





Cuttack lawyers boycott courts over SAT closure

CORRESPONDENT CUTTACK Lawyers of all lower courts, tribunals and the Orissa High Court here in the city abstained from their respective courts on Friday in protest against the recent abolishment of the Odisha State Administrative Tribunal (SAT). Following a proposal from the Odisha government, the Union government earlier this week abolished the Tribunal in the State. Expressing gratitude for their solidarity, SAT Bar Association secretary P.K. Rout said their token protest on the day against the abolishment of all Benches of the SAT across the State was a "success". "We will decide our next course of action next week seeking cooperation from other Bar Associations of the State," Mr. Rout said.

Illegal gutka, pan masala units unearthed in Odisha; one held

RAIDS PART OF ONGOING OPERATIONS AGAINST MANUFACTURERS: POLICE On Thursday night, an illegal manufacturing unit of gutka at Panigrahipentha Street was raided. According to Berhampur Additional Superintendent of Police Pravat Routray, these raids are part of continuing operations against illegal manufacturers and traders of gutka and pan masala. On August 3, two illegal manufacturing units of gutka and pan masala at Baunsiapalli and seized machinery and raw materials used for its production. On Friday, the Berhampur Sadar police station personnel raided an illegal manufacturing unit of gutka and pan masala at Baunsiapalli and seized machinery and raw materials used for its production. 48 bags seized Forty-eight bags of illegally manufactured gutka were seized while it was being transported in a passenger bus from the Berhampur bus stand. One person involved in its transportation was arrested. On August 6, three persons were arrested when the police raided and sealed an illegal gutka manufacturing unit operating in the Bhairabi Nagar area of Berhampur Sadar police station. Small units All these were using small packing units in houses on different streets to manufacture fake versions of popular gutka and pan masala brands. It is suspected that a large portion of their produce was being sent to other parts of the State. In January this year, around 50 sacks of illegal gutka were seized from an Odisha State Road Transport Corporation bus in Bhubaneswar. Investigation had revealed that the seized product had been sent from Berhampur.

'Centre will not touch Article 371F'

Sikkim CM cites Union Home Minister's assurance on State's special status

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA

Even as he welcomed the amendment of Article 370 pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, better known as P.S. Golay, assured the people that the Centre will not interfere with Article 371F which provides special status to the State.



P.S. Golay. PHOTO FILE

any possibility of merger of Sikkim and Darjeeling hills, and said that Sikkim is protected by Article 371F of the Constitution, which is the result of the agreement in 1975 between the Union of India, the king of Sikkim and the State's political parties.

been demanding the status of a Union Territory.

A press statement by Sikkim's Information and Public Relations Department on August 8 said that Mr. Golay, during his recent visit to New Delhi, had requested the political leaders at the Union level to protect Article 371F.

'No merger' "Those demanding Gorkhaland for Darjeeling hills are doing so as per their constitutional right. It is for the Centre to decide on whether to agree with it or not. However, there is no question of its merger with Sikkim," he said.

After the reorganisation of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the political parties in Darjeeling hills have

University teachers' body condemns MU action

Manipur University had 'arbitrarily' terminated services of a guest faculty

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

The Federation of Central Universities' Teachers' Associations (FEDCUTA) has condemned the "arbitrary termination" of the service of Ningombam Bupenda Meitei as a guest faculty at Manipur University.

nated after less than two months.

"Throwing all academic freedom to the wind, Mr. Meitei was asked to clarify whether he was a member of a political party. Subsequently on the grounds of being a member of a political party, he was thrown out of his job. Such actions spring out of attempts to impose the Central Civil Services Rules in universities which

are contrary to building a free and fair academic atmosphere in a university," FEDCUTA president Rajib Ray and secretary Atul Sood said in a statement issued on Thursday night.

"In the past and currently, even full-time teachers in the universities have exercised this freedom and even contested elections on the tickets of various political parties. Academic freedom has

meant the freedom to carry through one's beliefs and convictions in the political arena," they said.

"The FEDCUTA believes that this termination of services of Mr. Meitei, who belongs to a different political party and ideology, comes out of the authoritarian imposition of the ideology of the ruling BJP government in Manipur on Manipur University," the federation said.

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# In Beed, a harvest of crushed hopes

Maharashtra's drought-stricken district of Beed hit the headlines recently when reports emerged of an unusually high rate of hysterectomies among its women, especially those who migrate to nearby districts to cut sugar cane. **Jyoti Shelar** pieces together their story as the State administration carries out an investigation

At 34, Sangeeta Kale from Maharashtra's Beed district is a mother of two college-going sons, aged 19 and 17. Married off to a sugar-cane cutter at the age of 13 even before she had hit puberty, Kale had little inkling of the hard life ahead. Kale, who had her first child when she was just 16, worked through her pregnancy with husband Sadashiv in the fields of western Maharashtra, sometimes spending up to 16 hours cutting and loading the cane crop into trucks during the harvesting months – October to March. Her life remained the same after her first and second deliveries and subsequent years.

However, she found the routine back-breaking work daunting on days her menstrual cycle set in, as the fields had no toilets. She couldn't take leave for fear of being heavily penalised. Finally, fed up with these troubles and other recurrent gynaecological issues ranging from white discharge to pain, Kale underwent hysterectomy – uterus-removal surgery – last July.

Just like Kale, many women, some of whom are just in their 20s, in Beed have undergone this life-altering procedure, which is otherwise prescribed only for a handful of medical conditions and often performed as a last resort.

What is even more shocking is that Kale was the seventh woman in her extended family, living in Beed's Umrad Jahagir village, to have undergone the operation. "Frustrated with period pain, white discharges and foul smell, when I approached a doctor, I was told my uterus was damaged and hysterectomy was the way out," says Kale.

The drought-stricken Beed district in Maharashtra's Marathwada region came under the scanner this May after reports came to light about the unusually high rate of hysterectomies among its women, especially among those who migrate to neighbouring districts to work as sugar-cane cutters.

State figures say that in three years (2016-2019), as many as 4,605 women have had their uterus removed in Maharashtra. Civil rights organisations allege that the hysterectomy rate in Beed is 14 times more than that for the State or the country. In Umrad Jahagir village where the Kales reside, the number of 'womb-less women' now stands at 50.

## Pushed into debt

Sitting on the floor of her tin-roofed shanty, Kale, slightly under five-feet tall, points towards her back and knees. "The uterus-removal surgery has no doubt relieved me from the menstrual cramps and vaginal discharge, but it has brought along back and joint pain. On many days, the pain is unbearable. It's like I have aged at a greater speed," she says.

"The doctor assured me that removing the uterus was the best option. Though I was taking medication, my infections were recurring. I had already undergone a sterilisation surgery, so there was anyway no scope of having more children. Hysterectomy seemed like the right thing to do. But later, the after-effects started," rues Kale, who missed out on the last sugar-cane cutting season as she was bedridden for three months after the procedure. Her decision to undergo the procedure has brought not just health issues but severe economic distress to the already impoverished household.

Her husband holds her responsible for the debt of ₹2 lakh that has piled on them. At first, he blamed her one-off leaves from work. Then, he pointed fingers at her for the ₹30,000 that they had to borrow for the hysterectomy. The taunts have gotten worse since they missed out on the last season of sugar-cane cutting.

Kale relied on the testimonies of her four sisters-in-law and two of their mothers-in-law, who had all been through the procedure, when she got admitted to the Veer Hospital located on the Beed-Jalna road for the surgery. "None of us has ever been to school. But the doctor is educated. His word was assuring for us," she says.

Kale's sister-in-law Vaishali, 33, was also advised a hysterectomy when she sought medical help after grappling with vaginal discharge and recurrent infections for years. "I was told my uterus was damaged and getting it removed was best. I had two sons, so we thought the most important job of the womb was done," says Vaishali.

Scores of women in Beed offer a similar narrative. Shockingly, most don't have medical reports or any papers to show the history of their treatment.

Their individual stories all follow a pattern. Women would commonly consult their doctors for health issues lasting up to a year, but then complain of recurrent infections. Sooner or later, hysterectomy would be recommended to them as a permanent solution.

However, they were never told how the surgery could lead to hormonal imbalance, calcium deficiency and constant body ache, among other things.

In Beed, open defecation remains a ground reality. Many households do have built toilet blocks built under the



Sarika Chandrasen Kurlekar, 32, among the 56 women in Vanjarwadi village who have undergone hysterectomy. • ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

government's Swachh Bharat scheme but their members still defecate in the open due to lack of water. For the women in the district, it is a vicious cycle as they have no sanitary facilities either at their workplace or at their homes. And the nature of work in a sugar-cane field has only worsened their situation.

An estimated 5-6 lakh people, including pregnant and lactating women, migrate from Beed to other parts of Maharashtra, and border areas of Karnataka, to work as sugar-cane cutters. Hailing from a region that is perennially under a spell of drought and not having many avenues of employment, Beed residents continue to live in abject poverty and have to rely on sugar-cane cutting to make a living. Traditionally, a couple is hired by a *mukadam* (contractor) as a single 'unit', known as *ek koyta* (one sickle). The contractor pays them *uchal* (a lump sum) in advance, ranging from ₹80,000 to ₹1.2 lakh, for a period of four to six months. The pairs migrate after Deepavali every year.

While a typical workday starts at around 6 a.m. for the couple, the woman gets up earlier, at 4 a.m., and cooks food for the entire family before she sets out. Children are left behind in temporary shanties near the sugar-cane farms as their parents toil under the sun.

## Two-and-a-half tonnes a day

Laxmi Chauhan, 44, from Beed's Vanjarwadi village and her husband Nanabhau, 45, have been migrating for sugar-cane cutting for the past 25 years. "We manage to cut about two-and-a-half tonnes of sugar-cane in a day. A tonne of sugar-cane earns us anywhere between ₹350 to ₹400 depending on the seasonal rate," says Nanabhau, a father of two sons, both in their twenties.

Soon after the birth of their children, Chauhan began experiencing pain in the abdomen, which resulted in her frequent absences from work and low productivity. "Working during the menstrual cycle was anyway difficult," says Chauhan, adding that she had to make multiple strikes with the sickle to cut a single cane, a process which made her feel further weak and unwell. It also meant lower earnings for the couple.

"We earned less than the *uchal* and had to repay the remaining amount to the *mukadam*. Also, when one failed to report to work, the *mukadam* demanded a fine of ₹500, which had to be paid in cash and was distributed among other workers who took the extra workload," says Chauhan.

Troubled by her own dwindling productivity and the couple's mounting debt, Chauhan finally decided to see a doctor at the Veer Hospital in 2014. Following a sonography, she was told that her uterus had got swollen and this could lead to cancer. Within the next few days, the couple hurriedly collected ₹25,000 and Chauhan got her uterus removed, as advised by the doctor. She was hospitalised for seven days.

"Since then, my body has begun swelling and I am in pain every day. But

**The surgery has no doubt relieved me from the menstrual cramps and vaginal discharge, but it has brought along back and joint pain**

SANGEETA KALE  
Beed resident



I feel better than before," she says. Weight gain, which Chauhan has experienced, is another inevitable side effect of hysterectomy. When asked if the uterus removal was at the suggestion of a *mukadam*, the couple deny it. "We trusted the doctor's word," says Nanabhau, adding that they had sought help with the intention of getting medical treatment and not surgery. "When the doctor told us about the risk of cancer, we did not want to take any chances," he says.

## Coaxed by contractors?

Following reports on the high number of hysterectomies performed in Beed, the Maharashtra administration launched an investigation on June 18. Among the many aspects that the authorities are probing, one is whether the *mukadams* push women to undergo the procedure to ensure better returns. "There could be a nexus between profit-driven doctors and the *mukadams*. This definitely needs to be investigated, among other things," says Neelam Gorhe, who is heading the seven-member investigation committee that will submit its report to the Chief Minister and Health Minister this month.

A *mukadam* is a well-connected villager who reaches out to prospective labourers from the nearby areas. With frequent droughts and failing crops, many couples prefer to migrate for income generation, even if they have acres of farmland back home.

"The poverty is so ingrained that the advance taken by couples is exhausted very quickly. When they fail to cut sugar-cane worth the advance paid to them, we are left with no choice but to

pursue them to return the remaining money," says Bappa Kotwade, 42, a *mukadam* from Beed's Irla Dubba village. Having been a *mukadam* for the past 15 years, he supplies up to 200 *koyatas* (couples) to sugar-cane factories every season.

While some labourers are *gadiwale* (couples with a pair of bullocks and a rented cart), some work as *toliwale* (groups that transport harvested sugar cane in trucks or tractors).

"Some men are alcoholics and recovering money from them becomes a task. Some couples disappear midway. There are some who never pay back. We have to be taskmasters to deal with this," says Kotwade, adding that they forge long-standing relationships with the labourers and keep paying them small amounts for food and health expenses to ensure that they come back every season.

But it is not always hunky-dory for the labourers, some of whom have been beaten up and even illegally detained in factories when they failed to cough up the money. "There have been murders too," says Kotwade, citing a story of a *mukadam* who had a scuffle with a labourer while demanding the money. "The labourer died due to serious injuries and the *mukadam* landed in jail."

Kotwade, however, rubbishes the allegation that *mukadams* suggest hysterectomies to women. "It is a vicious cycle of hard manual labour, grinding poverty and bad living conditions. Uterus or no uterus, they have to work to earn. Why should we tell them anything?" he says, adding that women have been undergoing hysterectomies for years in Beed.

## Let down by doctors?

A muddy pathway through a farm in Vanjarwadi leads to the house of Sarika Chandrasen Kurlekar, a frail 32-year-old. In the village, where 56 women have undergone uterus removal procedures, Kurlekar is the youngest to have been operated. She has never migrated for cane cutting but, like all other women, had been complaining of continuous white discharge that caused fatigue. Her medical record from Matoshri Hos-

**Early marriages and child birth, fear of cancer and the loss of wages during menstruation have all culminated in the high rate of hysterectomies**

ABHJIT MORE  
Health activist

pital cites "bulky cervix and persistent demand by patient" as the reason for the hysterectomy.

Ashok Anand, head of gynaecology at the state-run J.J. Hospital in Mumbai, is amused at the reasons cited. "Neither a bulky cervix nor persistent demands by a patient warrant a hysterectomy. Her symptoms were more likely due to cervicitis, which could be treated through conservative medication," says Anand.

Since news on the hysterectomies in Beed came to light, questions have been raised on the possible role of the medical fraternity in making women undergo the procedure. State data showed that 99 private hospitals in Beed district have carried out 4,605 hysterectomies since April 2016. Eleven of these hospitals have carried out more than 100 hysterectomies in the three-year period.

## 'Gross exploitation'

The top five in the list are: Pratibha Nursing Home (277); Tidke Hospital (196); Shree Bhagwan Hospital (193); Gholve Hospital (186); and Veer Hospital (179). In comparison, 2,000-odd hysterectomies have been performed in the public sector in the same period in Beed. "Instead of getting rational treatment in public health-care facilities, the women are pushed towards irrational treatments in the private sector," says Abhay Shukla, national co-convenor of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan. "It's nothing but gross exploitation of vulnerabilities of women and a failure of the state," he says. Activists also rue that the official count could be under-reported as the state banks on these same hospitals to furnish the figures.

Local doctors, however, feel the criticism is uncalled for and insist that for most of the women who underwent the surgery, their health warranted it. Gy-

naecologist Madhav Sanap, who has run the Shree Bhagwan Hospital since 1998, is prompt to assert that there may be doctors who conduct unindicated procedures, but he is not one of them. "Of the 193 surgeries that I have carried out, only four were of women under 35. I can provide history for each and every case," he says, while arguing that the hype around hysterectomies in Beed requires an in-depth analysis. "It will prove that the district has rates comparable to other parts of the State," he says.

## Poor hygiene

Sanjay Veer, a gynaecologist and owner of Veer Hospital, says no one goes under the knife unless there is real suffering. "These women live in conditions of extremely poor hygiene. They don't have access to toilets. They can't afford sanitary pads. Open defecation is rampant in their villages as near the sugar-cane farms where they work," he says.

"The core issues are poverty, illiteracy, lack of sanitation and access to water. Doctors are being made scapegoats in this issue, which is largely a socio-economic one and requires a larger solution," he adds.

The National Family Health Survey data show that the rate of hysterectomies in Maharashtra is 2.6%, while the national average is 3.2%. But when it comes to Beed, a 2018 survey of 200 women by Maharashtra State Commission for Women revealed the extent of the problem as around 36% were found to have had undergone hysterectomies.

According to Beed's civil surgeon Ashok Thorat, there is an absence of enough data to carry out comparisons with other districts in Maharashtra. "Our primary investigations have shown that the prevalence of hysterectomies is 17 per 1,000 women in Beed. In some parts of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and other States, the prevalence is about 50 to 60 per 1,000 women," says Thorat, adding that a detailed survey is under way to get to the root cause.

In fact, a circular dated April 16, has made it compulsory for private gynaecologists in Beed to seek permission from a civil surgeon for every hysterectomy procedure barring emergency procedures, which have to be reported within a span of 24 hours. The circular warns doctors against portraying all kinds of tumours, growths and swelling on uterus as cancers.

"The number of hysterectomies has gone down by 50% since we implemented the SOP [Standard Operating Procedure]," Beed's collector Astik Kumar Pandey tells *The Hindu*. "Right now, all the hospitals are under our scanner. All hysterectomies in the past, especially of women who are under 35, are being scrutinised," he says.

Activists say that the menace of unwarranted hysterectomies affects not just sugar-cane cutters but women in general. "Early marriages and child birth, fear of cancer and the loss of wages during menstruation have all culminated in the high rate of hysterectomies. The government has no clue about the ground reality as it has never maintained any data," says health activist Abhijit More who terms Beed's situation as a blatant violation of rights of women living in the district, who are uneducated and therefore ill-equipped to make the right health choices.



Six out of the seven women from the extended Kale family in Umrad have undergone hysterectomies. • ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

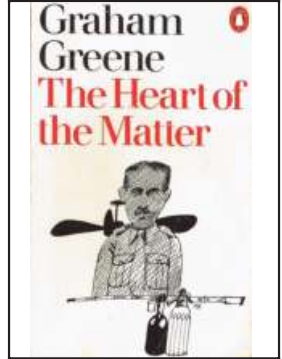












**Last book that made you laugh?**  
*The Bartimaeus Trilogy* by Jonathan Stroud. He's so funny, so old and so irascible.

**What are you reading now?**  
Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*. It's so depressing; I have no idea why I picked it up.

**Literary character you love?**  
Yossarian, from *Catch 22*.



**And web series... your pick?**  
*Fleabag*. I loved the first season of *Stranger Things* but subsequent seasons had me scratching my head. Among Indian shows, I love *The Viral Fever's Kota Factory*. I also enjoyed *Made in Heaven* but kept wishing it had a smidgen of romance somewhere.



Anuja Chauhan:

# READY FOR BOLLYWOOD

The film adaptation of *The Zoya Factor* releases next month, two other books of hers have been picked up by heavyweights (Anil Kapoor and YRF, if you must know), and there's a Hotstar series coming up



This September, Chauhan, 48, is all set to make another career jump. *The Zoya Factor* has been adapted for screen with Sonam Kapoor and Dulquer Salmaan in the lead and director

Abhishek Sharma at the helm. The author is credited with 'Additional Dialogues' for the film. "While I haven't met Dulquer, I've interacted with Sonam often. The first time I met her, she

pulled out all my books which looked old and well-read. She asked me to sign all her copies," recalls Chauhan, who is working on two original web series that are "all hush-hush for now".

But that's not all. *Battle for Bittora* has been optioned by Anil Kapoor Films while YashRaj Films recently picked up *Baaz* and Hotstar has announced a series based on *Those Pricey Thakur Girls*.

### It began with Shah Rukh

*The Zoya Factor's* journey from book to screen has been a long one. Shah Rukh Khan's Red Chillies Entertainment had first optioned the book. "On that Pepsi shoot, when Shah Rukh had gotten to know that I [was] writing a book, he'd said 'I'll make the film'. He had called dibs on it even before I had finished it. They were excited but eventually nothing happened. The book was languishing when Pooja and Aarti Shetty (of WalkWater Media) got in touch, saying they wanted to make it," says the author who relocated to Bengaluru from Mumbai five years ago.

Chauhan credits her time in advertising for having honed a writing style that seems tailor-made for screen adaptations. "When you write ads, you're visualising things and have to put the audio and the video together when you're creating it. Once you have a style, it stays," Chauhan explains, quickly adding, "But it's not easy because you have to trim the fat for a film and my books have so many layers and characters. This is why I was so happy that for *The Zoya Factor* I was brought in only after someone else had already chopped it. All I had to do was put a neat bow on it."



### No lotus-eater

Laughing over the romantic notion most people have about a writer's life and process, she says, "Writing is a job and it's as unromantic as any other sort of work. When my kids were younger, I'd start when they left home at 7 am and keep writing until they returned at 4 pm. I am not so regimented now that I am working on a web series, but I write a regular magazine column just to keep that deadline muscle toned; you don't want to become some flakey, lotus-eating type." Five years ago, her move from Gurugram to the Garden City has also helped. "I get so much respect now when I go to Mumbai because people think living in a 'jungle' must mean that I am wise," she says laughing, adding that she is "happy to live in a 'jungle' with my animals, many gardens and great weather. It's a lovely township...And you have just enough space to not feel crowded".

### Of weird gurus and reality

Chauhan was initially adamant that she didn't want to be involved with the adaptation of this book. "I was so manically possessive about every little detail... I was also a little sick of it. At the time, I had spent one year writing the book and I wanted to be done with it. Also, I had started writing *Battle for Bittora* so, in my head, I had moved on. And I still had a full-time job." Perhaps the delay in getting the film green-lit helped, for she was excited about revisiting her first novel. Once Dulquer was cast to play Nikhil, there was some talk about tweaking the character to suit the Southern star. They ultimately didn't. "We thought that his character could be from Kerala but when I heard him speaking Hindi, I realised that we didn't need to do that. His Hindi is perfect."

The cricket team that Nikhil leads is one that's desperate to win the World Cup. After all, the book was written before Team India lifted the World Cup in 2011 but apart from this little detail

Chauhan believes that *The Zoya Factor* is more relevant now than it was then. "It's quite weird because of the state of the nation today, with the kind of superstitions, blind faith and the worshipping of Godmen and all these weird gurus. The idea that superstition makes Zoya the mascot for the team seems less far-fetched now."

Working on the dialogues for the film gave Chauhan a taste of what it would be like to collaborate with others once again. When she quit advertising, she imagined herself being a 'nightie-person' who spent her days writing books that she had complete control over. But the very safe, creative and constructive atmosphere with Pooja, Aarti and Abhishek for this film has readied her for collaborations with others and a new medium.

"I am currently working on the Thakur Girls adaption. It's all very exciting. Maybe if OTT platforms were around in 2006, I might not have written any of my books," muses Chauhan.

KARISHMA UPADHYAY

About 13 years ago, advertising executive Anuja Chauhan found herself on an ad shoot for Pepsi with Shah Rukh Khan, Saif Ali Khan, R Madhavan and Surya. The plan was to shoot a multi-lingual commercial with the stars over a span of four days. "We had an insane number of shots to be done in one day, and were compromising a lot. I felt so helpless and out of control, because I had written something and we were shooting something completely different," she remembers. On her way back to the hotel, she decided to write a book because "no one could mess it up".

Thus was born the love story between Zoya Singh Solanki, a young advertising executive, and the dashing captain of the Indian Cricket team, Nikhil Khoda. Chauhan, after 17 years at the ad agency JWT India – having created memorable slogans like Pepsi's Yeh Dil Maange More and Darr ke Aage Jeet Hai – decided to pivot to a full-time literary career in 2010. In the years since, she's written four more bestsellers – *Battle for Bittora*, *Those Pricey Thakur Girls*, *The House That Bf Built* and *Baaz* (the story of a fighter pilot who falls in love with a colleague's sister).

# Waves and poetry with Ditty

Back in Delhi soon after the release of her debut album, singer-songwriter Ditty talks about poetry creating an experience through her album



VANGMAYI PARAKALA

The calming sounds of waves wash over you when you press play on Ditty's debut album *Poetry Ceylon*. Then, lilting, rhythmic music builds into poetry. Ditty is talking to us, telling us of coming back home to her roommate, after a particularly tough trip to the grocery store, where she's had many little memories with her former partner.

This recollection is not entirely melancholy – she thinks back fondly to the conversation, how her roommate comforted her, "collecting the pieces of her sadness." But the tone changes soon, as early as the second track, when her words take to tune; the ambient sounds are present but



**Talking music** Ditty will soon perform in the city  
\*RONIT SARKAR, GORKEY PATWAL

not as prominent, only coming back when they're needed. This well-thought-out execution of an artistic expression is of 30-year-old urban ecologist Aditi Veena's (aka Ditty) time in Sri Lanka. She has broken the path of complacency towards which Indian "indie" seemed to be heading. The truncated word for independent artists, has quickly taken on a "vibe" of its own, denoting a whole genre by itself.

"For me, song-writing is essentially having a conversation with myself...I just let things come. I don't necessa-

rily think about what's going to work or not," says Ditty, whose spoken-word makes us feel like we've stolen a few pages off her journal; the ambient sounds transport us to exactly where she'd want us to be.

Ahead of her performance in Delhi, at the monthly musical series Under The Banyan Tree (which also features the Hindustani singer from Mumbai Nirali Kartik), Goa-based Ditty talks about how her day job inspires her work, and the art of performing such delicate, themed albums live. Edited excerpts.

### It's been four years since your EP, *Mumblings*. How do you think your music and writing have evolved?

I feel like I can write better songs now. I know myself more. *Mumblings* was my first attempt at song-writing. This time I was writing a whole record.

### You started work on *Poetry Ceylon* in October 2017. What's the process been like?

I suppose I was thinking of the whole album as one piece – like an experience, as a journey for people to float in and out of through poetry and music. That's how I like to perform it as well, especially when I'm playing with a band.

### Has your work in urban ecology ever influenced your music?

Yes. Meeting permaculturist Raya

Cole of Living Ecology, and working on a permaculture farm, for instance, inspired *Under the Sun* [the final track in *Poetry Ceylon*].

### How big a part of the conceptualizing of *Poetry Ceylon* were its ambient sounds?

Most of the album was first recorded in my bedroom by Shantanu Pandit [Delhi-based musician]. But I recorded *Under the Sun* myself, in my garden. The birds sounded so beautiful, and I decided to make that the last track. And then came in more ambient sounds [for the rest of the tracks on the album].

### There's a sense that the spoken-word must be experienced at a personal level, rather than at a gig. Do you agree? How do you recalibrate when you perform these tracks for a live audience?

A lot of people have reached out to me to tell me that they've been touched by the spoken-word pieces. I got more confident about putting the songs on the album after performing them to audiences who loved them. It's been lovely performing in live spaces. I have consciously chosen to do curated shows and not play in bars or restaurants because they give me a chance to connect with the audience in front of me.

*Under The Banyan Tree*; 7 p.m. onwards at IAQ, Opposite Qutub Minar, Mehrauli; tickets ₹1,500 upward, on friendsofmusic.in

## PRODUCTS

### Rainforest seating

Transport yourself to Malaysia's Borneo rainforest with this ode to a mushroom. Built to lend your living room an earthy feel, the Oyster Lounge is intricately handcrafted out of refurbished teak wood. The circular seat also sports a *tel pani* polish finish, blending seamlessly into almost any kind of decor.



Details on [artiseram.com](#);  
₹2,06,500

### Dog's day



Legend has it that at a board meeting, David Brown, owner of Aston Martin, walked in with his dog, plonked him on the table, and demanded, "Build me something for him to sit in." Thus was born the Aston Martin DB5 Shooting Brake. The 1965 vintage had a limited-edition run of a dozen cars. It's up for auction by RM Sotheby's at the Monterey Car Week (August 15-17, and is expected to go for between USD \$1 million and \$1.4 million.

Details on [rmsothebys.com](#)

Contact us at [delhimetro@thehindu.co.in](mailto:delhimetro@thehindu.co.in)

## 5 EVENTS WORTH YOUR WHILE



MUSIC

**Ghazal**  
Noted musician and writer Vidya Shah teams up with the popular radio personality Sayema Rahman for a musical evening, *Aaj Jaane ki Zid Na Karo, Romancing the Ghazal*. The show features some of the most romantic, celebrated ghazals of all time with interesting anecdotes, trivia and stories about them and the artists.  
**VENUE:** Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre  
**TIME:** 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.



WORKSHOP

**Rakhi making**  
This Sunday, The Earth Collective, a group of organic food-lovers and farmers, is conducting a workshop on rakhi-making. Organised by Yatan, an NGO, this workshop will educate the participants on adding seeds as decoration on the rakhis, so that it can grow into trees when the day is done.  
**VENUE:** Sunder Nursery, Nizamuddin  
**TIME:** 9 a.m. - 10 a.m.



DANCE

**Arangetram**  
The Bharathanatyam arangetram of Shreeya Srikanth, a student of Guru Kanaka Srinivasan, an exponent of the Vazhuvoor School of Bharathanatyam, will be held this evening. Shreeya has been learning this ancient art for the past 11 years and has been part of various dance productions under her Guru's tutelage.  
**VENUE:** The Delhi Tamil Sangam, RK Puram  
**TIME:** 6:30 p.m.



FASHION

**Khadi way**  
Good Earth, a home décor chain of stores, has launched, The Khadi Way by 11.11/eleven eleven, a unique hand spun collection. An ode to Mahatma Gandhi, this collection celebrates Gandhi's legacy of hand spun and handwoven textiles made from desi cotton on the wheels of Gandhi Charkha and Amber Charkha.  
**VENUE:** Good Earth Store, Khan Market  
**TIME:** 12 noon - 8 p.m.



THEATRE

**The Unknown**  
Divyansh Vyas, an aspiring writer, whose poems have been aired on AIR, has now penned a play titled *The Unknown* that will be staged this Sunday. The play deals with the idea of an artist's unchecked ego to satiate his desires and the extreme importance he gives to himself for producing art.  
**Venue:** Akshara Theatre, Baba Khark Singh Marg  
**TIME:** 7 p.m.

FILM REVIEWS



A journey through horror that sees some changes in the characters •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# There will be blood

Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark makes you momentarily recoil at the gruesome and the hideous

NAMRATA JOSHI

### Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark

**DIRECTOR:** Andre Ovredal  
**STARRING:** Zoe Colletti, Michael Garza, Gabriel Rush, Austin Zajur, Natalie Ganzhorn, Austin Abrams  
**RUN TIME:** 107.29 minutes  
**STORYLINE:** A group of youngsters in small town America of 1968 visits a haunted house, returns home with a book of stories only to find newer, malevolent ones getting written on its blank pages with blood

If one were to talk of *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* in Indian terms then, instead of *bhaya* (fear), it evokes quite another rasa – *veebhatsa* or that of revulsion; here the macabre disgusts. Instead of becoming the stuff of your worst and most abiding nightmares, this scary movie makes you momentarily recoil at the gruesome and the hideous. It doesn't quite manage to mess with your head and heart enough to haunt you long after it's over.

An adaptation of Alvin Schwartz's popular tales, Andre Ovredal's *Scary Stories...* it feels like a mix of the *Twilight Zone* and *Urban Legend*. But a bland one despite some good acting and atmospheric. It is set in 1968, during the 'season of the witch', in the American small town of Mill Valley. These are the times of the Vietnam War's horrors, of the cult horror film *Night of the Living Dead*, of Nixon on the eve of the presidential elections and also of openly racist bullying. However, beyond the incipient uneasiness, uncertainty and a sense of the sinister, there is a bigger evil looming large, at a specific address: the haunted house of the Belows, the site of a tortured childhood. A group of

and, of course, the pale, smiling lady who embraces only to consume you. Then there is the gruesome Toe monster found in the bowl of stew and a disgusting, uncontrollable zit, the red spot which has spiders run amok. It's these grisly beings that make the film come alive.

The monsters could have had more meaning than meets the eye. When it comes to Guillermo de Toro (one of the producers and screenplay writers), monsters are often mirror images of the marginalised, and hence, a conduit for persuasive social commentary. They don't quite plumb the philosophical depths here. However, the journey through horror does make the young protagonists confront their worst of fears. Stories hurt, they heal and often they turn real to make people face up to who they are. It makes Ramon (Michael Garza) find a direction in life and has Stella (excellent Zoe Colletti) realise that she isn't quite accountable for the guilt she had been needlessly harbouring for long. It also makes her take the responsibility of telling the real story of another girl who has been wronged all along. A film that comes a wholesome full circle even while dealing with spooky uncertainties.

# Painfully preachy

A stellar supporting cast cannot uplift *Jabariya Jodi*, a lacklustre romcom disguised as a social message

DEBORAH CORNELIOUS

### Jabariya Jodi

**DIRECTOR:** Prashant Singh  
**CAST:** Sidharth Malhotra, Parineeti Chopra, Javed Jaffrey, Sanjay Mishra, Aparshakti Khurana, Chandan Roy Sanyal, Neeraj Sood, Sheeba Chaddha  
**STORYLINE:** Abhay Singh who kidnaps grooms for a living, ends up in a similar situation

Robin Hood stole from the rich and gave to the poor. In *Jabariya Jodi*, Abhay Singh (Sidharth Malhotra) kidnaps men who demand dowries and forces them to marry young women at a fraction of the cost. Both are some form of social work, right? At least that's what director Prashant Singh had in mind when making his debut with *Jabariya Jodi*. The film is yet another half-hearted attempt to cash in on the hinterland milieu that's popular with Bollywood these days. What Singh envisioned is a romcom that would capture life in contemporary Patna, while simultaneously imparting a message on abolishing dowry and the freedom to marry.

Unfortunately, the execution fails at the get go with the casting of Malhotra. The actor, try as he might, cannot embody the disposition or essence of a Patna lad.

Like someone forced, pun intended, to messy up, Malhotra stands out sorely, as he mouths dialogue in a dialect he's clearly uncomfortable with. That coupled with the zero chemistry he has with the feisty Babli Yadav (Parineeti Chopra), makes for a terrible combination. When Abhay isn't being incorrigible – like poking holes in condoms so the eventual baby compels a forced-couple to stay married – he's painfully preachy, whether he's wishing for a daughter or waxing eloquent on the ill-effects of *jabariya pyaar* and *shaadi* (forced relationships and weddings).



The connection between the lead pair is simply not there •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Babli, for all the 'freedom', comes across as less independent and more deranged. In spite of *Jabariya Jodi* being a romcom that requires two people, the film's entire focus is on its male protagonist. Babli is just an accessory to Abhay's redemption arc. And even as Sanjeev K Jha's screenplay unfolds without an ounce of unpredictability, the crux of the film, its love story, takes infuriatingly long to progress. Then there's the fact that the film's director thinks women in Bihar roam about in mid-riff-baring crop-tops. Even worse are the film's product placements – a blood pressure machine, Manyavar and Gas-O-Fast antacid – that will induce eye rolls galore.

The redemption then, for *Jabariya Jodi* is fleeting and in spurts. Thanks to a cracking supporting cast, the film isn't entirely an oppressive watch. Sanjay Mishra, as Babli's patient and benevolent father, shines in every mo-

ment he's on screen. Javed Jaffrey as Abhay's father, is equal parts the menacing wannabe Bihar politician-cum-thug as well as sassy jester. Some of the best deliciously cheesy lines are devoted to his camaraderie with subordinate goons. Aparshakti Khurana as Babli's pal Santo is hilarious in spite of the injustice meted out to his character. It's as if every single actor, with the exception of the lead duo, have done their best for *Jabariya Jodi*. Unfortunately, it's just not enough.

# Fun family adventure

With thrills, humour and life lessons, it is happy times at the movies with *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*

MINI ANTHIKAD CHHIBBER

This live-action adaptation of the Nickelodeon and Nick Jr. show, *Dora the Explorer* finds a 16-year-old Dora leaving the jungle to tackle the scariest place on earth, high school, in *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*.

When her explorer parents drop off the grid while searching for the mystical lost city of the Incas, it is up

to Dora, her cousin Diego, the school dork and dorkess, and a talking monkey to find them ahead of evil, mercenary treasure hunters.

The film, directed by James Bobin, (*Alice through the Looking Glass*) is energetic and good humoured.

The CGI does not work, but that too is a relief after the photo-realistic Simba and gang in *Lion King*, which is



### Dora and the Lost City of Gold

**DIRECTOR:** James Bobin  
**CAST:** Isabela Moner, Eugenio Derbez, Michael Peña, Eva Longoria, Danny Trejo  
**STORYLINE:** A teenage Dora and her group of friends, have to save her parents and find a lost Incan city  
**RUN TIME:** 102 minutes

still raking in much moolah. Isabela Moner as Dora is sweet and committed, while Eugenio Derbez as Alejandro, the mandatory inept adult in children's adventures, is competent enough. Michael Peña and Eva Longoria play Dora's parents Cole and Elena. Peña's impromptu rave session was quite funny. Voice work by Danny Trejo (Boots the monkey) and Benicio del Toro (annoying Swiper the Fox) makes the cut.

*Dora and the Lost City of Gold* though not explicitly stating the time it's set in, has a nostalgic feeling of adventure of the movies one watched as a child, when everything was simpler. Without gross mind flayers, the film offers an escape for a little window of time, in a now complex world.

### POOCH CAFE



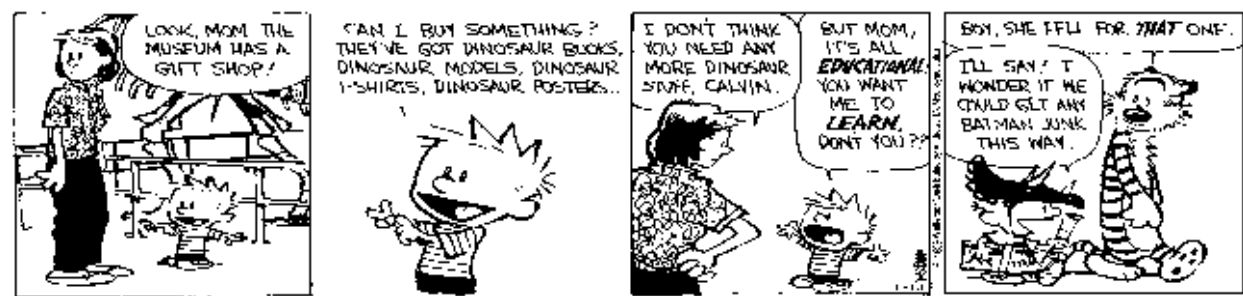
### PEANUTS



### HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



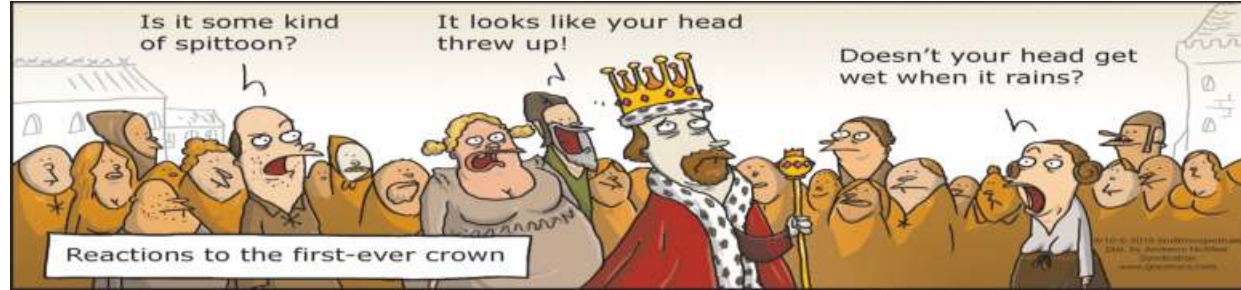
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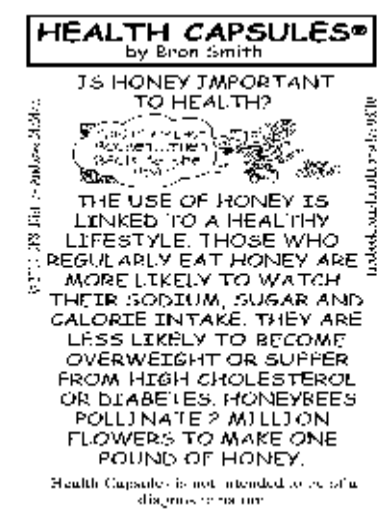
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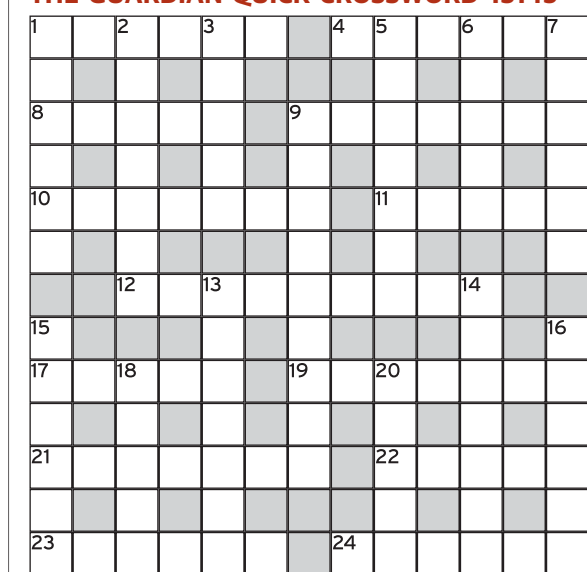
### WUMO



### PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



### THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13145



- (anag) (7)
- 3 Have a prevailing direction (5)
- 5 Horse that races 'over the sticks' (7)
- 6 Bleed (5)
- 7 Smoulder (6)
- 9 Criterion (9)
- 13 Yokels (7)
- 14 Trap (7)
- 15 Alters (anag) – less fresh (6)
- 16 Carefree and happy (6)
- 18 Exposure to harm (5)
- 20 Highland Games event (5)

- Across
- 1 Artificial and inferior (6)
- 4 Sunglasses (informal) (6)
- 8 Subject set for discussion (5)
- 9 Prolonged artillery fire (7)
- 10 Widow Twankey's principal boy (7)
- 11 Execute mob-handed without trial (5)
- 12 Competitor about whose abilities little is known (4,5)
- 17 Spanish appetisers (5)
- 19 Act of imputing blame or guilt (7)
- 21 Most northerly town in the British Isles (7)
- 22 Inhumanly cruel person (5)
- 23 Savour – sauce (6)
- 24 Ice over (6)
- Down
- 1 Bit players (6)
- 2 Attendant – wed star

Solution will appear in The Hindu dated August 12, 2019.

Solution No. 13144

