IMPACT 2018

Selections from IPSMF Grantee Media
Selections from IPSMF Grantee Media IMPACT 2018
The Wire
What would urban sanitation look like without caste?

IndiaSpend
Farmers suicide down 21% in 2016; Farming sector suicides at decade low

The Print
Modi govt wants to change how civil service entrants are allocated IAS, IPS, IFS, IRS.

EPW
The Aadhaar Game

Live Law
Judges Appointment: A Ping Pong Game?

Swarajya
How Kashi Became “Wireless”

Dool News
When gender becomes a liability

Down to Earth
Azadi Ka Sangharsh: The Patthargarhi Movement

CSE study finds genetically modified ingredients in food products

EPW
Busted: Four myths on caste-based reservation policies

Alt News
Decoded: The business of Facebook pages – selling Modi, God, patriotism and more

Alt News
Audio analysis of the viral Araria video with alleged pro-Pak slogans raises suspicions
Given that India slid to 138 on the Press Freedom Index 2018, two ranks lower than the previous year and five since 2016, the fierce and inclusive reportage by Grantees of the Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation reflects an unshakeable determination to uphold the raison d’être of journalism: moral commitment to truth and an ethical pursuit of holding power to account in public interest.

Newsroom 2018 has selected stories from Grantee publications that showcase the breadth of subject covered meticulously by digital platforms in the course of this calendar year. More importantly, these represent a landmark logbook from a historical standpoint: a country in countdown-mode to election year 2019. The narratives underpin some of the most contentious issues in preceding months.

The Foundation’s support to independent media allows the very essence of journalism to prevail on digital platforms whereas traditional media may face greater challenges led by conflict of ownership interest, paucity of space and faltering resources and revenues. The cross-pollination of the Grantee media outlets through syndication with legacy and broadcast media has also extended the impact of their stories.

As is well-established globally, journalism practised through online multimedia outlets has enabled far-reaching democratisation of media itself. For instance, media being consumed on smartphones is rising exponentially. Reports say that by 2022, more than 500 million Indians would own a smartphone. Most Indians under the age of 25 get their news primarily from phones.

Wide-ranging access to news is to be welcomed. With a caveat.

For, it is also true that, in turn, the Fourth Estate has found itself besieged from within its folds as the intrinsic mission of journalism vies with its “echo chamber” electronic and digital media hydra-heads. Without access to principled grants and aid, diligent “first drafts of history” may diminish dramatically in a country where ruler-interpretation and revisionism constantly lurks. There is also the palpable fear of rumour-mongering and social media `forwards’ passing off as news. Without the encouragement of the Foundation’s philanthropists and the unflinching vision of the trustees the survival of quality media entities would be impaired dramatically and a vital distinction between information and informed journalism would blur even more rapidly into inanity. Instead, the Foundation has noted, happily, that Grantees have been enabled to steadfastly do the heavy-lifting for independent reportage.

Embedded in the DNA of digital news platforms is the characteristic mother lode of technology that enables it to spawn but also frequently casts them as headline subjects. In other words, media processes are dismantling, reshaping and catalysing journalism itself. While this is most obvious in the conflation of social media, digital media and the fake news industry, newer fault lines are emerging in the manner in which traffic is driven towards or away from credible news platforms; how media is consumed, and the business of new media itself.

The `big picture story’ and long-form journalism apart, Newsroom 2018 also showcases new media forms such as podcasts and videos, citizen journalism and hyperlocal stories and selections from Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi. The stories are taken from 18 Grantee publications with corresponding outlines of the impact these have had. The main narratives are reproduced in full and edited to meet the format of this journal. The remaining selections are presented as brief summaries accompanied by impact statements.

We hope this publication will enthuse both our donors and our Grantees.
Sanitation in India’s cities relies heavily on the most oppressed castes – the erstwhile untouchables, the Dalits. Not only is the work itself degrading, it is also performed under extremely hazardous conditions. But it is only when tragic incidents occur in the metros – as they did last year in Delhi and the beginning of this year in Mumbai and Bangalore, where manual scavengers died while fixing and cleaning sewers and cleaning septic tanks in hotels – that their social background, the indignities they face and the risks they take to keep cities clean come to public notice.

Results of a study conducted by the authors in the industrial town of Angul in Odisha shed light on how urban sanitation work perpetuates caste stereotypes, which are further reinforced by city residents. Angul is an industrial city surrounded by a number of public and private sector mining companies. It became a Notified Area Council (NAC) in 1955, and was extended in 1977 to include two villages – Hulurisingha and Baniabahal – and a part of the Turanga forest. Angul became a municipality in 2008. It is spread over 19.24 square km and has 23 municipal wards. According to the 2011 Census, Angul has an urban population of 43,794, of whom 5,039 belong to Scheduled Castes and 1,473 to Scheduled Tribes. The Angul municipality has 27 slums, out of which 13 are unauthorised and 14 are authorised. The slum population is 10,950.

Sanitation in Angul city comes under the purview of the municipality. Currently, on-site sanitation with septic tanks and pit latrines is the practice in the city. The city largely has open drains, with only limited closed drains. Household waste, waste in the market place, garbage dumped by people, household toilet waste (from toilets connected to drains) and sludge collected by manual scavengers are all dumped into the drains. Manual sanitation in urban centres rests on the caste system. The lowest castes, whose traditional occupation has been sweeping, scavenging and dealing with dead animals, work as sweepers and scavengers in urban areas.
centres as well, keeping them clean. Their work as manual scavengers continues despite legal prohibitions. All municipal sweepers in Angul municipality are from the the Hadi and Ghasi SC communities, who live in slums and separate hamlets away from other castes. The Angul municipality employs sweepers both directly and through contractors. People from nearby villages are also recruited as sweepers, but no one other than lower castes is willing to work as a sweeper. The sweepers say that their work though considered dirty and degrading, and is readily available to them because there is no competition. A majority of them work as contractual labourers for low salaries.

The caste dimension escapes municipal officials. They do not see this as an anomaly. It is expected: “Those who know the best are in the job” is the rational a municipal official gave, thus attaching a professional skill dimension to what is otherwise a consolidation of caste status quo.

The cleanliness of the city depends on a host of services – sweeping the streets, garbage collection, rag picking, cleaning the open drains, removal and disposal of dead animals, cleaning sewers and sometimes desludging toilet tanks where on-site sanitation is practiced and mechanisation is either not available or expensive, or manual cleaning is preferred by the residents for the reasons such as long gap of desludging turns faecal matter into solids that it becomes difficult for machines to clean, or because of the cost involved in diluting the solid waste that clients have to pay when they opt for mechanised cleaning.

The sweepers collect door-to-door garbage as well as garbage from slums, market and public buildings, they sweep the streets and clean the drains, cut bushes, spray mosquito oil, chlorinate the open wells and collect unknown dead bodies, both human and animal.

While the sweepers are mostly provided with gloves and boots – gloves to handle the garbage and cleaning of the drain, and boots to prevent contamination when they step into the drain to clean – they don’t use them as they find them unwieldy. The officials are of the view that sweepers find these accessories/aids an obstruction to free movement. However, given the risk involved, the officials should be enforce the service rules that make it mandatory for sweepers to take precautions. But official will for that is missing.

Manual scavenging, though legally prohibited, is widely prevalent in Angul city. The state government is currently undertaking a survey to identify them. The sweepers work also as manual scavengers and clean private toilet tanks. The practice is not a secret, and is allowed to continue in the absence of mechanised methods of sludge disposal as well as residents’ preference to get toilet tanks cleaned manually. High-income households, though well equipped with modern sanitation technology, use traditional ways of toilet cleaning by employing people from lower castes.

All municipal sweepers in Angul municipality are from the SC communities, who live in slums and separate hamlets away from other castes. The Angul municipality employs sweepers both directly and through contractors. People from nearby villages are also recruited as sweepers, but no one other than lower castes is willing to work as a sweeper. The sweepers say that their work though considered dirty and degrading, and is readily available to them because there is no competition. A majority of them work as contractual labourers for low salaries.

The caste dimension escapes municipal officials. They do not see this as an anomaly. It is expected: “Those who know the best are in the job” is the rational a municipal official gave, thus attaching a professional skill dimension to what is otherwise a consolidation of caste status quo.

The cleanliness of the city depends on a host of services – sweeping the streets, garbage collection, rag picking, cleaning the open drains, removal and disposal of dead animals, cleaning sewers and sometimes desludging toilet tanks where on-site sanitation is practiced and mechanisation is either not available or expensive, or manual cleaning is preferred by the residents for the reasons such as long gap of desludging turns faecal matter into solids that it becomes difficult for machines to clean, or because of the cost involved in diluting the solid waste that clients have to pay when they opt for mechanised cleaning.

The sweepers collect door-to-door garbage as well as garbage from slums, market and public buildings, they sweep the streets and clean the drains, cut bushes, spray mosquito oil, chlorinate the open wells and collect unknown dead bodies, both human and animal.

While the sweepers are mostly provided with gloves and boots – gloves to handle the garbage and cleaning of the drain, and boots to prevent contamination when they step into the drain to clean – they don’t use them as they find them unwieldy. The officials are of the view that sweepers find these accessories/aids an obstruction to free movement. However, given the risk involved, the officials should be enforce the service rules that make it mandatory for sweepers to take precautions. But official will for that is missing.

Manual scavenging, though legally prohibited, is widely prevalent in Angul city. The state government is currently undertaking a survey to identify them. The sweepers work also as manual scavengers and clean private toilet tanks. The practice is not a secret, and is allowed to continue in the absence of mechanised methods of sludge disposal as well as residents’ preference to get toilet tanks cleaned manually. High-income households, though well equipped with modern sanitation technology, use traditional ways of toilet cleaning by employing people from lower castes.

All municipal sweepers in Angul municipality are from the SC communities, who live in slums and separate hamlets away from other castes. The Angul municipality employs sweepers both directly and through contractors. People from nearby villages are also recruited as sweepers, but no one other than lower castes is willing to work as a sweeper. The sweepers say that their work though considered dirty and degrading, and is readily available to them because there is no competition. A majority of them work as contractual labourers for low salaries.

The caste dimension escapes municipal officials. They do not see this as an anomaly. It is expected: “Those who know the best are in the job” is the rational a municipal official gave, thus attaching a professional skill dimension to what is otherwise a consolidation of caste status quo.

The cleanliness of the city depends on a host of services – sweeping the streets, garbage collection, rag picking, cleaning the open drains, removal and disposal of dead animals, cleaning sewers and sometimes desludging toilet tanks where on-site sanitation is practiced and mechanisation is either not available or expensive, or manual cleaning is preferred by the residents for the reasons such as long gap of desludging turns faecal matter into solids that it becomes difficult for machines to clean, or because of the cost involved in diluting the solid waste that clients have to pay when they opt for mechanised cleaning.

The sweepers collect door-to-door garbage as well as garbage from slums, market and public buildings, they sweep the streets and clean the drains, cut bushes, spray mosquito oil, chlorinate the open wells and collect unknown dead bodies, both human and animal.

While the sweepers are mostly provided with gloves and boots – gloves to handle the garbage and cleaning of the drain, and boots to prevent contamination when they step into the drain to clean – they don’t use them as they find them unwieldy. The officials are of the view that sweepers find these accessories/aids an obstruction to free movement. However, given the risk involved, the officials should be enforce the service rules that make it mandatory for sweepers to take precautions. But official will for that is missing.

Manual scavenging, though legally prohibited, is widely prevalent in Angul city. The state government is currently undertaking a survey to identify them. The sweepers work also as manual scavengers and clean private toilet tanks. The practice is not a secret, and is allowed to continue in the absence of mechanised methods of sludge disposal as well as residents’ preference to get toilet tanks cleaned manually. High-income households, though well equipped with modern sanitation technology, use traditional ways of toilet cleaning by employing people from lower castes.

All municipal sweepers in Angul municipality are from the SC communities, who live in slums and separate hamlets away from other castes. The Angul municipality employs sweepers both directly and through contractors. People from nearby villages are also recruited as sweepers, but no one other than lower castes is willing to work as a sweeper. The sweepers say that their work though considered dirty and degrading, and is readily available to them because there is no competition. A majority of them work as contractual labourers for low salaries.

The caste dimension escapes municipal officials. They do not see this as an anomaly. It is expected: “Those who know the best are in the job” is the rational a municipal official gave, thus attaching a professional skill dimension to what is otherwise a consolidation of caste status quo.

The cleanliness of the city depends on a host of services – sweeping the streets, garbage collection, rag picking, cleaning the open drains, removal and disposal of dead animals, cleaning sewers and sometimes desludging toilet tanks where on-site sanitation is practiced and mechanisation is either not available or expensive, or manual cleaning is preferred by the residents for the reasons such as long gap of desludging turns faecal matter into solids that it becomes difficult for machines to clean, or because of the cost involved in diluting the solid waste that clients have to pay when they opt for mechanised cleaning.

The sweepers collect door-to-door garbage as well as garbage from slums, market and public buildings, they sweep the streets and clean the drains, cut bushes, spray mosquito oil, chlorinate the open wells and collect unknown dead bodies, both human and animal.

While the sweepers are mostly provided with gloves and boots – gloves to handle the garbage and cleaning of the drain, and boots to prevent contamination when they step into the drain to clean – they don’t use them as they find them unwieldy. The officials are of the view that sweepers find these accessories/aids an obstruction to free movement. However, given the risk involved, the officials should be enforce the service rules that make it mandatory for sweepers to take precautions. But official will for that is missing.

Manual scavenging, though legally prohibited, is widely prevalent in Angul city. The state government is currently undertaking a survey to identify them. The sweepers work also as manual scavengers and clean private toilet tanks. The practice is not a secret, and is allowed to continue in the absence of mechanised methods of sludge disposal as well as residents’ preference to get toilet tanks cleaned manually. High-income households, though well equipped with modern sanitation technology, use traditional ways of toilet cleaning by employing people from lower castes.
Farmers suicide down 21% in 2016; Farming sector suicides at decade low

The minister’s reply, based on provisional data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a division of the home ministry, did not reveal the causes for suicides in 2016.

Farmers agitated due to lack of government’s response, and loan waivers in drought-affected regions of the state, Pradeep Sahu reported on February 23, 2018, Scroll.in reported on February 25, 2018. Farmers from seven states protested demanding farm loan waiver and fair pay over the last year.

As many as 6,351 farmers/cultivators committed suicide in 2016 across India, or 17 every day, according to the latest home ministry data. Suicides declined 21% from 8,007, or 22 every day, in 2015, data show.

Suicides in the farming sector declined 10%—from 12,602 in 2015 to 11,370 in 2016—according to this reply to the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) by Panshottam Rupala, minister of state for agriculture and farmer welfare, on March 20, 2018.

The minister’s reply, based on provisional data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a division of the home ministry, did not reveal the causes for suicides in 2016.

“Farmers agitated due to lack of government’s response, and loan waivers in drought-affected regions of the state, Pradeep Sahu reported on February 23, 2018, Scroll.in reported on February 25, 2018. Farmers from seven states protested demanding farm loan waiver and fair pay over the last year.

As many as 6,351 farmers/cultivators committed suicide in 2016 across India, or 17 every day, according to the latest home ministry data. Suicides declined 21% from 8,007, or 22 every day, in 2015, data show.

Suicides in the farming sector declined 10%—from 12,602 in 2015 to 11,370 in 2016—according to this reply to the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) by Panshottam Rupala, minister of state for agriculture and farmer welfare, on March 20, 2018.

The minister’s reply, based on provisional data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a division of the home ministry, did not reveal the causes for suicides in 2016.

As many as 6,351 farmers/cultivators committed suicide in 2016 across India, or 17 every day, according to the latest home ministry data. Suicides declined 21% from 8,007, or 22 every day, in 2015, data show.

Suicides in the farming sector declined 10%—from 12,602 in 2015 to 11,370 in 2016—according to this reply to the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) by Panshottam Rupala, minister of state for agriculture and farmer welfare, on March 20, 2018.

The minister’s reply, based on provisional data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a division of the home ministry, did not reveal the causes for suicides in 2016.

As many as 6,351 farmers/cultivators committed suicide in 2016 across India, or 17 every day, according to the latest home ministry data. Suicides declined 21% from 8,007, or 22 every day, in 2015, data show.

Suicides in the farming sector declined 10%—from 12,602 in 2015 to 11,370 in 2016—according to this reply to the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) by Panshottam Rupala, minister of state for agriculture and farmer welfare, on March 20, 2018.

The minister’s reply, based on provisional data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a division of the home ministry, did not reveal the causes for suicides in 2016.

As many as 6,351 farmers/cultivators committed suicide in 2016 across India, or 17 every day, according to the latest home ministry data. Suicides declined 21% from 8,007, or 22 every day, in 2015, data show.

Suicides in the farming sector declined 10%—from 12,602 in 2015 to 11,370 in 2016—according to this reply to the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) by Panshottam Rupala, minister of state for agriculture and farmer welfare, on March 20, 2018.

The minister’s reply, based on provisional data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a division of the home ministry, did not reveal the causes for suicides in 2016.
Modi govt wants to change how civil service entrants are allocated IAS, IPS, IFS, IRS.

The PMO has proposed allocating the cadre and service to probationers only after they complete three-month foundation course. Govt says just a suggestion, no final decision taken.

New Delhi: The Modi government is considering a significant change in the existing rules to allocate the service as well as the cadre or state to those qualifying in the prestigious All India Civil Services Examination.

The PMO has sought the opinion of the cadre-controlling ministries on a proposal to allocate the cadre and the service to probationers only after they complete their three-month foundation course.

At present, qualifying candidates are immediately allocated the service as well as the cadre based on the ranks they secure in the examination, conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, for 24 all-India services including the premier Indian Administrative Service, the Indian Police Service, the Indian Foreign Service, and the Indian Revenue Service, among others.

If the proposal does come through, those cracking the prestigious exam may now have to endure a nerve-wracking three-month wait, until they complete their foundation course, to know about the service and cadre they are being allocated.

An earlier version of this report triggered strong reactions, with DMK working president M.K. Stalin demanding the immediate withdrawal of the proposal, calling it a move aimed at nullifying reservation for Dalits and backward classes.

Responding to the report, the central government issued a clarification. “DoPT sources clarified that no final decision has been taken and it is one of

The government reacted to the news by quickly clarifying that they were merely exploring such a proposal. It has dropped the plan for the moment.
the suggestions under consideration," a government spokesperson said in a statement. Although senior officials in the know claimed the PMO had not explained the rationale behind the proposal, they pointed to other efforts by the Modi government to fine-tune and mould the civil services by getting new recruits to work in the national capital.

The government has also introduced a new cadre allocation policy this year for India’s top bureaucracy to protect the national character of the all India services. The policy was aimed at stopping the services from turning regional in nature by letting officers choose from a variety of states as their cadre, aside from their home state by dividing the cadre into five zones.

One senior official, who spoke to ThePrint on condition of anonymity, cautioned that the government was only exploring the option and has hence invited views and suggestions of the cadre-controlling ministries, to see if the option is feasible. Nothing much should be read into it as of now, the official stressed.

Modalities unclear
The latest proposal has been incorporated into a letter that the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) last week forwarded to the cadre-controlling ministries.

The DoPT, while pointing out that the suggestions have come from the PMO, has sought the “consideration” and “necessary action” of the ministries so that the change could be implemented from this year. The letter has urged the ministries to examine the existing rules of service and provide their inputs on the matter within a week.

The letter has urged the ministries to study the feasibility of allocating service and cadre based on the combined score a candidate secures in the civil services examination and the foundation course.

The letter does not specify what criteria would be followed to assess a candidate’s performance during the foundation course. It does not make clear whether the performance in the foundation course would be solely based on an objective written examination or on other aspects to be assessed by the faculty or other officers of the academy.

Another senior bureaucrat termed the proposal as being “sinister”. “If the service and the cadre allocation are determined solely based on the combined score of the civil services examination and the score or performance of the foundation course, it will dilute the role of UPSC by increasing the interference of the executive," the officer said.

Yet another bureaucrat from the IAS said that it would lead to a lot of arbitrariness. “The papers, the subjects, the faculty and also the overall standards ….everything is different for different foundation courses. As result, there would be a lot of arbitrariness in something as crucial as service allocation for which candidates put in so much effort,” the officer said.

At present, IAS and IFS (foreign service) probationers have their foundation course at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LSBNAA) in Mussoorie, while the probationers of other services are divided among the three training academies for their courses — the LSBNAA, the State Academy in Hyderabad and the State Academy in Bhopal.

Another senior bureaucrat said that the intention of the move may be to better assess candidates. “Today the qualifying candidates are assigned cadres and services just on the basis of their ranks, without adequate knowledge about the individual. The foundation course can help assess their conduct, behaviour and other such factors before they are assigned a premier service,” the officer said.

But it could have high potential for misuse, he added: “Service allocation after foundation course will have tremendous potential for misuse unless it is done objectively and in a transparent way.” With the proposal coming from the PMO, it would be difficult for the cadre-controlling ministries to say no, he added.

According to DoPT, while pointing out that the suggestions have come from the PMO, it would be difficult for the cadre-controlling ministries to say no, he added. “It is also unhealthy to make the probationers compete from day one of their foundation course; the camaraderie among them will be lost.”

The government has also introduced a new cadre allocation policy this year for India’s top bureaucracy to protect the national character of the all India services.
In the fragile and uncertain lives of poor people in Jharkhand, the public distribution system (PDS) provides a modicum of food and economic security. They keep their ration cards safely, visit the ration shop monthly, and get angry when the local PDS dealer cheats them.

A few years ago, a new system of Aadhaar-based biometric authentication (ABBA) for the PDS was first introduced in Ormanjhi block of Ranchi district, and then extended to other parts of Jharkhand. By May 2017, the entire state was covered, though some areas (about 15%–20%) were still in the “offline” mode.

Jean Drèze, Nazar Khalid, Reetika Khera and Anmol Somanchi conducted a survey in 32 randomly selected villages in Jharkhand, publishing their findings in a paper titled “Aadhaar and Food Security in Jharkhand: Pain without Gain?” in the Economic and Political Weekly in December 2017. In this feature, we map out scenarios using data from villages in which ABBA has been implemented.

Enter this maze to understand the many ways in which ABBA can create barriers and hurdles in the PDS, especially for the most vulnerable.
Judges Appointment: A Ping Pong Game?

LiveLaw has been collecting data about the pending recommendation of names of persons for appointment as judges to different High Courts.

For the Allahabad High Court, the name of Basharat Ali Khan was recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium on 01.11.2017 and the same is pending with the Central Government. For Tripura, the name of Mr. Arindam Lodh was recommended by Supreme Court Collegium on 01.11.2017 and the same is still pending with Central Government.

The collegium reiterated the name on 15.11.2016 and that was returned again on 01.03.2017. The Collegium reiterated the name once again on 07.04.2017 and the name is still pending with the Central Government. Similarly names of Samba Sarkar, Sabyassai Chouhary, Ravi Kapoor, Arindam Mukherji, and Sakeya Sen were recommended on 04.12.2017 by collegium but still the file is pending with the Central Government. The Calcutta High Court is functioning at less than half the strength of sanctioned posts of 72, with 33 judges. So much so that Calcutta lawyers called for five days strike to protest delay in filling up of vacancies.

For Karnataka High Court, the name of Narendra Prasad is also pending with the Central Government for 11 months. Following a hunger strike staged by Karnataka lawyers for filling up vacancies, the Centre notified the appointment of five judges in Karnataka High Court. For Madras High court, the names of 9 persons including the name of Subrahmaniam Prasad, who is a Senior Advocate in the Supreme Court, are pending since 04.12.2017 with the Central Government.
On May 16, 2018 Swarajya detailed How Old Kashi Became ‘Wireless’, probing the ancient quarters around the city’s ghats and their descent into messy contemporaneity before reviving to disguise its scarring cable lines. A team from the Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS) rose to the challenge. Tackling overhanging cables lines was complicated by the teeming populace of the city. The report detailed how the IPDS team, headed by Sudhakar Gupta, doggedly worked to ensure that all overhead cables in Old Varanasi were replaced with underground ones.

American author Samuel Langhorne Clemens, popularly known as Mark Twain, once remarked about Benares that it “is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together”. That was decades before Varanasi got electricity. Until about three years ago, if Twain’s ghost had visited old Kashi and noticed the maze of electrical wires running through its narrow lanes, he would’ve thrown in lots more “old” to his original quote. That’s how dilapidated the city’s power infrastructure looked. During one of his earliest visits to his parliamentary constituency, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had quipped there were more wires in Varanasi than the number of power connections. He exhorted government officials to do something about it “so that some sun rays could penetrate the thick mesh and enter people’s homes and streets”.

Apart from being an eyesore, such labyrinthine model of power transmission is also to be blamed for electricity theft, transmission losses, faster infrastructure degradation, which in turn leads to frequent cuts, repairs and extra costs. Worse, people on the streets are in constant danger of falling victims to these hanging and swinging live wires.

In its very first budget, the Modi government announced the Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS), which was launched in Varanasi on 28 June 2015. Though primarily aimed at ensuring 24x7 power to all, it also intended to strengthen the sub-transmission network, metering, provisioning of solar panels at government buildings and so on, and was sanctioned an amount of Rs 572 crore. In the city, one of the themes was to replace overhead cables with underground ones, that is, to make the city “wireless”.

It was no mean task. “Kashi is thousands of years old. But its modern infrastructure looks as ancient. No civic body has kept any record of how the city has developed over the years. We didn’t have any data on existing sewer and water pipelines, of BSNL [Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited] or DISCOM [Distribution Company] cables. All this is very daunting for anybody who wants to fix the mess,” says Sudhakar Gupta, the official-in-chief of IPDS project in Varanasi.

But he has done it. Three years and several thousand man-hours later, the project is nearing completion and should be wrapped up by end of this month.
"The two-year work has finally concluded. As you talk to me, I am sending the last email related to the project," said Gupta, who worked on the power project during the two-year period. Gupta had also stayed in Delhi all his life, this project brought him to his ancestral city. It’s probably fate’s way of giving me another opportunity to serve my land.

Gupta has succeeded in executing arguably one of the most daunting power infrastructure projects in recent times not just in Varanasi but also in India. His formidable job entailed clearing the cramped, bustling, haphazard lanes of old Kashi of the maze of electrical wires running through them. He had to finish a long-pending task of underground cabling in the heart of the city.

"Gupta sums up the project in numbers: ‘More than 700 people, 150 engineers, 25 consultants worked for months to lay down 1,500 km of cables underground in the 16 square km area: eight km along the ghats and stretching two km into the city. Around 50,700 consumers were given service connections. We had 40-50 different WhatsApp groups running at any given time during the course of the project. Any issues or problems that arose were solved quickly and without delay thanks to such an efficient communication channel that we had set up.’"

The numbers are impressive. Besides improving the aesthetics, the project has had a spillover effect. Power theft, which according to DISCOMs hundreds of crores each year, has been curtailed drastically in the old Kashi area. The project has also brought down the aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses from 45 per cent to less than 10 per cent. Legal connections have increased substantially. Customer complaints have come down from 8.7 per cent to 0.99 per cent. There are fewer power cuts. People no longer worry about losing power.

"During the course of the project, any issues or problems that arose were solved quickly and without delay thanks to such an efficient communication channel that we had set up," Gupta said.

"The two-year work has finally concluded. As you talk to me, I am sending the last email related to the project," said Gupta, who worked on the power project during the two-year period. Gupta had also stayed in Delhi all his life, this project brought him to his ancestral city. It’s probably fate’s way of giving me another opportunity to serve my land.

Gupta has succeeded in executing arguably one of the most daunting power infrastructure projects in recent times not just in Varanasi but also in India. His formidable job entailed clearing the cramped, bustling, haphazard lanes of old Kashi of the maze of electrical wires running through them. He had to finish a long-pending task of underground cabling in the heart of the city.

"Gupta sums up the project in numbers: ‘More than 700 people, 150 engineers, 25 consultants worked for months to lay down 1,500 km of cables underground in the 16 square km area: eight km along the ghats and stretching two km into the city. Around 50,700 consumers were given service connections. We had 40-50 different WhatsApp groups running at any given time during the course of the project. Any issues or problems that arose were solved quickly and without delay thanks to such an efficient communication channel that we had set up.’"

The numbers are impressive. Besides improving the aesthetics, the project has had a spillover effect. Power theft, which according to DISCOMs hundreds of crores each year, has been curtailed drastically in the old Kashi area. The project has also brought down the aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses from 45 per cent to less than 10 per cent. Legal connections have increased substantially. Customer complaints have come down from 8.7 per cent to 0.99 per cent. There are fewer power cuts. People no longer worry about losing power.

"During the course of the project, any issues or problems that arose were solved quickly and without delay thanks to such an efficient communication channel that we had set up," Gupta said.

However, Gupta is upset at the way civic authorities are handling the boxes. "We have installed them. Now, it is the municipal’s job to make sure the boxes are well kept. At many places, one can see garbage accumulating under and near the boxes. Then, stray animals try to eat from that. They may get electrocuted. People should also take care that they don’t litter near the boxes," he complains.

"How are residents of old Kashi taking to this idea of going ‘wireless’?

The IPDS team had divided old Kashi into 16 zones. It started its work from the spacious and less congested Kabir Nagar. In fact, a month after the project started, in November 2016, PM Modi dropped by Kabir Nagar during a tour of Varanasi before the crucial Uttar Pradesh polls, mainly to check the progress of his pet programme.

He was pleased and so are the residents. A retired professor from Banaras Hindu University Devesh Chand Pant told Swarajya that the mesh of electrical wires has partially blocked the view of his shop. "Hamara toh nukusia hai hua hai (We have suffered a loss)," he said. Zonal IPDS officer Swapnil Soni, however, said the shop owners are so used to dodging electricity bills that paying for its use hasn’t exactly pleased them. He added that the pending civic works of the project is out of the purview of IPDS. ‘It’s the municipal body’s job,’ he said.

"In such lanes, all we would get was three to four hours. From past midnight to dawn,” he said. Soni. “We would dig up the street and dump the soil manually in hand-driven carts in order to lay the wires. Before dawn, the street had to be restored to its previous state,” he said.

"Fantastic. The impact is just fantastic," Pant, 60, said. A few kilometres away at Dashashwamedh Ghat, shop owners are less enthusiastic. While the main street leading to the Ghat has none of the unsightly wires, the narrow lanes on the sides still do. "Galiyan baaki hai (the lanes are left). Where is this hundred per cent electricity connection they are talking about," said Sapata Jaiswal, a shop owner. Jaiswal’s neighbour, who did not wish to be named, complained that several streets that were dug up are not restored yet. Surprisingly, he also rued that the junction boxes set up under the IPDS have partially blocked the view of his shop. "Hamara toh nukusia hai hua hai (We have suffered a loss)," he said.

Zonal IPDS officer Swapnil Soni, however, said the shop owners are so used to dodging electricity bills that paying for its use hasn’t exactly pleased them. He added that the pending civic works of the project is out of the purview of IPDS. ‘It’s the municipal body’s job,’ he said.

"In such lanes, all we would get was three to four hours. From past midnight to dawn,” he said. Soni. “We would dig up the street and dump the soil manually in hand-driven carts in order to lay the wires. Before dawn, the street had to be restored to its previous state,” he said.

"These lanes are always abuzz with festivities so the crowd never thins down. Some dignitary or the other keeps visiting too. Work slowed down several times due to such VIP [Very Important Person] movement,” another officer Antarkish said.

There were also unexpected hurdles. Almost four months in 2016 and three months in 2017 were wasted due to heavy rains and floods along the Ganga, said Gupta.

In some areas, wary residents resisted the project fearing that the Ganga possibly flowed in a larger area than we know, he said. “It was an exciting discovery but for the job at hand, it was a headache.”

In old Kashi, the degree of aesthetics and fresh power connectivity varies from area to area, but what residents throughout the city note is an increase in power supply, in many cases uninterrupted. In Chowk, Bhelupur, Madaipur and Godhowlia, residents said they see only occasional short power cuts, as opposed to nine to ten hours a day in the past.

“Earlier, even the slightest rains or winds would lead to power cuts. Not anymore,” said a resident of Godhowlia Sanjay Yadav. “This has brought about major relief.”

A resident of Bhelupur Shankar Lal Baravanal said he is saving money as he hardly uses generators for power now.

It was at Varanasi that Prime Minister Modi had launched the Rs 45,000-crore IPDS for the country. Last week, the project kick-started in Haridwar too, another city that needs urgent attention.

“The scale of the work was much larger in Varanasi. Haridwar seems so doable now,” said Gupta.

I can tell you, this was an ambitious project. And unprecedented in India.”

Gupta has blazed a trail in this very first and a most complicated IPDS project in the country. The other officers heading similar programmes in different parts of the country have their work cut out for them.
In a candid video documentary When gender becomes liability that aired on January 30, 2018 Dool News delved into the taboo subject of the life of transgenders in Kerala and the sex reassignment surgery that they undergo.

The documentary reveals that primitive methods such as heated knives continue to be used for the surgery within the community. The video was widely shared on social media platforms. It has already had 682173 views. Law makers subsequently discussed initiatives to make the state transgender-friendly. In August 2018, the Kerala government announced it would help the community with sex reassignment surgery that met medical standards.
The bilingual environmental magazine Down to Earth published Azadi Ka Sangharsh on April 26, 2018. The story described the Adivasis' long-standing tradition of Patthargarhi stone inscriptions which morphed into a movement to save their community land from modern exclusionary definitions of development.

DTE's story triggered a discussion about the momentum in the Patthargarhi movement and the Adivasis' sense of neglect. Over 20 national and regional dailies that previously dubbed the tribal agitation 'anti-national' did a rethink after learning that the Patthargarhi tradition was not a fad but an assertion of community rights to natural resources and their management.

Around 50 journalists from Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra and activists, academicians, government representatives and members of the civil society attended the public meeting on developments in the India's tribal heartland that DTE hosted in Ranchi subsequently.

IMPACT

Community
आजादी का संघर्ष
झारखंड में इन दिनों आदिवासी और प्रासाद के बीच झुक जा गई आजादी है। एक तरफ मंद क्षमालाभ की धमकी करती है, दूसरी तरफ स्तरस्त्र इसका भी क्रुद्ध और सत्ता से सही को करना बना है। इस तनावःमण में किसी भी दिन सरकार और आदिवासी के बीच संघर्ष चिंता सत्ता है। कूलद गावस्ट्रं और भाग्यवाद की सिद्धांत

उत्तर-चाबू भारत के रूप सारखे में आदिवासी हंसगंग से लेकर आ तक कई उत्तर-चाबू देखें

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>वर्ष</th>
<th>मामला में संगठन</th>
<th>संगठन का मामला प्रस्तुत करने का भीम</th>
<th>1800-1820</th>
<th>1830-1850</th>
<th>1860-1900</th>
<th>1900-1930</th>
<th>1930-1940</th>
<th>1950-1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>सारखे राज्य में बृहस्पति से संघर्ष करते हैं</td>
<td>भीम</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
सरकार आई है तब से आज आवाजािों की िमीन हड़ीकर उद्दोगिज्यों को िेने की कोजशश के केंद्ी्य महासजी और िूवचा मंत्री बंधु ज्तकवी का कहना है जक यह सरासर गल्त है। अजधकारी और िेसा कानून के प्ररे्ता जिवंग्त बीडी शमाचा अिने िीवन के अंज्तम जिनों लािे िा्ते रहे हैं।

कानूनों को लागू नहीं कार िाएगा तब तक सरकार िमीन लेने के जलए कुछ न कुछ के जलए कई सारे कानून में संशोधन के प्र्यास जकए गए, िैसे छोटा नागिुर काश्तकारी प्रकारेन आज आवाजाजों की िमीन लेने के प्र्यास में है।

वषचा 2016 में सरकार ने अंग्ेिों द्ारा बनाए गए सीएनटी और एसिीटी में फेरबिल सथानी्य संसाधन िैसे िंगल, िमीन, खजनि और िल स्ो्त अिने हाथ में ले चुके हैं। ितथरगडी करने वाले ्या कहें खुि को सवा्यत्त घोजष्त करने वाले ज्यािा्तर गांव ऐसे हैं िो आज आवाजाजों को डराना चाहा िर सफल नहीं हुए तो अब आिसी म्तभेि कराकर इन बनाई िानी चाजहए िो संवैधाजनक संसथा के जलए ही ख्तरा बन िाए।

ग्ामसभा को संवैधाजनक वैध्ता जमल गई है... िंचा्य्ती राि के समानां्तर ऐसी संसथा नहीं मना करना िडा था। उनहोंने ित्र में जलखा, "कानून िास होने के बाि िंचा्य्ती राि और ्तरह की अलग सजमज्त बनाने के प्र्यास जकए िो कानूनन िंचा्य्त के जनगरानी में जक्या का िैसा सीधे गांव सजमज्त को जि्या िाएगा। उसके सिस्य ्युवा होंगे। मुख्यमंत्री ने चनिनजक्यारी में सवगवी्य िावचा्ती चरर मह्तो की वहां आज आवाजाजी जवकास सजमज्त बनाने की बा्त सरकार ने जवकास सजमज्त गजठ्त करने की घोषरा की है।

सरना की िमीन इस बैंक में डाल िी गई। सरना से ्ताति्यचा है उस जहससे से है िहां है। िमीन लेने की मंशा इ्तनी मिबू्त है जक सरकार आज आवाजाजों के िूिा सथलों ्तक को आिेश जिए और कुछ ही जिन में िूरे राज्य से 21 लाख एकड िमीन इस लैंड बैंक में अकेले खूंटी जिले में जिछले 6 महीने के िौरान करीब 200, िूववी-िनशचमी जसंहभूम में और वनाजधकार कानून 2006 का इस्तेमाल लोग कर रहे हैं। इनहीं कानूनों की मिि से उसका सहारा जल्या िा रहा है। लोग िांचवीं अनुसूची में आने वाला कानून, जफर िेशा िमीन लेना चाह्ती है। इन सब को िेख्ते हुए आज आवाजाजी भी अिनी िमीन बचाने के बंधु ज्तकवी का कहना है जक सरकार की निर िमीन िर है और लोग अिनी िमीन में गांव के बिा्य व्यनक्त को एक इकाई के रूि में सवीकार जक्या ग्या है।" संजवधान वनों और इसमें मौिूि उतिािों िर अजधकार सथाजि्त हो ग्या और ग्ामीर जरिजटश सरकार में ्तब केंद्ी्यकरर और बाहरी लोगों का हस्तेक्षि शुरू हुआ। कानून के ्तह्त सरकार का जक्या। इसके नौ साल बाि 1865 में वन कानून अनस्ततव में आ्या। भार्त के गांव गरराज्य जलखकर कहा था जक उनहें ्तालाब का इस्तेमाल करने िे नहीं ्तो वे उसे अिने ्यह अनुसूची स थानी्य समुिा्यों का लघु वन उत िाि, िल और खजनि ों िर अजधकार भार्ती्य संजवधान की िांचवीं अनुसूची 10 राज्यों के आज िवासी इलाकों में लागू है। आज आवाजाजी का बड़ा विनिमय इस तथ्य पर है कक वे िांचवीं अनुसूची में शामिल होने के बाि दुनिया में विश्व आदरणीय है। आज आवाजाजी का बड़ा विनिमय इस तथ्य पर है कक वे िांचवीं अनुसूची में शामिल होने के बाि दुनिया में विश्व आदरणीय है।
सक्ता, तो गांवीरों का संजवधान प्रित्त अजधकार है। सरकार अगर अब हुए सत्ता का जवकेंद्रीकरर करना चाहेंगे ताजक जवकास का सवाि गांव का जसफाररश कर िी। यही विह है जक बहुत से गांव गरराज्यों ने लघु वन सौंिने का जवरोध जक्या बनलक सरकार को इसे अिने अधीन रखने की सौंिने जक्तना कारगर है। सजमज्त ने न केवल ग्ामसभा को यह अजधकार इंसिेकटर िनरल एससी चड्ा की अध्यक्ष्त में एक सजमज्त गजठ्त कर िी। कानून के तह्त वन और भूजम से संबंजध्त कानूनों में संशोधन की िरूर्त है इस जिशा में िहल की है और ग्ामसभा के अजधकारों को सिष्ट जक्तना कारगर है। केवल मध्य प्रिेश ने राष्ट्रज्त केआर नारा्यर के कारर अिने मकसि में सफल नहीं हो िाई। रािसव को कोऑिरेजटव के माध्यम से सथानी्य लोगों के साथ साझा करें। क्षेत्रों में सभी प्रकार के खनन और उद्ोग गैरकानूनी हैं क्योंजक इसके जलए के प्रावधान प्रकाश में आए। न्या्याल्य का आिेश था जक अनुसूजच्त अथथों में इसकी व्याख्या की िाए ्तो ि्ता चलेगा जक गांव में प्रवेश के जलए लघु वन उतिाि, जसंचाई और लघु खजनिों िर सवाजमतव प्रिान कर्ता है। के बाि ्यह कानून बन िा्या। िेसा ग्ामसभा को सशक्त बना्ता है और उसे लागू हो ग्या। ्यह कानून िांचवीं अनुसूची क्षेत्रों के जलए है। ्यह कानून 1996 में िंचा्य्ती (अनुसूजच्त क्षेत्रों िर जवस्तार) कानून अथाचा्त िेसा पेसा का प्ावधान ्ताक्तवर है, इसका अंिािा इस ्तथ्य से लगा्या िा सक्ता है जक साल 2000 में गांव में प्रवेश का हवाला िेकर जवभाग ने इस िर जन्यंत्रर कर जल्या था। मेंढा लेखा की ग्ाम सभा जक्तनी आचछाजि्त है। ्यही विह है जक 1950 में वन जवभाग की निरें इस गांव िर जटकी थीं। वन कानून का अजधकार िे जि्या है। गोंड आजिवासी बहुल इस गांव का 80 प्रज्तश्त क्षेत्र घने िंगलों से लोगों के मन में यह वाक्य रच-बस ग्या है। महाराष्ट् का ्यह गांव ग्ाम सवराि की अवधाररा "हमारे गांव में हमारी हम सरकार हैं, जिलली मुंबई में हमारी सरकार है" मेंढा लेखा के गांव के कुल जमलाकर कहा िा सक्ता है जक िेश में एक के बाि एक गांव िांचवामेंट के माध्यम से सथानी्य लोगों को ग्ामसभा के फैसलों का लागू होने का अनुमज्त अजनवा्यचा है। हो्ता है। गांव में हर व्यनक्त अिनी सालाना आ्य से 10 प्रज्तश्त ग्ाम सभा के फैसलों का लागू होने का योगिान िेना है और सभी को इसमें अिना योगिान िेना है। मेंढा लेखा, गढ़वचरौली, महाराष्ट्र
CSE study finds genetically modified ingredients in food products

Manufactured and imported by American healthcare giant Abbott Laboratories, a 400 gram packet of Similac Alimentum costs Rs 2,800 and can meet Nikki’s requirement for about 10 days.

It all started at the weaning stage. Nikki (name changed) was about to turn one when it became evident that she was not gaining weight. After several visits to pediatricians and multiple tests, she was diagnosed with cow milk protein allergy—a disorder found in some 7 per cent of children in the country. The doctors said that Nikki’s immune system considers the protein in cow milk as something that the body has to fight off. This leads to damage of the intestinal mucosa lining for which Nikki is not able to digest most of what she eats and suffers from chronic diarrhoea. They suggested changes in her diet—first eliminate all potentially allergenic foods from her diet, so that the intestinal lining can heal, and then reintroduce one food at a time to monitor possible reactions. Till she outgrows the allergy, doctors recommended a hypoallergenic infant formula, Similac Alimentum, to supplement her nutritional needs.

Manufactured and imported by American healthcare giant Abbott Laboratories, a 400 gram packet of Similac Alimentum costs Rs 2,800 and can meet Nikki’s requirement for about 10 days. But cost is the last thing on the mind of Nikki’s mother, an occupational therapist in east Delhi. Every day, she carefully prepares the formula milk meeting the prescribed calibration standards to ensure that Nikki regains health. Little does she know that all these months she has been feeding her toddler genetically modified (GM) food, whose safety to health has been a matter of concern worldwide. Researchers with the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in Delhi recently found evidence of GM ingredients in Similac Alimentum and another infant formula by Abbott—Similac Isomil, which is meant for the lactose intolerant (Access the full CSE Report). Infants with lactose intolerance cannot digest the sugar found in milk and dairy products and are often prescribed soya milk which is naturally lactose-free. The finding is alarming because the products are being increasingly prescribed by doctors for infants with special health needs.

It is also alarming because in an affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court last year, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) said, “The Central government has not notified any regulation under Section 22 of the Food Safety and Standards Act in regard to (sic) the manufacture, distribution, sale and import of genetically modified foods. Hence, genetically modified foods are not allowed in the country and neither can be regulated till such notification is issued.”

But the list of such illegal GM products being sold in India does not end here.

Over the past six months, CSE researchers analysed 65 food products that are likely to contain soyabean, corn, rapeseed (canola) or cottonseed oil in some form or the other. These are the crops whose genetically modified variants are grown on 99 per cent of the area under transgenic food crops in different parts of the world, and are used in everyday food like cooking oils, breakfast cereals, ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat foods, infant formula and protein supplements. Thiny of the food products are manufactured domestically; the remaining imported.

The products were tested at CSE’s state-of-the-art Pollution Monitoring Laboratory (PML), now at Nimli, Alwar, which has been credited for several hard-hitting exposé over the past two decades. To test food products for the presence of genetically modified ingredients, PML acquired high-end machines and instruments that use the advanced analysis technology of qPCR (quantitative polymerase chain reaction) to amplify GM markers in a food product to detect their presence (see ‘Chasing GM marker’).
found in 32 per cent of the 65 products tested. Almost 80 per cent of these are imported. All the 16 imported products that CSE found GM-positive were from USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Thailand and the UAE. USA and Canada are the leading countries growing genetically modified crops and producing genetically modified food products. Though the remaining do not allow commercial cultivation of GM crops, their food processing units heavily rely on raw material imported from USA and Canada. Hudson canola oil imported from the UAE says on its label that it is “extracted from Canadian oilseeds”.

What’s a GMO

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are those plants, animals or microorganisms, in which the genetic material (deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA) is altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating or through natural recombination. They are produced using genetic engineering technology, also known as recombinant DNA technology, in which scientists transfer select genes from one organism into another of the same species or a non-related species so that the recipient acquires a desired trait. So far, the major use of the technology has been to make crops resistant to pest attacks, improve their tolerance to herbicides and to increase their nutritional content. For instance, scientists have developed Bt variants of cotton, corn and soyabean by inserting the gene of a bacterium, Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt), into the plants’ original genetic material. Bt gene expresses codes for Bt toxin protein, which when ingested by bollworm insects attacks their gut cells and kills them. Similarly, scientists have developed herbicide-tolerant (HT) corn, soyabean, cotton and rapeseed by modifying the gene that produces the enzyme EPSPS (5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-phosphate synthase) in plants. The enzyme produced by the modified gene does not get degraded by herbicides like glyphosate and glufosinate, and therefore does not harm the plant. While there is no clear evidence of these claimed benefits outside confined laboratories, studies do indicate their impact on human health.

To the dismay of CSE researchers, some 17 per cent of the food samples manufactured domestically tested positive for GM. These were samples of refined cottonseed oil, or kapasia tel, sold under the brand names of Tirupati, Ankur, Ginni and Vimal. The sample of crude cottonseed oil also tested GM-positive. This finding clearly indicates that BT cotton, which is the only genetically modified crop allowed for commercial cultivation in the country since 2002, and now occupies 94 per cent of the country’s cotton farms, has found its way into our food system.

These findings are alarming because some of the products found GM-positive are consumed on a daily basis. Consider cottonseed oil for instance. It is a cheap cooking medium—usually 30-40 per cent cheaper than the other vegetable oils like mustard oil and soyabean oil—and is used voraciously by the packaged food industry for making namkeen snacks like bhujia. It is also a permitted ingredient for vanaspati, which is referred to as poor man’s ghee and is used by the bakery industry for providing stability to the products and improving their shelf life.

Then there are those products that are becoming popular among the urban health conscious. Maya Mishra, a teacher in south Delhi, has recently switched to canola oil and vouches for its goodness. She says the oil is a healthy choice for her husband and son, both suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. While the oil is marketed with claims such as “the ability to reduce the risk of heart diseases”, CSE has found four of the seven canola brands GM-positive.

Consumers like Mishra and Nikki’s mother have no way of knowing the truth because labels do not always tell the whole story; some products even take the liberty of making false claims. CSE findings show most samples—74 per cent of the imported products and 96 per cent of the domestic ones—did not mention anything about GM on their labels. When tested, a quarter of them—54 per cent—were found using genetically modified ingredients. Three of the five brands whose labels suggested no use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were also found GM-positive. These were Candrop canola oil from Canada, MORI-NU’s Silken tofu from the US and PromPlus sweet whole kernel corn from Thailand. While Candrop claims that the product is “GMO free” and MORI-NU’s tofu’s claim reads “Non-GMO Project Verified”, the label on PromPlus kernel corn declares “Non-GMO”.

These products are imported by industry behemoths like Jindal Retails (India) Pvt Ltd, Abbott Healthcare Pvt Ltd, Dalma Continental Pvt Ltd and Jivo Wellness Pvt Ltd, and lesser-known Bajajia Food Pvt Ltd, Newage Gourmet Foods in Delhi, Century Edible Cooking Oils Pvt Ltd, Olive Tree Trading Pvt Ltd and Guru Kirpa Impex, Delhi.

Down To Earth (DTE) contacted some of the industry representatives to check if they had the approval to import genetically modified food. While the All Indian Cottonseed Crushers’ Association (AICCA) refused to comment, Jivo Wellness Pvt Ltd, which claims to be the largest seller of canola oil in India, evaded DTE’s queries and the Olive Tree Trading Pvt Ltd did not respond till the magazine went to press.
Anti-discrimination laws and reservation policies were brought in to ensure that Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are protected from discrimination in the spheres of employment, education and political representation. The idea was not just to improve their economic status, but to address the denial of rights and oppression meted out to these groups over the years, and to work towards rectifying their utter lack of representation in public office.

The question of caste still looms large in India, yet many among us refuse to see, hear or understand caste and what it means for those who suffer because of it.

In this feature, we bust some of the common myths regarding caste-based reservation policies. This is based on the empirical and theoretical analyses offered by Sukhadeo Thorat, Nitin Tagade and Ajaya K Naik in a special article published in the Economic & Political Weekly, Vol 51, Issue No 8: “Prejudice against Reservation Policies: How and Why?”

Busted: Four myths on caste-based reservation policies

The debate around reservation policies in India is deeply polarised.
Busted: Four Myths on Caste-Based Reservation Policies

**Myth One**
"So many rich people are benefiting from reservation just because of their caste."

Why should reservation be based on caste and not economic status?

**Myth Two**
"Look at India. Reservation has clearly not helped the poor."

Are reservation policies really helping in reducing poverty?

**Myth Three**
"Unreservation people are getting ': just a develop': country like this."

Are reservation policies slowing India's progress?

**Myth Four**
"Unreservation people are getting ': just a develop': country like this."

Is there a need for reservation policies in this day and age?

---

Many people worry that reservations are making India inefficient. However, we must remember that to achieve economic efficiency and optimize economic outcomes, certain freedoms like the choice of occupation, work, and educational opportunities are necessary preconditions.

What we need in India for many years, which continues till today, is a caste-based society with an unfair economic order. Our caste-based society has affected the mobility of capital, because of the restrictions across caste occupations, on the acquisition of skills, and education. In fact, some occupations are considered impure and polluting.

Reservations are interventions to equalize this unfair order. They help remove these imperfections in the markets and affirmative action policies and are positive steps for economic growth.

As an example, a study on the Indian Railways shows that proportion of SC/ST employees in high-level positions is positively associated with Indian Railways' productivity growth.

---

**Myth One**
"So many rich people are benefiting from reservation just because of their caste."

Why should reservation be based on caste and not economic status?

**Myth Two**
"Look at India. Reservation has clearly not helped the poor."

Are reservation policies really helping in reducing poverty?

**Myth Three**
"Unreservation people are getting ': just a develop': country like this."

Are reservation policies slowing India's progress?

**Myth Four**
"Unreservation people are getting ': just a develop': country like this."

Is there a need for reservation policies in this day and age?

---

While there has been some improvement in access to civil rights for the SCs and STs, discrimination and untouchability practices are still widespread in India, and far from extinct.

Inequalities in India, in terms of ownership of assets, education, employment, civic amenities, and income and poverty, are thus, in large part, to the economic discrimination perpetrated against the SCs.

---

Based on: Prejudice against Reservation Policies: How and Why? | Karthik Gangadharan and Ajay K Nish

Economic & Political Weekly
Those of us even sparsely active on social media must have at some point of scrolling through an ocean of posts come across images of Indian army soldiers, with the caption – “share if you are a true Indian”.

A thriving business
Those of us even sparsely active on social media must have at some point of scrolling through an ocean of posts come across images of Indian army soldiers, with the caption – “share if you are a true Indian”. The not-so-subtle nudge at our patriotism gets us to do as intended and the post goes viral; rarely do we wonder that the image might have an ulterior motive.

Decoded: The business of Facebook pages – selling Modi, God, patriotism and more

On August 6, 2018 Alt News ran a two-part investigation into how an entire underground network of closed/secret Facebook groups are used to buy/sell Facebook to promote celebrities, army, sports and religion before rebranding the pages as political affiliates. The story illustrates how such online pages are then used to earn money by promoting fake/sleazy/low quality content.

The story revealed how the false propaganda machinery works.
1. Modi and BJP
With the advent of the internet, social media has become a money-making factory. Facebook is no longer limited to connecting with friends and playing Farmville but a place to easily connect with potential buyers. As more and more people got politically active on Facebook, a silent market emerged.

Members of Sharing is Caring are not ignorant of the country’s political winds and their deals are in tandem with the same. There are numerous individuals on the group selling pages dedicated to PM Modi, often charging hefty amounts. For instance, in the example below, one of its members is offering a page related to the Prime Minister for Rs 0.12 cost per like (CPL). He claims to have 3,86,000 followers, meaning that his “hell active” page would fetch him Rs 46,350. A member who wishes to purchase a page dedicated to PM Modi is willing to pay up to Rs 0.09 CPL for a minimum of 9 lakh followers. He is offering Rs 81,000.

Another related topic that we found commonly sold was APP, Congress, Rahul Gandhi, etc., weren’t popular choices.

A marketplace like Sharing is Caring exists because social media pages are a good source for making a quick buck. However, apart from monetary reasons, many members of Sharing is Caring are a part of the misinformation ecosystem. Two examples that we picked up are Ankit Pandey and Rajesh Jindal. Alt News has in the past written articles on both these individuals.

Ankit Pandey
In a May 2017 article, we chronicled the activities of Pandey - how he made a mint in sleazy and pro-BJP sites that supplied regular content to Facebook pages.

His website, InsistPost, isn’t as active as it used to be these days. There were many such pages that had the same name. He got his hands on one of them and renamed it Swadeshi Jaganer Manch, which is affiliated to RSS.

He had also posted a picture with BJP Haryana MLA Gian Chand Gupta. rajesh jindal has been a part of Sharing is Caring for six months now (at the time of writing this article), and he is quite an active member. He mentions that the pages he owns are “bhakti (devotion) and ‘cricket’.

There are several other such offers from Jindal. While there are many more such individuals profiting from running Facebook pages, the focus of this article is Sharing is Caring and what sells most on the group.

2. Indian army
One of the simplest ways to engage people is to stroke their beliefs and things they are most passionate about, which explains the numerous offers of Indian army pages. Members are not only buying and selling these pages but also offering them for rent.

There are also rate cards mentioning the CPL of pages.

The video below shows the popularity of Indian army pages on Sharing is Caring.

3. GirLS
One of the most trending topics on the group is “girls.” Members of Sharing is Caring regularly make deals on pages that feature images of women, Instagram being a popular platform.

What’s even more astonishing is that these pages are started with random names of girls and are sold once we got popular. We found a member selling a page named Neha Kumari. It has a following of over 1 lakh and all that the page does is share images of girls and women.

Misogynistic content is a quick way to gain followers. One of these, for instance, is a page with 1.2 lakh following. He adds that the option to rename and/or merge the page (with other pages) is available and asks people to start bidding above Rs 4.50. There are many more such pages on topics related to love, jokes and shayari.

4. Bollywood
Bollywood is yet another favourite topic of the group. They offer dozens of celebrity pages and a lot of times, with the option of renaming the pages.

This pattern is also noticeable in Sharing is Caring, where people sell political pages, including ‘girls pages’, with the option of renaming.

5. Cricket
As the most popular sport in the country, cricket could not be left behind in Sharing is Caring. One of the members offered a Dhoni page with 3.5 lakh followers for Rs 24,500. Another member was selling a 20,000 followers cricket page for Rs 5,500.

Members seem to have a fair understanding of social media, which explains the buying and selling of not only Facebook/Instagram pages dedicated to the sport but also pages dedicated to popular players like Dhoni and Kohli.

6. Devotion
By this point in the article, Alt News was hitting random search results across another popular topic: pages dedicated to God, devotion and religion. One of the members on the group was offering two pages with a combined following of nearly 7.5 lakh for Rs 1.5 lakh (in the collage below).

One of the admins of the group offered a total of four pages (combined following of 5 million) and mentioned that the pages are a part of the same “brand.”

As the most popular sport in the country, cricket could not be left behind in Sharing is Caring. One of the members offered a Dhoni page with 3.5 lakh followers for Rs 24,500. Another member was selling a 20,000 followers cricket page for Rs 5,500.

Members seem to have a fair understanding of social media, which explains the buying and selling of not only Facebook/Instagram pages dedicated to the sport but also pages dedicated to popular players like Dhoni and Kohli.

7. Jokes, shayaris and love
Harmless the group too, and a lot of times, with the option of changing it to something completely different. In the screenshot below, a member is offering a “ladies divas” page with over 1.2 lakh following. He adds that the option to rename and/or merge the page (with other pages) is available and asks people to start bidding above Rs 4.50. There are many more such pages on topics related to love, jokes and shayari.

8. Buying and selling followers/views
It is the number of followers that make a page/account on social media popular and decides its incremental power.

Therefore, any social media page is easy to start, supplying regular ‘vital’ content to increase followers might be time-consuming. Sharing is Caring recognised this demand, and its member can be seen giving rate cards for Instagram and Facebook followers, selling 5,000 followers for Rs 20, and another member was charging Rs 50 per Instagram view.

But it isn’t always possible to buy real views in large quantities, and if Facebook’s algorithm favours popular content, yours might stay hidden in a corner despite your page having lakhs of likes. This is where fake views come into play. A lot of people on Sharing is Caring ask for deals on “fake views” for Facebook and Youtube videos.

9. Fake offer websites
Alt News has recently published a story on fake government offers doing rounds on WhatsApp, claiming that the Prime Minister is giving away free helmets and bicycles. The message included a link that opened up a form, which asked for your personal details, including your residential address. The one-page form had at least two Google ads. Last year, another WhatsApp forward claimed that PM Modi is giving free balance. This too redirected users to a form that asked for their name, phone number, mobile service operator and the state of residence.

We found similar websites selling on Sharing is Caring. While these fake pages are more frequent on websites with fake Paytm offers and Patanjali SIM cards.

While at face value such websites might seem harmless, their repercussions are major. Recently, a fake poll doing rounds on WhatsApp asked for people’s preference for Ram Mandir or Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The communally-charged fake website only had a polling form that had a question: “Which is your choice?" When the desire to make money surpasses ethics, it gives birth to such provocative content.

While reading through Facebook’s terms and conditions, Alt News found that a Facebook employee explained that opening a new page and selling pages is against the website’s policy.

Members also seem to be aware of this regulation, as we inferred from a lot of conversations.

Despite the violation, thousands of individuals on Sharing is Caring are making deals every day, and this is only one such group who we have written about.

Alt News had in the earlier article of this series revealed how Facebook pages drive enormous traffic to sleazy websites to make money. Our next article will elaborate further on the business model of these Facebook pages and websites.
Even a casual look at the video will make it apparent that there are serious issues with lip sync in the video. Alt News decided to dig deeper into this and do an audio analysis of the video. We examined this video from 3 independent sources. Suspect Audio Waveform

We analysed the three videos using an audio editing software called Audacity. What is observed consistently across all the three videos is that in two spots in the video, the volume or the audio level is ZERO (circled). If you listen to the video, you’ll hear a sound of a vehicle in the background, one which resembles a tuktuk. There is also other kinds of commotion going on in the background that is audible. However, all that background noise becomes ZERO at the above mentioned time intervals which raises the initial suspicions about this video and its authenticity.

There is no audio-video sync

As we mentioned earlier, the very first observation about the video was that it didn’t seem to have lip sync. To ascertain whether the audio and video are in sync, we examined individual frames from the video against the audio waveform.

For those who are interested in knowing how to break down a video into individual frames, we used ffmpeg which is a cross-platform video editor. The following highlighted command will break down the video into individual frames at a rate of 30 frames per second and add a timestamp to the top left. The timestamp reflects the position of an individual frame with respect to the start of the video.

A zip file with all the frames obtained using the above command can be downloaded here.

From the above images, we created various collages to see the lip positions of the subjects in the video. The following collage has frames from 3.100 seconds to 3.767 seconds of the video.

As can be seen in the above collage, only the person on the right has his mouth visibly open while the other two people have their mouth shut. The person on the right has his mouth visibly open from 3.200 seconds to 3.700 seconds. If the audio and video are in sync, the audio waveform should show increased audio levels during this period. Does it?

The audio waveform shows almost nil audio levels in the duration 3.250 seconds to 3.500 seconds. This shows that while the subject on the right had his mouth open and is visibly exulting, the audio for the corresponding period doesn’t match and shows close to nil audio levels. This shows that the audio and video are not in sync.

The above observations necessitate that the video be examined by a certified forensic laboratory for its authenticity. With so many easy-to-use software tools available which allows one to dub an audio over an existing video, news channels or journalists shouldn’t be propagating such videos without doing an independent analysis of their own.

Videos like the one above can cause friction between communities of an area and can be used as part of a political agenda. It is therefore of utmost importance that when these videos become viral, extra care must be taken before mainstream media further popularises such videos.

Two persons have been reportedly arrested with regards to the above video and we hope that police investigation will throw further light on the authenticity of the video. The audio analysis of the videos circulating on social media raise several red flags and hence a detailed forensic analysis of the video should be done.
The Malayalam online portal Azhimukham carried a hard-hitting series over several months on the murky land deals by senior clergy of the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala.

The scandal finally forced Cardinal George Alencherry to step down from administrative responsibilities. A criminal case was registered against him. What started out as a gossipy tidbit ended up being investigated seriously and mainstreamed by Azhimukham.
កូនជាតិមន្ត្រី ប្រឹក្សាមុខ guildon.Internet, ដ្លាត់ប្រឹក្សាមុខ ដែលគេអាច្វែងទៅលើវេបសារណ៍ ។ កូនជាតិមន្ត្រី ប្រឹក្សាមុខ guildon.Internet ត្រូវបានរៀបចំ ដោយ ក្រុមបរិមាណ កូនជាតិមន្ត្រី Intertop ។

ការសម្រមោងស្នើសុំភាពយន្ត និងការគាំទ្រមាននៅក្នុងការដោះស进驻ីការអតិថិជន ជាច្រើន។ ការដោះស进驻ីការអតិថិជន ជាច្រើននៅក្នុងការសម្រមោងស្នើសុំភាពយន្ត និងការគាំទ្រមាននៅក្នុងការដោះស进驻ីការអតិថិជន ជាច្រើន។

សម្រមោងស្នើសុំភាពយន្ត និងការគាំទ្រមាននៅក្នុងការដោះស进驻ីការអតិថិជន ជាច្រើន។
NARENDRA MODI’S FIRST PRIME MINISTERIAL visit to France, in April 2015, came amid long-drawn negotiations over India’s purchase of Rafale warplanes, manufactured by the French company Dassault Aviation.

The story led to vociferous debate around the deal finalised by the NDA government, particularly over the pricing issue and the contract being awarded to Reliance Defence that has negligible experience in defence manufacturing. The article was translated into French and published by the Paris-based weekly Courrier Internationale. It also sparked a clutch of public interest litigations currently being heard in the Supreme Court.

On a wing and a prayer

NARENDRA MODI’S FIRST PRIME MINISTERIAL visit to France, in April 2015, came amid long-drawn negotiations over India’s purchase of Rafale warplanes, manufactured by the French company Dassault Aviation. In 2012, a Congress-led government had declared Dassault the lowest bidder in a contest to supply 126 fighter jets for the Indian Air Force. After nearly ten years of cautious planning, field trials and rigorous evaluations, the country was, by most accounts, on the brink of finally acquiring its long-awaited seven squadrons, when Modi’s government took over. Modi now had a chance to make his mark on the negotiations.

The Indian prime minister’s schedule for the first full day of his visit included, among much else, round-table discussions with French CEOs from the infrastructure and defence industries, as well as talks with the French president. Afterwards, Modi announced to the media that he had discussed a government-to-government deal—foreign military sales negotiated directly between two countries, instead of a global tendering process—to purchase 36 Rafale jets in “fly-away condition” as soon as possible.

This completely bypassed the prior acquisition process. Dassault, like any foreign defence manufacturer selling to India, has to reinvest part of the total cost of any large deal back into the country—through some combination of local manufacturing, investment and transfers of technology. Earlier, the Indian government had stipulated that, to meet this obligation, whichever firm won the competition would have to work with the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited as its main partner. Now, suddenly, HAL was no longer in the picture.

This turn of events blindsided even top officials in Modi’s own administration. Two days before the
prime minister's trip to France, his foreign secretary, S Jaishankar, told the media in Delhi discussions on the Rafale issue were underway between Dassault, HAL and the Indian defence ministry. A fortnight before that, Dassault’s CEO spoke publicly of his “great satisfaction to hear … from HAL chairman that we are in agreement for the responsibilities sharing”; and of his strong belief that “contract finalisation and signature could come very soon.”

Soon after Modi’s announcement, Manohar Parrikar, his defence minister at the time, said in a television interview that he did not yet know the details of the discussions. In another interview, he said, “the decision is probably the outcome of the discussions between the prime minister and the president of France.”

Within a few months, Parrikar told the parliament that the original process to acquire 126 fighter jets was officially void. In September 2016, he and the French defence minister signed a government-to-government agreement for the purchase of the 36 Rafale jets from Dassault. The deal was reported to be worth $8.7 billion—roughly Rs 59,000 crore, or $8.8 billion. Dassault was required to reinvest half the value of the deal in India.

THIRTEEN DAYS BEFORE MODI announced the agreement, Reliance Group, headed by the industrialist Anil Ambani—who was also in Paris during Modi’s visit—registered a new subsidiary named Reliance Defence Limited. This was new territory for the company—it had no history in the defence sector, except for very recently securing a major stake in a shipbuilding firm handling military contracts. Ten days after the Rafale agreement was signed, Reliance Group and Dassault announced the creation of a joint venture, Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited, majority-owned by Reliance Group. From having had nothing to do with aerospace before, Ambani’s corporation was suddenly guaranteed aerospace business worth thousands of crores of rupees.

The defence minister’s “deal set of a war of words ever since. In November 2017, shortly before he went to Paris for the Modi government’s choices—and what they mean for Modi’s legacy, perhaps the biggest manufacturing deal in its history, to yet further domestic defence-manufacturing; it is even more surprising that it did so under Modi’s watch. The present government has talked up defence manufacturing as a major plank of its “Make in India” campaign—an effort to bring in foreign partnerships and investment. Yet Modi—on his own initiative, if the surprised reactions of his own officials were true—snatched away a state-owned defence-manufacturing company’s chance at participating in the business of manufacturing deal in its history, to even more surprising that it did under Modi’s watch. The present government has talked up defence manufacturing as a major plank of its “Make in India” campaign—an effort to bring in foreign partnerships and investment.
opportunity to develop defence technology inside ambitious plans to modernise India's military strength. As Pakistan.

fighter aircrafts and has started selling to countries such can be inordinately slow. Meanwhile China, considered the arsenals of all its armed forces, and much of their existing armament is almost obsolete, or already so.

defence, India is a major player in the global arms-

latest budget, which sets aside Rs 2.95 lakh crore for production, and few private firms have the facilities and even when it allowed private participation in defence initiative had offered a lot of hope to small private manufacturers. However, instead of committing to buy it once I put my money into the market. "Okay, you don't invest," said an industry official, "and demonstrate its performance at their own cost, means that manufacturers have to develop the product and demonstrate its performance at their own cost, rather than relying on the defence ministry from the defence ministry. According to him, foreign companies have become a workshop. According to him, foreign companies have been using the vast platform given to them within the Indian defence industry only to assemble their own products, rather than helping Indian companies in manufacturing. Bureau procedures have made it nearly impossible for small-scale companies to get a foothold. In 2005, the government took up. As a long-term solution, it also laid down the guiding principles underlying this new procedure, approved in 2016, requires at least 30 acquisition predicament.
The consortium of European countries that makes several countries outside its home in the United States.

India. This, coupled with his much-hyped "Make in India" initiative, offered hope that the government would stem the drain of the defence deal if flawed, seemed to have found some answers to the country's defence-acquisition predicament.

INDIA'S NEED FOR NEW FIGHTERS was already apparent in the 1990s, as light defence fighters saw the country heading for a shortage of replacements in the works for about a decade and had vastly overrun its initial budget, but was nowhere near ready. The air force, to fill the gaps in its fleet that the Tejas was meant to address, continued to stretch out the service life of old fighters—especially the Soviet-designed MiG-21. The programme was to be the country's largest-ever defence acquisition. This, coupled with his much-hyped "Make in India" initiative, offered hope that the government would stem the drain of the defence deal if flawed, seemed to have found some answers to the country's defence-acquisition predicament. The programme envisioned harmonizing the requirements of both the public and private sector by relaxing licensing norms, simplifying procurement procedures and increasing the role of foreign direct investment.

On the face of it, the government seemed to be deliberating on its promise. In 2016, a new category of procurement led "the industry yet to move. It was an early favourite to meet this need was the Mirage-2000, also built by Dassault, which had impressed at Kargil. In 2002, the government, then led by the BJP, approved the purchase of ten squadrons, at least seven below its sanctioned strength. By 2007, the air force was operating just three squadrons, at least seven below its sanctioned strength.

In the aftermath, the government decided to open the competition. The government did not take the offer. As a "single-source deal"—that is, a deal that bypassed the competitive bidding process—led India to the Rafale deal, even if flawed, seemed to have found some answers to the country's defence-acquisition predicament.

The standing committee called for an upgrade programme for the existing combat fleet, which the government took up. As a long-term solution, it also laid down the guiding principles underlying this new procedure, approved in 2016, requires at least 30 acquisition predicament.

An early favourite to meet this need was the Mirage-2000, also built by Dassault, which had impressed at Kargil. In 2002, the government, then led by the BJP, approved the purchase of ten squadrons, at least seven below its sanctioned strength. By 2007, the air force was operating just three squadrons, at least seven below its sanctioned strength.

The government published an updated defence budget in January, in anticipation of a tender. The government earmarked Rs 42,000 crore for the deal—over $10 billion—which was to be the country's largest-ever defence acquisition.

The government published an updated defence budget in January, in anticipation of a tender. The government earmarked Rs 42,000 crore for the deal—over $10 billion—which was to be the country's largest-ever defence acquisition.

The government published an updated defence budget in January, in anticipation of a tender. The government earmarked Rs 42,000 crore for the deal—over $10 billion—which was to be the country's largest-ever defence acquisition.

The government published an updated defence budget in January, in anticipation of a tender. The government earmarked Rs 42,000 crore for the deal—over $10 billion—which was to be the country's largest-ever defence acquisition.
the required criteria in its technical bid. The Rafale was to be left out of upcoming field trials. A month later, though, the government said it could not accept the life-cycle cost clause in the agreement as it was a new concept. Simultaneously, it also received representations from many others, including some responsible opposition leaders, objecting to the lifecycle-cost clause. This clause, Antony maintained, had been included in the evaluations because the air-force had insisted on it. He decided “to call the files, and made a clear noting to the effect that the final proposal must be prepared by the government as per the Lifecycle cost clause is settled.”

Addressing the disputes meant a delay of several months. The defence ministry finally signed off on the evaluation process in July 2012. Negotiations between the Indian and French governments turned out from there—with constant diplomatic prodding from the highest levels of the French government—but hit a wall. In December 2012, the finance minister, Aji Shukla, wrote two years later that the defence ministry had found that the Rafale was too high, and that air-force pilot training would have to be supplemented. Dassault signed a memorandum of understanding with India on October 2, 2013, and it was unveiled in 2017. It called for the government to simultaneously select private Indian companies and foreign companies to participate in the Rafale project. The government reserved contracts in four sectors—fighter aircraft, submarines, combat helicopters, and transport planes—operating under the strategic-partner model.

Dassault’s country manager, PV Rao, fell foul of the air force. Rao, effectively a local dealer for Dassault, had accused an air-force wing commander of demanding a bribe in connection with a parking slot for the Rafale at an annual defence exhibition organised by the Ministry of Defence. This wing commander was reportedly reported to an administrative officer, and barred him from dealing with IAF in the future. The wing commander was court-martialled and dismissed. Rao currently serves as a director for Dassault Aircraft Services India Limited, a wholly owned local subsidiary of the French company—an unlisted company operating in south Delhi.

In April 2011, the government shortlisted just two fighters: the Rafale and the Typhoon. Dassault and the Eurofighter consortium were asked to formulate commercial bids. This set off a string of visits by French officials to promote the Rafale deal, and from British officials—the United Kingdom is part of the Eurofighter consortium—backing the Typhoon.

The competition closed a deal with Dassault to upgrade its fleet of 52 Mirage-2000s for around Rs 11,000 crore, translating to over $145 million for each aircraft. The French companies, led by mower, had assured Dassault that the Rafale was going to be left out of upcoming field trials. A month later, though, the government said it could not accept the life-cycle cost clause in the agreement as it was a new concept. Simultaneously, it also received representations from many others, including some responsible opposition leaders, objecting to the lifecycle-cost clause. This clause, Antony maintained, had been included in the evaluations because the air-force had insisted on it. He decided “to call the files, and made a clear noting to the effect that the final proposal must be prepared by the government as per the Lifecycle cost clause is settled.”

Addressing the disputes meant a delay of several months. The defence ministry finally signed off on the evaluation process in July 2012. Negotiations between the Indian and French governments turned out from there—with constant diplomatic prodding from the highest levels of the French government—but hit a wall. In December 2012, the finance minister, Aji Shukla, wrote two years later that the defence ministry had found that the Rafale was too high, and that air-force pilot training would have to be supplemented. Dassault signed a memorandum of understanding with India on October 2, 2013, and it was unveiled in 2017. It called for the government to simultaneously select private Indian companies and foreign companies to participate in the Rafale project. The government reserved contracts in four sectors—fighter aircraft, submarines, combat helicopters, and transport planes—operating under the strategic-partner model.

Dassault’s country manager, PV Rao, fell foul of the air force. Rao, effectively a local dealer for Dassault, had accused an air-force wing commander of demanding a bribe in connection with a parking slot for the Rafale at an annual defence exhibition organised by the Ministry of Defence. This wing commander was reportedly reported to an administrative officer, and barred him from dealing with IAF in the future. The wing commander was court-martialled and dismissed. Rao currently serves as a director for Dassault Aircraft Services India Limited, a wholly owned local subsidiary of the French company—an unlisted company operating in south Delhi.

In April 2011, the government shortlisted just two fighters: the Rafale and the Typhoon. Dassault and the Eurofighter consortium were asked to formulate commercial bids. This set off a string of visits by French officials to promote the Rafale deal, and from British officials—the United Kingdom is part of the Eurofighter consortium—backing the Typhoon.

The competition closed a deal with Dassault to upgrade its fleet of 52 Mirage-2000s for around Rs 11,000 crore, translating to over $145 million for each aircraft. The French companies, led by mower, had assured Dassault that the Rafale was going to be left out of upcoming field trials. A month later, though, the government said it could not accept the life-cycle cost clause in the agreement as it was a new concept. Simultaneously, it also received representations from many others, including some responsible opposition leaders, objecting to the lifecycle-cost clause. This clause, Antony maintained, had been included in the evaluations because the air-force had insisted on it. He decided “to call the files, and made a clear noting to the effect that the final proposal must be prepared by the government as per the Lifecycle cost clause is settled.”

Addressing the disputes meant a delay of several months. The defence ministry finally signed off on the evaluation process in July 2012. Negotiations between the Indian and French governments turned out from there—with constant diplomatic prodding from the highest levels of the French government—but hit a wall. In December 2012, the finance minister, Aji Shukla, wrote two years later that the defence ministry had found that the Rafale was too high, and that air-force pilot training would have to be supplemented. Dassault signed a memorandum of understanding with India on October 2, 2013, and it was unveiled in 2017. It called for the government to simultaneously select private Indian companies and foreign companies to participate in the Rafale project. The government reserved contracts in four sectors—fighter aircraft, submarines, combat helicopters, and transport planes—operating under the strategic-partner model.

Dassault’s country manager, PV Rao, fell foul of the air force. Rao, effectively a local dealer for Dassault, had accused an air-force wing commander of demanding a bribe in connection with a parking slot for the Rafale at an annual defence exhibition organised by the Ministry of Defence. This wing commander was reportedly reported to an administrative officer, and barred him from dealing with IAF in the future. The wing commander was court-martialled and dismissed. Rao currently serves as a director for Dassault Aircraft Services India Limited, a wholly owned local subsidiary of the French company—an unlisted company operating in south Delhi.

In April 2011, the government shortlisted just two fighters: the Rafale and the Typhoon. Dassault and the Eurofighter consortium were asked to formulate commercial bids. This set off a string of visits by French officials to promote the Rafale deal, and from British officials—the United Kingdom is part of the Eurofighter consortium—backing the Typhoon.

The competition closed a deal with Dassault to upgrade its fleet of 52 Mirage-2000s for around Rs 11,000 crore, translating to over $145 million for each aircraft. The French companies, led by mower, had assured Dassault that the Rafale was going to be left out of upcoming field trials. A month later, though, the government said it could not accept the life-cycle cost clause in the agreement as it was a new concept. Simultaneously, it also received representations from many others, including some responsible opposition leaders, objecting to the lifecycle-cost clause. This clause, Antony maintained, had been included in the evaluations because the air-force had insisted on it. He decided “to call the files, and made a clear noting to the effect that the final proposal must be prepared by the government as per the Lifecycle cost clause is settled.”

Addressing the disputes meant a delay of several months. The defence ministry finally signed off on the evaluation process in July 2012. Negotiations between the Indian and French governments turned out from there—with constant diplomatic prodding from the highest levels of the French government—but hit a wall. In December 2012, the finance minister, Aji Shukla, wrote two years later that the defence ministry had found that the Rafale was too high, and that air-force pilot training would have to be supplemented. Dassault signed a memorandum of understanding with India on October 2, 2013, and it was unveiled in 2017. It called for the government to simultaneously select private Indian companies and foreign companies to participate in the Rafale project. The government reserved contracts in four sectors—fighter aircraft, submarines, combat helicopters, and transport planes—operating under the strategic-partner model.

Dassault’s country manager, PV Rao, fell foul of the air force. Rao, effectively a local dealer for Dassault, had accused an air-force wing commander of demanding a bribe in connection with a parking slot for the Rafale at an annual defence exhibition organised by the Ministry of Defence. This wing commander was reportedly reported to an administrative officer, and barred him from dealing with IAF in the future. The wing commander was court-martialled and dismissed. Rao currently serves as a director for Dassault Aircraft Services India Limited, a wholly owned local subsidiary of the French company—an unlisted company operating in south Delhi.
offset partners suggests that the government was, at the least, enthusiastic to turn a blind eye to this question. As a result, the new orders came in with even more complacency and with even less scrutiny. The defence ministry stated as late as in February 2016 that Reliance was a "leading player". The defence ministry said that "no Indian Offset Partner for the Rafale deal 2016 deal for Rafale Aircraft has been so far selected by the vendor."

On 4th December 2017, Anil Ambani reportedly wrote a letter to Rahul Gandhi refuting the claims the latter had made in parliament. The letter said the partnership between Dassault and Reliance was "independent agreement between two corporate private sector entities, and Governments had no role to play in this matter." It is disingenuous to suggest an agreement between two private companies, when dealing with defence products, has nothing to do with the government, given the complex bureaucratic regulations that govern acquisition processes. He was able to get away with it because of the 2015 amendment allowing delayed disclosure, the same one that allowed the government to make promises without fulfilling them.

But air-force headquarters, replying to a Right to Information application I submitted earlier this year, said that the offset agreement in the Rafale deal was signed on the same day as the purchase agreement itself—in September 2016.

DASSAULT AND RELIANCE GROUP held a ceremony in October 2017 to lay the foundation stone for a manufacturing facility in a special economic zone in Andhra Pradesh. The dignitaries at the ceremony included the company’s “current order book isn’t encouraging.”

The hype and bonhomie presented at the ceremony was formalised in 2006, Anil walked away with the conglomerate’s telecom, power, natural-resources and financial-services businesses, which then formed the company’s “current order book isn’t encouraging.”

As Ambani’s family strategy. It was Mukesh’s Reliance Industries that Dassault first proposed to partner with after being declared the lowest bidder in the 126-jet competition, in 2012. In less than two weeks after the defence ministry declared to go with Dassault, Mukesh signed a pact with the company, but subsequently chose not to pursue business with it for a number of reasons. It was Mukesh, who had a chance to prove his detractors wrong.

He started off well. When he took Reliance Power

offset partners suggests that the government was, at the least, enthusiastic to turn a blind eye to this question. As a result, the new orders came in with even more complacency and with even less scrutiny. The defence ministry stated as late as in February 2016 that Reliance was a "leading player". The defence ministry said that "no Indian Offset Partner for the Rafale deal 2016 deal for Rafale Aircraft has been so far selected by the vendor."

On 4th December 2017, Anil Ambani reportedly wrote a letter to Rahul Gandhi refuting the claims the latter had made in parliament. The letter said the partnership between Dassault and Reliance was "independent agreement between two corporate private sector entities, and Governments had no role to play in this matter." It is disingenuous to suggest an agreement between two private companies, when dealing with defence products, has nothing to do with the government, given the complex bureaucratic regulations that govern acquisition processes. He was able to get away with it because of the 2015 amendment allowing delayed disclosure, the same one that allowed the government to make promises without fulfilling them.

But air-force headquarters, replying to a Right to Information application I submitted earlier this year, said that the offset agreement in the Rafale deal was signed on the same day as the purchase agreement itself—in September 2016.

DASSAULT AND RELIANCE GROUP held a ceremony in October 2017 to lay the foundation stone for a manufacturing facility in a special economic zone in Andhra Pradesh. The dignitaries at the ceremony included the company’s “current order book isn’t encouraging.”

The hype and bonhomie presented at the ceremony was formalised in 2006, Anil walked away with the conglomerate’s telecom, power, natural-resources and financial-services businesses, which then formed the company’s “current order book isn’t encouraging.”

As Ambani’s family strategy. It was Mukesh’s Reliance Industries that Dassault first proposed to partner with after being declared the lowest bidder in the 126-jet competition, in 2012. In less than two weeks after the defence ministry declared to go with Dassault, Mukesh signed a pact with the company, but subsequently chose not to pursue business with it for a number of reasons. It was Mukesh, who had a chance to prove his detractors wrong.

He started off well. When he took Reliance Power
idea that defence deals would stem the corporation's headaches. Ambani also spoke of defence manufacturing as a major driver of future growth for Reliance Group. The chairman of Reliance Infrastructure—a subsidiary of Reliance Group, which in turn counts Reliance Defence among its subsidiaries—declared to shareholders in 2016 that he saw opportunities in the defence sector worth Rs 1 lakh crore per year for the next 15 years. The corporation assembled a team of well-known defence experts to bolster credibility. However, it soon became clear to many of them that there was no clear long-term vision. "Because Reliance has no technical capability," one of them told me, it was important to "pick up a project, understand the technology and know nuances of it—so a lot of investment has to come towards building capability." Instead, it seemed more interested in attracting offset partners that would give a fillip to its business, rather than deliberate on the nature of the orders themselves from a perspective of technology development. The moment they realised that they were "more of trophies for them," as one official said, they left.

Three days before the proposal for the submarines was approved, Reliance Defence Systems Private Limited was incorporated. And three months later, it released a tender, in what was the first defence procurement exercise under the Strategic Partnership Policy, with a chapter on the strategic-partnership model, and whether the bidding happened, is not yet publicly known. In February 2018, I filed an RTI application with the defence ministry to ascertain which shipyards had been selected, and what criteria had been applied in doing so, but received no reply.

One of the firms, Pipavav Defence, has secured from the Rafale deal has not been enough to turn it around. Nor have other deals for the conglomerate's defence businesses—several of which show a pattern familiar from the Rafale saga, of government actions boosting Ambani's fortunes. How the government, in the name of defence spending, is destined for Ambani's corporation is an open question, but as is whether Reliance Group can survive long enough to see much of it at all. The situation has even been more peculiar in June 2017, when the defence ministry terminated an order for naval vessels that had earlier been signed with another private shipbuilder, ABG Shipyard, citing the company's tenuous financial health. However, RNaval had secured a large loan that the RELC of the government had guaranteed, which enabled it to continue with its debt restructuring RNaval's refinancing plan was published three days after the government's decision to cancel Hindustan Shipyard Limited's (HSL) nomination for the project. The company was not eligible to be considered. Interestingly, the second contender as the engineering firm Larsen & Toubro (L&T) had also applied to bid for RNaval, but its company was one of only two private Indian firms that had been granted permission to bid under the Strategic Partnership Policy. L&T's response was that it was "on the verge of bankruptcy.部委投资者 had reportedly offered to take a large stake in the company, indicating that their bids were more of trophies for them," as one official said, they left.

The same month that the navy annulled its order for building amphibious warships, the LPDs. When the government first invited bids for the LPD project, in 2013, it called for the building of four vessels in two different shipyards. It would select through tendering a private or public shipyard to build two vessels, and nominate a second shipyard to make another, after a transfer of know-how from the original shipyard. (Defence procurement procedures allow such nomination-based manufacturing for naval projects.) The government had earlier nominated Hindustan Shipyard Limited to build the first two ships, and Pipavav Shipyard and others had bid for the rest. In early 2017, however, the government decided that all four ships would be built by a single shipyard to be selected via a new round of tenders. Reliance Defence and Larsen & Toubro, both private firms, were reportedly the only firms to be invited to bid.

For as long as RNaval was still in the restructuring process, it was not eligible to be considered. Interestingly, RNaval's refinancing plan was published three days after the government's decision to cancel Hindustan Shipyard Limited's (HSL) nomination for the project. The company was not eligible to be considered. Interestingly, the second contender as the engineering firm Larsen & Toubro (L&T) had also applied to bid for RNaval, but its company was one of only two private Indian firms that had been granted permission to bid under the Strategic Partnership Policy. L&T's response was that it was "on the verge of bankruptcy.部委 investors had reportedly offered to take a large stake in the company, indicating that their bids were more of trophies for them," as one official said, they left.

In early 2017, however, the government decided that all four ships would be built by a single shipyard to be selected via a new round of tenders. Reliance Defence and Larsen & Toubro, both private firms, were reportedly the only firms to be invited to bid.

For as long as RNaval was still in the restructuring process, it was not eligible to be considered. Interestingly, RNaval's refinancing plan was published three days after the government's decision to cancel Hindustan Shipyard Limited's (HSL) nomination for the project. The company was not eligible to be considered. Interestingly, the second contender as the engineering firm Larsen & Toubro (L&T) had also applied to bid for RNaval, but its company was one of only two private Indian firms that had been granted permission to bid under the Strategic Partnership Policy. L&T's response was that it was "on the verge of bankruptcy.部委 investors had reportedly offered to take a large stake in the company, indicating that their bids were more of trophies for them," as one official said, they left.

In early 2017, however, the government decided that all four ships would be built by a single shipyard to be selected via a new round of tenders. Reliance Defence and Larsen & Toubro, both private firms, were reportedly the only firms to be invited to bid.
owned firms, the DCNS-Mazagon partnership was not a candidate for the LPD and advanced submarine projects that the government planned to award to private firms. The DCNS-Mazagon partnership was not a realistic option for several reasons.

RNaval modified its offer to the Indian government by offering to pay Rs 754.5 crore (approximately $100 million) for a 40% stake in DCNS, and DCNS would take a 26% stake in RNaval, with a share price of Rs 6,000 per share. This offer was not enough for the government in light of the problems that RNaval had encountered. For its part, the DCNS-Mazagon partnership had failed to submit a concrete plan for the project.

In late 2018, RNaval offered an additional Rs 500 crore (approximately $7 million) for a 20% stake in DCNS, with a share price of Rs 6,000 per share. However, this offer was not enough for the government in light of the problems that RNaval had encountered. For its part, the DCNS-Mazagon partnership had failed to submit a concrete plan for the project.
BUSINESS

In March 2018, The Ken ran a two-part story on Vakrangee, a Mumbai-headquartered e-governance company that had drawn the scrutiny of securities market regulator, SEBI. Little was known about the financial workings of the entity. Ken’s investigation revealed that the company share price and business model did not add up although its market cap had spiralled dramatically from Rs 50 crores in 2009 to Rs 50,000 crores in January 2018.

Soon after the exposé, the company’s auditors, PWC, resigned. The share price tanked. Many institutional investors fled. The company thereafter abandoned the idea for a public buy back of its shares.

The Mumbai-headquartered IT company was in hot water with Sebi recently, but then it disappeared from the news cycle. Very few know about Vakrangee, and fewer still are willing to talk about it.

The Ken

Things don’t add up at Vakrangee

The Mumbai-headquartered IT company was in hot water with Sebi recently, but then it disappeared from the news cycle. Very few know about Vakrangee, and fewer still are willing to talk about it.

Is the address correct? “Yes.”
Do you know about them? “Yes, I have heard about them. But they were never here.”
It is a surreal conversation. The address is right, to the T, from the annual report of Vakrangee, but the kendra doesn’t exist.
A few weeks back, The Ken took a short trip to Kota. The city in Rajasthan, known for its Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) coaching classes, hotels that don’t allow unmarried couples to room up, a biggish train station, and, well, not much else. The small city is

Is the address correct? “Yes.”
Do you know about them? “Yes, I have heard about them. But they were never here.”
It is a surreal conversation. The address is right, to the T, from the annual report of Vakrangee, but the kendra doesn’t exist.
A few weeks back, The Ken took a short trip to Kota. The city in Rajasthan, known for its Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) coaching classes, hotels that don’t allow unmarried couples to room up, a biggish train station, and, well, not much else. The small city is
where Mumbai-based Information Technology (IT) services company, Vakrangee Ltd, has its largest number of kendras or outlets. The company, headed by Dinesh Nandwana, has a business model, which can be best described as a supermarket for financial inclusion services. It has white label ATMs, helps people open and run bank accounts, gives out money to those enrolled in rural employment schemes, enables people to buy insurance, and, in some cases, it helps customers connect to Amazon, which is trying to reach the rural population of the country.

To offer these services, Vakrangee has outlets, which it calls kendras. It claims it has over 40,000 such kendras in the country. In Kota, it has 146 kendras listed on the website. Of the 146, The Ken visited 20 centres. Of the 20, only four were fully functional. It means they had a working ATM, a tie-up with a public sector bank and offered eMitra services provided by the Rajasthan government—essentially a centre for bill payment and voter registration. Eight other centres had no services except for eMitra.

The rest were never part of Vakrangee. Some had applied to be part of the network, but for one reason or another, they were never operational, and others had never even applied for a franchise.

We reached out to Vakrangee. What gives? “We are in process for appointment of a reputed consultant to carry out business quality analysis of Vakrangee kendras and have scheduled a Board meeting on 31 March 2018. The consultant would physically visit the stores and also analyse the activation of various services at the kendra outlet,” said a Vakrangee spokesperson in an emailed reply.

The company then declared to the exchange that it had appointed the consulting firm Grant Thornton to audit the kendras. Of the four functional kendras, three are owned and have been run by Nandwana’s nephew, Nikhil, for the last three years. The other is run by Aman Agrawal, who had appointed the consulting firm Grant Thornton to reply. ‘The consultant would physically visit the stores and also analyse the activation of various services at the kendra outlet,” said a Vakrangee spokesperson in an emailed reply.

Out of the synchronised trades could be tracked back to 119 companies. “It then said that only 12% of the synchronised trades could be tracked back to these 119 entities! Neither did it observe any Circular trading. So, Sebi announced it is not going to pursue the matter any further. So much for investor protection!” Chakraborty exclaims.

“First, Sebi is not god or an investigation agency like RBI or ED. However, it has its own system for working on the violation of the securities law,” says JN Gupta, former executive director, Sebi. He adds that the monitoring body has surveillance systems to keep track of companies, but it is not easy. “Sebi tries to do everything that is possible, but somehow or other, this is not the final outcome is not to the liking of the public or Sebi.” While that may be true, there are several companies which it needs to look at carefully. Companies where the most basic check suggests that things don’t add up. Vakrangee is a good case in point.

First look

Vakrangee had been moving along for the last three years when it pivoted to the kendra-led model. Its stock price had gone up on the back of winning Aadhaar enrolment contracts and being the logistics partner for Amazon in rural and slum areas. But in January 2018, Vakrangee bought 2 million shares of another listed entity, PC Jeweller Ltd. For Rs 112 crore (~$17 million). It was an unusual purchase and was announced on the stock exchange. This is when news of the Sebi investigation started getting traction.

Vakrangee released a statement claiming it had received no notice that it wasn’t under investigation. But one of the transfers on the Mumbai Mirrors reported that the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) had started an investigation against Vakrangee for share price manipulation. Sebi, curiously, cleared Vakrangee in its short-lived enquiry. More on this, in just a little while.

Sebi has given a clean chit to Vakrangee! The initial list under investigation included 12 related entities that were also related to the stock. The market cap rocketed; it had continued this growth over the last six months of the current financial year.

Vakrangee is a curious company. It does many unique things. It makes money off financial inclusion; it was a penny stock a decade ago and is now trading in triple digits; its market cap rocketed; it had continued this growth over the last six months of the current financial year.

Vakrangee got reduced on 28 May 2013 by 2.31% and was announced on the stock exchange. This is where matters get confusing. Vakrangee, in FY17, made a profit after tax of Rs 522 crore (~$80 million). Red flag. Vakrangee could have done a lot with this cash. It had a license to set up 15,000 ATMs. However, over the last four years, it has been able to set up just 800. The company currently claims it has just 25 self-run kendras; it could invest in growing those; it could easily put this in corporate fixed deposit receipts (FDRs). But it chooses to let it lie in the current account. Vakrangee says let cash lie there because it’s payments from a “legacy e-governance project”, and it only arrived in the last week of March so it showed it in the current account. Also, that it had been paying debts from the money in the current account.

Somehow, this doesn’t explain why it had never invested its cash before. A closer look at the balance sheet shows many inconsistencies. How does Vakrangee end up making the Rs 4,000 crore (~$615 million) it claims it made?

This is where matters get confusing. Vakrangee didn’t make Rs 4,000 crore in revenue from 35,000 kendras. According to the annual report, the company made about Rs 1,500 crore (~$230 million) from e-governance contracts alone. The remaining Rs 2,500 crore (~$384 million) was made from the kendras in one fiscal year. This comes down to the company spending its Rs 60,000 (~$922) from each centre, every month. “This number looks like a lot, but if 300 people made transactions, you would make that money,” says Amneet Sabarwal, president, investor relations, Vakrangee.

If Sabarwal is taken at face value, it brings Vakrangee’s revenue split to 40%. But he insists the revenue share between Vakrangee and the franchises is 80-20, with Vakrangee taking the lower billing. How? The company combines gross merchandise value (GMV) and net revenue. Sabarwal refuses to break it down any further. Vakrangee also includes its ATM and e-commerce services under revenue. In fact, it claims it processes 25 orders a day from Amazon from these kendras with an average ticket size of Rs 500 (~$7). “These numbers seem high. Especially in rural areas,
The biggest question marks on the company's balance sheet. “Opening stock is usually something that is consumed to generate revenue. What is that Vakrangee uses?” he asks.

When asked what kind of stock is consumed to generate revenue, the company spokesperson said, “Our cost of goods sold include the goods as well as service commission paid to the franchisee. Also, the governance business includes electoral rolls as well as the hardware kits sold to the franchisees.”

The cost of goods in the inventory is quite high vis-à-vis the revenue in the company’s books, Mangal says. “There is no clarification from the management on this and the clarification they give does not add up to the numbers,” he adds.

A step further

Following the market uproar and a steep fall in share price, the company announced a one-time share buyback of Rs 1,000 crore (~$153 million) and a dividend payout of Rs 250 crore (~$38 million) in February. The company, however, did not give a timeline of the buyback.

On closer inspection

Based on the reported Q2 and Q3 FY18 financials, the current net worth (paid-up equity + free reserves) of Vakrangee should be around Rs 2,800 crore ($430 million). Hence, the company cannot do a buyback of more than Rs 700 crore.

“Surprisingly, over the last two months, we haven’t seen any additional details on the buyback from the company. If it feels the price fall is unjustified, it should take advantage of the situation and buyback shares at a low price. This will be value-accretive for shareholders. Why is it waiting for the price to recover?” asks Amit Mantri, Managing Partner, 2Point2 Capital PMS.

Based on the reported Q2 and Q3 FY18 financials, Mantri estimates that the current net worth (paid-up equity + free reserves) of Vakrangee should be around Rs 2,800 crore ($430 million). Hence, the company cannot do a buyback of more than Rs 700 crore ($107 million), if it plans to do in the next month or two, he says.

After the share buyback announcement, the back-to-back lower circuit came to a stop and the stock price started climbing, hitting consecutive upper circuits for a couple of trading session. The momentum did not sustain, and the price peaked at Rs 286 (~$4.4) per share and has been in free fall since then, hitting the lower circuit every day. The market cap now stands at Rs 22,245 crore (~$3.4 billion), as of Monday.

But this doesn’t bother Vakrangee too much. On 31 March, however, the company announced that it has appointed Arihant Capital Markets as a merchant banker to assist with the buyback. It also has plans to launch an ad campaign soon. For it is time to improve its image.

Another red flag

The Ken sent an email to Amazon to verify Vakrangee’s claims. The Seattle-headquartered company did not respond.

The biggest revenue source for Vakrangee has been Aadhaar enrollment, and now that it has been taken off private contractors, that source is gone. But there is no stopping Vakrangee as its revenue continues to climb.

Aadhaar enrollment, and now that it has been taken off the charts.

Independent analyst Nihal Mangal says this is one of the biggest question marks on the company’s balance sheet. “Opening stock is usually something that is consumed to generate revenue. What is that Vakrangee uses?” he asks.

When asked what kind of stock is consumed to generate revenue, the company spokesperson said, “Our cost of goods sold include the goods as well as service commission paid to the franchisee. Also, the governance business includes electoral rolls as well as the hardware kits sold to the franchisees.”

The cost of goods in the inventory is quite high vis-à-vis the revenue in the company’s books, Mangal says. “There is no clarification from the management on this and the clarification they give does not add up to the numbers,” he adds.

A step further

Following the market uproar and a steep fall in share price, the company announced a one-time share buyback of Rs 1,000 crore (~$153 million) and a dividend payout of Rs 250 crore (~$38 million) in February. The company, however, did not give a timeline of the buyback.

On closer inspection

Based on the reported Q2 and Q3 FY18 financials, the current net worth (paid-up equity + free reserves) of Vakrangee should be around Rs 2,800 crore ($430 million). Hence, the company cannot do a buyback of more than Rs 700 crore.

“Surprisingly, over the last two months, we haven’t seen any additional details on the buyback from the company. If it feels the price fall is unjustified, it should take advantage of the situation and buyback shares at a low price. This will be value-accretive for shareholders. Why is it waiting for the price to recover?” asks Amit Mantri, Managing Partner, 2Point2 Capital PMS.

Based on the reported Q2 and Q3 FY18 financials, Mantri estimates that the current net worth (paid-up equity + free reserves) of Vakrangee should be around Rs 2,800 crore ($430 million). Hence, the company cannot do a buyback of more than Rs 700 crore ($107 million), if it plans to do in the next month or two, he says.

After the share buyback announcement, the back-to-back lower circuit came to a stop and the stock price started climbing, hitting consecutive upper circuits for a couple of trading session. The momentum did not sustain, and the price peaked at Rs 286 (~$4.4) per share and has been in free fall since then, hitting the lower circuit every day. The market cap now stands at Rs 22,245 crore (~$3.4 billion), as of Monday.

But this doesn’t bother Vakrangee too much. On 31 March, however, the company announced that it has appointed Arihant Capital Markets as a merchant banker to assist with the buyback. It also has plans to launch an ad campaign soon. For it is time to improve its image.

Another red flag

The Ken sent an email to Amazon to verify Vakrangee’s claims. The Seattle-headquartered company did not respond.

The biggest revenue source for Vakrangee has been Aadhaar enrollment, and now that it has been taken off private contractors, that source is gone. But this doesn’t bother Vakrangee too much. On 31 March, however, the company announced that it has appointed Arihant Capital Markets as a merchant banker to assist with the buyback. It also has plans to launch an ad campaign soon. For it is time to improve its image.

Another red flag

The Ken sent an email to Amazon to verify Vakrangee’s claims. The Seattle-headquartered company did not respond.

The biggest revenue source for Vakrangee has been Aadhaar enrollment, and now that it has been taken off private contractors, that source is gone. But this doesn’t bother Vakrangee too much. On 31 March, however, the company announced that it has appointed Arihant Capital Markets as a merchant banker to assist with the buyback. It also has plans to launch an ad campaign soon. For it is time to improve its image.

Another red flag

The Ken sent an email to Amazon to verify Vakrangee’s claims. The Seattle-headquartered company did not respond.

The biggest revenue source for Vakrangee has been Aadhaar enrollment, and now that it has been taken off private contractors, that source is gone. But this doesn’t bother Vakrangee too much. On 31 March, however, the company announced that it has appointed Arihant Capital Markets as a merchant banker to assist with the buyback. It also has plans to launch an ad campaign soon. For it is time to improve its image.

Another red flag

The Ken sent an email to Amazon to verify Vakrangee’s claims. The Seattle-headquartered company did not respond.

The biggest revenue source for Vakrangee has been Aadhaar enrollment, and now that it has been taken off private contractors, that source is gone. But this doesn’t bother Vakrangee too much. On 31 March, however, the company announced that it has appointed Arihant Capital Markets as a merchant banker to assist with the buyback. It also has plans to launch an ad campaign soon. For it is time to improve its image.

Another red flag

The Ken sent an email to Amazon to verify Vakrangee’s claims. The Seattle-headquartered company did not respond.

The biggest revenue source for Vakrangee has been Aadhaar enrollment, and now that it has been taken off private contractors, that source is gone. But this doesn’t bother Vakrangee too much. On 31 March, however, the company announced that it has appointed Arihant Capital Markets as a merchant banker to assist with the buyback. It also has plans to launch an ad campaign soon. For it is time to improve its image.

Another red flag

The Ken sent an email to Amazon to verify Vakrangee’s claims. The Seattle-headquartered company did not respond.

The biggest revenue source for Vakrangee has been Aadhaar enrollment, and now that it has been taken off private contractors, that source is gone. But this doesn’t bother Vakrangee too much. On 31 March, however, the company announced that it has appointed Arihant Capital Markets as a merchant banker to assist with the buyback. It also has plans to launch an ad campaign soon. For it is time to improve its image.
The human cost of expanding the Salem Airport

The death of livelihoods, a sense of community and fertile agricultural lands - all to expand an airport with a history of poor patronage.

In a hot summer day in May, the dinny lit shed in Rajendran’s two-room house reverberates with the clattering of the powerloom that he has cautiously watching over. As his burly hands pick away delicately at the stray golden lint, the razor-sharp needles of the machine swallow up row after row of neatly lined threads. Gradually, the coil of yarn bunched atop the loom transforms into a soft, red silk saree.

Rajendran is one of 500 weavers in the Omalur taluk who stand to lose everything if the airport in Salem district, Tamil Nadu, is expanded any further. The airport, who stand to lose everything if the airport in Salem into a soft, red silk saree.

ally, the coil of yarn bunched atop the loom transforms swallow up row after row of neatly lined threads. Gradu

The lease documents from 1989 show a grossly undervalued sale. Retiring from service to pursue his family’s traditional occupation of farming, Subramani points towards the airport that lies a stone’s throw away from his house. “I have already lost six acres to the old airport. They bought it to build the housing quarters for those working at the airport. We didn’t know the land value then. We didn’t know we could say no to the government. We were not educated. We would quietly go away if there was any trouble. But now, all I have left is two acres. If that is gone, nothing is left,” he says.

A short walk away – in an almost shocking contrast filled, lush agricultural lands spread as far as the eye can see outside the industrial 136-acre Salem airport. The road leading to the airport makes it amply clear that a dispute is underway. In addition to the periodic mooing of cattle, every person entering and exiting the airport now bears witness to large neon signposts that scream, “Is it necessary to destroy farming to expand the airport?”

In 2006, Air Deccan demanded that the local industry deposit Rs 80 lakh or commit to 50 percent of the bookings as a prerequisite to start operations. By 2007, the airline was bought by Vijay Mallya’s Kingfisher Airlines. After a two-year run, the only and hour-long service to Chennai ended in August 2011. With poor patronage for commercial flights among residents, the airport became practice ground for flying schools, chartering for occasional private aircraft.

In March this year, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami inaugurated the revamped airport. The airport now operates one commercial flight to and from Chennai.

As District Collector Robini Bhaljibhakare was preparing for a grand re-opening of the Salem airport, she assured villagers of a satisfactory solution. Speaking to media persons outside the airport, she said, “We have been directed by the Honourable Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to give the highest compensation to the farmers. Accordingly, we have instructed all authorities to give the maximum compensation. Farmers don’t have to worry about this at all, we will give them the highest compensation possible.”

But why exactly does an airport with a history of poor patronage need to be expanded? Even more intriguing, why at the cost of agricultural lands?

The newly proposed expansion falls under the Udan scheme, an initiative jointly funded by the Central and state governments across India that aims to ‘let the common citizen fly’. The government has pumped in Rs 4,500 crore for the scheme. While the Centre will offer a lowered VAT, service tax and flexible code sharing, the state will subsidise jet fuel, provide security, fire service, electricity, water and land. The government hopes to increase regional connectivity and facilitate the growth of jobs and infrastructure.

While it is well known that a ‘Tamil Nadu Defence Corridor’ is all set to include Salem, Coimbatore, Hosur and Chennai, a draft plan accessed by TNM shows that Salem in particular has been earmarked for rubber products, helicopter manufacturing and maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) services.

In addition to this, Salem will also serve as the destination for small aircraft manufacturing, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) service and repair, paramilitary equipment manufacturing. The development of hangar and cargo services would also likely make this an airport fit for night landing.

Speaking to TNM, industrialist Mariappan who has been at the forefront of initiating an airport service in Salem says, “For expansion, 567 acres of land was already identified and published on the government gazette. Government is prepared to pay three to four times of the market value. There are some agitation, teething troubles as the government shall take possession of the required land to set up the defence hub.”

“It took me 25 years to build my business. There are 500 families like mine. I built this house with my own hands. I would work at the looms in the morning and come back and work on the house in the evening. I can send my children to school today because I have worked in the fields and at the looms for 25 years. If I’m asked to move, everything is over,” he says.

He continues, “I have borrowed a lot from moneylenders for my machine. I don’t have anything else – only my
to his fellow villagers. Walking around with a cache of organising the agitations. The young man has taken she asks.

"If they take away our land, we will also have the same fate as him. Last month, they cut down five of my coconut trees because they were a disturbance for the aeroplane. They said they would give me Rs 20,000 for it, but they never gave it to me. On one hand, they are saying agriculture is the backbone of our country. But they are stubbing us in the back," says Bhagyaraj.

As we approach the colourful Mariamman temple nearby, the loud beating of drums and clanging of bells draws us in. An excursion is underway. Kuppusamy, the head priest, briefly steps aside to talk to us.

"This is the kula deva koil (temple) for the seven surrounding villages. Thousands of people come to worship here. If it is a festival day, at least 5,000 people come. They are saying they will remove the temple along with the land. They have given us a notice. This is not something that can just be upheld and thrown away," he says.

Kaveri, who has come to pray at the temple with his wife, is scared because he has heard rumours of the government throwing the villagers out with the help of the army. He believes the land is going to be acquired for the army to use.

He says, "The Divisional Officer comes here every now and then and says we are giving you notice to vacate. When we ask him where we can go, we don't get answers. They are saying the army will threaten us to vacate these lands. Out of that fear, some people are trying to sell the land. They are saying this as a precautionary measure but even then they are only getting low rates. We are trying to give them confidence. We only have to tell them calmly and explain we should be united." As Salem-based environmental activist Piyyush Maruthi points his finger at the paddy fields in the distance, he says, "I'm going to meet the villagers waiting for him, he asks, "These are prime agricultural lands. This is a living, breathing ecosystem. I represented them to have their lands across the river taken away."" Needless to say, the talk of the day for Piyyush, however, is to stop the spread of fake news and rumours doing the rounds about compensation and a forced takeover. As we drive through the fields of paddy, rice and turmeric, he says, "They (the government) are deciding the value of the land. They are saying that because of the number of stones in the soil, the price is lesser. At the same time, they're saying the land has a lot of soil, so the value is more. This is what happens. One man who has sold his land says the money he got was less. After the land has made good crops, they're saying they will quote a lesser price. This is the reason why I've been mentioning 25 points. Had you known this 30 years back, would you have allowed this to happen? You're repeating the same mistake. No one is going to deposit money in your bank account." He then adds, "Don't believe in rumours. Firstly, you need to believe that you can win. I thought this news has come everywhere and so many people are visiting. But this isn't working out. We should hold another meeting so that we can explain once more what is happening and how we are fighting this."

"The first task at hand is to convince people to stop selling their soil out of fear of a government takeover," he informs them.

Activists have been calling attention to the protests for over three years now. In order to highlight the woes of the villagers and lend visibility to the issue, they have brought politicians and actors to visit the area. And so, one leader after another has been visiting the town to express their solidarity with the people.

Today, Congress leader Mohan Kumaramangalam – whose ancestors not-so-ironically were once the zamindars in these parts – is in the area. Speaking to a small posse of media persons, he says, "If they move the airport elsewhere, it will do well. They have brought it here with the help of the urban subsidy scheme, but that scheme is not suitable for this area. It takes 570 acres of agricultural land is wrong. Where is the project plan? Why can't we discuss the benefits of the plan at the gram sabha?"

When we ask if senior Congress leaders were apprised of the situation, he says, "To be honest with you, of the immediate situation here, I'm not sure they knew about it in Chennai. But I will be taking this to my state president, so he's fully aware of what is happening here. To be fair, they've sent notices to different banks of people. People have just passed a resolution showing that the majority of them are not interested in having an airport here. This is the time to start taking action accordingly."

Kumaramangalam goes on to talk about the Land Acquisition Act and the fact that the government has taken 2013. "Once BJP's central ordinance failed, they had no other option but to come up with their own version of the diluted Land Acquisition Act and get it signed by the President. This is the result of that. Whatever happened before our government passed the Act is happening again. When Parliament is back in session, we will be making a representation to Mr Gandhi so he can raise this in Parliament himself."

As the leaders come and go with promises of helping them, the villagers in Omalur talk with hope that one of them may make a strong case for them. But for now, they have a meeting to plan and everything else can wait."

---

Muniyamma, like many standing beside her, works as a daily wage labourer on the farms of neighbours to make ends meet. She pulls out as a daily wage labourer on the farms of neighbours to make ends meet. She pulls out...
CGNet Swara is a voice-based news portal established for citizen journalists to phone in and listen to audio news for the Chhattisgarh region in Hindi and Gondi, the language spoken by two million people of the Gond tribe in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and other states such as Telangana and Maharashtra. CG stands for Central Gondwana. Reports about local governance issues through the platform and direct intervention with government officials results in many of the problems being addressed.

A resident of Barpatiya village in Pratappur, Surajpur reported that the nearest road to the village was five kilometres away and poorly laid out. Within weeks of the story being aired, repairs were underway.

**Work on road to our village started after CGNet report, many thanks...**

Audio story of the citizen's complaint.
Mhatre's popularity surged after the article was posted. Media channels including Aaj Tak, BBC Marathi, Buzzfeed C and seven radio stations ran her interviews. Celebrity improv comic Aditi Mittal reached out to her. They now collaborate on new shows and scripts. Mhatre has also shared the stage with marquee stand-ups Varun Grover and Abhishek Upmanyu. She now has a manager to handle her social media, publicity and shows.

The Better India portal aims to make a difference one microcosm, one grassroot story, at a time. On July 30, 2018 the website profiled Deepika Mhatre: This Mumbai Woman Is a Domestic Help by Day, Stand-Up Comic by Night. A part-time Mumbai cook, Mhatre decided it was time for the maids, “bai log,” to reclaim their comedic trope. Her gigs began to make waves.

Deepika Mhatre

He wakes up at 4:00 a.m., gets ready and rushes to the local train station in Mumbai—not just to get to work, but to sell imitation jewellery to passengers on the train. By 6:30, after finishing her train rounds, 43-year-old Deepika Mhatre heads to the first of the five homes she cooks in. Her entire day is spent cooking for families, and she gets free only at 4:00 p.m. In her tedious routine of earning money for her family of five, cooking for five homes and travelling between Nala Sopara, where she lives, to Malad, Deepika finds humour—the kind that she shares when she takes the stage at stand-up comedy shows.

When I asked her about her family, Deepika said, “I have three daughters… and one husband.” We both crack up at the joke. Almost exclusively associated with an urban setting, grievances and experiences, you may not always associate stand-up comedy with the experiences of a domestic help. In fact, as Deepika begins her act, she says, “I have seen stand up comedians often sharing stories about their maids, but now, I will speak.”

Sweetly smiling at her audience throughout the act, waiting for the applause to die down after every punchline (which happens quite often, honestly) and dropping truth bombs like second nature, Deepika effortlessly wins the hearts of her audience right from the first minute.

So, how did she change her career path from a domestic help to a stand-up comedian?

The truth is, this isn’t a career change at all! Deepika still works as a cook (although that has reduced to a significant degree because of her health issues) and sells jewellery in local trains. The only difference is that now, sometimes she gets a gig for which she heads right after finishing her chores in the five homes.

Speaking to The Better India, Deepika said, “This started when Sangeeta madam (Sangeeta Das, at whose home Deepika works) arranged a talent show for us “bai log”. No one usually does that, right? But she gave us a platform to showcase our talents—just as a fun activity. That’s where I decided to take my jokes to the stage.” That day, about a year ago, gave Deepika a stage for her comedy and gave the comedy brigade a talented artist, who shares experiences from “the other side.”

Rachel Lopez, who works with the Hindustan Times, spotted Deepika at her first show and knew she had a good future in comedy. She wasted no time in contacting Aditi Mittal, an established comic in India and introducing her to Deepika. A meeting with Deepika at Sangeeta’s house was enough for Aditi to recognise her talent. She immediately asked her if she would be willing to move to a professional stage.

“I had never performed on a big stage before. So Aditi took me to shows where she performed and mentored me. Gradually, we shot an episode of ‘Bad Girl’ together.”

You can watch the whole episode here.

Where does she fit in all of her gigs, with two-day jobs to take care of?

“The gigs are usually in late evenings or nights. So I return home after 10-12:30 at night,” she tells TBI as if it is no big deal. The next morning, Deepika wakes up at 4:00 a.m. and its business as usual.

So what all does she speak about in her shows?

“There are people like Sangeeta madam, who always do good things for us. But on the other hand, I worked at some places where I am always a servant—an inferior. They tell me not to sit on chairs, only on floors, and to drink water or tea from separate glasses. I speak about all of it—good and bad.”

In her show, in fact, she says “The building I work in, I am very special there. Because people like me, we have a separate lift. We even have a separate mug! She sells imitation jewellery in the morning and has her audience in splits in the evening.

People think servants should have separate vessels. Go on then, hide your own vessels! You eat the rotis that I made, don’t you?” she says to a massive round of applause.

Each of her jokes is matter-to-fact, in a tone which never sound like complaints. It almost feels like a group of domestic helpers are joking about their work and their employers at the end of the day. But it is one woman, bringing to us her perspective, her life, cushioned in humour. Nowhere during the interview did Deepika ever sound tired or sad. But the truth is, Deepika has to shoulder the financial responsibility of her entire family since her husband doesn’t keep well.

“She has asthma, and now I have high blood sugar, so neither of us can work. My elder daughter has just started working. A person from Mid-day, who interviewed me, gave her a job. But the financial condition of my family is quite tight—so, my only condition in every interview is a request for help.”

Deepika is open to financial help or more gigs on stage.

So if you wish to lend her a helping hand, we request you to please write to us at editorial@thebetterindia.com, and we will get you connected with Deepika.

(Edited by Gayatri Mishra)
On April 17, 2018, the Indian edition of online platform Vice carried Humans of the Hindu Yuva Vahini, a report commissioned by Khabar Lahariya. The report, which profiled young members of the HYV, the youth wing of UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath’s religious organisation, emerged after meticulous research for over a year.

It did very well on Vice, getting over 15,000 page likes. It reached 5500 viewers and had 58 interactions on Vice’s Facebook page. The visibility of the piece went a long way in establishing Khabar Lahariya’s ability to produce high quality content for English platforms and resulted in regular syndication partnerships.

Politics

IMPACT

Humans of the Hindu Yuva Vahini

As Yogi Adityanath contended with balancing hardline Hindutva and the demands of development during his first year as UP’s chief minister, four members of his radical religious youth organisation went through their own struggles.

In December 2017, after months of playing cat-and-mouse with members of the Hindu Yuva Vahini, I got a message on a WhatsApp group about a gathering on “Shaurya Diwas”, the anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Posters advertising the December 6 event were plastered around Banda, in the Bundelkhand region of southern Uttar Pradesh.

These Photoshopped works of art depicted a muscular Rama, flanked by a punier local leader, against the background of the Ram Mandir compound, wreathed in red smoke. The images gave me goosebumps. Despite my trepidation, I arrived, camera in hand, at the HYV’s Banda office: a large compound with a few motorbikes and cows, a shed, and a temple where meetings are generally held, if not under the shade of a peepal tree outside. It didn’t look much like the regional nerve center of a powerful youth militia with political patronage, whose founder Yogi Adityanath was now chief minister of the state.

Inside the temple, I sat outside a circle of 10 men—11 if you count the swarthy figure of Hanuman presiding over us. My presence was charged: a woman and a reporter? The men were suspicious, but soon warmed up. They vowed—as other Hindu organisations had done—to mark Shaurya Diwas yearly until the Ram Mandir was built. They even let me film a series of video portraits in which they explained what Ayodhya meant to them. An older advisor, Adhirsh Singh, talked about the historical “proof” that the three acres of disputed land were passed down by King Dashrath. For him, these were not “Hindu truths”, but geographical ones. Dinesh Kumar, “Dadda”, the district coordinator, put forward his opinion that Babar should be seen in a long line of...
“Muslim terrorists.” Despite the enthusiasm, the event felt somewhat anticlimactic, especially when compared to the beginning of that year, when the HYV was on a high. In March, it had helped the Bhartiya Janata Party capture the Legislative Assembly and ensured for Adityanath the foremost seat.

Adityanath founded the HYV in 2002, but it was only around Ram Navami 2017, soon after the new government came to power, that I suddenly saw members of Yogi’s youth wing everywhere in Bundelkhand: managing crowds and traffic, playing at bouncer, priest, and police. The organisation was reportedly swelling, especially outside its traditional stronghold of eastern UP.

Who were these men, and how deep was their loyalty to Adityanath’s organisation? Were they as efficient and influential as they appeared in the news, and in their processions? Or was the HYV just the latest banner being hoisted by vigilantes and criminals to gain legitimacy?

Over the next few months, I did everything to find out, short of signing up myself—something I couldn’t bring myself to do, though several colleagues and members suggested I should try. As a woman with less than conducive caste and political credentials, I felt ambiguous about actually joining this male, Hindu bastion, dominated by Thakurs and other “upper castes.”

Still, each time I approached what was touted as one of the most powerful forces in UP, the HYV seemed to vanish, like the mirage of a shiny glass building on a hot, dusty road.

A little over a year after Adityanath’s victory, it seems obvious that the HYV was on shaky ground. The army that had propelled its mukhya to power was a threat to the BJP and its affiliates in the Sangh Parivar. As the HYV saw mass desertions, there was also reportedly a growing dissonance between its higher echelons and its newer foot-soldiers. Consequently, the BJP’s defeat in Gorakhpur and Phulpur in the March 2018 bypolls was seen by many as a turning of the tide.

Looking back over my nine months of befriending HYV members, and eavesdropping on their real life and WhatsApp conversations to try and get access to the group, this wasn’t too surprising. I had found that for its newest, youngest, grassroots members, loyalty to the Hindu militia was born not only—or not even primarily—out of a sense of religious duty. Their motivations were in keeping with those of any millennial with few prospects, with an eye out for a step up, or out. Some came to the HYV out of personal need or a sense of responsibility to community. Others were drawn to the outfit by family or caste connections. These factors often blurred with political ambition.

On December 10, a few days after Shaurya Diwas, I finally found myself inside an HYV meeting in Banda. There were even fewer people present, and the mood of these men in their 20s and 30s was mostly disgruntled. A notice had been circulated, suspending members who had contested in the UP civic polls the previous month, even though they had allegedly been granted permission to contest earlier.

The promise of BJP electoral tickets, or implicit blessings for candidates’ campaigns, were crucial in mobilising HYV support in the Assembly elections that year. Perhaps more so than the selfless urge to do social work or religious fervour. But when the members started to remind the organisational leadership of this promise of political power, it became clear that they had been “doing all that work”, as one member said, “for nothing.”

In a sense, the following profiles of one woman and three men of the Hindu Yuva Vahini illustrate the fragility of such networks and their symbiotic relationship with electoral politics. But through each story also runs the strong current of the HYV’s religious discourse, threatening to consume those who dip their toes in the waters of Hinduva.

On July 4, 2018 the Kannada portal Samachara ran an investigative piece about the Mysuru-based JSS religious mutt and its attempt at land grab through its high-profile hospital.

The story gave a voice to the marginalized. The community of Ashokpura dalits were alerted to the danger of land theft and circulated copies of the story amongst themselves. It was a rare, if not the first, media report against the activities of the mutt. This article was ranked the website’s eighth highest read story.
Samachara
The data journalism initiative aka IndiaSpend ran a fact-check on Parliament. No data on lynching. Here they are including 36 lynching incidents between July 2018 and March 2019.
Minister to Parliament: No data on lynching. Here they are (including government’s own).

In its March 2018 response to the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament), the home ministry did furnish some data on mob lynchings recorded by states. In contrast, during the same period, IndiaSpend’s two databases on mob violence—due to child-lifting rumours and bovine-related hate violence—recorded 80 cases where attackers outnumbered the victims, and 41 deaths by such lynchings. This is without counting other instances of mob violence related to issues such as caste and moral policing.

The NCRB was planning to collect data on mob lynchings across the country, the Indian Express quoted a Bureau official as saying in its July 9, 2017, report. More than a year later, and more than half-way through 2018, the Bureau has yet to put out its annual report on crime statistics in India for 2017.

Since 2010—the start of IndiaSpend’s bovine-related hate violence database—86 attacks fuelled by the suspicion of cow slaughter or beef consumption, have been reported in English media across the country. About 88% of these attacks occurred post-May 2014, after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed power. At least 33 persons were killed in these attacks—25 or 88% of whom were Muslim. Over 56% of all attacks occurred in states run by BJP governments. The IndiaSpend database of bovine-related hate crime was quoted by senior advocate Indira Jaising in her written submission to the Supreme Court for the petition to crackdown on cow vigilantes.

The violence started with cow-related vigilantism but is now building up more violent behaviour—from small to big reasons—anything could be the trigger,” Upneet Lalli, deputy director, Institute of Correctional Administration, had told IndiaSpend on July 9, 2018.

Since the start of 2018, 27 persons have been reported killed in 66 cases of mob violence sparked specifically by rumours of child-lifting circulated on social media, an IndiaSpend analysis of news reports from across India showed. This is eight times as many attacks and thrice the number of deaths as were reported in 2017, when nine were killed in eight such mob attacks. Overall, since January 2017 to-date, 74 mob attacks over suspected child kidnapping killed 36 persons, the IndiaSpend database showed. Prior to 2017, only one incident was reported in 2012, in Bihar.

On July 19, 2017, home minister Rajnath Singh made a statement to the Lok Sabha indicting misinformation and fake news for the spate of mob violence. Adding that it is the state governments’ responsibility to maintain public order, Singh said social media operators have been requested to be vigilant of the spread of fake news on their platforms. Currently, 18 of 29 states have governments run by the BJP. Twitter Ads info and privacy.

A day prior to MHA’s response to the Rajya Sabha, the Supreme Court on July 17, 2018, urged Parliament to enact a new law to deal with the offence of lynching. “Citizens cannot take the law into their hands or become law unto themselves,” said the apex court stressing that “horrendous acts of mobocracy” cannot become the new norm.

(Saldanha is an assistant editor with IndiaSpend and FactChecker)
On September 30, 2018, The News Minute featured a video on the ‘loosu ponnu’ character in Tamil cinema and discussed why the damsel-in-distress stereotype should be relegated to history.

Feminist critic Rahini David, director CS Amudhan, and actors Nithya Menen, Khushbu and Iswarya analysed this stock character of Tamil films and how it impacted women actors. The critique was well-received within the industry with some filmmakers suggesting they would refrain from featuring loosu ponnus in their films.

**Impact**

Feminist critic Rahini David, director CS Amudhan, and actors Nithya Menen, Khushbu and Iswarya speak to TNM about the ‘loosu ponnu’ trope.

Feminist critic Rahini David, director CS Amudhan, and actors Nithya Menen, Khushbu and Iswarya speak to TNM about the ‘loosu ponnu’ trope.

Tamil cinema is going through interesting times. On the one hand, we have films with women as solo leads, some of them going on to become superhits. But on the other hand, the average mainstream Tamil film has relegated the heroine’s role to that of a ‘loosu ponnu’. So common is this trope that it even figured in CS Amudhan’s Tamizh Padam 2, a film that parodies Tamil cinema.

A ‘loosu ponnu’ is a heroine who is very angelic and innocent, needs constant rescuing and cannot do the simplest things in life. The attributes vary from film to film – from having her help visually impaired people cross the road to not knowing how to cross at all, from eating ice-cream to dancing in the rain, and speaking with a lot of unnecessary gestures.

The ‘loosu ponnu’ became increasingly popular in the ‘90s, as the masculinity of the hero became more overblown than ever before. However, mainstream heroines are now speaking up about this trope. Actor Jyothika appealed to directors to give women “intelligent” roles before the release of Magalir Mattum. Samantha recently spoke at the press meet for U Turn about how she did not have to dumb down for the film. However, not all heroines have the choice to not do such roles – in a male-dominated industry where scripts are written for heroes and the heroine disappears after a few romance scenes and songs, how choosy can women actors get?

TNM spoke to feminist critic Rahini David, who has been writing about the ‘loosu ponnu’ trope for years now, and to people from the Tamil film industry to understand the fascination for the guileless heroine character. In the video, director CS Amudhan, actors Nithya Menen, Khushbu, and Iswarya Menon share their thoughts on the emergence of the ‘loosu ponnu’ and what can be done to change how heroines are represented in mainstream cinema today.
Men must step up now

#MeToo has the power to change our culture. Men must play their part. We diminish ourselves by not taking responsibility.

Men are oblivious to this; and women have had enough. This is what the #MeToo movement is about.

Patterns of Behaviour

The importance of the #MeToo movement is not about the big stories that makes waves, but the cultural tides that lie beneath. #MeToo is not just about sexual assault and crossing clear lines of consent: most people accept that those are wrong. It is about patterns of sexist behaviour that are so normalised that most men and many women take them for granted.

Men don’t get this because for all of us, our gender is not a factor in our everyday lives. I don’t need to question myself or alter my behaviour because of my maleness. Women carry the burden of their gender in everything they do: while commuting, while expressing themselves in work meetings in rooms full of male egos, while going out for evenings walks, while deciding what to wear, or not to wear. What might be a trivial event for a man – someone puts his hand on your thigh while explaining something – can cause great discomfort to a woman, and much self-doubt.

“Am I over-reacting? Did I do something to

Verma was an early supporter of the tsunami of women calling out men for sexually predatory behaviour at the workplace. Pragati offers a progressive male counterpoint to culturally chauvinist behaviour.

It is common for women to feel uncomfortable at the workplace, and one reason for that is air conditioning. In the 1960s, when central air conditioning became common in offices, the norms of what the default temperature should be were set after taking into account what most workers felt comfortable at. This was logical then, but there was one problem: most office goers in those days were men.

Men and women have different metabolic rates, and women tend to feel comfortable at higher temperatures than men do. In other words, they feel cold in modern offices, and often wear scarves and shawls to account for this. But most offices remain too cold for women, as the men in charge dismiss and minimise the problem. What is worse, they make the women feel guilty for feeling cold, as if there is something wrong with them.

Air conditioning might seem a trivial subject, but to me, this is a good analogy for the state of the world today. We live in a world designed for men, by men – and the discomfort of women is brushed away as if it is nothing. This manifests itself in deeper forms than just air conditioning, and in more places than just the workplace.

IMPACT

Think Pragati

#MeToo

Amit Verma

Verma takes a stand on the need for men to hold a mirror to themselves in the context of the #MeToo movement.

Pragati offers a progressive male counterpoint to culturally chauvinist behaviour.
The Effects of #MeToo

There are a number of different effects I see #MeToo as having. One, it will embolden more women to speak up. Many women who were silent earlier because of social pressures, or who might have simply doubted themselves, will now find the courage to say, “No more!” #MeToo validates the anger most women feel, and gives it strength.

Two, it will change the incentives of male behaviour. Earlier, men could get away with sexism with impunity. They use women as a means to an end, and not as autonomous human beings worthy of respect in their own right. They get away with what they can – and much of what they get away with, in fact, is not even considered a problem. Predators are affectionately said to be having a ‘roving eye’, so who can blame them for ‘playing the field’. And men try to keep plausible deniability by saying that they respected the woman’s consent – but can a 20-year-old intern push away her much-admired 50-year-old boss when he hugs her in a social setting, with the risk that her colleagues will accuse her of over-reacting?

We must, here, consider the interplay between Nature and Nurture. All of us are hardwired with conflicting instincts: lust and violence coincide with empathy and altruism. Which of these characteristics get amplified depends on our culture: as Steven Pinker said, Nature gives us knobs and Nurture turns them.

Culture can amplify some of our instincts, and mitigate others. Since the Enlightenment began, the arc of culture has tended towards respecting individual autonomy. Slavery has been abolished, as have child marriage and Sati, women can vote, and our views on racism have evolved. There have been inflection points at which the norms regarding all of these have shifted. I believe the #MeToo movement is one such turning point.

What can men do?

So here is a question I have asked myself: What should a man do now? I am still processing this, but I have three suggestions:

1. Don’t let women fight this alone. Call out sexist behaviour when you come across it, whether it is in a locker room or a family Whatsapp group. Others may feel the same as you, and your words may validate their feelings. They may join the chorus in a virtuous cascade.

2. Remember the burden of their gender that women carry, and go out of your way to make sure you never make a woman uncomfortable. Think of it as a game-theory problem, where the purpose is to minimise the possibility of a woman feeling uncomfortable. Maybe, when you meet women in social setting, you let them initiate physical contact, whether a hug or a handshake. Maybe you avoid cracking lewd jokes in mixed company, and remain aware of how often you interrupt women. And so on: These are little things to men but, cumulatively, can add up for women.

3. Talk to the women you care about. Ask them if you have ever behaved in ways they object to. Ask them if they feel angry. Give them space if they need it. Try to understand – and show them you understand.

And yes, you could also ask if the air conditioner is too cold for them. You know where the control is.

It is too cold for them. You know where the control is. You understand.
Jio Institute declared top-notch by Modi govt, but you can’t find it in Google search

When it comes up in 3 years, institute will have far greater autonomy; UGC says selected under ‘greenfield’ category.

New Delhi: Two years after the Modi government came up with the idea of branding some of the top higher educational institutions in the country as Institutions of Eminence (IoEs), just six were announced to have made the cut Monday from the original proposal of 20.

But that was not the only surprise. One of the six — the Jio Institute, to be run by the Reliance Foundation in Mumbai, has not even started functioning.

The college is only set to begin operations in the next three years but when it does, it will have far greater autonomy from government regulators as compared to most institutions.

The IoE tag will grant special powers to these six institutes, such as greater autonomy to start a new course, hire foreign faculty and collaborate with foreign universities without government approval.

The Jio institute shares its place on the list, announced by the Ministry of human resource development Monday, with the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in Delhi and Bombay, the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, and two private institutions — the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani, and the Manipal Academy of Higher Education.

Jio’s presence on the list is all the more curious as the IoE tag and Jio was selected from among them.

“We have selected Jio Institute under the greenfield category, which is a category meant for new institutes; institutes that have no history. We looked at the proposal and it turned out to be fit for the tag. They have a plan in place, they have funding, they have a place for a campus and everything that was required under the said category,” former election commissioner N. Gopalaswami, who headed the panel to select the institutes, told ThePrint.

“One greenfield and 29 brownfield (existing) private institutes had applied. Of them, one in the greenfield category and two in the brownfield category have been selected.”

The government had in 2016 announced the plan to create Institutes of Eminence, which it had earlier planned to term as World Class Institutes. The idea was to grant special powers to these institutes in order to catapult them in the world rankings.

“The clause 6.1 of the UGC (Institutions of Eminence Deemed to be Universities) Regulation 2017, provides for a completely new proposal to establish an institute to be considered under this project,” the ministry said in a statement.

“Accordingly, a separate category of applications have been invited from the sponsoring organisations for setting up new or Greenfield projects. The purpose of this provision is to allow responsible private investment to come into building global class education,” it added.

Jio was among 11 institutes that applied under the category. The others included Vedanta for a university in Odisha and Airtel for Bharati University.

“Selected under greenfield category”

Earlier on Monday, the University Grants Commission (UGC) had also defended Jio’s inclusion on the grounds that it was selected under rules for greenfield institutions — new or proposed institutions that are yet to come into existence.

According to officials, 11 such institutions had applied for the IoE tag and Jio was selected from among them.

“We have selected Jio Institute under the greenfield category, which is a category meant for new institutes; institutes that have no history. We looked at the proposal and it turned out to be fit for the tag. They have a plan in place, they have funding, they have a place for a campus and everything that was required under the said category,” former election commissioner N. Gopalaswami, who headed the panel to select the institutes, told ThePrint.

The government had in 2016 announced the plan to create Institutes of Eminence, which it had earlier planned to term as World Class Institutes. The idea was to grant special powers to these institutes in order to catapult them in the world rankings.

“The clause 6.1 of the UGC (Institutions of Eminence Deemed to be Universities) Regulation 2017, provides for a completely new proposal to establish an institute to be considered under this project,” the ministry said in a statement.

“Accordingly, a separate category of applications have been invited from the sponsoring organisations for setting up new or Greenfield projects. The purpose of this provision is to allow responsible private investment to come into building global class education,” it added.

Jio was among 11 institutes that applied under the category. The others included Vedanta for a university in Odisha and Airtel for Bharati University.

“Selected under greenfield category”

Earlier on Monday, the University Grants Commission (UGC) had also defended Jio’s inclusion on the grounds that it was selected under rules for greenfield institutions — new or proposed institutions that are yet to come into existence.

According to officials, 11 such institutions had applied for the IoE tag and Jio was selected from among them.

“We have selected Jio Institute under the greenfield category, which is a category meant for new institutes; institutes that have no history. We looked at the proposal and it turned out to be fit for the tag. They have a plan in place, they have funding, they have a place for a campus and everything that was required under the said category,” former election commissioner N. Gopalaswami, who headed the panel to select the institutes, told ThePrint.

The coverage helped Satija promote the switch from non-biodegradable waste such as plastic containers to reusable eco-friendly steel utensils for public events. Private citizens, NGOs and religious organisations have been inspired to set-up crockery banks. Satija is to be credited for preventing the use of 80,000 disposable items in Gurgaon and the National Capital Region.
Think Pragati's podcast The Seen and the Unseen on October 15, 2018 discussed the impact of the seminal movement that is #MeToo, where victims of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct at the workplace have broken their silence.

On April 4, 2018 The Ken analysed Facebook-owned WhatsApp’s adoption of Unified Payment Interface and its unusual seamless experience. It discovered that unlike other UPI apps, WhatsApp did not adhere to many of the UPI interoperability rules that others had to mandatorily follow.

In August 2018, Kerala reeled under the worst flood in its history. The Malayalam portal Dool News exposed divisive campaigns by right-wing elements that gloated the calamity was a sign of divine retribution on beef-eaters.

The in-depth report forced the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to clarify that WhatsApp’s formula was only a beta roll out, a favour it had not extended to any other payments app. WhatsApp has had to comply with some of the regulations but, several months later, it struggles to meet the rest.

In August 2018, Kerala reeled under the worst flood in its history. The Malayalam portal Dool News exposed divisive campaigns by right-wing elements that gloated the calamity was a sign of divine retribution on beef-eaters.

The portal alerted citizens to the hate-mongering on social media by people like Suresh Kochhati, who was the Hyderabad head of the prime minister’s social media campaign in 2014. Vigilant Keralites took to social media to sharply rejected the malevolence. The video has had 457000 views and 15000 shares.

On September 27, 2018 LiveLaw detailed the landmark judgment of the five-member bench of the apex court: Husband Is Not the Master of Wife’, SC Strikes Down 158-Year Old Adultery Law Under Section 497 IPC. The report presented the salient points of the verdict including institutionalised discrimination, feminism, gender equality, gender bias, sexual autonomy, marriage and divorce.

LiveLaw reported the “Adultery Judgment” of a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court was the law portal’s most shared story with over 40.4K shares.

On September 27, 2018 LiveLaw detailed the landmark judgment of the five-member bench of the apex court: Husband Is Not the Master of Wife’, SC Strikes Down 158-Year Old Adultery Law Under Section 497 IPC. The report presented the salient points of the verdict including institutionalised discrimination, feminism, gender equality, gender bias, sexual autonomy, marriage and divorce.

The story held to scrutiny the generosity shown by the NHAI and the Tamil Nadu government to a company that did not even submit a proposal and the stalling of the already green-lit Chennai-Madurai corridor.

The story garnered 40K hits on the website and reached a million on social media. It also led to a constructive healthy online debate around the incident.

Residents of Teliyapani Ledra village in Jamun (Chhattisgarh) had complained unsuccessfully to the local administration about the intermittent electricity supply. After a villager’s phone-in to CGNet Swara material for solar lighting was quickly dispatched to Teliyapani under a government scheme. Solar units were up and running in some areas while in the rest work was underway.

The Malayalam news portal Azhimukham on January 16, 2018 ran What is happening in our labour rooms about the humiliation women patients are subjected to in government hospitals in Kerala.

The narrative led to angry public discourse about the wide-spread harassment faced by pregnant women in hospitals in Ernakulam, Kozhikode, Thruvananthapuram and other cities. The spotlight on the belittling behaviour by hospital staff behaviour led to systemic changes and policy course correction being initiated in state-run hospitals.

The Malayalam news portal Azhimukham on January 16, 2018 ran What is happening in our labour rooms about the humiliation women patients are subjected to in government hospitals in Kerala.

The narrative led to angry public discourse about the wide-spread harassment faced by pregnant women in hospitals in Ernakulam, Kozhikode, Thruvananthapuram and other cities. The spotlight on the belittling behaviour by hospital staff behaviour led to systemic changes and policy course correction being initiated in state-run hospitals.

The portal alerted citizens to the hate-mongering on social media by people like Suresh Kochhati, who was the Hyderabad head of the prime minister’s social media campaign in 2014. Vigilant Keralites took to social media to sharply rejected the malevolence. The video has had 457000 views and 15000 shares.

The Malayalam news portal Azhimukham on January 16, 2018 ran What is happening in our labour rooms about the humiliation women patients are subjected to in government hospitals in Kerala.

The narrative led to angry public discourse about the wide-spread harassment faced by pregnant women in hospitals in Ernakulam, Kozhikode, Thruvananthapuram and other cities. The spotlight on the belittling behaviour by hospital staff behaviour led to systemic changes and policy course correction being initiated in state-run hospitals.

In August 2018, Kerala reeled under the worst flood in its history. The Malayalam portal Dool News exposed divisive campaigns by right-wing elements that gloated the calamity was a sign of divine retribution on beef-eaters.

The portal alerted citizens to the hate-mongering on social media by people like Suresh Kochhati, who was the Hyderabad head of the prime minister’s social media campaign in 2014. Vigilant Keralites took to social media to sharply rejected the malevolence. The video has had 457000 views and 15000 shares.

The Malayalam news portal Azhimukham on January 16, 2018 ran What is happening in our labour rooms about the humiliation women patients are subjected to in government hospitals in Kerala.

The narrative led to angry public discourse about the wide-spread harassment faced by pregnant women in hospitals in Ernakulam, Kozhikode, Thruvananthapuram and other cities. The spotlight on the belittling behaviour by hospital staff behaviour led to systemic changes and policy course correction being initiated in state-run hospitals.

The portal alerted citizens to the hate-mongering on social media by people like Suresh Kochhati, who was the Hyderabad head of the prime minister’s social media campaign in 2014. Vigilant Keralites took to social media to sharply rejected the malevolence. The video has had 457000 views and 15000 shares.