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ISSUE
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VOICES FROM KALYANA-
KARNATAKA BREAKING
FREE FROM TRADITION.

Stories beyond NEET,
JEE, and judgment

The Tyranny
of Criticism

Redefining
Modernity

Growing Up
Under Parental
Pressure



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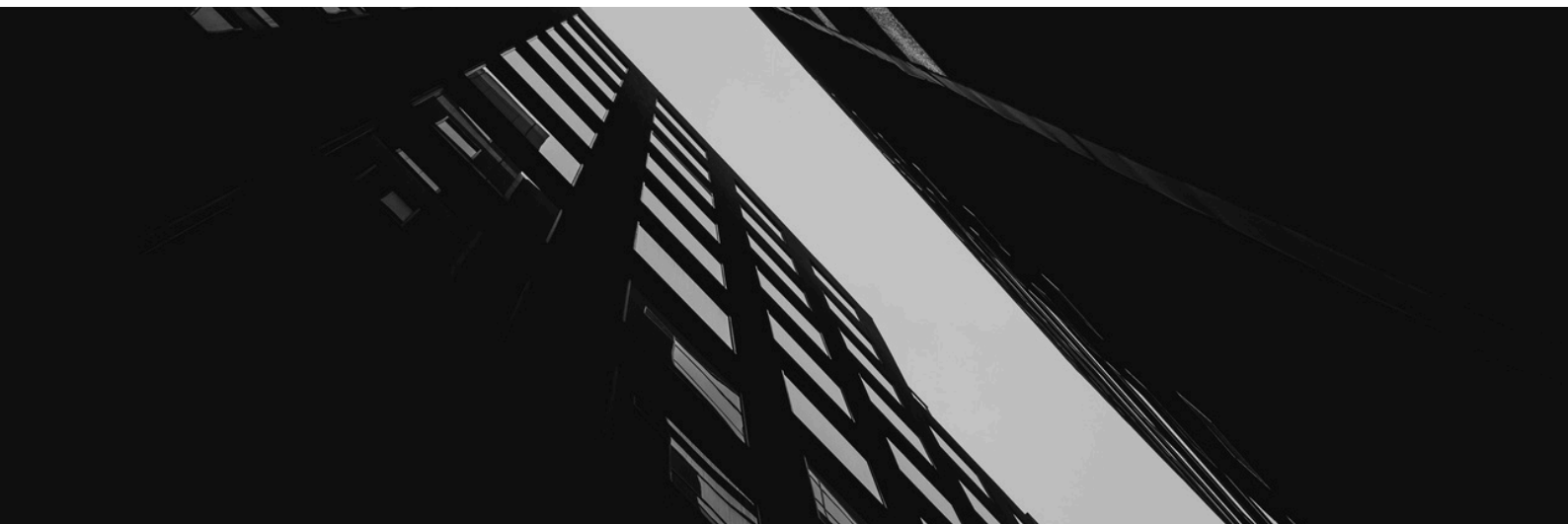
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Sbrpaglu
Editor-in-Chief

From the Editor



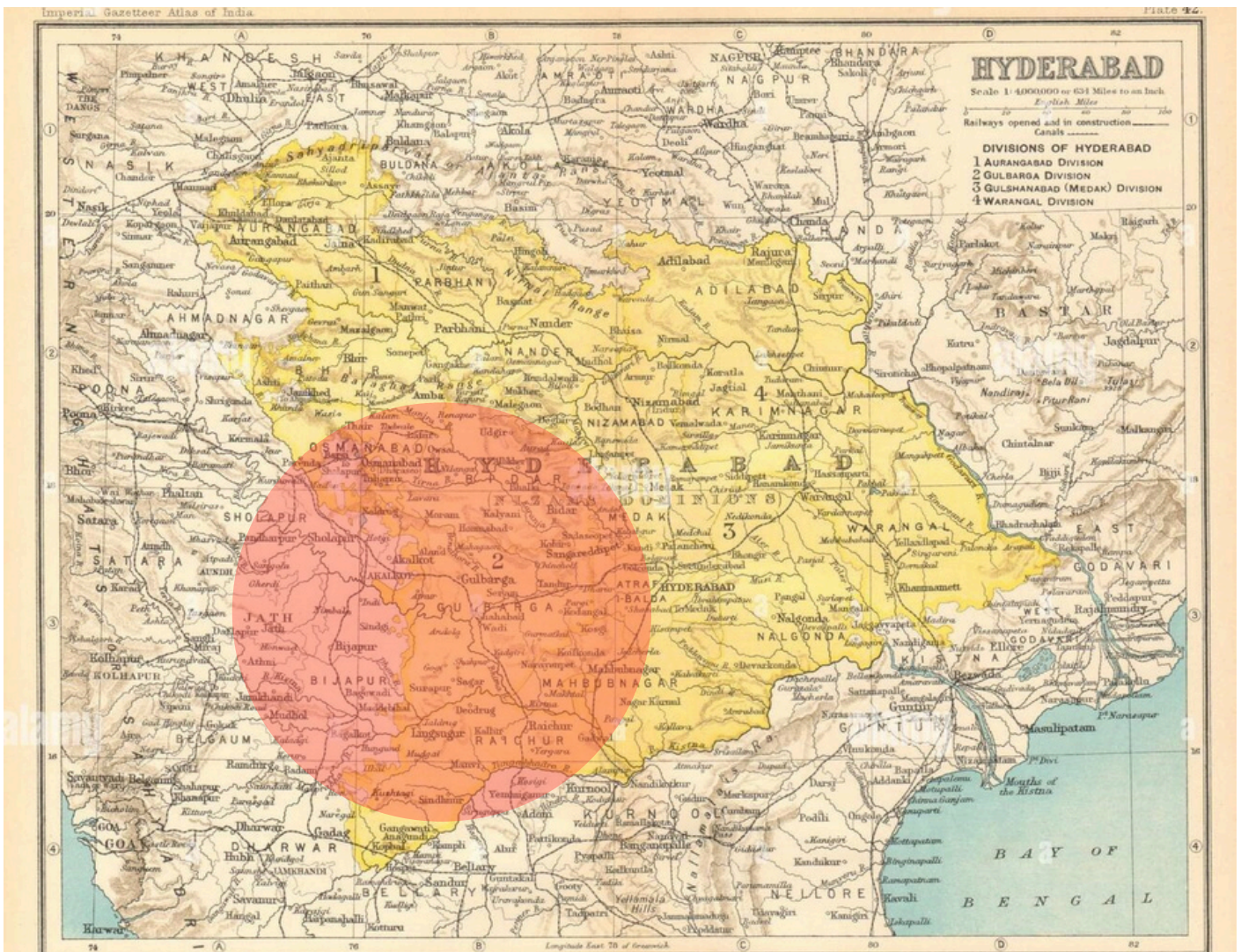
I didn't create this magazine just to complain. I created it because I was tired of being silent. Growing up in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region, I've seen too many brilliant minds crushed under the weight of someone else's dreams—parents who meant well but never asked what we wanted. I've lived the grind of NEET prep, seen friends disappear under pressure, and watched creativity die quietly in science classrooms.

This magazine is a rebellion. A soft, thoughtful rebellion. It's for every student who's been told their art, their emotions, their relationships, or even their rest is a waste of time. Through essays, data, and raw truths, Shacked Dreams tries to do what school often forgets—to listen. Not just to toppers or ideal children, but to those who dare to imagine something different.

"When success has only one definition, dreams become casualties."

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SHACKLED DREAMS



A picture showcasing the region of Hyderabad Karnataka

I grew up in the sleepy towns of Hyderabad-Karnataka (the Kalyana-Karnataka region of Karnataka). I watched classmates and cousins drag themselves to coaching centers at dawn and cry themselves to sleep at night. In my family and neighborhood, success meant only one thing: becoming a doctor or engineer.

Our parents, like many in the six districts (Ballari, Bidar, Kalaburagi, Koppal, Raichur, Yadgir), believed in a rigid script: studious obedience now, guaranteed job later. Any deviation – a hobby, even a daily trip to the gym – was dismissed as wasteful or “Western.”

This pressure is real. Nationwide, entrance exams like NEET and JEE draw millions of hopefuls, but the ratio of aspirants to actual seats is absurdly lopsided. Over 20.3 lakh students sat for NEET-UG, India’s medical entrance test, yet only 11.45 lakh (about 56%) qualified. Those qualifiers then competed for roughly 1.07 lakh MBBS seats and 27.8 thousand BDS seats.

THE TYRANNY

2 million kids Yet only a few hundred thousand slots exist in premier institutes. Such sky-high competition drives families to extremes - uprooting teens to coaching centers signing them up for endless mock tests, drilling them on theory rather than nurturing curiosity.

The obsession with grades and careers in Hyderabad-Karnataka often feels like a tyranny of exams. From childhood, we hear that only certain careers matter: medicine, engineering, or government service. . Even today, extended relatives judge a child's worth by marksheets alone. In practice, this means rote learning and memory games. An IIT Bombay analyst observes: "the shallow form of schooling with its emphasis on information kills rather than develops curiosity and creativity, all made worse by the importance given to 'marks' recorded in exams". In other words, education becomes about acing tests, not understanding or creativity.

These endless tests take a toll. A recent Karnataka study of class XI-XII students aiming for competitive exams found 86% of adolescents reported high academic stress, and 87% felt intense parental pressure. In my class, these numbers felt like personal testimony. Nearly everyone I knew in science stream had dark circles and panic attacks around board exams or mock NEET tests. The study's authors warned that this stress erodes general well-being; students are anxious, sleep-deprived and only half of them reported feeling mentally healthy. It matches what I saw first-hand: even bright, cheerful kids turned irritable and exhausted, their only conversation topic the next exam or score. Such pressure is often self-perpetuating. Parents cite statistics to scare or motivate us, yet the numbers reveal harsh truths



Of those 20 lakh NEET aspirants, only about 1.14 lakh MBBS seats exist. Even among the 11.45 lakh who "qualified," many still don't land a seat, and hundreds of thousands more simply failed to qualify. We compete knowing these odds: roughly 1 out of 10 aspirants go home empty-handed. Yet paradoxically, parents often seem unaware of these inequities. They tirelessly push us into coaching and late-night study, as if effort alone guarantees success, ignoring that most students will not become doctors or engineers. Some even equate effort with worth: "He studies on weekends, he'll make a man!" they say. Meanwhile, they turn a blind eye when our mental health frays - or when siblings talk of arts, sports or soft jobs. The result is a culture where only one path is legitimate.

CREATIVITY CHAINED BY TRADITION

OUTSIDE ACADEMICS, THE SITUATION IS HARDLY BETTER. IN THE HYDERABAD-KARNATAKA HEARTLAND, PARENTS EXPECT CHILDREN TO LIVE BY OLD TRADITIONS

Ask to join a gym, and you're met with suspicion: wasting time "looking at yourself in mirrors." Mention playing a video game, and it's "childish." Pursue painting or music as a serious interest, and you'll hear, "What will you eat out of this?" Many brilliant peers with theatrical or artistic talent quietly abandoned their passions. We idolize the art and culture of our ancestors in stories – the relics of Kalyana and Bidar Sultanates, the folk dances and languages of the region – yet we refuse to let modern students explore any artistry.

This myopia also crushes sports and fitness. I remember begging my father to let me play cricket; he retorted, "Study first, you won't make a career in sports."

What style are you going for? Is it playful? Classic? Bold? A good masthead captures the essence of your magazine, so it needs to be flexible, meaningful, and consistent enough for future issues. Next, think of a compelling feature for your cover story. This will be what draws your audience in. Make sure that you have accompanying visual content that immediately catches the eye. Include photos, illustrations, and other graphics to match. Appeal to your audience, choose the right fonts and images, and you'll have a magazine that people will remember for years to come. When you've decided on your India's sports scientists and athletes bemoan this attitude: as one Times of India report notes, India is still "a country where sport is not considered a viable career option

If even Olympic stars fear discrimination, it's no wonder parents feel it's safer to have kids stick to books. Even fitness and regular exercise are frowned upon – ironically, while research shows that physical activity improves academic performance and mental health. A recent study found that children engaged in regular school physical education exhibit "stronger interpersonal interactions, lower anxiety, and greater self-esteem in addition to superior academic results" jrpsjournal.in. In other words, if we went for that run or hit the gym, we'd likely study better, not worse. But popular belief is stuck in the myth that gym = distraction or vanity.

- **Worse is the hypocrisy in lifestyle control. In social matters, many of these conservative-minded parents paradoxically embrace aspects of modernity (smartphones, fashion, luxury), but not for their children's choices**

The Hidden Toll: Anxiety and Burnout



A Anxious person sitting

All this pressure does not dissipate quietly. It breaks young minds. Across India, doctors and counselors are reporting soaring cases of teen depression, anxiety, even suicide – often linked directly to the academic rat race and parental pressure. In Ludhiana, psychiatrists find they now treat double the student cases they did five years ago. They describe symptoms that mirror my own friends: anxiety, irritability, loss of interest, even suicidal thoughts. Research confirms these stories. The Karnataka survey (cited above) warned that adolescents under such stress often develop depression and insomnia

Another study in India found 81.6% of exam-bound teens suffered exam-related anxiety, and 66% acknowledged heavy parental pressure for high marks

What's most tragic is that many parents still blame the children – as if “growing up” and striving for high achievement naturally means collapsing by age 16. one psychiatrist warns that “mounting expectations from the family precipitate mental disorders” in kids who simply can't cope. I saw how my own father refused to accept that he might fail an exam or get a low rank, calling it “laziness.” It turns normal teen woes into personal failures. Unlike proud announcements of achievements, parents rarely discuss failure or resilience. In fact, psychological experts emphasize this gap: Dr. Param Saini says parents must realize children are not vessels for their unfulfilled dreams, and teach them that “failure is not an end in itself”. But for most families here, that message is missing.

This suffocating environment breeds low self-worth. Students become “capricious and inattentive,” struggling to concentrate and constantly fearing the next test. In my college, many classmates – especially those who didn't “make it” in engineering or medicine – confessed feeling like impostors or failures. Some became secret gamers or social media addicts just to escape. Others turned rebellious in small ways: dyeing hair, staying out late, then apologizing. Burnout in our community became a badge of honor: the kid who quit coaching last year “after several failed attempts at JEE” was a topic of hushed gossip.

Beyond the Classroom: loss of *Identity*



**WHEN EVERY CHILD'S
WORTH IS MEASURED BY
EXAM PERFORMANCE,
INDIVIDUALITY IS LOST.**

. I watched shy, creative cousins become shadows of their own personalities. One friend, talented in sketching folk designs, abandoned art classes because “they won’t put food on the table.” Another loved writing Kannada stories but joined biotechnology “for respect.” We all learned to hide parts of ourselves. The few who did choose arts or sports paid for it with criticism: our families brand them as lazy or irresponsible, forgetting that it was these very fields that could have brought them joy and even success.

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This isn’t a lack of talent – it’s a lack of encouragement. But for many, “later” never comes. My local Nagarika Kannada community newspaper once featured an interview with a district bank manager who became a writer secretly because as a boy he wasn’t allowed to pursue literature – he “did business for stability.” The irony is stark. To be honest None of them had scientific reason – just old beliefs. Little do they realize studies show exercise can help anxiety, focus and mood. But myths persist, and children pay the price by sitting still from dawn to dusk.

To be honest None of them had scientific reason – just old beliefs. Little do they realize studies show exercise can help anxiety, focus and mood. But myths persist, and children pay the price by sitting still from dawn to dusk.

Breaking Free: Toward *Empathy* and Empowerment

THIS SYSTEM ISN'T BROKEN IN ONE EASY WAY - BUT CHANGE MUST START AT HOME AND IN SOCIETY.

First, parents must be counseled too. Mental health experts increasingly stress that parents with rigid expectations need guidance as much as students. Parents should learn to value their child's unique strengths, not just trophies and ranks. For example, hearing that "failure is not an end in itself can free a student to pursue slower paths without shame. Schools and colleges could hold seminars not just for students but for families on topics like stress management and career guidance (instead of just glorifying top scorers).

If parents realized that many young achievers regret their obsessive training regime, or that successful people often switch careers and stumble along the way, maybe they would relax their grip. After all, growing up should be about finding yourself, not fitting yourself into someone else's mold. As one counselor put it, parents need to unconditionally accept their child's talents and flaws. In Hyderabad-Karnataka - a land rich in history and potential - we must give our youth room to breathe and become. Only then will the next generation build on our cultural heritage with creativity and confidence, rather than just a list of grades.





Brighter *Vision*

THE END

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