younger days, but since our opponents are from the same age group, it is an advantage for us."

Their journey back to basketball had been filled with challenges, including age-related struggles, health issues, and the demands of family life. Many of them sidelined their careers to focus on raising children and managing households, earlier in their careers. Vandana Xavier, a senior team member, stepped away from basketball in 1993 due to multiple major surgeries.

Yet, she made a remarkable comeback in 2022 which stands as a testament to her resilience. Looking back on her journey, she said, "My passion overshadowed the pain I endured, and it has been an incredible transformation." As they prepare for the World Masters Games, these women view challenges not as obstacles but as fuel for their motivation, pushing them to train harder and aim higher. Early morning training sessions, late nights at work, and family responsibilities are all part of their relentless dedication to the sport.

### Sideline no more

In a country that often underestimates women's potential in sports, especially older women, these athletes have had to battle

*Continued on page 10*

systemic neglect. While men's basketball in India receives more attention and resources, women's basketball often goes unnoticed, with players left to fend for themselves due to lack of proper funding. With limited support for women's sports, they usually have to pool personal savings or rely on small donations to cover travel and equipment costs.



Gold medal for India Sonia Jose

# Goa's tourism at crossroads: Reviving India's party capital

**Errol Kendrick Moraes**

## A party capital story

Goa, with its electrifying nightlife and sun-kissed beaches, is a hedonistic escape for many. A successful *Goa ka plan* is often considered a stamp of strong friendship. As Goa's tourism season ends, the Pearl of the Orient fades to a quieter charm, to the denial of locals while disappointing tourists.

Before it became India's party capital, Goa found its laid-back bohemian vibe in the 1960s, courtesy of hippies escaping conventional life and creating a counter-culture. Later, charter flights brought tourists from Europe and Russia, fueling its tourism boom with warm summers and psychedelic experiences.

## Rising controversies

Goa's tourism shortcomings have been under debate. Last November, an X user alleged a decline in foreign tourists, sparking outrage and testimonies about unaffordability and the 'taxi mafia'. While the government

dismissed these claims as propaganda, concerns about rising costs and overcrowding persist.

Official data confirms Goa's snail-pace tourism revival. The Tourism Ministry reported

1.04 crore tourist visits in 2024, higher than 86.28 lakh in 2023. In 2024, Goa saw a record 99.41 lakh domestic tourists, up 22% from 81.75 lakh in 2023, while foreign tourists rose by 3% from 4.52 lakh to 4.67 lakh. Foreign tourist arrivals are gradually recovering, albeit still below pre-pandemic levels.

## Curating experiences

A drop in Goa's niche high-spending crowd reflects this. Sarthak Gupta, CEO of Anjuna's Purple Martini said, "The high-spending foreigners dropped post-pandemic. Our reservations were booked, and the atmosphere was lively and



Main Stage of Sunburn Goa 2024- Asia's biggest EDM Festival Sunburn Goa

thriving. We hosted celebrities and crowds every day." Purple Martini's branding underscores Goa's potential for rebranding. "Our name is synonymous with Goa. One can experience Santorini sitting on the shores of Goa with us," he added.

Ernest Dias, a member of the Goa Tourism Association (GTA) pointed out the government's effort to revive tourism. "We are committed to make Goa a world-class preferred destination around the year for high-spending tourists in India by 2030 as envisaged in the Goa Tourism Policy 2020. Water sport services across Goan beaches are streamlined to regularise charges and expand water sports activities beyond popular beaches." The return of Sunburn Goa was a conscious choice. "The government welcomed electronic music revelers by granting permission to Asia's largest EDM festival, an ideal year-end celebration. Goa also hosted the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) and Serendipity Arts Festival, which drew international and domestic crowds. These showcased Goa as

more than just a party destination, offering a blend of art, culture, and celebration," Dias added.

Serpentine lines at the decennial St. Francis Xavier Exposition proved that the veneration was a golden goose for tourism. Fr. Henry

Falcão, Convenor of the Exposition Committee said, "The relics drew Goan families and devotees residing across India and globally for the veneration. The Public Works Department earmarked 150 crore rupees for investments in infrastructure, including a Pilgrim Village."

## All is well, allegedly

The frenzy of Goa's tourism decline is firmly refuted by locals. "This notion is rebutted by the daily reality of overwhelming crowds and traffic. It is like having relatives at home 24/7," said Viraj Phadte, a Goan Instagram influencer. "Media

algorithms quickly amplify viral videos about Goa, particularly negative ones. Misleading videos claiming Goa is empty are the real scam," he added.

## Way forward

Facing competition from alternative destinations like Sri Lanka and Thailand, Goa must reinvent its tourism model. Varun Hegde, Founder of Soul Travelling, noted that the present model consumes Goa instead of understanding its story. We bridge this gap with offbeat trails like a visit to an Indo-Portuguese house in Chandor or a tavern crawl in Panjim. December was our busiest month. This is Goa's reimagined future," he said.

Goa is at a crossroads of reimagining its fate. The stakeholders must win back foreign tourists and retain the domestic ones, being cautious of overtourism. The taxi mafia ought to be reigned in to cap travel costs. Goa's idyllic charm must be preserved, celebrating its status as among the states with the lowest alcohol taxes. Till then, this slice of Portugal in India awaits you.



Party goes chime into New Year 2025 at Purple Martini, Anjuna Prananav Batra



A Serendipity Goa musical session on the River Mandovi Austin Moraes

# Frozen yet fierce: Gurez's tale of survival and resilience

Families sit in darkness, children study by candlelight, and businesses come to a standstill, all while the cold creeps upon Gurez

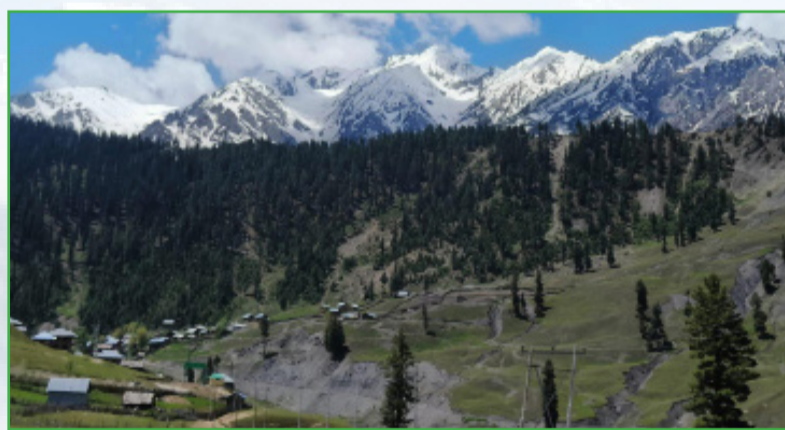
**Kohsheen Raina**

The snow-covered mountains hide our sorrows, yet their cold embrace reminds us of the warmth we yearn for. - Habba Khatoon

Gurez Valley, cradled in the Himalayas, is a snow-capped heaven in Kashmir. Beneath this beauty lies a harsh reality. For six months every year, a blanket of snow blocks the valley from the rest of India. This winter too, Gurez is cut off, as electricity supply dwindles, healthcare facilities deteriorate and education services collapse. Salim Ahmad, a resident of Gurez, guides us into the lives of the people living in this snow-bound land.

## Thriving in tough times

Salim Ahmad's life represents the quintessential experience of a Gurez livelihood. The snow is freezing his dreams, harsher than the terrain. With these unforgiving winter months being a period of dependence on preserved food, Ahmad says, "Since my childhood, it has been a battle for survival. We depend on dry food like potatoes and kidney beans as fresh vegetables are unavailable. Wood-burning stoves, locally called bukhari, are the only way



Gurez- A valley hidden amongst the Himalayas

**P. Koul**

we keep ourselves warm."

## Healthcare in isolation

As the snow pounds Gurez, the people have little to no access to medical facilities. In cases of severe illness or emergencies, helicopters are the only lifesavers. Unpredictable weather prevents helicopters from operating, often leading to tragic consequences. Last year, Ahmad bore witness to three young women who died from complications during childbirth. "The weather was so harsh that even the army helicopters could not reach here," he says.

## Krishanganga's impact

Electricity is a daily struggle disrupting life. Families sit in

darkness, children study by candlelight, and businesses come to a standstill, all while the cold creeps upon Gurez.

The Krishanganga dam, constructed in Gurez, supplies electricity to nearby Bandipora district, leaving Gurez in darkness. Ahmad says, "We had hoped that the dam would benefit us, but it brought losses only. Our village was thriving before it was drowned by the dam, and now we neither have the land nor electricity."

## A struggle to learn

Education in Gurez remains a challenge, especially during the winters. Schools remain closed, with many teachers preferring to

leave the valley. "In the past, every village had teachers, and children received a decent education. Now many parents admit their children to schools in Srinagar or Bandipora. To solve this, the Indian Army opened the Army Goodwill School and set up computers to improve digital learning," says Ahmad.

## Army's hand of hope

The Indian Army significantly impacts the people of Gurez during these isolating months. Army officer Manoj Sinha says that the army aids residents. "From providing ration supplies to conducting medical evacuations, we track this remote village, train them in basic first aid and distribute medicines during summer so that they can handle health issues in winter," he says.

Sinha notes an incident of a pregnant woman needing a critical C-section during winter. While the civil administration took time, the army successfully arranged a helicopter evacuation, saving her life.

Gurez remains strong, weathering storms of struggles. Sinha praises the loyalty of the people of

Gurez saying, "The people here are always ready to help, even in difficult times and emergencies. They report information about outsiders trying to enter India."

## Dreams past the snow

Ahmad's hopes for better connectivity and opportunities that cater to the greater aspiration of the people of Gurez. "If we had a tunnel for tourists here, like in Gulmarg or Sonmarg, it would create jobs and improve our lives," he says. His story reflects the people's dream for a future where Gurez thrives. Kashmir is the crown of India, and the soul of Kashmir lives in its many villages, akin to Gurez.



Through snow and struggle P. Koul

# 41st Carnival dims the charm of Kochi's New Year celebrations

Vaishnav V Kumar

The Cochin Carnival, known for its grandeur and vibrant New Year celebrations, faced unexpected challenges during its 41st edition. While the festivities remained lively, last-minute decisions and disruptions left many attendees disappointed. The Cochin Carnival originates from European traditions brought to Kerala by the Portuguese during the colonial era. While Malayalis traditionally celebrate New Year in the month of Chingam as per the Malayalam calendar, the first day of January became an integral part of the local festivities under European influence. This is still carried as part of celebrations at Fort Kochi, which is the present-day Cochin Carnival. The Carnival is organised by a committee of over hundred clubs, supported by the Cochin Corporation and the Kerala state government. It officially begins on the first of December with a wreath-laying ceremony to honour Indian Navy martyrs. The event includes a variety of competitions, such as swimming, bike race, and dance, funded by donations, club contributions, and municipal support. One of the iconic features of the celebrations is the largest natural Christmas tree at Veli Ground, managed by independent clubs, including De Gala club, who host the festivity. Although it is not directly a part of the Carnival Committee's efforts, the tree remains a central symbol of Kochi's festive spirit.

## The Carnival fever

The Carnival has gained widespread recognition across Kerala and all over India through repeated media coverage. Organisers have observed this trend over the years as the visitors have started to increase because of the visibility gained through visual media. Malayalam films like 'Chhota Mumbai' have popularised the Carnival, attracting larger crowds, particularly from younger audiences. Muhammad Shifan, a youngster from Kannur, shared his excitement about attending the Carnival, "In Kerala, this kind of celebration happens only in Kochi, in an authentic way."

## Tradition faces setbacks

This year, the Carnival faced setbacks due to unforeseen circumstances. National mourning for a former Prime Minister led to the rescheduling of events and the cancellation of some key celebrations at Parade Ground. In the past, events were disrupted by court orders, the 2004 tsunami, and other unforeseen circumstances. The cancellation of the Parade Ground events significantly affected the much-anticipated burning of the Pappanji effigy. The 50-foot



Natural Christmas tree, Veli Ground Harikrishnan G

effigy, symbolising the passing year, remained incomplete. However, the carnival continued at Veli Ground, where an alternative effigy—a 40-foot depiction of Gandalf from The Lord of the Rings was designed by Arun Michael. Stephen, a Carnival committee member, said, "The Pappanji burning is a long-standing tradition of the Carnival; each year, a new design is created by artists, and the burning is accompanied by fireworks, which this time was activated via remote control."

## Barricading the plan of crowd control

Faizal Anas, Fort Kochi Circle Inspector, said, "Managing a large crowd at the Carnival is always challenging. 1,050 police officers have been deployed to ensure safety this time." At Veli Ground, barricades were set up to regulate entry, but many people were left outside due to space limitations. The double-barricade system and additional safety measures ensured that the Pappanji burning occurred without accidents. Vehicle access to Fort Kochi was restricted, and ferry services were regulated to avoid overcrowding.

## Care for the environment, a priority

The Cochin Carnival has long highlighted its commitment to environmental sustainability. The Pappanji effigy was made using eco-friendly materials like straws and hays, avoiding plastic. Extensive cleanup efforts followed the celebrations,

led by the Cochin Corporation, the Green Worms agency, and the Cochin Heritage Zone Conservation Society (CHZCS). Over 60 student volunteers from Cochin College and Sacred Hearts College contributed by collecting over 40 sacks of waste during their regular cleanup drives. The Corporation managed roadside cleaning, while CHZCS took charge of the beach area. The District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) also deployed 24 staff for post-event cleanup. Stephen highlighted the committee's focus on preserving the environment alongside the celebrations by pointing out the Carnival's slogan - peace, participation, development, adventure, and environment.

"The Carnival drew a large crowd to Veli Ground on New Year's eve, with attendees filling up to capacity, even reaching till the gates.", said Ancy, president of the De Gala Club. However, the Carnival rally held on the second of January saw a noticeable dip in attendance compared to previous years due to the rescheduling of the events. Kamarudeen, a resident, expressed disappointment, "For us locals, it was disheartening to see a smaller crowd at Fort Kochi. The cancellations affected the spirit of the celebrations here." Despite this, post the second of January, events at Parade Ground attracted significant crowds, as noted by the Carnival Committee.

**"It was disheartening to see a smaller crowd at Fort Kochi."**

**- Kamarudeen, a local**



Pappanji effigy (Gandalf), Veli Ground Vaishnav V K

# Thrissur Pooram's rules and regulations in question

Anusree Balan Menon

Thrissur Pooram, one of Kerala's most famous festivals, is renowned for its grand celebrations that include music, fireworks, and the majestic elephants, held annually at the Thekkinkadu Maidanam in Thrissur. It has been celebrated for over 200 years, attracting thousands of visitors from around the world who get to experience Kerala's rich cultural heritage. However, a recent legal battle has sparked debates over the role of elephants in the event and the need to balance tradition with animal welfare. The festival was introduced by the Maharaja of Kochi, Shakthan Thampuran after the temples in Thrissur were excluded from the Arattupuzha Pooram in 1797. Over the years, it has grown into an iconic event, celebrated not only by the people of Thrissur but also by Keralites worldwide. Arjun Varma T, a Chenda Melam artist, pointed out, "Thrissur Pooram has gained global recognition and the festival has become a symbol of Kerala's cultural identity, inspiring similar events like mini Thrissur Pooram abroad,



Majestic elephants covered in gold Arjun Varma T

**"Animal rights activists often focus on elephants while neglecting other forms of animal cruelty..."**

**- Baiju Thazhakat**

including in the UAE, where Keralites living there celebrate the festival to reconnect with their roots."

## The role of elephants in the festival

Elephants have been integral to the festival for centuries, carrying deities in procession and enhancing the elegance of the celebration. Arun PV, a Thiruvambady temple managing committee member, said, "Elephants have always played an integral role in the rituals, as they are mentioned in ancient texts like the Mahabharata and Ramayana. For many, it is essential to carry the deity on the back of an elephant, as it is followed as part of religious practice." On the contrary, Ashok Shenoy, an animal rights activist, criticised the rise in the use of elephants, "There is no specific religious requirement for the number of elephants used in the festival." He added, "They may endure stress and exhaustion from the long processions and schedule."

## The legal battle

The Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu Devaswoms, which organise the festival, filed a petition against

the High Court's rules which demanded a 3-5 meter distance between elephants and the public. This led to the involvement of the Supreme Court of India concerning the treatment of elephants in the festival. The Devaswoms argued when the High Court laid down specific rules and regulations limiting the elephants from participating in the parade and further noted that these regulations were impractical and could negatively affect the tradition. Baiju Thazhakat, president of the Pooram Premi Sangham, stated, "Animal rights activists often focus on elephants while neglecting other forms of animal cruelty, such as the slaughter of animals for meat." He fears that the restrictions on the elephants could lead to a decline in visitors, ultimately harming the overall outlook of the festival. Vinod Kanden Kavu, convenor of Pooram Premi Sangam, also shed a concern on the court-imposed restrictions, he said, "The elephant is a significant part of the Pooram, and without them, the festival would lose its essence." Kandeav called for a balanced approach, which would allow the festival to maintain its traditional outlook while ensuring the safety of elephants.

## A delicate balance

The ongoing debate reveals the complexity of balancing the rich cultural traditions of Thrissur Pooram with the need to safeguard animal welfare. Those who want to preserve traditions fear that changes to the use of elephants will erode the festival's authenticity, while animal rights activists stress the importance of ensuring that elephants are not subjected to harm. As the Supreme Court prepares for a final judgment, the future of Thrissur Pooram and the role of elephants in the festival remain uncertain. The outcome will determine whether the festival can continue in its traditional form or if the need for animal protection will change how it is celebrated.

# Frames and frontiers: MediaCon 2025 explores the future of storytelling

Karen Hezron



Krishna Hebbale, filmmaker and actor

JMF

The air crackled with anticipation at St Joseph's University as the ninth edition of MediaCon 2025 unfolded as a two-day international conference on 30-31 January. More than a discussion on cinema and digital media, the event critically examined the very foundations of media discourse. Themed 'Cinematic Crossroads and Digital Frontiers,' the event featured over 40 paper presentations exploring sub themes like film production in the digital age, the cinematic shift to OTT, AI in cinema, cultural representations in film, and media convergence. It became a dynamic forum for students, academicians, and industry professionals to explore the shifting landscapes of film, technology, and media ethics in a rapidly evolving world.

## The power of storytelling

In his keynote address, renowned filmmaker, actor, and theatre personality, Krishna Hebbale spoke about the evolving role of cinema in society. "Cinema is not just a reflection of society; it is a bridge to the future. In the digital age, every frame we create shapes how we connect,

communicate, and co-exist," he said. He emphasised the responsibility of filmmakers to create stories that not only entertain but also challenge societal norms.

## The Hema Committee report: A turning point for the industry



Panel discussion at MediaCon 2025

JMF

MediaCon 2025 did not shy away from confronting critical issues. One of the most impactful discussions revolved around the Hema Committee report, a groundbreaking study on workplace harassment and exploitation in the Malayalam film industry. The panel, moderated by Anjana George, an independent journalist, featured Women Cinema Collective (WCC) member Miriam Joseph, actress Shrutu Hariharan, and Nandini Chandrashekar, Editor-in-Chief of The News Minute who offered critical insights into the report's significance and its implications for the broader film industry.

"The HEMA committee was formed after years of struggle. Women in the industry were tired of being silenced," Miriam Joseph stated. The report went beyond highlighting sexual harassment, uncovering deep-rooted feudal structures, labor exploitation, and fundamental

workplace negligence. Shrutu Hariharan, a prominent advocate for gender equality in Kannada cinema, described the report as a crucial blueprint for change. "Change is slow, but it is happening," she affirmed.

Meanwhile, Nandini Chandrashekar made a compelling case for responsible journalism in covering these issues. "As journalists, our job is to report the truth, not to pass judgment. We need to be conscious of the language we use and the narratives we amplify," she noted.



Fr. Dr. Richard Rego, Dean, SCMS

JMF

## AI in cinema: A tool or threat?

Beyond traditional storytelling, MediaCon turned its lens toward AI's impact on filmmaking. Rev. Dr. Richard Rego, Dean of the School of Communication and Media Studies, set the stage with a striking observation. "AI poses a challenge to human creativity, but it also offers opportunities. We need to adapt and integrate AI into our work, or risk being left behind," he asserted.

Krishna Hebbale built on this, pointing out that while AI can assist, it cannot replace creativity. "AI can only create what we instruct it to. It needs notes, and those notes are given by us. As long as we continue to evolve and adapt, AI will be a tool, not a threat," he said. The sentiment was clear: technology is not the enemy, stagnation is.

## Shaping a progressive tomorrow

It was evident that this year's MediaCon was not just about discussing the present, it was a moment of awakening. A reminder, as Hebbale put it, that students own the future of storytelling. "You are my future directors, my future storytellers. The stories you tell will shape the world we



The minds behind MediaCon

JMF

live in. So, tell them well," he urged. With that, the curtains fell on MediaCon 2025, not as an end, but as a prelude to the narratives yet to be written, the voices yet to be heard, and the cinematic frontiers yet to be explored.

# The second coming of cinema: How re-releases are capturing hearts

S N Adikesh

In an era of social media and streaming platforms, where audio-visual content is just a click away, cinema is finding a revival in theatres through re-releases. From cult favorites to box office failures, these cinematic gems are given a second life on the big screen. Technological updates, such as 4K restorations, have further captured the attention of cinephiles, offering them a chance to experience classic films in their full glory.

From Mohanlal's cult classic psychological horror, Manichitrathazhu, to Anurag Kashyap's gritty crime saga, Gangs of Wasseypur, 2024 witnessed a surge in re-releases, gradually transforming them into a cultural phenomenon in the film world. Even Bollywood's underrated gems, such as the folk-horror Tumbbad to the tragic romance Laila Majnu, returned to theatres, performing better than their initial box office runs and gaining the recognition they deserved.

## Filling the content gap

During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, theatres faced significant challenges due to delays in film production and social distancing restrictions, leaving audiences with no other option but to switch to OTT platforms, which subsequently surged in popularity. Many theatres, left with few options, resorted to re-releasing films that had previously been successful.

"Classics featuring big names like Mammootty and Mohanlal provided some relief during this challenging period," expressed Girish Chandran, owner of Sri Padmanabha Theatre in Thiruvananthapuram.

## Reviving cult favourites and unseen gems

Several factors have drawn audiences back to theatres to rediscover cult favorites and critically acclaimed film. The current generation, in particular, has not had the

chance to experience many classic movies, whether from specific genres or those with compelling plotlines. "Take Devadathan, for example—a film that was considered a flop during its initial release. Since its re-release, it has collected Rs 5.2 crores," commented Vimal Unnikrishnan, theatre manager at New Theatres in Thiruvananthapuram. "On the other hand, Mohanlal's cult classic Manichitrathazhu, despite being critically and theatrically acclaimed back in the day, continues to gain popularity, proving its timeless appeal."

## The quality dilemma



Manichitrathazhu poster E4 Entertainment

Content plays a crucial role in the financial success of theatrical re-releases, but even timeless stories need to be technically updated for modern audiences. Movies starring Mohanlal, such as Manichitrathazhu and Spadikam, saw a massive reception during their second runs, mainly due to their timeless stories and the technical enhancements made in their restoration. "Manichitrathazhu and Spadikam received huge appreciation, thanks to the enhanced sound and visual quality from their 4K restorations," said Parthasarathi, technical operator and distributor of Manichitrathazhu. He also discussed the technical challenges involved in reviving old films. "Recovering the original print is one of the biggest challenges. If we have the negatives, we can achieve good quality. If not, we have to rely on digital prints from previous telecasts, and the print quality ends up being mediocre," he added.

## Shortcomings and nostalgia

Although many popular classics have been celebrated once again through their re-releases, not all films have experienced significant success. Movies like Valliattan and Thalapathi failed to generate considerable collections. "Having knowledge about



Thalapathi poster SSI Production

the re-release is crucial for its success—timing is key, such as aligning with anniversaries, star actors' birthdays, or fan favorite films," observed Abhishek U, a film student at Neo Film School. "Many audiences missed re-releases like Paleri Manikyam. It is important to understand the target audience before remastering a film," he added.

An example of a successful re-release is Kollywood actor Vijay's Ghilli, which was re-released to coincide with its 20th anniversary, becoming the third highest-grossing re-release ever in Indian cinema, collecting Rs 26-32.5 crores.

Nostalgia was key to Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani's re-release success. The film's themes of friendship, love, and self-discovery resonated with Gen Z, drawing audiences back to theatres and earning Rs 25 crores at the box office.

While re-releases can breathe new life into older films, their success ultimately depends on a blend of timing, audience understanding, and the power of nostalgia. When memorable themes, emotional connections, and strategic re-releases align, these films can continue to thrive, proving that classics remain relevant across generations.

# The Godfather of Bengaluru's film culture and the rise of new blood

**Athar Inam**

Bengaluru's film scene has always been a lively confluence of diverse ideas, voices, and aesthetics. However, in recent years, a noticeable shift has occurred in how the city's residents experience curated cinema. In the past, spaces like the Suchitra Film Society held the banner high for curated screenings and intellectual discourse around films. In today's scenario, smaller film clubs, forums, and independent groups are taking over the city, sparking new conversations and offering fresh spaces for film lovers.

## From lockdown to lights, camera, action

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, film screenings went from being a niche activity to actively embracing change. As lockdowns were lifted, film clubs adapted by offering more intimate, flexible experiences. Among those spearheading the shift are new-age film clubs and forums, like the Bangalore Film Forum (BFF) and The Parallel Cinema Club (TPCC). "Before the pandemic, I regularly visited film societies and art house cinemas like Suchitra and Bangalore Film Society. But when they became less active post-pandemic, I decided to take the initiative and start something myself," shared Vinayak Bhat, founder of BFF.

## Spotlight on new spaces

Emerging venues may lack the deep institutional backing of Suchitra Film

Society, but they are compensating with flexibility and a willingness to engage in new forms of programming. With the rise of these smaller groups, accessibility has increased, as screenings are now held at various locations across Bengaluru, unlike Suchitra's centralized venue. When it came to selecting venues for the screenings, Nikhil Waiker, founder of TPCC, explained that the choice was driven by accessibility, atmosphere, and the willingness of hosts and organisations to collaborate and foster a sense of community around art house



Post-screening discussion TPCC

cinema. The group's first screenings were held at K.V. Subbanna Theatre, a makeshift venue for about two months. In 2022, they moved to Dialogues Café, which showed enthusiasm for hosting such events. They expanded to venues like Urban Solace near Ulsoor Lake and Underline Centre in Indiranagar, selecting spaces for people

from different parts of Bengaluru.



Film screening at a cosy cafe TPCC

## A clockwork budget

BFF has partnered with institutions like MAP (Museum of Art and Photography), Goethe-Institut, IKEA, and Jyoti Nivas College to make arthouse and independent films accessible to all. However, hosting such screenings is not possible without challenges. "The financial model is not sustainable," admits Anuradha H R, Artistic Director of Untitled Arts Foundation. "Artistic ventures rarely are. Both BFF and we have often used funds from other projects to make this work. There is a lot of backend effort—paying royalties, getting permissions, and it all adds up. But we are mad enough to keep going because we believe it is necessary for the community." Despite hurdles, there is an undeniable sense of satisfaction in seeing these efforts take root. Anuradha adds, "What makes it worthwhile is building relationships with the audience. The quality of discussions and

the engagement we see after the screenings are proof that this is about more than just watching a film. It is about fostering a deeper appreciation for cinema as an art form."

## A legacy that won't fade to black

For decades, Suchitra Film Society was the cornerstone of Bengaluru's film culture, shaping the city's engagement with world cinema. "I have been a member for the past four decades," says film critic Babu Subramanian, recalling the vibrant screenings at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, where filmmakers and critics first encountered international classics. While Suchitra's contributions to Bengaluru's cinematic legacy are undeniable, its present challenges reveal cracks in the foundation. The traditional audience, which comprised an older generation of cinephiles, has dwindled post-pandemic. The centralized venue, once an asset, now feels limited compared to the flexible and widespread locations of the newer film clubs. Anand Varadaraj, Suchitra's secretary, remains optimistic: "Suchitra has survived for more than 50 years, and I am sure it will survive for 50 more." He emphasizes the society's ongoing work, such as collaborating with consulates to curate global films, supporting independent filmmakers, and hosting interactive screenings with directors. As Bengaluru's film culture expands beyond traditional spaces, new film clubs draw in diverse audiences while Suchitra Film Society, with its deep-rooted legacy, explores a new chapter as a film school. Amid evolving voices, a quiet constant remains, shaping the city's cinema culture.

# Read it, like it, share it: The BookTok effect



BookTok section in stores The Warrior Word



Representational image CBC



Viral books on BookTok CBC

**Mitreya Venugopal**

In the digital age, where fleeting trends dominate social media, the unexpected rise of BookTok, a community of book lovers on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, has revolutionised how people engage with literature. BookTok has transformed a solitary hobby into a collective and thriving culture. In India, where TikTok is banned, book enthusiasts found their home on Instagram Reels, creating a lively Bookstagram community. "BookTok gives readers a sense of belonging," says Muskan (@call\_me\_a\_reader), a Delhi-based Bookstagrammer. "Readers are often introverts, and finding a community that shares your love for books is empowering." Muskan's words resonate with millions of readers drawn to BookTok-inspired recommendations. The platform has become a force that not only shapes readers' preferences but also fuels the literary industry.

## Bringing back old publications

One of the most striking impacts of BookTok is the ability to breathe new life into older titles. Books like *It Ends With Us* by Colleen Hoover and *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller saw sales skyrocket years after publication due to viral BookTok reviews. Readers who might have overlooked them during their publication years are now buying them in large numbers. The power of BookTok has also benefited bookstores, which previously

struggled against online giants like Amazon. Stores like Crosswords and Kinokuniya now feature dedicated BookTok sections to cater to these trends. Kenneth Mathew, the manager of Crosswords bookstore, shares, "Footfall in our store has increased, especially among younger audiences. They're coming in with lists of books they have seen online, which has given us a much-needed boost post-COVID."

## Revival of classics and Gen Z's interest

For years, literary classics have struggled to stay relevant in an era dominated by digital content. But BookTok has reignited their interest among Gen Z. Classics like *Wuthering Heights* and *Pride and Prejudice* are seeing a revival in popularity. Some users approach classics earnestly, discovering timeless themes. For others, these books serve as a status symbol, leading to what Muskan describes as "FOMO-driven reading." While the aesthetic appeal of vintage-looking editions cannot be dismissed, readers like Gargi Venugopal find genuine joy in exploring classics. "I picked up *Jane Eyre* after seeing a BookTok discussion about its strong feminist undertones. It was refreshing to see how relatable the story still feels," she says.

# Breaking the silence: How conversations can save young lives

C Rupasree

“Instead of support, children are met with criticism and isolation. This adds to their anxiety and feelings of worthlessness. We as parents try to console them, but the burden is too much for them to bear,” says Bhagyalakshmi, a grieving mother who lost her child, Bhargavi to suicide. Her plea serves as a reminder of the invisible battles that students face every day. Across the nation, the pressure to excel academically and socially is taking a devastating toll on young lives.

According to the 2024 survey conducted by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the overall suicide numbers in India have increased by 2% annually, while student suicide cases have increased by 4%. Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Madhya Pradesh have the highest number of student suicides, collectively accounting for one-third of the total.

## Conversations that save lives

For families like Bhagyalakshmi's, open conversations with their children will prove to be effective. “Every member should take time to sit with their child and discuss their daily lives, struggles, and aspirations. Inform them that their marks do not determine their value.” Her heartfelt



Students in distress

Rupasree

message underscores the importance of creating a nurturing and safe environment where the children will be able to feel valued for who they are and not just for their achievements. She advises that parents must actively prioritise conversations that address emotional well-being over academic achievements, breaking the silence that often surrounds the struggles with mental health. She opines that a supportive family will help children tackle the mental pressures that they face and will provide them with an open space to share their problems.

## The role of educational institutions

While families play a crucial role, schools and colleges are equally responsible. The current academic environment, with its long hours and relentless focus on performance, adds more burden on students. “It is illogical to maintain 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. timing in schools and colleges. By doing this, you are merely putting more burden on children without helping them comprehend the extent of that

pressure,” says Bhagyalakshmi. Psychologist Roseline Gomes calls for urgent changes in the educational system that could contribute towards better mental health among children. “Mental health is one of the major concerns among students of the developmental age groups. As stakeholders belonging to the educational sectors, it is our social responsibility to navigate both within and beyond classroom settings to understand the psycho-social conduct of our younger generations,” says Gomes. She also stresses the need for accessible counselling services and proper faculty training to identify mental health issues and support students who are under pressure.

## Battling internal and external pressures

Gomes says, “The challenges students face today are multifaceted.” She further points out that overthinking, peer pressure, low tolerance for setbacks, and the increasing influence of social media further complicate their struggles.”

To resolve this, Gomes advocates for a more inclusive approach where gatekeeper training is necessary, primarily in school curricula where teachers are trained to identify and support students who are showing warning signs of suicide risk.

There are also societal pressures faced by the students, which are as taxing as academic pressures. “People often ask, ‘Why don't you have a job yet? Why is it taking so long? These questions only add to the stress, especially for a woman, as there are underlying assumptions that they should settle down or follow a conventional path,” said Gowthami K., a chartered accountancy aspirant, when asked about her struggles.

## Focus on yourself

Amidst all these pressures, finding time to improve themselves can be a powerful way for students to decompress. “Encourage children to take up activities or any other hobbies that help them relax,” said Navamallika, an IAS coaching staff.

Psychologists advocate for students to engage in extracurricular activities that promote their mental and physical well-being, whether it be yoga or sports. “Physical and mental well-being is a crucial step for students to step away from all pressures, helping them to take time to reconnect with themselves,” Gomes added.

By fostering open conversations, reducing academic pressures, and promoting emotional well-being, a supportive environment can be created where students feel valued irrespective of their achievements.

# Sweeping away dignity: The silent struggles of Bengaluru's Pourakarmikas

Hemanth Kumar O

In Bengaluru, a city racing towards growth and modernisation, an important but overlooked workforce takes care of its streets ensuring that its residents live in clean environments. Despite their essential contributions, these workers known as Pourakarmikas, continue to face discrimination, abuse, and neglect. Why is this happening? And why do we, as a society, turn a blind eye to their daily struggles?

## What went wrong?

In November 2024, an incident near Dairy Circle served as a shocking reminder of the deep-rooted prejudice faced by the Pourakarmikas. Chandrakala, a Pourakarmika was verbally assaulted by a car driver and his mother while she was performing her cleaning duties at Ward No. 146. “A car driver suddenly stopped the vehicle and started abusing me when I simply asked him to look at the road and drive carefully. They accused me of being in their way and demanded compensation. It was dehumanising,” said Chandrakala.

The situation escalated when their supervisor, Ramesh R. intervened, only to be met with more abuse.



Pourakarmikas sweeping Hemanth

“When I tried to intervene, the driver shouted, ‘Hey, you low-class people! Your job is to clean the roads. Do not come near me.’” said Ramesh.

The situation reached the Adugodi police station, where the mother of the driver made an unexpected gesture - kneeling at the feet of the worker and asking for forgiveness. A police official from the station, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that many cases like these are settled outside the station, so no formal complaints are registered.

## The larger picture

The widespread disrespect stems from entrenched caste-based discrimination. With over 25,000

Pourakarmikas keeping Bengaluru clean, most belong to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported over 67,000 caste-based crimes in 2022. According to Thagaraj, President of the Karmika Samrakshana Trade Union, approximately 1000 - 1200 cases of caste-based discrimination against Pourakarmikas have been reported in the past five years in Karnataka alone. Yet, many cases go unaddressed, as police often dismiss them as ‘insignificant’.

Lawyer and activist Murthy Bhim Rao highlighted the legal protections available under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities Act) 1989. “This is a powerful law designed to prevent hate crimes against marginalized communities,” he said. “The act has undergone amendments in 2015, 2018, and 2019 to strengthen its provisions,” he added.

Further compounding the issue is the lack of proper facilities for these workers. Inadequate access to toilets, drinking water, and other basic amenities only reinforces their status as second-class citizens.

## Why are we addressing this?

It is not about the poor treatment of a particular group of workers - it is a reflection of larger societal values.



Pourakarmikas working near Bosch, Adugodi

Hemanth

Pourakarmikas keep the environment livable for the rest of us. And yet, the respect they deserve remains elusive. Thyagaraj urged stronger measures from the BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) “The BBMP Commissioner, Tushar Girinath, announced in September 2024 that any caste-based discrimination would be a punishable offence under the SC/ST Act, but every case remains pending,” he said. “We need awareness campaigns to educate the public about the consequences of caste-based discrimination. Pourakarmikas feel unheard and fear losing their jobs if they speak up,” he added.

## It starts with us

As of today, solutions require more than just laws. It requires a shift in how we, as a society, view Pourakarmikas and other marginalized groups. The first step is to recognize their humanity and their rights. Chandrakala's story isn't just hers alone, it reflects the unheard voices trapped in the shadows of systemic neglect. If Bengaluru is to truly call itself progressive, it must first look inward and honour the hands that keep it alive—its Pourakarmikas. They deserve more than just acknowledgement; they deserve respect, dignity, and a city that fights for them as fiercely as they fight for its cleanliness.

# Left behind in a moving world: Challenges of the disabled

Aron Shaji

The Rights for Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act of 2016 was created to protect and support disabled people, ensuring they have equal access to jobs, education, and transport. The law recognises 21 types of disabilities and aims to prevent discrimination. However, despite these promises, many disabled people in Karnataka still face major difficulties in using public transport. Poor infrastructure and lack of proper facilities make it hard for them to travel, leaving them socially and economically isolated.

## Public transport: the real concern

For people with disabilities, moving around the city is a daily challenge. Whether they have difficulty seeing, hearing, or walking, public transport is not designed to meet their needs. Buses, the most common mode of transport, are supposed to follow specific accessibility guidelines set by the government. Bus steps should be at the same level as bus stop platforms so that people with mobility issues can get in and out easily. Unfortunately, this rule is rarely followed. "In most of the places, they do not

follow this design. In a few places like Majestic, we can see that they follow this design but that alone will not solve the problem. This needs to be maintained at every bus stop," says Rueben Daniel, Head of Program and Operations at PACT India. Visually impaired passengers also struggle due to the poor condition of the audio announcement systems inside buses. Lokesh Naik, a regular commuter, shares, "The system that announces the next stop either does not work properly or is not used at all." The problem is not just with buses; trains and railway stations also lack proper facilities for disabled passengers. G. N. Nagaraj, President of the Karnataka State Disabled and Caregivers Federation, pointed out, "Many stations and train coaches are not designed for disabled people. Ramps and parking spots do exist, but they are often misused by others."

## Disparities exist

According to the 2011 census, Karnataka has over 13 lakh (1.3 million) disabled people. Despite being a fast-growing state known for its technology and development, Karnataka has failed to provide proper support



Wheelchair user checks bus stop accessibility

RampsMyCity

to this section of the society. The government's recent budget cuts have made things worse. The funding for disabled people was reduced by 80% (from 54 crores to just 10 crores) in the 2024-25 budget. This drastic reduction has left many without the basic support they need to live independently. "Each District Panchayat is supposed to spend 5% of its budget on disabled people, but this is not being followed properly. Instead, the money is used for other things," said Nagaraj. The situation is even worse in rural

areas, where transportation is limited. Disabled individuals in villages have very few options to move around, and authorities often ignore their concerns.

## Welcoming new initiatives

Despite these challenges, some new initiatives have tried to improve transportation access for the disabled. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are working with private companies and the government to introduce better facilities. One such initiative is the Purple Ride,

launched by EnAble India, an NGO in partnership with the Namma Yatri app. This service trains auto drivers to assist disabled passengers properly. "Auto drivers will be provided with a two-minute training video on assisting disabled passengers, thereby, giving drivers the necessary information to provide the required assistance," said George Sebastian, Head of eiLabs (EnAble India Labs). Another upcoming initiative by EnAble India has been developed in collaboration with the Raised Line Foundation (a non-profit startup incubated at IIT Delhi). This project helps visually impaired people by providing them with a system that announces bus numbers and arrival times in an audio format. Sebastian added that this initiative had recently begun in Bangalore and depending on its success there are plans to expand it to other states as well. Innovative initiatives like Purple Ride and the new audio system offer a glimpse of hope. Innovative initiatives like Purple Ride and the new audio system are starting to ease travel for disabled commuters. However, experts like Sebastian points out that without steady government support, these improvements may not spread statewide.

# Flames of neglect: Unmasking the health and environmental crisis of waste burning

Mohammad Saheel



Waste dumping near Agara Lake

Residents Watch

## Toxic toll on health

"Burning of non-segregated waste is hazardous and can cause permanent damage to the body," said Dr Ashwin Kulkarni, a doctor at Manipal Hospital, Bengaluru. The burnt waste releases toxins into the air, which can

Waste management has always been a problem in Bengaluru, and despite many attempts to manage the waste in neighbourhoods, irregular waste dumping persists. Garbage frequently accumulates to the point where the locals and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) workers have no choice but to burn the waste. The failure to segregate waste further escalated the issue as non-segregated waste contains organic and Persistent Organic Pollutant (POP) materials, which, when burnt, release harmful toxins, pollute the air, and cause serious health complications. This has resulted in significant problems for the public.

enter our lungs. Areas like K. R. Market and Subramanyapura have become hotspots for this issue. Dr Ashwin explained the pulmonary problems caused by the burning of waste. "Carbon and other oxides are emitted when the waste is burnt; this causes asthma attacks and other respiratory infections". He pointed out that older adults are more vulnerable as it causes wheezing and several allergies.

## How does BBMP react?

BBMP's Assistant General Manager (AGM) Abhilash denied that BBMP workers are responsible for burning waste. "It is not like we start a fire. Dry leaves and other particles may catch fire due to discarded cigarettes," he said.

He acknowledged that BBMP has several mechanisms to recycle dry waste and convert the wet waste into compost. However, the issue prevails in areas like Avalahalli and the outskirts of Hesaraghatta, where large amounts of waste dumping are observed. On a positive note, the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) representatives in these areas have expressed gratitude that BBMP and local MLA Vishwanath are working to improve society's waste management. Dr Selvarajan, founder of Green Circle, an NGO and a resident of Avalahalli, has urged BBMP to take stricter action. He said, "Our NGO works hand in hand with BBMP and makes efforts to clean the nearby lakes as well as relocating and segregating garbage".

## Waste control efforts in Agara Lake and Chikkaballapura

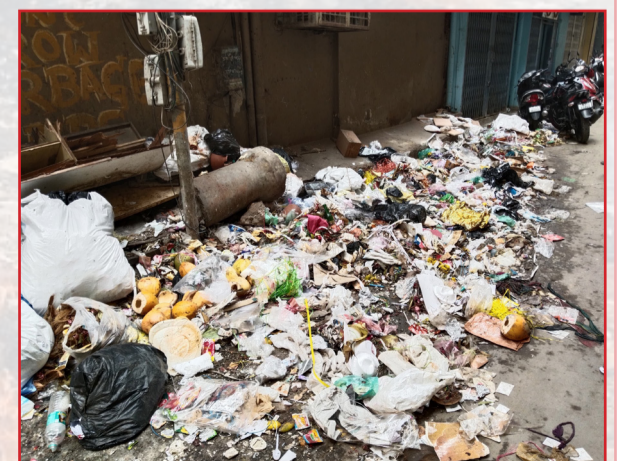
Agara Lake, a popular site for idol immersion, faces severe pollution from solid waste during festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi. Nagaraj from Ploggers Army, an environmentally driven community, described the impact after the 2024 immersions. "We received reports from locals and conducted a survey, which revealed that the lake was polluted with POP materials and plastic. That is when we took action," he

said. The Ploggers Army, with BBMP's assistance, launched a cleanup drive to restore the lake and its surroundings in HSR Layout. In Chikkaballapura, extreme waste dumping had been observed, particularly on the outskirts. Assistant Executive Engineer (AEE) Umashankar of the Chikkaballapura City Municipal Council (CMC) explained, "The waste dumping does not occur within the CMC limits, but it is common on the outskirts. Before COVID-19, the issue was frequent in areas like Doddaballapur and Tumkur, though it has declined since then."

## Green spaces under threat

Reckless waste management has severe environmental consequences. Waste burning releases methane and other toxic gases, contributing to air pollution and deforestation. "75% of the collected waste is processed, but only 50% gets segregated. The rest ends up in a landfill," noted Dr Selvarajan. About waste segregation, he added, "Usage of cotton boxes

for wet waste can reduce non-biodegradable waste". Wet waste can be decomposed, but dry waste is not readily biodegradable. The government's idea of encouraging the reduction in the use of single-use plastic is a good initiative to control waste management," he added. Dr Selvarajan emphasised the need to curb waste burning, which has become a common practice nowadays. He has planned to develop an app where users can upload selfies with the garbage and the location, allowing authorities to relocate waste to a designated zone. In a city like Bengaluru, the non-segregated waste that is not relocated to a dumping yard is almost always burnt. This, in turn, continues to jeopardise the health of the people and cause environmental pollution.



Waste dumping in K.R Market

Mohammad Saheel

# Dogs: The unsung heroes in cancer detection

**B Sakshi**

Dogs have long been cherished as loyal companions, but their talents extend far beyond friendship. One extraordinary skill recently discovered is their ability to detect cancer using their incredible sense of smell. By detecting subtle chemical changes in the body, dogs can identify certain cancers at early stages, a groundbreaking capability with lifesaving potential.

## How dogs are trained to detect cancer

Dogs have the incredible ability to detect cancer through their powerful sense of smell, but training them for this life-saving role requires time, patience, and precision. Richard, a K9 Team member, explained, "Dogs can learn to recognise a specific scent, like cancer, in less than 10 days." However, he added, "Ensuring they are accurate and consistent takes much longer. It's a process that never really stops." The journey starts with choosing the right dog breeds. Beagles and Hounds, known for their sharp noses, are often preferred, but Richard says individual temperament matters

more. "Not every dog in these breeds has the natural confidence or drive needed for detection work. Each one is carefully assessed before training begins," he said. Once selected, the dogs are introduced to cancer samples, such as breath or tissue. They are trained using classical conditioning. Whenever they correctly identify the scent, they are rewarded with treats, toys, or praise. The key is to make the dog understand that finding the scent is exciting and rewarding, explained Richard. Trainers also work hard to avoid giving unintentional cues, like changes in tone or body language, so the dogs rely purely on their noses.

## Dogs as early cancer detectors

Detection dogs in the field of cancer are precise and have the advantage over traditional diagnostic approaches, making them effective in the early detection process. Their extensive training puts them in the position to handle different samples of patients. Their capacity potentially increases treatment outcomes in medicine, particularly with cancer. "The clinical team plays a crucial role," said Sahana, a member of the clinical operations. "They handle sample collection, coordination with hospitals, and manage patient

communication, allowing us to process up to 5000 samples daily." Trained detection dogs provide a cost-effective and non-invasive alternative to traditional diagnostics like biopsies, which are costly and invasive. These dogs, capable of identifying cancer-related scents from simple breath samples, offer reliable and early detection, adapting to environmental factors. Their precision and efficiency make them a valuable complement to conventional methods, improving accessibility and enhancing early intervention opportunities.

## Tech meet canines

The dogs' incredible ability to detect cancer is natural, but technology is taking this skill to a whole new level. In the specialized 'sniff space' where training takes place, advanced tools work hand-in-hand with these animals. Thirumalai, a member of the tech team, explained, "Each dog wears a helmet fitted with EEG sensors to monitor brain activity as they sniff cancer samples." This data reveals how specific brain regions respond to cancer scents. It is combined with inputs from cameras tracking body language, breathing, and movement

sensors, creating a robust system for refining detection techniques. All this information is fed into a machine learning model to build a predictive system for identifying cancer, Thirumalai added. This innovative approach sharpens accuracy and boosts training methods by mapping how scent triggers specific responses in a dog's brain. Research in this avenue has been an on-going process. "Our goal is to create a bridge between the dogs' natural abilities and advanced technology. We have been working on these innovations for decades. With enough data, we aspire to refine our techniques and develop systems that complement our traditional medical practice," he added.



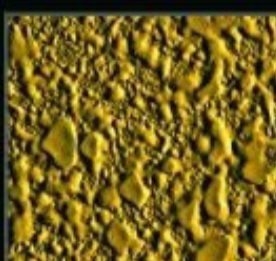
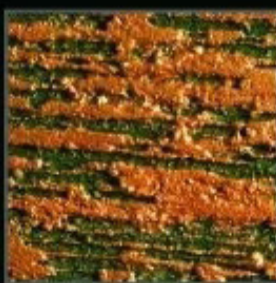
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*A thing of beauty  
is a joy forever*



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# Mic check: The underdog story of Malayalam Hip-Hop

Romil T N V

## My journey into the Malayalam rap scene

I was born in Kerala and raised in Gujarat. Unaware of the profound artistic genres my home state had to offer, I scrolled through the endless stream of Instagram reels during the lockdown. That is when I came across Vedan, a Malayali rapper who surprisingly talked about casteism in Kerala through his music, so I decided to dig into what Malayalam rap had to offer.

Even though Malayalam rap has not gained mainstream attention, it is one of the many underdogs in the sphere. When I dug up more, I discovered that rap music in Kerala got traction during the 2000s, yet no streaming platforms could help the artists reach or sustain an audience.

## A story of persistence and passion

The more videos I watched, the more my curiosity grew. Early rappers in Kerala recorded tracks at home using basic equipment, often with just a USB mic and free DAWs (Digital Audio Workstation). The production quality was low, with the focus primarily on the lyrics and the message.

The first wave of experimentation began when artists such as Street Academics and Thirumali began to emerge, infusing Malayalam lyricism with hip-hop elements. After the 2020s, independent labels and partnerships have allowed artists to work in professional studios for mixing and mastering.

Now, even their music videos have evolved from DIY (Do it yourself) low-budget projects to high-end, polished productions that rival the Indian mainstream hip-hop scene. "A childhood friend produced Vedan's first music video, but now he can spend up to Rs five lakhs on production. We have come a long way," said Vignesh Guru, an executive producer and close acquaintance of Vedan.

## Breaking the beat

After days of listening to mainstream rap, I came across the 'Malabari Rappers' from the North of Kerala. Unlike most rappers I had heard, they rapped in a thick Malabari accent, which surprised me. According to VP Anas, a lyricist and a poet, "Malayalam has different dialects across regions, the Malabari accent is considered to be a bad replica of real Malayalam, yet



Rap as revolution vedanwithword



Malabari rapper Dabzee Dabztories

when Dabzee, MHR, SA and other pioneers introduced a genre of rap that included Malabari slang, it was revered and celebrated."

The Malabari rap style draws inspiration from Mappila Pattu, or folk songs that combine Arabic, Persian, and Malayalam with themes of migration, devotion, and resistance. It also incorporates elements from other traditional art forms, like the Vanchippattu boat songs, the narrative style of Kadhprasangam, and even the lyrical storytelling traits of early Malayalam cinema.

## A voice for the oppressed

I have noticed that rap lyrics frequently make sharp political remarks regarding topics like caste-based oppression, corruption, and social injustice. As evident in Vedan's 'Voice of the Voiceless' lyric, which loosely translates to:

*"While they build palaces above us,  
We survive on mere grains of rice,  
If we all stand together as one,  
We will break their chains."*

When conversing with Guru, he explained how Vedan grew up in a colony that housed the underprivileged, a background reflected in the raw emotion of his lyrics, which convey his personal tribulations through a broader societal lens.

Female representation in the rap industry remains limited, with only a few women participating in rap battles and festivals. However, this is gradually increasing, indicating a shift toward greater inclusivity. Murderer, a Trivandrum-based rapper, said, "We are definitely making a space for ourselves; it's about time we go mainstream."

## What's next?

"I feel like we are going global; Malayali rappers are breaking international charts," said Actor and Rapper Neeraj Madhav, and I couldn't agree more. The future of Malayalam rap is bright and full of promise, as evidenced by the rising generation of performers influencing this genre.

What began as a grassroots movement, fueled by raw talent and perseverance, is poised to carve out a space on the global stage. Yet, even as it evolves, Malayalam rap remains deeply rooted in its cultural essence, echoing the voices, the struggles, and the triumphs of its people.

Continued from page 5

## BookTok Vs. traditional marketing

Traditional book marketing relies on book launches, reviews in literary magazines, and author tours. BookTok, however, has transformed the process, empowering readers to influence the market with authentic reviews, spontaneous reactions, and engaging challenges like 'reading a book in a day' have made BookTok a reliable and efficient marketing tool. Kenneth highlights the impact of BookTok on sales, saying, "We have seen a significant increase in sales of books that go viral on the platform." He notes that publishers now collaborate with Bookstagrammers, recognising it as a cost-effective strategy. The platform also serves as a launchpad for debut and self-published authors, expanding the literary landscape.



Representational Image CBC

## Overhyped and overrated

While BookTok's viral nature has amplified the reach of books, it has also led to specific titles being overhyped. Colleen Hoover's 'It Ends With Us' is a prime example. While many adore the novel, others feel it does not live up to the immense praise it receives. The overhype of specific genres, like romance and thrillers, often overshadows equally profound but less trendy works. Harshita Belwal (@prose\_andverse), another Bookstagrammer, remarks, "A lot of paid reviews and collabs bump up the popularity of books, making readers buy them. I myself have been there where a highly popular book fell flat for me." At its core, BookTok is reshaping how society views reading. It has normalised reading as a social activity rather than an isolated one. "Even if some people start reading to follow a trend, it is a win," says Muskan. "If you are reading ABC today, you might read a full sentence tomorrow, so that is a good start." As BookTok continues influencing reading habits worldwide, its impact on India's book-loving community is undeniable. It proves that even in a fast-paced world, there is still room for the timeless joy of books.

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# From Nizams to Taste Atlas: The journey of Hyderabadi biryani

Continued from Pg 1

Hyderabadi biryani landed 31st spot in Taste Atlas's '100 Best Dishes in the World' list of 2024, alongside India's beloved Murgh Makhani

## Shaik Nishaath

Hyderabadi biryani is a feather from the Mughals cap, telling a savoury story of marinated meat mingling with aromatic basmati rice, with the scent of spices and ghee dating back to the kitchens of the Hyderabadi Nizams.

Recently, it has landed the 31st spot in Taste Atlas's '100 Best Dishes in the World' list of 2024, alongside India's beloved Murgh Makhani. The dish's culinary and cultural significance is reflected in a stunning 4.52 star rating, inciting pride as well as debate.

## A royal legacy

The origins of Hyderabadi biryani can be traced back to the Nizams, who fused Persian and Mughlai traditions to conjure a dish as rich as their legacy. By combining fragrant basmati rice, high-quality meat, and a carefully curated mix of spices, they perfected a recipe that would become an enduring symbol of Hyderabad's heritage.

The Nizams ensured that every element of the dish was a reflection of their opulence and sophistication, turning a simple meal into an emblem of Hyderabadi culture. Today, this legacy continues to inspire chefs and food lovers alike.

## The love for biryani

Hyderabadi biryani's charm lies in its unique blend of flavors, aromatic spices, and rich history. Whether served at a lavish wedding or a local eatery, it



A tantalising plate of Hyderabadi biryani

## Charcoal Eats

has become synonymous with celebration. "It is unique - the spices, the masala, and the recipe make Hyderabadi biryani stand out. In my opinion, it deserves a much higher rank," said Nasreen, a loyal customer in the bustling streets of Hyderabad, who believes the dish is unmatched in its authenticity.

## Local eateries keeping the tradition alive

The global acclaim for Hyderabadi biryani is rooted in Hyderabad's legacy of iconic culinary establishments. From Shadab to Mehfil and Grand Hotel, these custodians of tradition preserve the dish's authenticity while refining it to new heights.

Ayaz, the owner of Shadab Hotel, takes pride in his work. "We use top-quality spices and aged basmati rice. The authenticity of our ingredients make our biryani

special. We live up to Hyderabadi biryani's global reputation," he said.

Aneel Verma, the owner of Mehfil said, "Hyderabadi biryani transcends religion or caste. We find unity in this cultural cuisine."

Meanwhile, Saif, owner of the 80-year-old Grand Hotel, added, "Our biryani is known for quality, quantity, and reasonable prices. It is a matter of pride that foreigners and locals alike recognize its worth."

## A dish for some, not all

While many adore this dish, some find its bold flavors overwhelming. Sana, a Hyderabad resident prefers subtler tastes. "The strong saffron and spices are too much for me. The layers of rice and meat do not always blend well," she said. These differing opinions explain why some feel the 31st position is justified, while others argue for a higher ranking.

## Global recognition

Despite an array of divided opinions, Hyderabadi biryani has gained worldwide fame. The dish has not only captured hearts in India but also gained international appeal, with restaurants like Mehfil expanding their reach beyond Hyderabad. From its humble beginnings in 2006, Mehfil Hotel now boasts of 13 branches, including one in Dubai. "This expansion is driven entirely by biryani.," said Verma. Shadab and Grand Hotels also noticed a steady influx of tourists, drawn by the promise of authentic Hyderabadi flavors. "Foreigners initially worry about the spice, but after tasting our biryani, they are convinced it's worth the hype," said Laxman Ustad, a chef from Shadab.

## More than just a dish

Hyderabadi biryani is an invisible string connecting humans. Its fame extends across India's borders, heralding a taste of Hyderabad's culture to the world. As this culinary treasure continues to evolve and win hearts, it cements its spot as an intrinsic part of India's gourmet. While debates on its ranking may persist, one truth prevails that Hyderabadi biryani is a dish that unites people. Its unparalleled legacy, that is defined by a balance of tradition and innovation, guarantees that it will remain a global favorite for generations to come.



Still got game

## Swamy

Despite these hardships, they have never let these constraints deter them from pursuing their passion. "Even though we do not get the same exposure as men's basketball, representing India on the global stage is a privilege beyond measure," said Maya, a team member. "Wearing the Indian jersey and stepping onto the court fills our hearts with immense pride."

## A story to inspire the future

Their love for the game has carried them to extraordinary heights. Each team member reveals that each dribble, each shot, and each game takes them back to their happy 20-year-old selves. Their journey goes far beyond the basketball court. It is a testament to the power of passion and perseverance. Their way of life serves as a powerful reminder that it is never too late to pursue your dreams, redefine what is possible, and inspire others. "We believe that in the future, our lives could be an inspiration not only for older athletes but also for younger sportswomen," says Vandana. These women are not just athletes but trendsetters and torchbearers of today, proving that it is possible to reinvent yourself at any age and any day. Their story is one of hope and determination, showing that life's second innings can be as fulfilling and more incredible as the first.

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# Man's greed bites the hand that is most faithful to him

Gitanjali Uthaiyah

Dogs have been an integral part of human lives since time immemorial, earning their reputation as 'man's best friend.' Once protectors and loyal companions, they have now, in some cases, been reduced to mere status symbols or living showpieces. Behind the glossy allure of so-called 'pure' breeds lies an often-overlooked reality.

## The myth of bred dogs

"People often buy dogs like German Shepherds to guard their houses, especially in sparsely populated areas. One does not get pure breeds in adoption or rescue centers," said Nikhil, a breeder at Happy Kennels, Mysore. Breeds like German Shepherds are popular choices for guarding homes, but their demand often leads to troubling practices in the world of dog breeding. The practice of breeding dogs starts off as a passion but often devolves into a profit-making machine that often blinds humans to the torture they inflict upon dogs.

Krithika U, a customer who buys from breeders, explains, "A dog from a breeder is purebred, whereas you do not know the

origins of a rescued dog." She added that rescued dogs could have been through some trauma that affects their temperament, but with a bred dog, its origin is known, and so are its parents because that is a given. A recurrent problem within the dog breeding industry is the lack of strict laws and regulations. While breeders are required to obtain a license to breed dogs, many operate without one, bypassing this essential legal requirement.

## The harsh reality

"Breeders force female dogs to give birth regardless of their condition, as their sole focus is on securing puppies and profiting from their sale," said Keerthan Vignesh, Manager at Charlies Animal Rescue Centre (CARE), Bengaluru. Breeders are complicit in cruel practices. "They often resort to debarking, a procedure that removes the dogs' vocal cords to prevent them from barking. When females are in heat and refuse to mate, their legs are tied to a water can, and they are subjected to abuse," he adds. One of CARE's documented rescues involved a dog that had outgrown its cage and required

**"Breeders force female dogs to give birth regardless of their condition, as their sole focus is on securing puppies and profiting from their sale."**

- Keerthan Vignesh

respite from severe cruelty. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated. This adage should guide our conscience when it comes to supporting dog breeding.

## The safety blanket for dogs

Adopting a dog rather than buying them from a breeder comes from a place of empathy and love rather than as a business transaction. Non-descriptive dogs, commonly known as Indie dogs, are easily adaptable and have immense disease resistance. In contrast, bred dogs have specific food or protein requirements, said Dr Jairamaiah, a pet consultant and the President of Karuna Animal Welfare Association of Karnataka. Contrary to the

popular belief that the bred dogs are meant for security reasons, Keerthan and Jairamaiah agreed that Indie dogs are territorial and very protective compared to the other dogs. "I have had a Daschund and Mudhol Hound myself before, but now I keep an Indie in my house. It comes and goes when it wants, eats food, and gets everyone's love," said Jairamaiah, who shifted from buying dogs to adopting them.

Adoption rates in 2025 remain low, with the ratio between buying and adopting still at 70:30. "I chose to adopt because, from what I have seen and heard, the dogs are mistreated and overly bred to produce a litter. In adoption, a life already exists, and you give it a home. The same applies to looking after street dogs around my

neighborhood," said Ashwin K, a dog owner. Keerthan from CARE emphasized the need for greater awareness around adoption, especially to overcome the stigma associated with adopting older dogs. Raising this awareness is crucial to improving adoption rates.

For as long as there is love to put out in the world, with baby steps, adoption will make dogs 'man's best friend' again. Significant progress has been made in both mindset and adoption rates over the years, but the adoption rates are still far lower than those for buying dogs. This imbalance needs to change. Stricter regulations and patrolling unethical breeders could go a long way in preventing cruelty against these innocent creatures.



Rescued boxer at CARE rescue facility

Gitanjali

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