



# P Fine PRINT

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Mount Carmel College Autonomous, Bangalore - Department of Communication Studies

## Manu Pillai: 'The Future Belongs to Young People'

*A conversation with the award-winning Indian author and historian*

SMRITI SUGANT

**M**anu Pillai, author of 3 bestsellers and winner of the *Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar* for his *The Ivory Throne: Last Maharani Of Travancore*, started off his journey as a writer when he was just 19 years old. Fine Print presents excerpts of our conversation with him, on everything from the current socio-political situation of the country to his writing process.

### 1. At what age did you feel confident in your voice as a writer and how?

There are two answers to this, really. Confidence, defined as the capacity to publish work with a degree of self-assurance, came in my mid-20s. The success of my first book, *The Ivory Throne*, gave me the encouragement I needed to stick to my work and do more – this led to two other books since. But defined in another way, I don't know if I am entirely confident even now, over a decade after I first began to write seriously. After all, with every passing year, there is an evolution of worldview, of style, of depth; all of which constantly reminds me that I have a lot more to do, and a long way to travel before I can be fully certain about my writing and its place in the world. In such a context, confidence too soon could be counter-productive. In many ways, therefore, I am still finding my voice. This probably means that I will only give myself a vote of confidence in my voice towards the end of my life, if at all.

### 2. What is your take on the student protests happening in the country?

Protests are a healthy phenomenon in a democracy, especially when they come from the young. Youth does not always have the patience and sobriety of those far gone in age, but that is not a bad thing always – on the contrary, youthful conviction, idealism, and strength keeps those in power on their toes, balancing out other weaknesses in society, and serving as a corrective force. Indeed, even a morally superior force. In this specific instance, I am thrilled by the celebration of the Constitution as part of the protests. What used to be something talked about in the abstract is now highlighted in a very real, visible, direct, and potent fashion. The protests show that even as some in power try to hollow out the Constitution, there are others who will pledge themselves to protecting its substance. The future belongs to young people, and it is reassuring to see them fight for it, despite the enormous power and intimidating strength of the men who have captured the present.

### 3. Is censorship making writers more creative or hampering their art and freedom of speech?

Censorship by external forces is more real in cinema and the visual arts, whereas in books, the growing feeling is of self-censorship. Particularly in the case of history, where it is so entwined with politics and 'public sentiment' these days, you



CREDIT: [business-standard.com](https://www.business-standard.com)

can never say who will 'take offence' and harass you. I say this as the recipient of a legal notice for one of my books, demanding a colossal sum of money. Perumal Murugan, similarly, has spoken of self-censorship in the context of his novels which are also powerful social commentaries. I do feel that pressure sometimes, but usually manage by being shrewder with my wording and framing, rather than expunging material. But yes, your question is right in that illiberalism in the air does also breed new kinds of creativity. The ongoing protests are a sign of this: the kind of art, the posters, the poetry that was born of it is truly remarkable. Crisis breeds fear, but in those who defy that fear through art, it inadvertently carries seeds of new, powerful ideas.

### 4. What are your inspirations for your creative process?

I don't have inspirations in the conventional sense. On the contrary, it is an austere, almost dry awareness of how much discipline and hard work matter, alongside talent, in producing good writing. But I must add that because I work with history and see myself also as a storyteller, I am surrounded by tales of extraordinary beauty and power, which keep my mind and intellect nourished and perpetually interested in the work I do. In that sense, the chief inspiration in my life is the layered, fascinating, and richly colourful Indian past.

### 5. What role do you think the women in your family played while writing the book *The Courtesan, The Mahatma, and The Italian Brahmin: Tales from Indian History*?

A very serious role indeed, not just in terms of that one book, but in my life altogether. Women, in general, live in a world designed by men. I am surrounded by women who, in their own ways, not only negotiated this world, but challenged it and brought it down to their terms, fighting difficult battles in the process. My admiration for the women around whom I was raised – my grandmother, mother, and sister – is immense. I wish I had half the personality these women possess.

### 6. Which book did you enjoy working on the most and what part of the journey do you miss the most?

The process of writing a book can be interesting, exciting, but also horribly isolating, and even terrifying in some ways. But my first book and the 6 years it took will remain special. People credit me for writing the book, but the book gave me a lot, including how I evolved as a person. The book is, of course, what is out there for people to see. But for me it is also an entire chapter of my life, with all the ups and downs I encountered in those 6 years that took up all of my early 20s.

### What was the funniest typo you have ever made?

When I sign books and write, 'With best wishes', more than one person has asked me why I wrote, 'with best wife' in their copy, thanks to my awful handwriting.

### If you could tell your younger writer self anything, what would it be?

Don't allow your book to turn into a 700 page affair. My first book fell on a student's toe and broke his toenail. I feel personally responsible for his pain.

### The one show you would binge watch for a quick laugh?

*Jeeves and Wooster* featuring Hugh Laurie and Stephen Fry and *To the Manor Born* with Penelope Keith.

### Your favourite way to unwind at the end of a long day?

I value my friends and the capacity we possess to leave our work behind and simply gossip, which dilutes the seriousness that is the rest of my life.

## ‘Educate, Organize, Agitate’

*Several students from across the city came together and raised their voice against the Citizenship Amendment Act*

MANOGNA RAJAN

Since the introduction and passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), students of Bengaluru have found themselves at the forefront of the protests against this legislation, in the city.

On the night of 30th January 2020, a group of 30 students from across Bengaluru gathered at Maurya Circle to protest against the shooting that had happened earlier that day in Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi and against the CAA, NRC, NPR. Many of them were also part of student organisations such as The Student Outpost (TSO).

“When the anti-CAA, NRC, and NPR protests started, both I as an individual and TSO collectively had a stance on it but could not do anything as many of us were not on ground,” said Shalom Gauri, a student in Ambedkar University, Delhi. The Student Outpost (TSO) was started by students from CMS Jain College and St Joseph’s College. “The existing student councils only participated in fests, they never looked at students’ issues, forget state or national issues,” says Shalom. She also says that there was definitely a need for all the individual students to come together as a group and make a collective effort to fight this.

When the protests began in earnest, TSO called for a meeting in Loyola Hall in St Joseph’s College, where a majority of the students decided that they wanted to come under one banner. They decided to start a new organization, to be called the *Students Alliance (BSA)*, primarily focused on opposing the CAA, NRC, NPR, and police brutality against students.

Amulya Leona Noronha, a student of NMKRV College in Bengaluru and a member of BSA, was arrested for sedition and causing enmity between groups on February 20th. She was charged with IPC Section 153 (a) and (b) and Section 124 (a) for raising a ‘Pakistan Zindabad, Hindustan Zindabad’ slogan at a public meeting organised at Bilal Bagh, Bengaluru. A day after Amulya was arrested Ardra, another member of the student movement, was arrested and charged with IPC section 153 (a) and (b) for holding a placard that said ‘Kashmir – Dalit – Muslim – Bahujan – Adivasi – Trans liberation NOW’. After the arrest of Amulya and Ardra, who were both still in jail, many panic-stricken students decided to leave BSA, leading to its dissolution. The protests are supported by other organisations and individual contributors. “We as students cannot afford to provide food, water, mats, etc for the protestors. We don’t take any contributions in cash. All contributions are made in kind,” said an English Literature student from Kristu Jayanti College, Bengaluru, who wished to remain anonymous.

At the Maurya Circle protest in Bengaluru a group of police men and women stood behind the barricades and took pictures and videos of the students singing songs and raising slogans such as ‘JNU tum sangharsh karo, hum tumhare saath hai!’ (Stay strong JNU, we support you!). This gained the attention of many passersby peering out of their car windows, some of whom saw the students and joined them, while others circled the area on bikes, yelling threats such as ‘If I had a revolver, I would make this into another Jamia. You deserve what happened in Jamia!’ with their fists in the air. “Until that night, there was a sense of comfort in knowing that neither the police nor the citizens of Bengaluru would turn to violence. And that we need not worry about being part of an organization in order to feel safe. But now we are unsure of this,” said a student at the protest while handing out bottles of water to the other protestors.

“This is only the beginning of the students’ fight against this oppressive Act. ‘Educate, organize, agitate’, as Dr Ambedkar said. That is the only way,” said a Journalism student from Christ University.

“The existing student councils only participated in fests, they never looked at students’ issues, forget state or national issues.”



# Beyond the Renegade: Politics in the Age of Tiktok

*Amidst a slew of controversial policies, the video-making platform has become the hub of a heated debate about the right to free speech*

NIRUPAMA GANESH

Two young men, one with a large red tilak and the other wearing a white Muslim cap, are sitting on a small stone slab and feeding each other chips. As the melancholic soundtrack of Rang De Basanti reaches a climax, the Muslim boy disappears in a flash, leaving the Hindu shocked and confused.

This impactful 15-second clip, made by 22-year-old Ajay Barman, has garnered more than 2.5 million views on the immensely popular app TikTok. But, he claims that over the past 4 months, the platform has restricted the reach of his account due to its 'risky' content, allegedly costing him over 25,000 followers.

In an official statement, TikTok India said that it does not restrict any political videos unless it seriously violates its community guidelines against pornography or hate speech. Such content is left up on the app, but is partially limited across user feeds. However, these limitations seem to be biased against protest-inspired content. A quick search of #CAA on TikTok revealed that the results are dominated by politically sponsored videos, made by official party or government accounts. The videos of public accounts such as the student-run *Azaadi Collective*, while far more popular, are harder to find on the app. This kind of limiting or 'shadow banning' has raised multiple objections, particularly in the current political environment.

"The recent protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act have really brought to light the importance of the democratic process, which includes the right to free speech and the media's role in covering the dissent fairly," muses Gowri Kolal, a first-year student at Ashoka University and co-administrator of the *Azaadi Collectives* social media accounts. "These platforms majorly cater to the youth, and they need to realize that we will not stop talking about politics. Now, or ever."

TikTok, however, does not seem likely to respond to these public demands. In a blog post on the company's official website, Blake Chandlee, TikTok's vice president of global business solutions, said the platform's focus is on "creating an entertaining, genuine experience for our community. The nature of paid political ads is not something we believe fits.. (that) experience."

Ironically, the hashtag #politics has 121 million videos on TikTok. In 's student marches against the CAA, it is a common sight to see young influencers uploading videos of themselves sloganeering with fellow protesters of all religions, ages, and castes. 16-year-old Gillian Sullivan from Nevada even used the app to organize a strike in support of teachers receiving better wages. There seems to be no doubt that TikTok's audience disagrees with the company's apolitical policies.

According to Jayalakshmi Nair, a sociology professor in Christ University, this kind of political dialogue is inevitable in a forum shared mostly by the youth. "People tend to think of TikTok as a kind of superficial platform for goofing around. But when young people hang out online, they also talk about meaningful, serious topics, like politics, in the language of young people — whether it's lip-syncing political speeches, making funny songs, or using popular culture references in political ways."

The youth, however, is not alone in recognizing TikTok's potential as a tool of political propaganda. In recent elections, political agencies, campaigners, and strategists have begun to acknowledge social media sites as a way to reach young voters. Prahlad Kakkar, a well-known advertising professional who assisted the BJP in previous marketing campaigns, believes TikTok is on par with Instagram now, which was very popular during general elections. "TikTok will be big in terms of opinion making in the upcoming elections," he mused. "It's all about how creatively advertisers and users leverage the platform, without making it sound like propaganda."

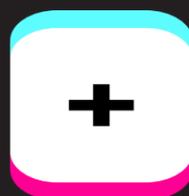
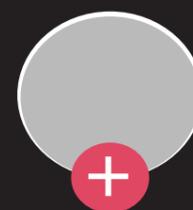
But if the American example is anything to go by, propaganda on TikTok might be the way to go. In the light of the upcoming presidential election in America, young teenagers have set up TikTok campaigns for their chosen candidates, with news updates and real-time commentary. In essence, these users are building short-form TV networks for a voter base that is far more likely to turn to YouTube or TikTok than watch cable television. These 'hype houses' have gained immense traction on the app, with some Republican accounts having nearly 300,000 followers. The app's American team seems to have abandoned their earlier policy, with a simple statement to these extremely political users. "We encourage our users to have respectful conversations about the subjects that matter to them," says an email from the PR team. In an interview with The New York Times, TikTok head Alex Zhu said that political content is now allowed on the platform, if it falls in line with the app's "creative and joyful" goals.

While TikTok India has made no such policy turnarounds as of today, its users are sure that the app will soon respond to the popular demand and allow political content on the platform. But regardless of the official stance, these Indian creators are determined to continue expressing their views, loud and clear.

Since the shadow ban, Mr Barman has abandoned his first account and started afresh, uploading only comedy content that steers clear of his usual themes. "I have made most of my Hindu-Muslim humanity videos private, hoping that TikTok will reverse the ban." His fans, meanwhile, have started an online campaign with more than 700 videos to reinstate his account, using the hashtag #unfreeze.

Other Indian TikTokers, like 16-year-old Mirza Baig, are hesitant to upload any political clips. "They [TikTok] don't want anything that will impact them."

But these young influencers are indefatigable. When asked if he plans to stop making these "harmony videos", as he calls them, Mirza is quick to say no. "I think carefully before I upload anything," he says. "But (they) need to realize that we will not stay quiet any longer."



# Suburban Rail Finds its Mention in the 2019 Budget

*Srinivas Alavilli, co-founder of Citizens for Bengaluru, talks about the suburban rail network*

TEJASWINI NALEGAVE

Mr Anand Menon rides his bike from New BEL Road to Whitefield everyday, and is now eagerly waiting for the Bengaluru suburban rail network known as the Bengaluru Commuter Rail. Now, he can board the train from the station next to his house. "That way, I can avoid not only the traffic, but also save fuel," he says.

Anand Menon has *Citizens for Bengaluru* to thank for the rail network. This organization has fought for many causes around the city, most famously known for *#steelflyoverbeda* (say no to steel flyover). They also started the *#ChukuBukuBeku* (we want the train) for the suburban rail transport. Mr Srinivas Alavilli, the 46-year-old co-founder of *Citizens for Bengaluru*, has been fighting actively for the rail network for 4 years now.

## What do you think is blocking the commencement of the suburban rail project?

The Cabinet (union) must approve this cause, until then nothing will happen. But the state of Indian economy is scary, *#ChukuBukuBeku* is just a dream. Citizens of the city have been waiting for a commuter rail, I hope we get what we deserve.

## Do you think that its mention in the budget will make any difference from the last time it was mentioned in the 2018 budget?

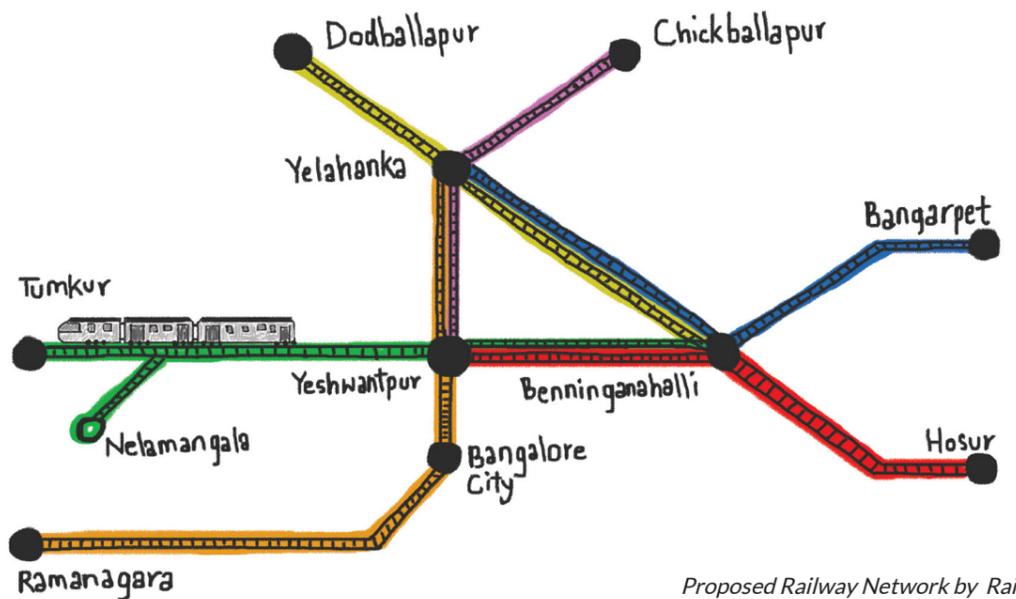
I do not think so. We had the funds in 2018 too; money was never the problem. The cabinet didn't approve it.

## What do you have to say about Bengaluru's traffic condition? Will this rail help with the traffic problem?

It was a known fact that Bengaluru traffic is awful, I think this rail will help. Once people realise how easy it is to reach parts of Bengaluru like Whitefield then the number of people using their own vehicles will reduce.

## Do you think it's too soon to celebrate when it was only mentioned in the budget?

Yes, we must wait till the Cabinet approves. Even in 2018, funds were given, but we didn't see any work happening. I hope we don't see the same happening this year too. But this doesn't mean that we are not happy. We hope to be optimistic.



Proposed Railway Network by Rail Company Limited.  
ILLUSTRATION: Natasha Magendar

The graphic shows the proposed rail network by the *Suburban Rail Company Limited*. The trains with all air-conditioned coaches will operate from 5 am till midnight and will cover 148 km around the city, playing a major role in decongesting Bengaluru and its traffic.

In 2018, the late Finance Minister Arun Jaitley also mentioned the Suburban Rail Network in the Union Budget, and allocated Rs.17000 cr for the same. Since then, there has been no progress in the commencement of the project.

The Chief Minister of Karnataka, in an interview with *The Mint*, said, "This will boost the infrastructure facilities in Bengaluru, which has turned out to be a favoured investment destination for MNCs. This will help us to eliminate traffic congestion in this investment-friendly city."

## A Hard Fall for the High Bounce

*Penalties for unruly rental bike users set to be increased to counter fines levied on rental companies*

LIPSY LEO

Users of rental bikes are set to pay heavy penalties for parking and dumping of these bikes in unauthorised areas across the city.

These bikes, rented from app-based platforms such as *Bounce*, *Vogo*, and *Onn* bikes, are generally considered to be a boon to cover last mile connectivity but this increased usage has caused a large number of these bikes to be scattered across the city and in various public areas.

"These bikes have become a problem to other commuters. We have received several complaints of users taking up footpaths to park their bikes," said Mr Ganesh Kumar, traffic police personnel, to an *Indian Express* source. Residents of certain areas, such as Koramangala and Vasanthnagar, agree that these bikes have become a nuisance. Mr Manoj Gowda, a resident of Vasanthnagar, adds that these bikes take up space right by their houses and, in addition, blames bike rental companies for not taking the necessary actions against the perpetrators.

Residents of these areas are left with no choice but to head to corporation authorities to voice their grievances. Mr Umesh Shetty, the corporator of Govindarajanagar, says, "Rental bikes like *Bounce* come in handy for the last mile connectivity, but people are misusing them. These vehicles are parked at underpasses and alongside the busy roads, creating an obstacle for other motorists and pedestrians." As these bikes

are password protected, it becomes difficult for people to take matters into their own hands and move these bikes.

On receiving a large number of complaints from official authorities and even users of these bikes, the rental service platforms chose to resolve the issue by having the users themselves pay for their violations. Although the bikes that are seized by the traffic police in situations of parking violations have to be acquired by the companies after paying

fines, Vivekananda Hallekere, the co-founder of *Bounce*, tells the *Mirror*, "The penalty is transferred to the customers, and the amount is subtracted from their digital wallet. However, collecting the bike itself adds additional work."

"For instance, if the user leaves a cycle on the main road where there is heavy traffic flow, we send them a warning. They are penalised on the second offence," said Shamanth H, Head of Market Acquisition, during an interview with *Indian Express*. He refused to disclose the number of total violations recorded by *Bounce*.

According to similar QR-code-based companies such as *Yulu*, the impact of these fines being levied is seen in the significant decrease of the number of bikes that are being parked in unauthorised locations, and a decrease in the number of traffic violations by the users of these bikes following the implementation of these hefty fines. *Yulu*, for instance, recorded the incidence of parking violations falling from over 9,000 in November 2018 to just 1,740 in April 2019.

These bikes are used largely in commercial areas by students and young adults. Most users rely on these rental bikes due to ease of acquisition and low tariffs. However, implementation of penalties and increase in formality of usage of these bikes may lead to a significant drop in total number of customers, or hopefully more responsible behaviour.



PHOTO CAPTION: A rental bike from *Bounce* left parked on the street, inconveniencing pedestrians and obstructing traffic.  
CREDIT: Mahna Manoj

# Imposition of Kannada in Schools Sparks Outrage

Educationists say that there is a huge communication gap between the government and the schools

JESSICA RUTH

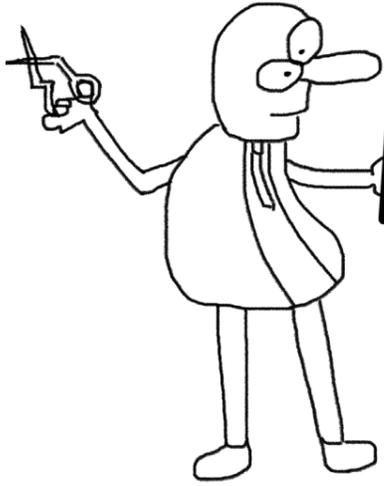


ILLUSTRATION: Natasha Magendar

“How can our children, having done French as a second language and English as a first language, suddenly write their boards in Kannada with barely any knowledge of it? What was the government thinking?” argues Arthi Singh, the parent of a student from Clarence High School.

Kannada being imposed as a compulsory first or second language in every CBSE and ICSE school in the state of Karnataka has elicited many such responses, from students, parents, and schools alike. The Kannada Language Learning Act (2015) implemented by the state government makes Kannada a mandatory subject for grades 1 to 10. While this rule

previously applied only to schools affiliated to the state board, the new act has widened its ambit to include all boards.

As a consequence, foreign languages like French are being done away with, posing a big threat to teachers of other languages. By 2025, most teachers of foreign languages could be unemployed in Karnataka.

“It’s not easy to find a job anymore. I agree it’s good for people to know the language of their state but the way this thing has been implemented seems like the government is taking away the freedom and rights of students,” says Marco Fernandez, a young Spanish teacher at Legacy School. “What happened to being a secular country?”

“We settled here because of the demand for foreign language teachers in schools. We may have a few years left to figure out what to do, but what if a rule like this comes to pass everywhere?” demands Jasmin Paul, a French teacher from Bethany High School. “I speak on behalf of all the teachers whose jobs are at stake right now. What on earth are we supposed to do?” She went on to express her concern for the students affected, stating that the sudden jump between two completely different languages would be a huge challenge.

Officials from private schools seem to be affected the most, as more and more students have opted for French and other languages in the past few years, leaving the schools in a fix on how to implement this rule. Parents say that it comes as a shock — while a majority of them said that it was very unfair, some agreed that it would be good for students to know the regional language. Many parents, who are not fluent in the language, hope that the school will make sure that the students develop an interest in the subject and do well in it, even if it means organizing special classes — which is what some schools have already started doing.

Counter views were still present. Pavithra Sengupta, a translator, said, “I still believe it’s for the best. I’ve seen many people struggling to communicate with auto drivers, shopkeepers, etc., but by the next generation I’m sure most of these problems will be solved. The government knows what they are doing.”

## Comics at Cubbon

Cubbon Park becomes a free comedy club for some early risers

SOUMYA NAIK

The Sunday morning sunlight seeped through the gaps of the trees, highlighting the beads of sweat trickling down the face of the jogger next to me. Nestled in the shade of the State Central Library at Cubbon Park, we hear 28-year-old engineer and comedian Kritesh Singh exclaim, “Bh\*\*\*\*d! Sab koi mere piche wale kutton ko dekh rahe hain, mujhe bhi dekho yaar!” (Everyone’s looking at the dogs behind me, look at me too!)

‘Suno Bey’ is a band of comedians who wanted a safe space to try out their new material and polish their jokes to perfection. In October 2018, this group of engineers and aspiring comedians decided to form a collective and host free open mics every Sunday from 8:30 am at Cubbon Park. But why Cubbon of all places? “It is the most happening place in Bengaluru on a Sunday morning,” said Jitesh Hingorani, a member of the collective, along with Sid Agarwal, Rishabh Kanishk, Kritesh Singh, and Debashish Rath.

The comedians approach strangers with a promise of a good time, which in itself, sounds inappropriate. This is met with hesitation, and often rejection, but on mentioning that it is free, some do excitedly join. “When an audience pays money, there’s an obligation that has to be fulfilled,” stated Mujahideen Sheikh, 27, software engineer and comedian. While introducing himself, Mujahideen assured me that he is not a jihadist, “or at least not anymore.”

It takes a lot of patience to sit through an unpolished set. “Main toh bhai, Modiji ka fan hoon”, was met with a loud silence. Some audience members listen to the first flat joke, tolerate the second one, and if the third one doesn’t make

them laugh, they get up and walk away. Then there are those who will sit through the most torturous of sets, some of whom will let their disappointment show on their faces, while the kinder ones will throw in a pity smile. “Comedy is comedy because there is honesty behind it. The moment you are completely honest, people will be like, ‘This guy is genuine and I can believe it’”, explains Kritesh. “So when a joke falls flat, you just make fun of yourself.”

Working on sets is time consuming, and there is a very tedious process behind the journey of a joke. “99 percent of the time, during live shows, all the jokes will land because they have been tried and tested on the audience here first. Only jokes that are received extremely well here are added to our live sets”, says Arun Kiran, 28, engineer and comedian.

“I’m a comedian because I’m passionate about my art and... poverty,” shared one of the comedians in their set. Most of them are corporate workers who come from an engineering background. They have a regular 9-to-5 job and spend their entire week glaring at computer screens, just to carry out their one true passion on weekends: comedy. When asked how they manage between a hectic corporate schedule and unpredictable comedy gigs, they say, “We don’t have a choice; we need to, right? When you feel really strongly about something, you will take time apart. So we work overtime to make up for the absenteeism at work.”

So the next time you find yourself at Cubbon Park on a Sunday morning, go near the State Library and find the crowd huddled over two cement benches under the trees. There will either be roaring laughter or awkward and deafening silence.



PHOTO CAPTION: Early risers turn into audience at Cubbon Park State Central Library. CREDIT: Soumya Naik

“I’m a comedian because I’m passionate about my art and...poverty.”

## KC Ganapathy: Steering Into the Asian Games

*Sailing through an Asian Games medal, the duo heads towards the Olympics*

DHRITI BELLIAPPA

Sailor KC Ganapathy and his teammate, Varun Thakkar, have made history by being the first Indian team in the Men's 49er series to win a medal. In an interview with Ganapathy, Fine Print finds out about their hard-won bronze at the Asian Games and his passion for the sport.

In 2018, Ganapathy and Varun, having won the test event at the Asian Sailing Championship, headed into the Asian Games held at Jakarta and took home the bronze. But the fight for the medal proved to be a real test of their sailing skills.

The sailing event took place over 6 days, each day consisting of 3 races, with a day's break in the middle. They had done well on the first 2 days, but the third didn't go as well. "It was really tight", Ganapathy says. "But we managed to claw our way back." They even finished first in the 14th and penultimate race but the victory was short-lived.

Finishing first in the penultimate race meant they got only one point, and in sailing, the team with the lowest points at the end of a competition wins. Ganapathy and Varun thought the gold was well within reach, until the Oman team claimed that the Indian team had blocked their path. Japan, who was on top of the leaderboard, supported Oman's claim, and this got India disqualified for the 14th race, causing their score to increase.

The team that was in the fight for gold was now fighting for a difficult bronze. To earn that bronze, they'd have to win the last race. They also had to ensure that Korea and Oman, the competitors for bronze, did not finish in the top three. "And we actually did that and got a bronze," says Ganapathy. "But we lost a good opportunity at gold."

Even as he expresses this regret, Ganapathy is thrilled that his



PHOTO CAPTION: Ganapathy and Varun on the 49er.  
CREDIT: Padma Shri Tom

weekend hobby, has now brought an Asian Games medal home for his team and the country.

As a young boy who went sailing with a friend's dad, Ganapathy says he was hooked right away. What started as a fun Sunday activity became a lifelong passion.

He started his sailing career on a boat called the *Enterprise*, an under-15 boat, and graduated to a boat called the *Optimist* in 2003. The 2010 Asian Games was his last major event on the *Optimist*. In 2011, he started sailing in the 29er, the two-handed skiff, with his current team mate, Varun Thakkar. In 2014, they went on to sail the 49er, an Olympic high-performance skiff.

Ganapathy met his teammate Varun on the waters. Varun had also been sailing from a young age and had been one of Ganapathy's main competitors when they sailed in the Under-15 category. "When I was done (with the U15 league), he was also done, and then we paired up to sail the 29er."

Now the two are working hard towards the upcoming Tokyo Olympics. "Last time, during the Rio Olympics, we had a very outside chance, but now we are one of the main competitors fighting for that position." Ganapathy believes that some of their toughest competition will come from Oman, Thailand, Hong Kong, China, and Korea, but thinks they'll still be able to qualify strongly.

The duo are currently practicing hard in Mumbai, in preparation for the qualifier set to take place in Abu Dhabi on 18th of March. Fine Print wishes the team the best at the Olympics and hopes to see them fulfill their dream of making India a name to be reckoned with in sailing.

## Khushi Dinesh: Turning the Tides

*The ace swimmer talks to Fine Print about her life as a young professional swimmer and the challenges she has faced along her journey so far*

MAHNA MANOJ

15-year-old Khushi Dinesh has done more in her short swimming career than most kids her age dream of. Fresh out of Khelo India 2020 held in Assam, along with 3 medals under her belt, Khushi tells us about her regime, balancing school work, and her parent's journey with her swimming career.

When we met her at Eatfit on Church Street, her hair was cropped short, which she laughs about, explaining how long hair is a hassle when you're in and out of the water all day. "I started swimming at the age of 3 and began competing from the age of 6, where I won my first medal at an inter school tournament. After that there was no getting me out of the water."

Khushi's master stroke in her career was when she was selected as the youngest member of the Indian Women's Swimming Team to compete in the U-17 Swimming World Championship, Chicago. When she was 13, she was the youngest to compete at a Senior National Championship and went on to represent India at the South Asian Championship held in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

She tells Fine Print about how she manages her schedule along with being a student. "My day starts extremely early. I get up at 5 am and usually spend about 3 hours in the pool before school, after which I am back at the pool again." On asking whether she ever gets overwhelmed with her schedule, she remarks, "Never. Being in the water brings a sense of calm around me. No matter what mood I am in, I'm always in the pool."



PHOTO CAPTION: Khushi Dinesh with her spoils at Khelo India 2020 in Assam. CREDITS: Special Arrangement

The cooperation of her school is integral for her to be able to commit to her demanding routine, Khushi remarks. Studying in Sophia High School, Khushi has nothing but praise and gratitude for her teachers and principal. "Sr Alpana, the Principal, knows exactly how important this is for me and has given her full support throughout. Without her understanding and cooperation, I would not be able to manage my studies." She also says the same about her teachers who go out of their way to work with her individually to make sure she is always up to date with classes during competitions so that she doesn't fall behind. While maintaining grades along with some of the top students of her class, Khushi has ensured that her packed athlete's schedule has not put her studies in the back seat.

Khushi's backbone, she says, are her parents. "They told me that they were fine with me swimming as long as I manage both studies and swimming together and therefore, I'm working very hard to balance both."

Any sport demands extreme dedication and patience as failure walks hand in hand with it. Khushi knows that enjoying the sport comes before doing well in it. On the mental health of young sportspeople who see failure more often than success, Khushi states that it is extremely integral to have a strong support system. "My parents were always supportive. My dad is a state level cricket player and he has been through the same thing, so he definitely pushed me to keep going and never give up."

At the moment, Khushi is looking forward to the Olympics this year which is to be held in Tokyo. "I've been working very

# Overthinking Aloud With **Surbhi Bagga**

An interview with a professional comedienne, podcaster, writer, and a self-professed overthinker

VAISHNAVI VINTA

**S**urbhi Bagga, owner and host of the podcast *The Overthink Tank*, tells Fine Print all about her journey with podcasting.

## How did you decide that your podcast would be about overthinking?

This idea occurred to me one day while I was commuting to work. I wanted to make a podcast that just lets you delve deep into your thoughts, but is also light and funny; something people can listen to while on a break. But I wrote it down in my journal and let that be. Few weeks later, I was discussing it with my friends and they pushed me to start it, so we used whatever we had and recorded the first episode. We liked how it was going. And once it was published, and the audience was formed, we just kept going.

## What attracts you to podcasting?

What attracts me to podcasting is the medium. It makes you vulnerable, it makes you connect with the person, and I personally like to lay it all out there and be very honest with my listener.

## What was your introduction to podcasts?

So the thing is, I didn't start out as somebody who wants their own podcasts, I started out as a listener, because I realised that my habit of reading was slipping away. I felt a lot less smarter than I was and I had to replace my bank of knowledge that I got from reading. When I first heard of the podcast *Serial*, I was like, how is it that I can't see anything yet can visualize, and that pushed me to make my own. We started with Season 1 of *The Overthink Podcast*, which was super low budget. We did it in my house, not as a career option; it was something I was doing on the side. Once I got hooked, I wanted to learn more, and I joined India's first premium podcast company called *IVM Podcasts* and that gave me grounds to work with. I was in a studio for 8 hours a day, hosting shows. I've worked there for 8 months. I generally enjoyed the idea of people listening to me on their earphones.

## What was your favorite episode?

Uhm... Very difficult to choose one! All my guests are very different from each other, and every episode is uniquely dear to me. But, Season 3 is my favorite season. We have a bunch of the coolest and juiciest episodes lined up!

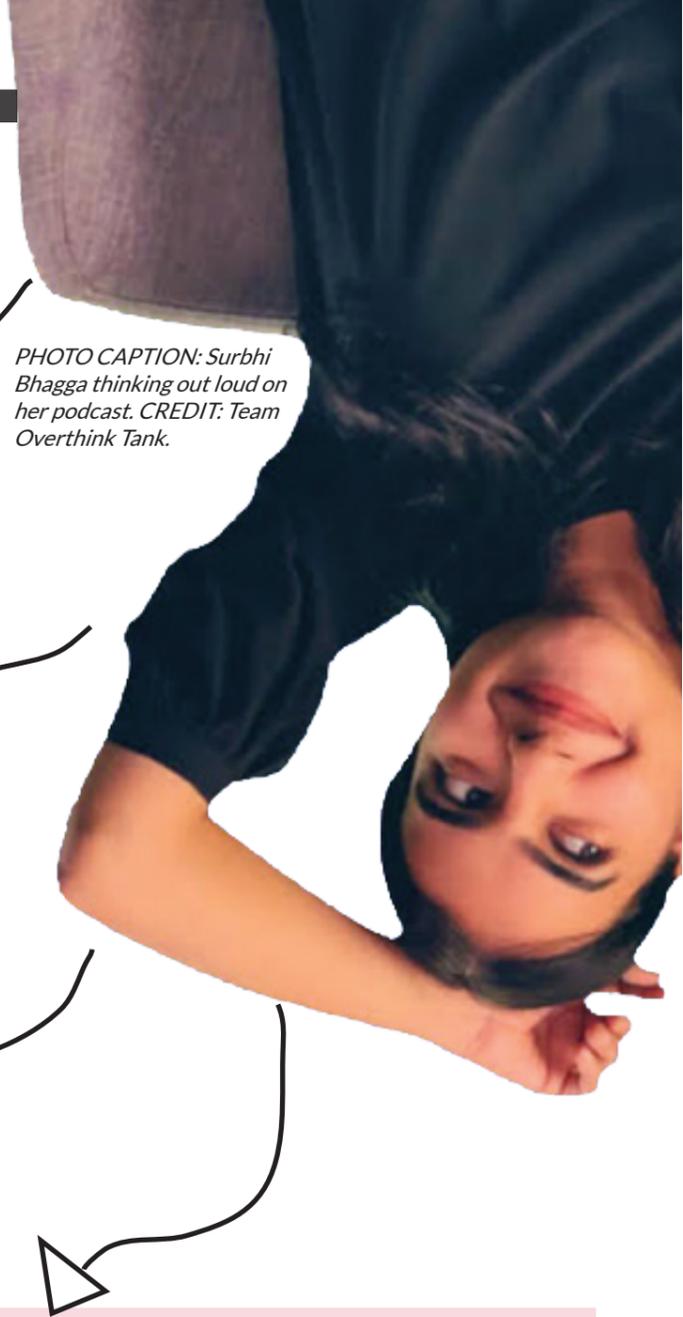
## What's the typical recording process like?

So right now, I have a system in place and I keep adding gears to it every year. I begin with figuring out what to discuss over the coming episode. I send out posts asking listeners what they want me to overthink about — some listeners write emails, most DM. I make a list of the most-requested topics, and then figure out the guests, see who would be ideal for this topic. Sometimes I try to get an expert and a comic, so it'll be fun and informative. Then I start my research. I try to read up a lot, talk to a few friends, and then it goes to the recording. Once it's there, it finds its own space. There's not really a script in place, but I have a bunch of questions in my head and I throw them at my guests.

## How has the podcast scene changed over time in India?

I think the podcast industry is rapidly expanding, especially after Spotify was introduced in India. I think the reason podcasts are becoming so popular is because of their ability to fit into everybody's life. The making of a podcast is not a costly affair, there are amazing podcasts made by students with just their mobile phones. So more and more people are consuming and creating podcasts every day.

PHOTO CAPTION: Surbhi Bagga thinking out loud on her podcast. CREDIT: Team Overthink Tank.



# ADCC 2020: The Rise of Indian Grappling

Over 300 participants fought for gold at India's biggest grappling event

NATASHA MAGENDAR

**H**er name is broadcast on the big screen. The fighter walks upon the pitch black mats, turned battlefield, where she faces her opponent. The referee's instructions are drowned out by the roaring of their teammates — 'Finish her!', 'Take her down!', 'You got this!'. The timer begins and the bumping of fists marks the start of the action. DLF Avenue Mall, Saket, New Delhi witnessed over 200 such battles in the first Indian national tournament hosted by the world's premier submission grappling club, the *Abu Dhabi Combat Club (ADCC)*.

Participants, hailing from different corners of India, put their limbs on the line as they contended for the gold. The venue included three large mat spaces, officiated by International ADCC referees from Singapore, Finland, and Kazakhstan. When asked about the objective of this event, Siddharth Singh, the founder of ADCC India, and CEO of *Crosstrain Fight Club*, said, "ADCC is like the Olympics of our sport. My dream of hosting ADCC in India was to have the first Indians compete in the World Championship which happens once every two years."

The tournament, open only to Indian passport holders, was divided into three categories — beginner, intermediate, and pro. In total, there were 35 gold medals up for grabs. Each skill division was further divided into different weight classes. In addition, an open weight division called the 'Absolute Division' had grapplers from any weight class, within their skill level, fighting each other. It was not uncommon to see a 60 kg man fight someone over 90kg

which resulted in some unforgettable David vs Goliath moments.

Ashwin Hoon won the stacked 'Absolute Division' in the Men's professional category and was crowned 'India's Best Grappler'. This was a major win for his team, *Warrior's Cove MMA* [Mixed Martial Arts] from Gurgaon. Despite being one of the last fights of the tournament, his final match reignited the energy of the crowd as he submitted his opponent with a slick D'Arce choke.



PHOTO CAPTION: Two grapplers thanking each other after a bout. CREDIT: ADCC India Official Page

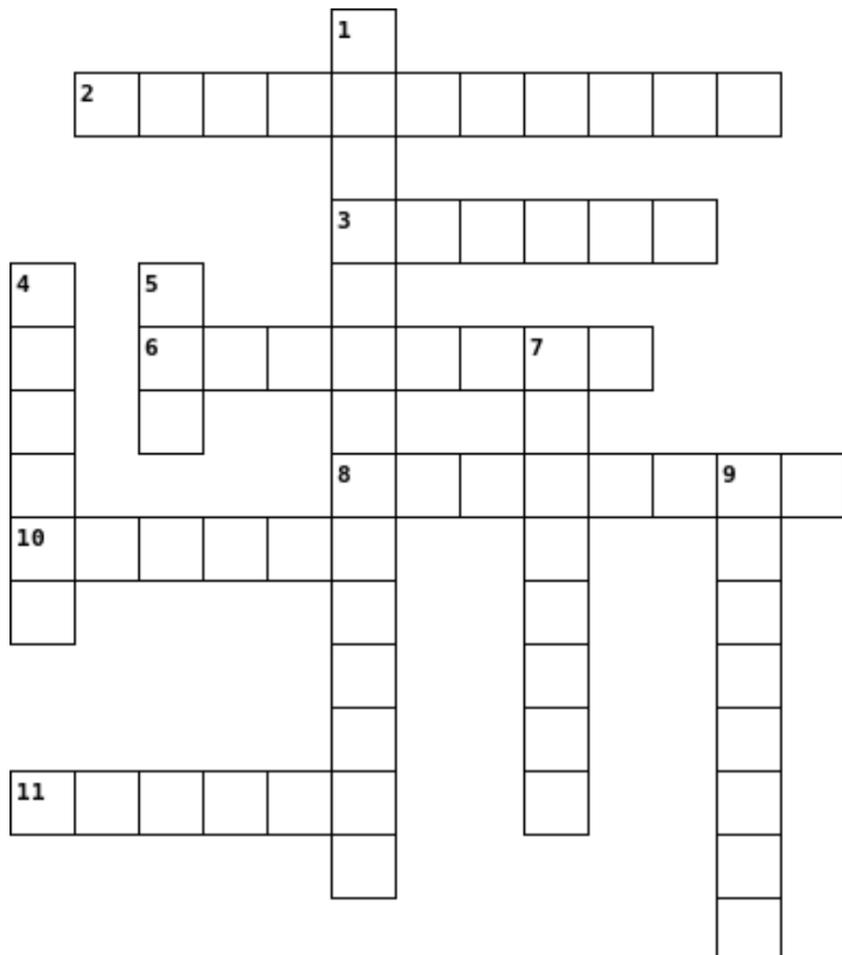
The champion commented, "It's good to see our sport finally receive some support and recognition. I thank the ADCC for this opportunity. To top it off, I'm thrilled to have received my purple belt after nine grueling years on the mat, it makes this moment all the more special."

Overall, two teams dominated the tournament with impressive performances. *Crosstrain Fight Club* from Delhi finished on top winning 15 gold medals, 4 silver medals, and 3 bronze. Notable wins came from Rachit Tiyagi in the under 77 kg Men's Professional category and Anwesha Deb in the under 50 kg and Women's Absolute Beginner category. Tiyagi's fight against Peeyush Pandey from the Institute of Jiu-Jitsu was considered the 'Match of the Tournament'. It was a nine-minute war filled with flashy takedowns, reversals and close submission attempts that showcased the heart of a fighter. Both men refused to give an inch to each other which left the crowd at the edge of their seats. Although Tiyagi was the victor, both men were heavily praised for their performance.

The Institute of Jiu-Jitsu from Bengaluru was another strong performer taking home 25 medals of which there were 6 gold, 10 silver, and 9 bronze. Their head coaches, Rohit Vasudevan and Devesh Thakur, clinched golds in the Men's Professional category in their respective weight classes. When asked about his expectations for this event, Vasudevan stated, "I expected my team, including myself, to do a lot better. I saw many good grapplers today. It's just incredible how the level of Indian grappling has increased." Asha Badrinath from The Institute of Jiu-Jitsu stood out with an exceptional performance, sweeping the Women's 50 kg Intermediate and Absolute category to win double gold with every opponent tapping out. In spite of weighing in at 44 kg, which is substantially low in both weight categories, Badrinath cemented herself as the undisputed champion and India's number one woman pound-for-pound fighter.

Regarding the tournament, Marko Leisten, Head of ADCC Europe, said he was impressed. He commented, "We witnessed tremendous grit and skilled styles of grappling across categories on the mats, which is commendable." It is undeniable that the level of Indian combat sports is on the rise with the huge success of this event. In a couple of years, it won't be a surprise to see many of these names competing and winning at a global level.

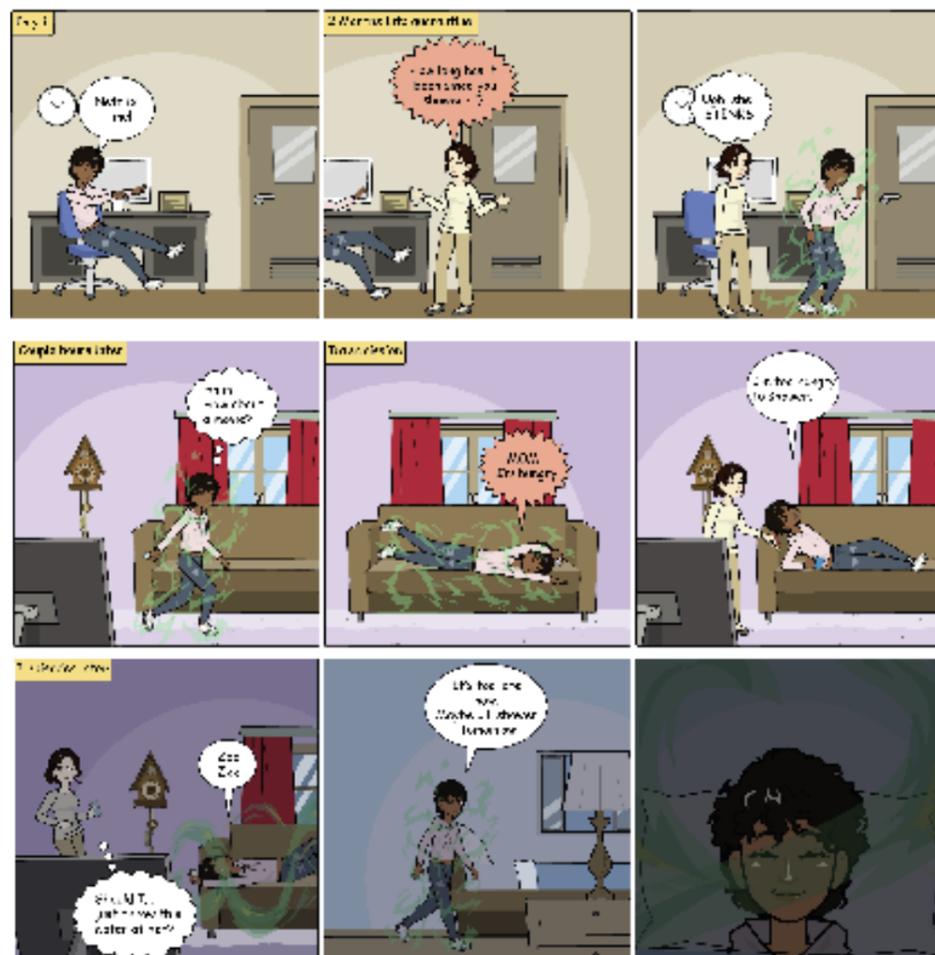
## FINE PRINT CROSSWORD



### Across

2. the wacky creature created by Lewis Carrol (10)  
 3. the young singer of the new 007 movie soundtrack (6)  
 6. a viral dance created by 14-year-old Jalaiah Harmon (8)  
 8. a blind prophet who accuses Oedipus of being King Laius' murderer (8)  
 10. a group of crows (6)  
 11. the screenplay writer of an Oscar-winning South Korean film (6)

## QUARANCOMIC



### Down

1. the act of throwing someone out of a window (12)  
 4. a season - the 15-year-old Canadian- Indigenous 'water warrior' (6)  
 5. \_\_ me a river, by the man who just can't stop feeling (3)  
 7. maiden name of the Lady of Dragonstone (8)  
 9. political (originally communist) propaganda, especially in art or literature (8)

## THE TEAM

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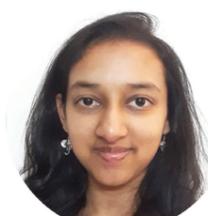


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