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IS DIGITIZATION WORKING IN FAVOUR OF CHILD ADOPTION?

Devipriya Chakraborty looks further into the question.

The last quarter of 2019 saw many news reports cite the increasing number of adopted children being returned to the child care institutions they were adopted from. Our conversations with child care professionals have suggested that this could be linked to the digitisation brought in with the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Amendment Act of 2015. The Act saw the transfer of power to the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), who introduced CARINGS (Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System), the e-governance portal to digitize the process, in 2016.

CARA introduced CARINGS, seemingly in order to bring about transparency and speed the process up in 2016. The Economic Times reports that according to an RTI (Right To Information) response to social workers in the field, it was found that between 2015 and 2019, 717 children of the 15,419, which is approximately 4.65% of all adopted children, were returned. Mr. Anthony, an expert in child adoption laws, said that before digitization there was almost a 100% success rate in the placement of children into homes, but today this is not the case. Many in the field attribute it to the reduction in the time

spent between the family and the child being considered for adoption.

"Earlier, parents would go to an adoption agency for registration and there would be a lot of back and forth between the social worker and the parents for several months about various documents and processes. So counselling would happen in the form of home study [a report that cross-checks personal and financial details of the parents in order to determine if they could parent a child] along with interactions with the child and conversations about motivation to adopt, expectations, everything," says Dr. Aloma Lobo who currently works with Padme—a meeting ground and support system for those part of the adoption ecosystem.

"Digitization also meant that a social worker nearest to the parent(s)' place does the home study report and counselling without even having met the child in question," says Dr. Lobo. The child comes from another agency which means there is no connection between the social worker and the child and because of this, she feels that the counselling remains incomplete or inadequate. Earlier, the interactions between the agency and the parents would

let the social worker(s) determine if the child would be a good fit for the family.

Dr. Bindya Shajith, a child psychologist, also says that counselling is not happening the way it should. "Counselling plays a major role in helping the parents understand the child, especially with older children. We are looking at something not just at the time of adoption but for the long run." Dr. Shajith thinks that the CARINGS system could have at least matched children with families who speak the same language. "An 8 year old child who speaks Kannada, for example, goes to a place that is so foreign to her language, food and culture and is expected to adjust."

Anthony C, an expert in child adoption laws, says, "One common list under CARINGS can mean children from Odisha can be taken into homes in Telangana and for older kids, that's a difficult cultural change, especially the language barrier. The past 7-8 cases we've seen children from Bengaluru being placed in Telangana. So in court when it came to submitting evidence and documents, we faced a hard time communicating as the parent knew only Telugu. We had to find a translator for the court proceedings."

CARINGS allows adoptive parents to register and get on a nationwide waiting list. Once a child's profile is referred to the parents, they have 48 hours to reserve or reject them. Reserving the child, matching the parents and the child takes 20 days and after accepting the child, they are taken

home for pre-adoption foster care period. Within the next 10 days, the parents and the State Adoption Agency file a petition to the designated court.

"It is important to keep in mind that most children are returned during this pre-adoption foster care time," says Dr. Lobo. "There are very few cases post the completion of the legalities." She adds, "There are definitely positives of CARINGS: the much reduced time period for adoption, the transparency as well as the choice to return children during the pre-adoption foster care period, which is much better than the child staying in a place where they are unwanted."

But all professionals working in the field also felt strongly that such an experience was traumatic, especially for those at an age where they will remember this for the rest of their lives and everyone agrees that digitization needs a thorough relook.



CARA (Central Adoption Resource Authority)

Sudha Narayan, one of the five founders and trustees of CARE—Charlie's Animal Rescue Centre, walks in while flipping through paperwork and addressing three volunteers at the same time. Life at the shelter is clearly very busy. Despite this, she finds time to spend an afternoon with us, taking us through her journey of starting CARE and her life before it.

What moved you to start CARE?

There were no shelters at the time [early 90's]. In 1994, Mrs. Menaka Gandhi who was the pioneer of the animal welfare movement in India, called me and several other animal welfare enthusiasts from other cities to come down to Bangalore. At that time animal birth control surgery, which the World Health Organization [WHO] had recommended to keep the street dog population under control had not been introduced in Bangalore. They were using a primitive method of lassoing dogs and would take them to outdated British era dog pounds and electrocute them. It was mass culling. But mass culling never worked because you always had dogs that hid away and multiplied. There was no scientific method to any of this.

So, Mrs. Gandhi came down to stop this cruelty and initiate the recommended methods. There I met the person who changed my life, Mrs. Cristy Rogers. She was the founder of Compassion Unlimited Plus Action [CUPA], one of the biggest NGOs in India. I became a trustee with them, and I have learnt everything I know from her and CUPA.

Back in the day there were no norms to govern animal

A COMMITMENT TO CARE

Aaienaa Khurana converses with Sudha Narayan about how she opened CARE and how life has been like since.



Dogs eagerly waiting for their lunch at CARE

welfare shelters. So, we had to use standards outside the country. Now we have a lot of people that come from all over the world. And we started setting standards for everything in welfare. So we learnt hands-on as we kept going. It was a real learning process, through trial and error.

What were some of the struggles you faced?

The problems were mainly funding, finding a place and the struggle to convince people that we mean business.

The first thing we had to do was find a place. This was difficult because having a place in the city meant inevitably disturbing residents because there's going to be barking dogs and messy animals. So we finally found a place which is somewhere inside the city but away from residents, it was slightly expensive for us because no NGO [Non-Government Organization] starts with money. You have to get money. I feel it's harder to raise money for animal welfare as opposed to human causes, because we sympathise more with our own kind. I worked with the government at the time in the income tax department. I remember taking a loan from my PF [Provident Fund] for an 'emergency surgery'.

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LOVE AT PROTESTS

Tarangini Nalegave tries to draw a connection between students' dating life and protests.

“ I saw Nadeema for the first time in one of the protests held at Town Hall. She looked so passionate while screaming ‘aazadi’ that I just had to talk to her. And I am glad that I did because our first date is something I will never forget. It was at the candlelight vigil against the CAA [Constitutional (Amendment) Act] and the NRC [National Register of Citizens],” said Irfan, a student of St. Joseph’s College, Bangalore. Irfan and Nadeema’s story is not singular. People are meeting at protests and falling in love. Since the student protests during the Emergency, stories of love and romance at protests are being told again.

Jaidev, another student, studying Journalism at Jain University CMS (Centre for Management Studies), met his current girlfriend at a protest. On being asked about meeting her at the protest, Jaidev said, “Wow, so I’m not the only one to find love at a protest?” His initial surprise gave way to him deciding that it perhaps was not uncommon for someone to find love at a protest “because your views, political ideas, values all sync up.”

It’s not just that people at protests are finding love but that political activists are using love to get to people to the protests. Given the banning/blocking of protest pages on mainstream social media—namely Instagram and Facebook, activists looked to dating apps

to spread awareness among the youth. Amulya Leona, a 19 year old activist, found it very difficult to talk to students her age through Instagram because troll followers kept reporting her. “That was when I had the idea of migrating my activism to Tinder,” she said to a reporter from The Times of India. Today you’ll find many bios on dating apps that have also started becoming about protests. Bios on dating apps screamed “COME TO THE PROTEST AT TOWN HALL AT 4:00 PM” and “SWIPE LEFT IF YOU'RE RIGHT of centre” for example.

Dating apps are also where conversations about politics happen. Moksha, a 23 year old designer met her girlfriend on Bumble. She

matched with Anagha and enlightened her about the anti-CAA protests in Bangalore. She recalls telling Anagha about the CAA, NRC, and NPR (National Population Register), over their first conversation on the app. Anagha wanted to go for the protests after their conversation. Their first date was on Friday, 14th February 2020 at the Bilal Bagh protest.

Chandana, a 19 year old bi-sexual economics student at Mount Carmel College said, “With so much time being spent together, hours and days at a time, you are bound to fall for someone who shares so many of your beliefs.” Chandana, who is a committed protestor against the CAA and the NRC said, “I meet so many



Illustration by Aaienaa Khurana

incredible people every day, at every one of the protests that I attend. They share the same beliefs, are all left, and sometimes they like the things you like. But one person caught my eye. After seeing her at not one but three protests, I decided to approach her. Soon after our acquaintance, I matched with Shivani on bumble. After that, we went on dates, met our friends, and spent so much time together, and now we can’t seem to want to spend any time apart. At protests or at home.” The girl Chandana met, Shivani, a 21 year old film student at Srishti University says in agreement, “I can’t think of a single day I didn’t meet her. After meeting her at the protest I knew instantly that we would ‘vibe’, and it’s still there.”

Moksha, Anagha, Chandana, and Shivani belong to a significant number of people from the LGBTQ community who have been openly participating in protests and finding both love and a larger community there. Siddhant, a 20 year old gender-queer Journalism student at Christ University said, “I have met so many people at protests who I instantly want to get to know better, and spend more time with.” Siddhant said, “One such person was Seewi. I remember walking up to her and telling her how much I liked all the tattoos she had on her body. I asked her out on a date and she agreed immediately. The date is yet to happen, by the way.”

The significant presence of LGBTQ people at Bilal Bagh is also reflected in the fact that 14th of February 2020, which marked one week of protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), was also celebrated as ‘queer azadi Valentine’s Day’

POETRY: A FORM OF DISSENT

Aatreyi Bose converses with Ravi Vishwakarma on the evolution of poetry in today's world.

For Ravi Vishwakarma, the founder of ‘Poets of Bangalore’ (POB), poetry is a form of dissent more than anything else. The idea of dissent is evident in his poetry and performances. On 22nd February, during his performance in the co-living space—Grextor Aquilla, he broke away from more traditional performance poetry structures by allowing the audience to disagree or comment on his lines through the rendition. We caught up with him sporting the official yellow POB T-shirt after the event to talk more about his poetry and his work with POB, an organization setup to provide a platform for amateur poets.

What makes the art and artists of Bangalore distinct in their voice of dissent?

Frankly speaking, if you see the demography of Bangalore it is not only the Kannadigas but also people of different cultures who have migrated to Bangalore. When you say art and artists of Bangalore, it includes all those people. It is diverse and their respective voices of dissent are unique. If you see people perform in our events in Delhi, they mainly speak in three languages—Hindi, English and Urdu. Whereas in Bangalore, apart from those three, people perform in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and many more [languages]. It’s like a rainbow out here, a rainbow of languages to convey their messages to their fellow migrants.

What was the initial objective behind starting your organization?

We started our work in Noida to trigger a response to all the illegal activities. We also wanted people to recognize the particular culture of Noida. With the help of the youth there, we started our events in the name of ‘Poets of Noida’. Many people

felt people won’t turn up. But the response we got was overwhelming. The poems were amazing and the media covered our events favourably. When I moved to Bangalore, I wanted to continue to be involved with poetry but also raise voices of awareness for various issues related to the city like water scarcity, pollution, security of women, etc. Hence, POB has been doing events to give a voice to those issues which were neglected by the government.

Do you have any plans to expand POB to other places in India and spread the voice of dissent?

Yes, in fact we have our team in four cities. Two are already very active—Poets of Noida is taking care of the parts of Delhi (National Citizens Register) and Poets of Bangalore in the southern part of India. Then, we will have Poets of Mumbai which will take care of the western part, and Poets of Kolkata in the eastern part. Let’s see, in the future we would love to expand more, but for now, we are

targeting these four major cities.

Where do you see POB in a few years?

When I see POB in the future, I see people from various age groups coming and taking the mic to express their thoughts and feelings. Talking in business terms, we are not looking at it monetarily. It’s about giving a platform and engaging more and more people. Normally, we have an event a month but we have been receiving queries if that can be increased or more poets can be included. So, we have been planning to make it four events a month and engage more people to perform, voice their opinions, to dissent or convey a message about politics or other issues.



Ravi Vishwakarma addressing the audience

What are your views on poetry being used as a form of dissent in protests?

Recently in U.P.—*Bol Ke Lab Azaad Hai Tere*—a poem by Faiz Ahmad Faiz was banned from being used at protests. Now, the government and the fascists are kind of scared of poets and poetry. It’s not just today, this has been there since the independence era and even before when there was no democracy. The poets always had a role to play to put the issues in front of people and make them understand what the reality is. I’m from a rural background and have seen people welcome this form, along with folk songs etc. So, I’m sure poetry is helping carry forward the message.

Do you think the youth can influence politics and society for the better? What role does POB play in making that possible?

Only youth can influence society and politics for the better because of the kind of energy they have. With no stereotypes

IMAGE CONSULTANTS: WHO ARE THEY?

Srijoni Sarkar talks to Chitra Balasubramaniam about what it means to be an Image Consultant.

The elevator door opens and we are greeted by a smiling Chitra Balasubramaniam, founder of image consultation service, Tres Chic Academy and a Times Power Woman 2019 awardee. We are joined by her four Shih Tzu puppies who lick our feet as she guides us into her dining room. Over the course of the next hour, we talk to her about her career in Image Consultation and what her experience has been in the field.

What is the goal of image consultation?

For me, it is empowerment. It is empowering a person and transforming them into someone totally different. Even if you wear a lot of dresses, you know that one dress will click with you and you will feel somewhat different. That is my job. When you enter into an image consultancy, first your dressing sense will change and when you change your hairstyle and your appearance depending on your body type, you will start feeling much better about yourself. All of this will change you externally but you need to change your insides too. A lot of things also change in

terms of communication, in terms of body language, depending on your professional goals and personal goals.

What is the age group that usually comes for Image Consultation?

18 and above. My clients are anywhere between 18-year olds to 62-year olds. I don't do kids. Clients sometimes ask me to help their child, who is around eight years or ten years old. They want them to change but I don't think it's the right age. They are kids. They will probably be naughty and after some years they will become sober. For now it's best to let them be themselves, but I can work with them after they turn 18.

Who are your usual clients?

I mostly work with celebrities and socialites. I started with female clients but now I do it for everyone, even corporates. People think image consultation is only important for women but it is important for everyone.

What shifts do you notice in your clients? How does that make you feel?

Transformation. I have seen people change and that has given me a lot of happiness. When I see a housewife coming out of her own cocoon, her transformation from being an introvert to going out there and doing what she likes, I feel happy. After so many years of helping women, I want each and every woman to be independent on

their own, irrespective of their professions or their financial positions or whatever it is. I want every single girl to not depend on anybody, not on their parents, not on their husbands, not on their kids. My goal is to fulfil that and change their confidence levels. The first step in gaining confidence is to change yourself.

Have you had to change yourself in any way?

Yes. Earlier, I was an introvert. Now, I am not. If I have to change somebody, I have to change myself first. When you are telling others that they have to dress themselves this particular way, you have to first do that for them to believe you. There is a misconception that Image Consultancy is only outer appearance but it goes deeper than that. When we change our client, we transform them totally.

Are there any other misconceptions about image consultancy?

There are a lot of misconceptions, especially in India. People don't really have any idea about what it is. They think we are stylists; that we just change the outer appearance. They believe we just change your dress and your hairstyle and that's it. People don't really know what we do. It is really difficult to change their perspective. It's like how people think only mad people go to psychiatrists.

What advice would you like to give young women like us?

Just be yourself. Enjoy each and every moment. Be independent. And achieve your goals. No matter what it is, even if you get married. Women are very smart compared to boys these days. So, have strong goals and achieve that. That's the only advice I would give.



Chitra Balasubramaniam

A COMMITMENT TO CARE

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So the five of us put in money and we secured land and then we had to face the problem of construction. Again, you have to rely on well-wishers. The advantage we had was that we had learnt a lot at CUPA, so even when we were breaking away and starting a rescue centre, a lot of animal lovers sympathized with us and had faith. It started with a shed for security, an office shed, and another shed to house animals.

To get people to believe in a new NGO is not easy at all. You have to show it through your work and for doing that work you have to persevere a lot.

If I look back, seven years down the line, I don't know how I did it. Today we are a force to reckon with. We are the first place youngsters want to volunteer at. It feels so good when you look back at your work, and everything has worked out. The thing is, when you put your heart to something, it'll happen.

What is your primary source of revenue to keep CARE going?

Primary source of revenue is public donations; the Indian government does not give you any grants for animal welfare. I don't even know if any provisions exist. The animal welfare board has a few grants, but it is not given to NGOs. Earlier, when we were at CUPA, the animal welfare board was

very proactive with NGOs. They did send other people from all over the country to check and inspect us, then [made us] send in a report so we could be given grants. But now there is nothing. If you want to start a shelter, you have to do it on your own. It's only the animal-loving public of Bangalore and other areas who've supported us. Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR] has crystallized over the last few years, so we do get some funding through them. Animal welfare is being seen as one of the topics under the head 'Environment'. So at least we're considered. We may not get the top grants but at the minimum we're on the lower rungs. That's one stepping stone.

What was your life like before CARE happened?

When I was growing up way back in the 70s, Bangalore didn't have any NGOs. Now we've created a space for youngsters to do hands-on work—we teach them first aid and so many things. There was only the 'Karuna Animal Welfare Association' of Karnataka, which was quite insufficient; and they didn't really encourage volunteering but I volunteered with them anyway.

I found myself compassionate towards these voiceless creatures from a very young age. I would always pet the neighbourhood dogs on the street and in those days, vaccines weren't as advanced. My parents

were definitely a little worried but they too, were animal lovers and to this day, I believe that the animal lover in me is definitely genetic.

Have the people around you, such as your family, been supportive of this journey?

I am not married, so I do not have those responsibilities. But I have been very lucky with my sisters and the people that work with me. I have two sisters, one helps me constantly with banks and paperwork, because again, I'm learning as I go. The other one lives in Australia but still makes sure to help out with design and other things. My department at the income tax office too, eventually found out what I was doing and was extremely supportive of my work. They were really proud. They always gave me postings where I could continue my work. I am also extremely grateful to my driver and my maid. They have been with me since day one. My maid runs my home for me. And my driver is always very helpful, especially when dealing with



Sudha Narayan plays with dogs at CARE.

critical animals.

And how do you see the future of CARE?

The future, just like the past, is in volunteer workers. It is heart-warming to see youngsters dedicate their lives to animal welfare. I know now, that CARE is in good hands."

A VEGAN IN THE GARDEN CITY

How much does a city dweller need to give up to be a vegan? Swarnali Mukherjee tries to find out.

You want to turn to veganism after watching a Netflix documentary on animal cruelty. Not pouring milk in your coffee is manageable, but the thought of missing out on that creamy chicken burger topped off with cheese is making you frown. Does it mean you can't go out to eat your favourite restaurant's food any longer?



Vegan delicacies by Carrots (top left), Sahana Murthy (right corner) and JustBe cafe (bottom).

Source: Respective Outlets

Fortunately for you, Bangalore over the last decade, has seen a few vegan restaurants pop up across the city that are committed to creating vegan alternatives for popular restaurant fare. Susmitha Subbaraju, co-founder of Carrots, the city's first 100% vegan based restaurant says, "We use cashew cheese on our pizzas and burgers making it healthy as well as super-indulgent." She says that Carrots was started with the intention of showing the world that "there can be so many choices and delicious options when it comes to veganism. It doesn't have to be about denial or sacrifice." The small number of restaurants catering to vegan choices means that

vegans like Richa Annie Thomas, a twenty-three year old, who's been a vegan for the last four years has to use other ways to achieve what she wants. She suggests that one can get vegan food at any restaurant. "I just ask them to make my dish without any dairy products. I tell them I have a dairy allergy".

Nidhi Nahata, co-founder of JustBe resto cafe, a Bengaluru based restaurant offering a wide range of vegan and vegetarian options says that although India is the land of '*ahimsa*', accounting for the highest number of vegetarians in the world, the use of dairy products is ubiquitous.

While it took an English animal rights advocate, Donald Watson to define veganism in 1944, as 'non-dairy vegetarianism', the practise of refraining from harming and exploiting animals can be traced back to India in 3300 BCE, during the Indus Valley Civilization. "I have enforced the law against killing certain animals. The greatest progress of righteousness among men, comes from the exhortation in favour of non-injury to life and abstention from killing living beings," said Emperor Ashoka (273-232 BCE) in one of his pillar edicts.

While a vegan lifestyle may be taken up by someone who is deeply stirred by the distress and pain caused to animals, other popular reasons reported to turn vegan includes health benefits like prevention of hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol levels and cardiovascular diseases.

Nidhi, who started working on JustBe resto café three years ago, is also a food therapist and a certified health coach. She says, "I have been a vegan for the last four years. I went to a 21-day whole food, plant based retreat hoping to improve my health." As time passed, she embraced all aspects of veganism in her life.

Dr. Sherebanu Milky, nutritionist and homeopath practitioner in Bengaluru, says that a common misconception is that dairy is the only source of calcium and protein. "There are various plant based proteins like pulses and legumes. Ragi, seeds like sesame, chestnuts and fox nuts are also great sources of calcium," she says. Although veganism is possible in an Indian diet, she adds, "It is definitely expensive and not a very sustainable practice in my opinion."

Sahana Murthy, a vegan-gluten-free chef who conducts cooking workshops in India and abroad has a different opinion. She says that the extensively available Indian staples and crops can be used to lead not only a vegan but also a gluten-free diet. She says, "Once while travelling in the US, I was asked to make a gluten-free pizza. So instead of using flour for the pizza crust," she adds "I used *Makkai ki roti* as the base."

Veganism being a diet characterised by a dependence on fruits, nuts and vegetables, one might feel left in the lurch when it comes to warm chocolate brownies and pastries. "That isn't true," says Sahana Murthy. She finds that various vegan substitutes like coconut cream and almond butter can be used to prepare our favourite desserts.

While the city sees a slow trickle of people experimenting with veganism, a common critique of veganism has been the B12 vitamin deficiency which is often associated with a vegan lifestyle. This can cause, according to medical professionals, tiredness, numbness and in extreme cases anaemia. But Richa Annie Thomas feels that "it is a myth that only vegans develop a B12 deficiency. Anyone; whether vegan, vegetarian or non-vegetarian may develop it."

For now, these special restaurants are spaces where people can go and learn more about veganism or at the least develop a taste for vegan alternatives, even if they don't convert.

CAFE QUIRKS

Pritika Das suggests these unconventional cafes in Koramangala for a more out of the ordinary cafe experience.

When we talk about startups in Bangalore, we don't generally think about cafes. But these offbeat food startups (or cafes) are breaking all the stereotypes. From freak shakes to fried burgers, these innovative cafes can turn out to be your favourite escapade in the city. The Bistro Claytopia and Candy Cloud Factory are two such unique cafes in the heart of Koramangala.

Bistro Claytopia

A girl wearing a pink headband was sitting in the corner with a *Perumal Murugan* book. Her table was also equipped with a set of paintbrushes and colours. When we struck a conversation with her, we found out that Ragini has been a regular at Bistro Claytopia for the past two years. She found the second love of her life—pottery at this cafe.

After placing an order of a Tandoori Chicken Burger, which she said is one of the best in town, she showed us how the cafe walls are adorned with the artworks of the guests. A ceramic car model painted by her nephew was hung on the wall. The bistro has a giant oven in which they bake all the pottery.

Sampath Prajapati, one of the co-founders of the cafe, manages the cafe and coordinates the pottery workshops in the premises every weekend, where indigenous artists from all over India are invited to train pottery enthusiasts in the city.

Candy Cloud Factory

The Candy Cloud Factory is a jointly owned food venture by four Jain University: CMS (Centre for Management Studies students);

Ronak Golecha, Prathyaksh Maloo, Sahil Gadiya, and Pratik Golecha. The four friends discovered their innovative menu and plan while scrolling through an Instagram video of Creamberry in Las Vegas.

Pratik Golecha says that they contrived the plan of opening a cafe in the second year of their college, but it was the idea of a cotton candy themed restaurant that really brought it all together for them. It took them around 6 months to find a place and another 7-8 months for actually accomplishing the idea.

He introduced us to the unique menu and their signature dish, the cotton candy burrito-flavoured ice-cream scoops mixed with sprinkles of every kind and spoonful of cereals which is rolled in fluffy cotton candy. It comes in various flavours—chocolate, strawberry, and unicorn to name a few.

He says that their milkshake range is also pretty varied in all flavours which comes in with a twist; it is served with dipped cotton candy. To rescue customers from excess sweetness, they have added pocket pizzas and fries to their menu.

Talking about the increasing popularity of the café among the young adults, he said that the customer base of Koramangala tends to drift away soon. So, keeping them hooked to the business is going to be the real challenge.



Pratik Golecha, co-founder of Candy Cloud factory.

SUSHI AT YOUR DOORSTEP

Maitreyi Bahuguna converses with **Abhijeet Urs**, the founder of SushiMen about sushi.



Abhijeet Urs showing us how he makes his famous

Salmon sushi roll

When we entered the SushiMen workspace, we were greeted by a smiling Abhijeet Urs. He is the Founder of SushiMen, a service which delivers sushi to all parts of Bangalore. He led us to his kitchen and made us some sushi as we talked with him about his career and his startup, which has grown in the last three years.

When did you realize you wanted to become a sushi chef?

It all started when my uncle asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, which was asked to a lot of kids my age. I was ten at that time and so I blurted out that I wanted to be a chef. I was fascinated by people cooking at weddings. My uncle helped me out a lot. The first thing that I had in mind was to become a pastry chef but my sweet tooth didn't let me. I would always put more sugar than asked for and so I had to give up my dream of becoming a pastry chef. After that did not work out, I worked at an Italian restaurant which I enjoyed since I liked Italian cuisine. Later on, a spot for a sushi chef in a Japanese restaurant opened up and they chose me. To be very honest with you, I didn't like the idea of raw fish and feeding it to people but I eventually got really into it.

How long did it take you to master the art of making sushi?

It wasn't a specific time, like I gradually just got better because of experience but it does take a lot of discipline, patience and precision. I think the reason why I stuck with sushi was because it used to keep me on edge. You make one small mistake and you've ruined the whole thing. I think I like that challenge of making no mistakes at all. It was surprising for people to see an

Indian making sushi behind the sushi counter since it was very new at that time. The attention to detail you need to pay for sushi making is incredible which is why I stuck to it.

How do you maintain the freshness of the sushi during deliveries?

We select the ingredients by hand and make sure that it's as fresh as it can be. When I started SushiMen, I was alone. So to test the sushi I made with the resources that I had, I used to make the sushi and travel to places which are comparatively far and try it myself and then figure out what works and what doesn't. It was actually a lot of trial and error.

You have multiple chefs now. Are your chefs trained by you?

Three of the chefs that I have are fresh graduates from hotel management courses but they did not have any practice in sushi making. I taught them how to make sushi. They had a genuine interest in sushi making which is why they didn't mind learning from scratch.

Is there strong competition among sushi chefs in the market?

Two years ago there was no competition at all, at least in Bangalore. It is only now that a lot of sushi restaurants are coming up although there is none when it comes to delivering sushi. I think the fact that so many sushi restaurants came to be in so little time did startle the market at first but now we're all back to work. I won't say that it's easy being a sushi chef in this city because it's too soon to tell. But personally, every obstacle I've encountered has been worth it.



The two most popular dishes—
Spicy tuna roll and Salmon roll



Food is distributed as soon as possible to the nearest shelter-home, orphanage etc.

HUNGER HERO OF BANGALORE

Sumayya Basheer talks to **Shaurya Satish**, city leader of 'Feeding India' about her contribution as the City head, the progress and work of this Non-profit organization.

“It all started when Ankit Kawatra, a boy from Delhi who, at his cousin's wedding took up the initiative to collect the 25 dishes of food being wasted and distribute it among the poor in the middle of the night,” recounts Shaurya Satish, a final year physiotherapy student at MS Ramaiah Medical College. She is the City leader of the organisation 'Feeding India' which works towards eradicating hunger, malnutrition and food wastage in India. Ankit Kawatra's initiative gave rise to a group of people who collected extra food from the local events and redistributed them among the needy. Feeding India now has volunteers actively working in around 85 cities of the country.

Many ask me how much I get paid for this work to which I reply, 'I get paid with lots and lots of happiness.'

Talking about how the team works, Shaurya says that it's an 'ad hoc' donation process. When a donor contacts them through the helpline number regarding the availability of food, calls are made to locate the nearest slum/orphanage/old age home etc, where the food can be donated. The vans and containers are then arranged followed by the final transfer and distribution.

But donations are not blindly accepted, she adds. There are certain conditions which need to be fulfilled, after which the distribution is done. "Meals prepared the previous day are not accepted. The food is first checked and tasted by our volunteers and only after confirming that it is good, we go ahead and distribute it."

The most well-known initiative of Feeding India, is the setting up of 'Happy Fridges' which are currently installed at places like Bangalore Railway Station, Government Heritage Hospital, Sobha Apartments and five other locations. People can donate food by placing it in the fridge and those in need, such as maids, patients from government hospitals

etc., can pick it up. The maintenance cost, which is around Rs. 700 in electricity bills per month, is jointly funded by the apartment owners or people in the locality. The 'initiator', who is usually a member of the apartment or locality looks after the security aspects of these refrigerators.

"We do not restrict our work to food alone," Shaurya says when asked about other projects. "We utilize our social media network to reach out to as many as possible and carry out donations of various things which people might be in need of. 'Share Love', the team's upcoming event with the theme of Valentine's day, included a drive to collect clothes, stationary and other such stuff which could be distributed. 'Doodh Suvidha' is another such initiative which provides milk to children from five shelter homes as a part of their nutritional needs," Shaurya adds.

Regarding the volunteers, Shaurya states that only around 30% consists of students, the rest being middle-aged working men and women along with a surprisingly fair percentage of retired people as well. "We do not give out certificates to volunteers very easily. Srilekha, who is in charge of keeping track of work, does so by carefully evaluating the presence of these volunteers during the various activities".

When asked about the main challenge that the team faces as of now, she says that it's the need for active volunteers who will present themselves regularly and not turn up once in a blue moon. "We should stop thinking about ourselves and start thinking a little about others," says Shaurya, who believes that as human beings we should be willing to help others as much as we can and that this doesn't necessarily need to be monetary help.

When asked about her experience as a leader for two years she says, "I'm really happy that I was able to be a mediator to serve so many meals. We started with one van for one shelter home, and now, here we are with eight vans for 10 shelter homes! Many ask me how much I get paid for this work to which I reply, 'I get paid with lots and lots of happiness.'"

ASMR: A DISEASE AND A REMEDY

Are the viral ASMR videos relaxing or not? Aaienaa Khurana finds out.

It is a Sunday night, VSS Vaishnavi, a student of Mount Carmel College, Bangalore, is frantically preparing for the next day's presentation. She pulls out her phone and searches for calming videos. She comes across 'ASMR sounds and triggers', 'ASMR Chicken wings mukbang', 'oddly satisfying gifs', 'soap cutting' and 'lofi beats'. She puts on some headphones and gets to work.

ASMR or Auto Sensory Meridian Response was first coined in 2010 by Jennifer Allen who started a Facebook group for her research on ASMR as an anxiety reliever. ASMR is used to describe the static-like tingling sensation that is felt in response to both aural and visual stimuli. This usually begins across the skull or neck and can move to other parts like the spine. It has gained a huge following outside of this research. Now, these are some of the most viewed videos with over five million views.

Millions of people tune in to watch somebody whisper into a microphone or do mundane tasks like crinkling wrapping paper or spraying a water bottle into a mic. Food ASMRs, where people record themselves biting and chewing into crunchy or sticky foods, are extremely popular.

"I love ASMR. Initially, I began watching these videos because they were trending but now I've realised that they are actually calming. It's the first thing I do when I get anxious," exclaimed VSS Vaishnavi, "I think what works for me is the repetition in these videos."

'Oddly Satisfying' videos are an ASMR genre in the online world. Videos of people cutting soap or playing with shiny slime get some of the highest views on YouTube. Calming music apps and Lo-fi beats are another online phenomena millennials find solace in for stress relief. As absurd as this may seem to someone who has never come across these

trends, there has to be a reason why millions spend hours making and viewing these videos.

"I discovered them through YouTube recommendations. It's really helpful especially in the night when I don't want something too stimulating or too soft. It helps me concentrate," says Arshya Khurana, a student of Delhi Public School. She adds, "There are different kinds of Lofi beats as well. Some are calming sounds of rain or traffic, which I really enjoy."

According to Loveleen Multani Arun, a therapist, "It acts like a brain massage. I wouldn't recommend it as a medical remedy but as an additional relief because it is said to be relaxing and helps with falling asleep."

On the other hand, there are some that do not feel the same way about it.

"I hate it. ASMR gives me intense anxiety, which is counterproductive because it is supposed to do the opposite. The nails ones especially. Thinking about it is giving me anxiety," says Srijoni Sarkar, a student of a city college.

This field is so new that little has been scientifically studied. Some scientists even wonder if ASMR is real, or measurable at all. The anecdotal accounts for the phenomenon are, however, practically endless.



ASMR KFC CHICKEN WINGS MUKBANG (No Talking) EATING SOUNDS | Zach Choi ASMR
5,516,057 views • Oct 9, 2019

Source: Youtube



ASMR 50+ Triggers over 3 Hours (NO TALKING) Ear Cleaning, Massage, Tapping, Peeling, Umbrella & MORE
63,447,690 views • Jun 17, 2018

Source: Youtube

THE LADY WITH A LENS

Devika K.S. interviews Aishwarya Ashok, who is battling gender biases in the field of Photography.

Aishwarya Ashok, a photographer and an Instagram influencer, living in Thalassery, a small town in Kerala, was born and brought up in Chennai with no idea what life had planned for her when she started posting her photographs on Instagram. Today, as a professional photographer with a camera and a tripod, standing in the middle of a wedding auditorium or during a tedious celebrity photoshoot, she has to battle random people who unapologetically approach her and raise sexist questions about her ability to perform in this traditionally male field. Aishwarya talks to us about becoming a full time photographer and her struggle against gender stereotypes.

What is it like to be a female photographer?

I come across this question a lot. When I go to cover events, many people come and say, "Oh this is the first time we are seeing a female photographer, are your parents okay with what you are doing?" But slowly the world is starting to accept that it doesn't make a difference, and that to imagine a male is better at photography is baseless. There is a huge growth in female photographers and it is amazing to see the kind of work they do. It is very important for the world to see things from a woman's perspective.

stand out among the world of growing photographers?

There has been a crazy growth in wedding and event photography over the last decade. I think a lot of people associate photography to just wedding photography because there are a larger number of wedding photographers. I don't know yet if I stand out in all this but I consciously try to do honest work and stay very true to the kind of person I am.

Do you think social media has helped you grow as a photographer?

Social media has helped people see my work. Otherwise, I don't think my work would have gotten noticed at all. I am a very shy and an awkward person. It took a long time for my friends to convince me to get on Instagram, and post my work and be social. It is still very difficult for me but I am slowly trying to work on things like being active on Instagram, posting stories and letting people know about my work. This has actually helped me get a lot of good clients. It has been a very organic growth and I am very grateful for the people who appreciate and give healthy criticism of my work.

How did you first enter the world of photography?

How do you think you are able to I was doing my bachelor's in journalism in

Chennai, and we had this paper on photojournalism. That was when I got my first camera. Before that I used to take photos with my father's point and shoot camera like everyone else did. I had also interned

with 'The Hindu' for a while and I had realized that photojournalism was not working for me. For some reason it was very restrictive and I wanted to do things that would allow me to be creative. So I switched to personal and event photography. I don't know when exactly it happened, but I was soon shooting for my friends, covering college events and I slowly started posting photos on Instagram after my friends forced me to. Somewhere along the way, I had people contacting me for photoshoots, and through them, I got to know new people and new faces. Very soon I realized that I really like shooting for women, doing portraits and fashion portfolios. Honestly, I don't remember what I was doing before photography.

How does photography influence your life?

Photography is a very beautiful form of expression. I feel I've learnt the most from it. For a person like me, who is an introvert, photography is a means of communication. Photography has made

me more observant of my surroundings. Even before photography, I was a person who gave importance and invested in little details that others thought were insignificant but photography fine-tuned this.



Aishwarya Ashok

What do you want to experiment in the future? You mostly do portraits, would you like to experiment with any other types of photography?

I have very recently started doing wedding photography. I started doing that to get out of my comfort zone. There were friends, who were already working in this field, [who were] asking me to try this out. It has been nice so far but I am not sure if I will continue doing this. I think the most wonderful thing to shoot is real-life emotions.

/ to express /

By Aatreyi Bose

We fail
to carve words
out of these
feelings
consuming
fragments of our
flesh;

searching in vain for
some meaning,
unable to express
the mess we slowly become, we turn
completely numb.

If it were so easy,
we all would have been
poets
or
prostitutes,

selling our mind or body,
by choice.

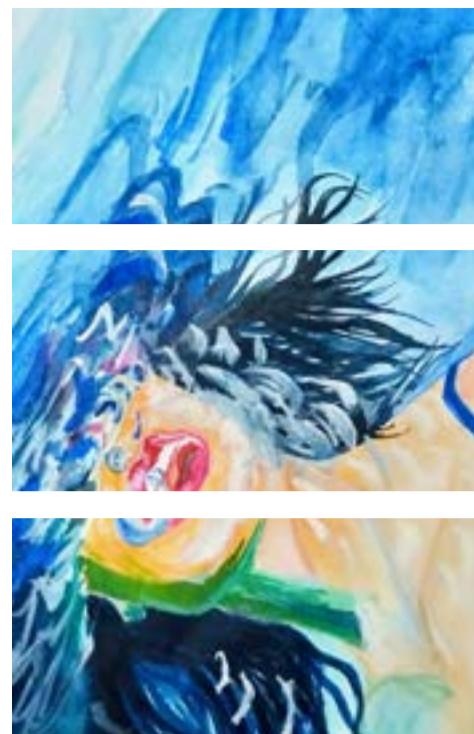


Illustration by Aatreyi Bose

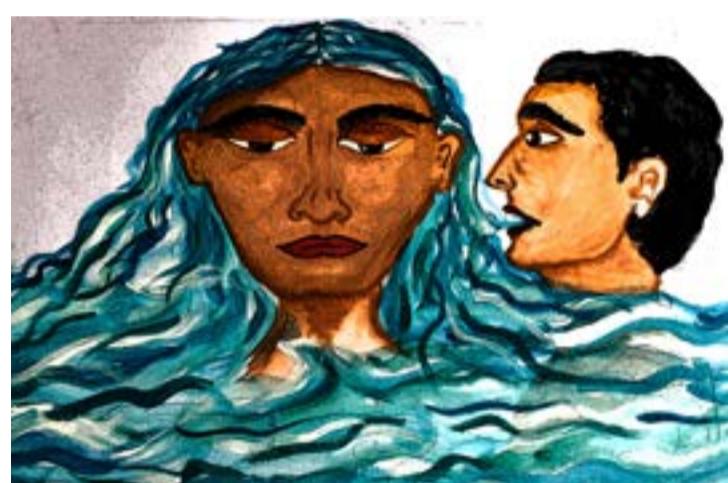
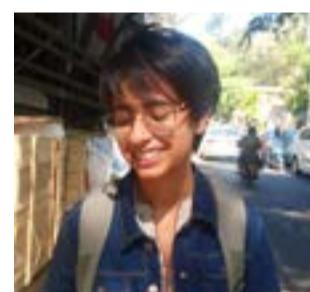


Illustration by Devika K.S.

MEET THE TEAM



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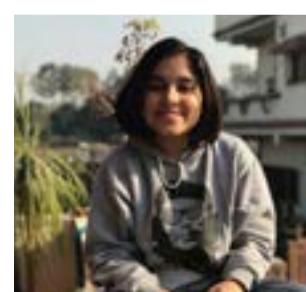
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Photographer



Aatreyi Bose
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Photographer
Proofreader



**Swarnali
Mukherjee**
Reporter



Ritika Khan
Reporter

~Things unsaid.

By Devika K.S.

There is an ocean
between us -
of things unsaid.
On some days,
I find you in
every strand of my hair.
You wear off, as tears
bring in a sea of
saltwater and drown us.

I wouldn't lie:
I have been
drowned in the ocean
before, oftentimes.
Sometimes, it left me
seasick.
And sometimes, with the
after-taste of sea salt,
for a long time.

And if the world
ends today,
I am no more afraid
of drowning.

For the sea will finally find
its way to the shores.
And so will the saltiness
of my body
find the sweetness
of your skin.

And then,
you will start with
the unsaid things;
so will I.
With each word said,
the ocean will move
us closer,
but despair will
paralyze the words
forming on our lips.

So I will ask the waves
to carry our unsaid words
into the deep sea, and
bury it under its golden sand,
untouched,
unstirred,
like the silence we share.