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“Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.”

HENRY FORD

ABSTRACT

Toxic fumes: Stubble is burned to remove paddy crop residues from a field on the outskirts of Sangrur district in Punjab on November 2, 2024. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

How governmentality exacerbates the problem of farmers' stubble burning

A new study by researchers Sujit Raghunathrao Jagadale and Javed M. Shaikh at the Indian Institute of Management, Amritsar analyses the problem of stubble burning from the lens of 'governmentality' and market failure

Jacob P Koshy

Jagadale, S. R., and, Shaikh, J. M, 'Governmentality and Marketing System Failure: The Case of Stubble Burning and Climate Change in Neoliberal India', *Journal of Macromarketing*, 2025
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Come November, the Indo-Gangetic Plain is often clouded in a pall of pollution. The cessation of monsoon winds from the preceding four months and a drop in temperatures lead to pollutants from year-round sources, such as vehicles, power plants, construction dust and other suspended particulate matter, persisting as a black shroud because of the formation of an 'inversion layer'. This means that these particles aren't 'flushed out' from the region by the stronger winds at the higher atmospheric reaches. Add to this the contribution of stubble burning. Particulate matter from the burning of farm stubble – rice chaff – by farmers in Punjab, and to a smaller extent Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh – is added to this haze, worsening the already noxious air quality in Delhi and several other north Indian cities. Farm stubble is burnt in October and November because it is the cheapest method employed by farmers to prepare their soil for Rabi wheat.

A wealth of correlational studies in the last two decades have linked particulate matter from stubble burning and winds originating from Punjab and Haryana to pollution levels in Delhi. In the case of Punjab, during winter, 54% of the time the wind from the State blew towards Delhi, it led to a spike in air pollution; when the wind originated from Haryana, the figure stood at 27%. Every additional fire incident was correlated with an increase in PM2.5 levels of 12.44 units. Studies over the years, most recently in 2023 by a consortium of IIT Kanpur, IIT Delhi, TERI, and Airshed, Kanpur, found that from mid-October to the end of November 2022, the role of stubble burning to air quality was on average 22% and peaked to as much as 35%. This is fairly consistent with previous studies that have estimated the contribution of stubble burning to range from 20%-40%. Many studies have also examined causes for farmers actions. The prescriptions also often analyse what may be changed that could incentivise farmers to cease from such burning.

How policy affects pollution

A new study by researchers Sujit Raghunathrao Jagadale and Javed M. Shaikh at the Indian Institute of Management, Amritsar analyses the problem from the lens of 'governmentality' and market failure. 'Governmentality' is a concept by French sociologist and philosopher, Michel Foucault that refers to how institutions of power – in this case the government – rather than employing explicitly coercive measures induce citizens to adopt self-policing or self-regulating behaviour to govern themselves.

Their study shows that governmentality can end up being counterproductive. The state's implicit directive to farmers to keep increasing grain output ends up promoting "suboptimal behaviours, like stubble burning, among farmers within India's struggling agricultural marketing system."

India's "neoliberal policies," such as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system, paradoxically exacerbates the issue. While MSP guarantees procurement prices for staple crops like wheat and rice, it ends up incentivising mono-cropping, leaving farmers dependent on short-term, unsustainable methods. The study argues that state and market forces create a cycle of marginalisation, pushing farmers toward stubble burning as a survival tactic.

The authors relied on semi-structured interviews with 18 farmers across three Punjab districts (Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Tarn Taran) and an analysis of national newspaper articles. The farmers interviewed ranged from smallholders (2-5 acres) to larger landowners, capturing diverse economic backgrounds. Interviews focused on farmers' decision-making, perceptions of state policies, and interactions with market actors. What they found was that the Union government's MSP policy prioritises wheat and rice production, discouraging crop diversification. Farmers face contradictory signals: the state penalises stubble burning but also offers no affordable alternatives. Farmers also viewed the state as favouring urban-industrial interests ("India") over rural communities ("Bharat"). For example, while stubble burning is vilified, industrial pollution is overlooked. The farmers saw themselves as reliant on middlemen (*arhatias*) who control crop prices, credit access, and market linkages. Farmers sell produce at artificially low prices set by *arhtias*, who profit by reselling at market rates. Debt bondage is common: farmers borrow from *arhtias* for seeds or emergencies, cementing dependency. One farmer noted, "Commission agents deduct expenses from our next income, trapping us in cycles of debt." Stagnant MSP rates (for example, wheat prices rose only 5% over a decade) fail to cover rising cultivation costs, including labour and equipment. The study's novel contribution is to reposition stubble burning not as individual negligence but as a systemic outcome of distorted marketing systems and neo-liberal governance.

Plausible remedies

As solutions, they suggest that remedial interventions primarily focus on developing a market for stubble and stubble-based products, such as fodder, energy products like pellets and packaging materials, aiming to boost farmers' income while simultaneously addressing climate change challenges. For this approach to be successful, efforts are needed to strengthen the value chain through diverse technologies within an enabling ecosystem. Currently, there is a significant lack of an efficient market mechanism for farm-waste, underscoring the need for policy and market interventions to bridge this gap. Although such interventions may require time to be implemented effectively, they necessitate the involvement of stakeholders, including state and market actors, across the value chain.

Regulatory interventions could be conceptualised at three levels: prohibiting stubble burning, managing it through selective permits, and promoting stubble usage by incentivising stubble-based products. Here, active participation from state actors is critical.

A key intervention involves ensuring that farmers receive fair prices for their produce by addressing existing inefficiencies within the market system. The commodities market in India is deeply embedded in socio-political structures, as previously discussed, and requires state-led efforts to enhance price transparency and fairness to support farm incomes.

Moreover, the socio-economic pressure on farmers to engage in aspirational consumption – often detrimental due to limited income –should be acknowledged. Addressing this issue may benefit from fostering cultural change, where socio-cultural organisations, including religious groups, could play a role in de-marketing non-essential aspirational consumption, the authors conclude.

Content.

- **Particulate matter from the burning of farm stubble — rice chaff — by farmers in Punjab, and to a smaller extent Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.**
- **Farm stubble is burnt in October and November because it is the cheapest method employed by farmers to prepare their soil for Rabi wheat.**
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- **India's "neoliberal policies," such as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system, paradoxically exacerbates the issue. While MSP guarantees procurement prices for staple crops like wheat and rice, it ends up incentivising mono-cropping, leaving farmers dependent on short-term, unsustainable methods.**

Fact

- **Union government's MSP policy prioritises wheat and rice production, discouraging crop diversification.**
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How is spaceflight safety ensured?

The Indian Space Research Organisation is currently placing tried and tested protocols in place as it prepares for its maiden human spaceflight mission, Gaganyaan. While Gaganyaan isn't expected to dock with any space station, its crew will be familiarised with the established procedures for docking

FULL CONTEXT

T.V.Venkateswaran

The recent safe return of NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore after a nine-month stay onboard the International Space Station (ISS) underscored the importance of following safety protocols. While these protocols were hidden from view, they allowed NASA to make sure that the astronauts were not harmed physically or mentally in the course of their unpredictable Starliner test mission. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is currently putting similar protocols in place as it prepares for its maiden human spaceflight mission, Gaganyaan. In this endeavour, its scientists and engineers are drawing from both the latest in research and incidents and accidents of the past.

Human spaceflight has three key phases: launch, orbit, and reentry. Let's explore safety protocols in each phase.

Before and during launch

On the launchpad: In 1967, three members of NASA's Apollo-1 crew met with tragedy when the crew capsule they were testing on a launchpad in Florida – even before the rocket took off – caught fire, killing all of them. Should a similar incident recur today, the crew will need to flee the area quickly. Thus, ISRO has installed ziplines and a fireproof bubble lift at its second launch pad at SHAR in Sriharikota.

After ignition until orbital insertion: A human-rated launch vehicle includes an emergency exit device, like the back door of a bus, to be activated in case a life-threatening incident occurs after the rocket has lifted off. In contrast to the Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3), ISRO's medium-lift launch vehicle that lifts satellites, the human-rated version will feature a tower-like structure on top.

The crew module is fastened to this tower-like structure. In case of a launch vehicle malfunction, the crew module and its escape mechanism will first disengage from the main rocket, then, the escape tower's solid fuel engines – designed to ignite quickly – will produce a tremendous amount of thrust in a short period of time, propelling the space capsule upwards and away from the rocket.

This is the Crew Escape System. On the human-rated LVM3, it is tractor-type, meaning a powerful engine will pull the crew module away from harm. The SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule utilises a pusher-type system where the system is located beneath the crew module and pushes it away from the main rocket.

During launch: The crew escape mechanism operates in three modes depending on the altitude obtained during the emergency. ISRO's Crew Escape System has two types of motors: the Low-altitude Escape Motor (LEM), which can generate enough thrust to propel the crew module away from the launch vehicle during the initial phase of the flight, and the High-altitude Escape Motor (HEM), which will kick in at high altitude to provide enough pull to yank the crew module quickly to a safe distance from the rocket.

Pad abort: This is when the emergency escape has to take place moments after ignition. Both the HEM and LEM motors of the Crew Escape System are activated to rapidly transport the whole crew escape assembly and capsule to a safe distance in the shortest amount of time. In low-altitude abort scenarios, both motors are triggered; however, now, the crew module will splash down at a designated spot in the sea. In normal conditions, the Crew Escape System is effectively dead weight. Therefore the LEM – which is the pencil-like element of the tower – is jettisoned at a specific height to reduce weight while the HEM remains attached to the crew module.

The Soyuz T-10 rocket caught fire on the launchpad just before liftoff in 1983. The crew could evacuate safely thanks to the Crew Escape System. Similarly, one minute into the Blue Origin New Shepard flight NS-23 on September 12, 2022, a launch engine failed and the launch escape device worked as intended, allowing the capsule to detach and land safely.

Entering and staying in orbit

ISRO's Gaganyaan crew capsule, which will transport humans, consists of a pair of interconnected modules. The crew module serves as the living quarters for the crew and passengers if any while the service module carries the fuel, engines, control systems, etc.

By the time the capsule gets close to its intended orbit, all components of the crew escape systems will have been released into space. In this case, the capsule's onboard propulsion system, in the service module, will launch the crew module onto a sub-orbital trajectory if emergency evacuation is required.

In the event of an emergency after the spacecraft is in orbit, the service module's propulsion system and the crew module's thrusters will together attempt to reenter the earth's atmosphere, towards the ground.

At the ISS

Gaganyaan isn't expected to dock with any space station, but its crew will nonetheless be familiarised with the established procedures for docking.

After docking, the first step is to keep the capsule docked as a 'lifeboat' in the event of an emergency aboard the station. When the capsule that carried Williams and Wilmore to the ISS malfunctioned, NASA launched another with two vacant seats and docked it to the ISS during their mission. There were two capsules at any time – one SpaceX Crew Dragon and one Russian Soyuz – with passenger capacity to fly them back.

The space station is also to have a 'safe refuge' space where its occupants could go to escape any danger, such as a fire, collision with space debris, or higher doses of radiation released in a solar flare. This area can be airlocked and kept apart from the rest of the module.

Returning to the earth

The most challenging part of spaceflight is reentry. Orbiting the earth is like riding a bicycle: in order to keep from falling down, you need to keep moving forward. Any capsule not firing its thrusters in orbit will slowly be pulled back by gravity and atmospheric drag. When reentry is desirable, the capsule will fire its thrusters accordingly to begin its descent, controlling its speed while also trying to ensure it lands in a particular region on the ground.

Once reentry has begun, atmospheric friction will heat the capsule's outer heat shield to up to 1,800º C. The crew in the crew module will be protected by the shield. Once the capsule has descended to a particular altitude, the crew will slow its descent using retrograde thrusters and deploy parachutes.

The Gaganyaan crew capsule will decelerate throughout reentry using a 10-parachute system. Its apex cover separation parachutes will deploy when it is 15.3 km from the ground and travelling at 276 m/s, After that, a pilot chute will deploy drogue parachutes, stabilising and decelerating the capsule to 70 m/s up to a height of 3 km. Then pilot parachutes will deploy and open the three primary canopies, reducing the drop speed to 10-12 m/s. The parachute will be disconnected once the capsule has splashed down using a pyrotechnic release mechanism.

T.V. Venkateswaran is a science communicator and visiting faculty member at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali.

Space trouble

As of January, space accidents have killed 17 astronauts and 4 cosmonauts in five separate incidents out of around 676 people who have flown to space

The model of the Gaganyaan crew module, a spacecraft that will carry a crew of three astronauts into orbit and back to Earth displayed at the HAL stall, at the 8th edition of Bengaluru Space Expo 2024 (BSX), in Bengaluru on September 18, 2024. MURALI KUMAR. K

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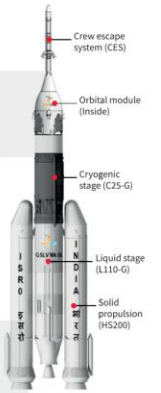
February 1, 2003: The Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated when the shuttle's thermal protection system (TPS) failed during reentry at an altitude of just under 65 kms to its destination killing six U.S. astronauts and one from Israel: Rick D. Husband, William C. McCool, Michael P. Anderson, David M. Brown, Kalpana Chawla, Laurel Clark and Israel's Ilan Ramon



NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams. REUTERS

THE GIST

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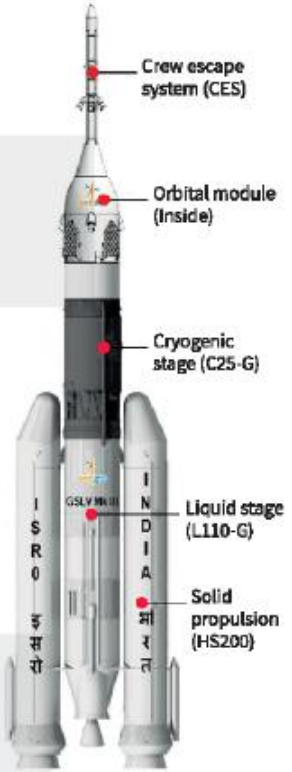

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- **The International Space Station (ISS) is the largest man-made object in space launched on November 20, 1998. It serves as a habitat for astronauts in space.**
- **Since 2011, the ISS has been continuously inhabited.**
- **Participating States: ISS is a collaborative project of the United States (NASA), Russia's (Roscosmos), Europe's (ESA), Japan's (JAXA), and Canada's (CSA) space agencies.**
- **Orbit: The ISS orbits approximately 400 kilometres above Earth.**
- **Speed: It travels around Earth at about 28,000 kilometres per hour, completing an orbit every 90 minutes.**

Key Facts about ISS

- Travels at a speed of **5 miles/second,** orbiting Earth about **every 90 minutes.**
- **Weighs** almost **400 tonnes.**

- **Covers** an area as **big as a football pitch.**
- **Largest artificial body** in **orbit.**
- **Has been continuously inhabited for more than 20 years** beginning with Expedition 1 in 2000.
- **Orbital inclination** is 51.6°, permitting it to fly over 90% of inhabited Earth.

Feminism for polarised times

Ruchi Gupta

Executive Director of the Future of India Foundation

While current debates on delimitation focus on its impact on the federal balance of power, another historic rebalancing is contingent on it – the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023. The Bill marked a watershed moment: gender equity moved from the margins of political discourse to its centre. No institution can now afford to dismiss it. Yet, this very mainstreaming has paradoxically made it harder, at times, to engage with the discourse critically.

As a woman, I often find myself on the edges of the feminist discourse. It's not because I'm "not a feminist" in the way some young women say. But I understand that clumsily expressed discomfort. Today's mainstream feminist discourse can feel like a minefield – demanding disclaimers and caveats before one can step in.

Two terrains

There are two distinct terrains when we talk about women's issues. The first is the structural – the way the design of our society can keep women at the margins. The second is the realm of interpersonal relationships. These overlap, but imposing the structural lens too heavily on the personal risks distorting both. It flattens the richness of human relationships, turning every minor conflict into a battle for power – even when the relationship may be undergirded by love, care, and a willingness to negotiate.

It is true that the personal is political, shaped by deeper hierarchies. But interpersonal relationships are often not reducible to oppression or domination. In India, many men labour quietly – denying themselves comfort, enduring difficult work environments – to support their families. That implicit sense of love and duty creates space for give and take. A husband may expect dinner on the table, but also give his monthly earnings to his wife. Men depending on their wives – emotionally and practically – inevitably reshapes the balance in those relationships. These are not straightforward expressions of patriarchy; they are messy, contradictory, deeply human.

Problematic behaviours exist. But they need to be addressed on their own terms – not simply labelled as misogyny or evidence of oppressive intent. After all, social change comes from public protest and policy reform but also from millions of daily negotiations – quiet shifts in family routines, small acts of solidarity, the rethinking of roles within daily lives. Often, the stories of women from marginalised backgrounds who have achieved unexpected successes include unexpected allies, such as a father who insists on sending his daughter to college. These accounts are part of the real story of progress.

Of course, where women's agency is denied forcibly, we need to address that, through societal change and state power. For instance, daughters who are murdered for pursuing love, or the grassroots elected representative who is made her own proxy by her husband. To empower women we must address multiple interlocking factors: economic independence, legal protections, education, social networks, and cultural shifts. To address these structural issues, we must build state capacity to ensure that institutions actually deliver the protections they promise on paper. However, the most effective interventions work at multiple levels simultaneously – the state and society – and are context-sensitive.

Blurring of inequities

The nature of constraints on a financially independent urban woman who is negotiating household responsibilities is not the same as that of a village woman fearing rape as she steps out at night to access a toilet. Yet, too often, feminist discourse collapses these into a single narrative. It moves too seamlessly between the structural and the interpersonal, the privileged and the vulnerable – sometimes masking inequity more than illuminating it.

This blurring of vastly different inequities – some life-threatening, others negotiable – risks alienating people, especially if they themselves feel embattled as many men do. And while that embattlement is sometimes overstated or misdirected, it is not always imagined. A man earning a lower income who goes to work may endure public humiliation. While his wife may be doing unpaid work at home, she may also be insulated from some of those public indignities. These are not arguments against feminism, but calls for a feminism that acknowledges multiple forms of suffering and responsibility.

Writing this may seem like one is being unnecessarily moderate, complicit in patriarchal structures of power. However, this is also a response to the current moment which is rife with antagonism across all fronts. A more compassionate feminism may be tactically right in this moment, to engender support instead of backlash. When feminist discourse recognises the emotional and economic pressures that shape the lives of men, particularly those at the margins, it invites solidarity rather than defensiveness.

Perhaps what we need now is a feminism that can hold complexity not just within its own ranks but across society. One that can confront injustice without antagonism. One that can distinguish between structure and sentiment, between cultural patterns and individual acts. A feminism that can accommodate contradiction without becoming complicit. This is especially because unlike other battles for rights, within the terrain of male-female relationships, there is no way to segregate the personal from the public. Thus if we adopt an antagonistic framework, we will bring the battle home. That may ultimately be necessary in some cases, but it need not be the starting point.

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Unnecessary change

Amending the RTI Act through the Data Protection Bill is unwarranted

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That the Right to Information Act and the use of RTIs have enhanced the accountability of those in governance in India goes without saying. In the last few years there have been attempts to dilute the provisions of the Act, a landmark one that was passed 20 years ago. Clearly, some in governance and administration have treated the Act and its provisions on transparency and disclosure to be encumbrances. A significant threat has now emerged in the amendment to Section 8(1)(j) of the Act, which has been introduced in Section 44(3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023. The Act itself is an outcome of *K.S. Puttaswamy* (2017), a judgment that upheld the right of privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act allows government bodies to withhold "information which relates to public information" provided its disclosure is not related to public interest or results in an unnecessary invasion of privacy. While doing so, it provides the safeguard that if the Public Information Officer or an appellate authority finds public interest in disclosing such information, it could still be available. This safeguard is important. Some information related to public servants, such as college degrees or caste certificates, might be private, but as a recent and controversial case of a bureaucrat using a fake caste certificate showed, such information could be released in public interest. Section 44(3) of the DPDP act amends Section 8(1)(j) by allowing government bodies to simply withhold "personal information" without the safeguard provisions on public interest or other such exceptions.

In a letter to Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Ashwini Vaishnaw defended the amendment, saying that Section 44(3) was aimed at preventing the RTI Act's "misuse" and was to harmonise the requirement of right to privacy and the right to information. He also said that information such as salaries of public officials would still remain accessible through Section 3 of the DPDP Act. But by amending the RTI Act itself – an outcome that was never the intention of *K.S. Puttaswamy* – and by defining "personal information" vaguely in Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, authorities could deny RTI requests of previously public data by classifying them as "personal" – and lessen public scrutiny. The RTI Act already harmonises concerns related to the right to information and privacy by subjecting them to the question of public interest. Therefore, the amendment using the DPDP Act is unnecessary and unwarranted. The government must take the concerns of civil society and transparency activists and remove the provision amending the RTI Act, in the DPDP Act.

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- **Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act allows government bodies to withhold “information which relates to public information” provided its disclosure is not related to public interest or results in an unnecessary invasion of privacy.**

- **While doing so, it provides the safeguard that if the Public Information Officer or an appellate authority finds public interest in disclosing such information, it could still be available. This safeguard is important.**

- **Some information related to public servants, such as college degrees or caste certificates, might be private, but as a recent and controversial case of a bureaucrat using a fake caste certificate showed, such information could be released in public interest.**

- **Section 44(3) of the DPDP act amends Section 8(1)(j) by allowing government bodies to simply withhold “personal information” without the safeguard provisions on public interest or other such exceptions.**

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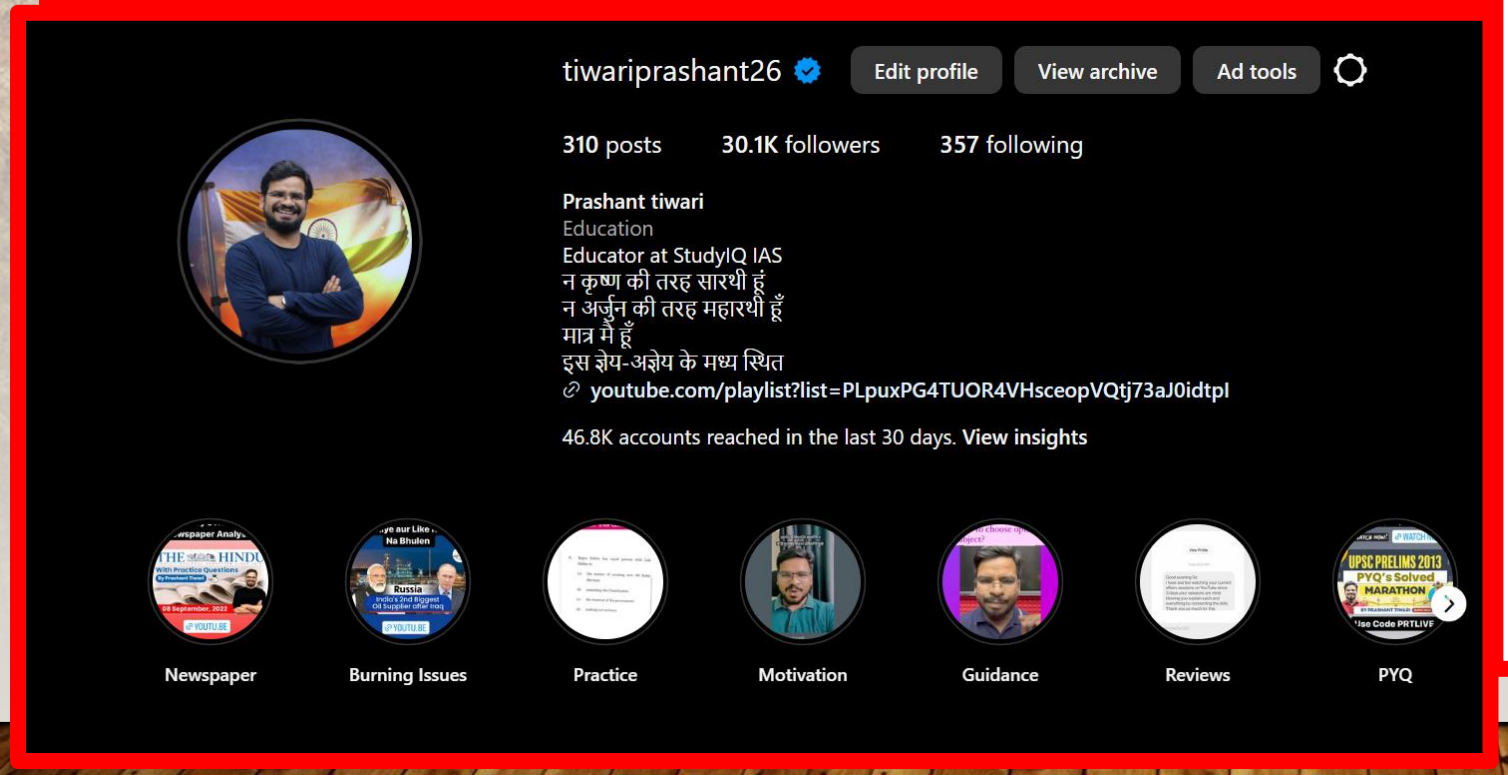

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Description

Thank You!