



CELEBRATING HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, 2020

HEAR MY VOICE!

LET'S MAKE IT COUNT.



Written by:

**A-LEVELS
CLASS OF 2021**

Exercising our Freedom of

THOUGHT & EXPRESSION

Published on

10TH DEC 2020

“
**human
rights
are not
optional**

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY
DECEMBER 10, 2020

”

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“When the
whole world
is silent, even
one voice
becomes
powerful.”

Malala Yousafzai

FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK



"Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.", William Wordsworth has said and today I am so proud to be sharing the breathings of the AS Level students in this wonderful compilation of their writings.

For a Principal, one of the greatest rewards is seeing the students take the responsibility of going beyond the confines of their curriculum. The students share their thoughts on issues closest to their hearts which they aptly decided to call "Hear My Voice". These are voices that reverberate with their passion and the strong convictions they hold on matters that matter to them. And it is this passion and strength of conviction that will resonate with all the readers of this book, just as did for me.

It is a pleasure to read the contributions – each one unique in its style - and giving us an insight into the minds and thoughts of the youth of today. I am proud of the courage you have shown to voice your thoughts.

I appreciate the collaborative work you have put in to see the book to its completion. These are valuable lessons you will carry for life and will stand you in good stead always – a deep respect and regard for each one's voice and the ability to come to a consensus, in spite of varying opinions.

This work is testimony of my belief and confidence in the capabilities and proficiency of my young Podar students. I wish the book every success.

Well done Class of AS Level 2020-21. Happy Reading to all !

Dr. Mrs. Vandana Lulla
Director/Principal

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

10TH DECEMBER, 2020

We are the generation of the future, we will live to inherit the earth, and we are now old enough and bold enough to start standing up for the issues that we believe in.

This anthology contains numerous original pieces from young people who have stepped up, demonstrating courage and passion, to speak up for those who cannot.

**REALISATION, RESILIENCE,
REFLECTION & REALITY ARE
OUR STEPPING STONES FOR A
BRIGHTER FUTURE.**

Hear My Voice was an idea born out of the realization that this world needs leaders, thinkers and fighters. As young people, we are fighting for our future and for the world that our children will grow into. This Human Rights Day, we are exercising our Freedom of Thought and Freedom of Expression to make our voices heard on real issues that we hold dear. Even the pandemic couldn't hold us back!





CHAPTER 1

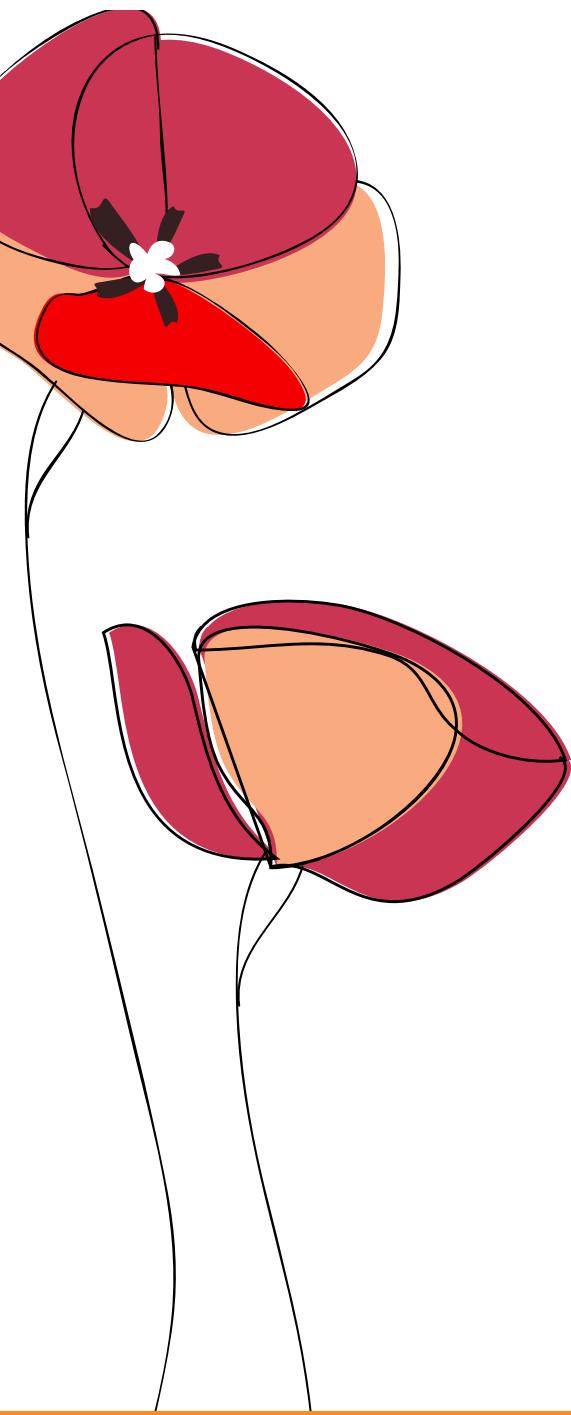
REALISATION

/ri:əlʌɪ'zeɪʃn/

noun *The fact or moment of beginning to truly understand a situation*

Listen

BY FARAH CHOWDHURY



Every day it gets worse,
Does humanity not feel remorse?

Another tree cut, another girl child lost,
Another man killed, at what cost?

Don't be deaf, ignorance isn't bliss,
We need to take action, this opportunity
we must not miss,

Another day passes,
And so I turn to the masses,

Listen, learn, change, and grow,
Love, accept and the difference will
show.

FOR ONCE



If you saw the destruction your generation did, why didn't you stand up for your children?

*If you knew your kids were to die someday from your mistakes,
Would you do anything to fix it?*

You called us names for caring, for thinking about those you've hurt.

*You call us names for caring, for trying to save those you hurt.
Do you even know what you've done?*

*It may be scary for you when your child walks out alone at night,
But think about the child her father died for being not white.
Does the colour of his skin matter more than his life?*

*Or the child who thinks they have to hide themselves,
Just because they don't conform to your structure of gender or sex?
Have you ever even opened your eyes?*

*Call us crazy, call us fools; You should have been an inspiration.
We are fools, but only for trusting you.
Can you see what you've done?*

*The planet is dying; the people are starving.
Those who deserve to smile? They are crying.
Was this the world you built for us?*

*Millions don't have a home to cherish, but they have degrees-
Bachelor's, Master's, PhD.
Why didn't you do better?*

*We're supposed to be global citizens, mending every bridge you broke.
International relations, to you, feels like a joke.
What would you do if you were here; what anger in you would this provoke?*

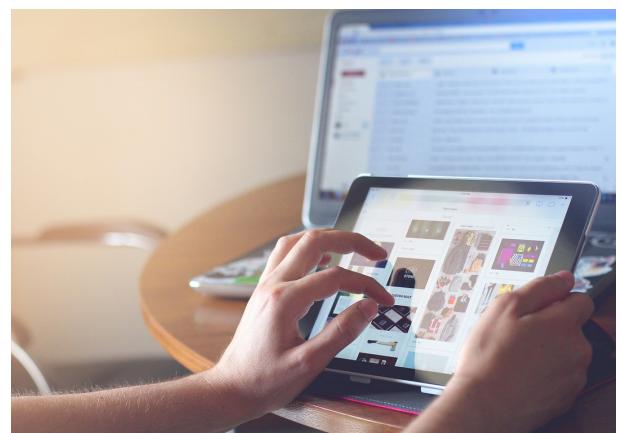
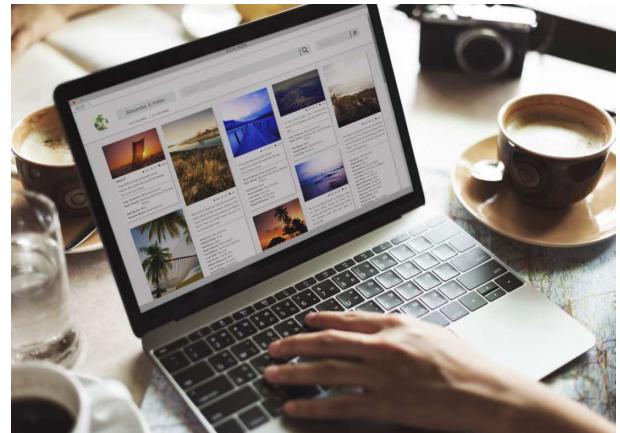
CRUSADERS OF YOUTH

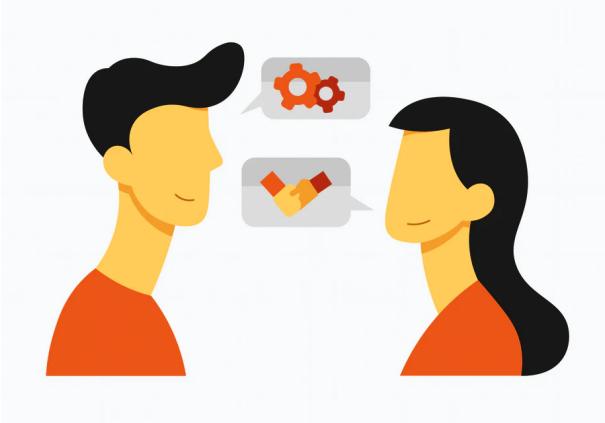
BY OWAIS BUBERE

The issues facing youth in the twenty-first century are greatly different from issues of youth centuries bygone. We, the youth of today often consider ourselves to be superior to others because we are fortunate to have everything we need and more. Our generation is far more pampered and therefore, at risk of being spoilt as compared to our predecessors. Even though we are old enough to do so, many of us are too settled into the lap of luxury to shoulder any hard responsibilities.

Young people in the twenty-first century know more and have access to vastly greater quantities of information than ever before. We have lots of information at our fingertips. This means we are less likely to accept authoritative answers, and want to find out things for ourselves.

In this new millennium, society has begun to recognise serious concerns with issues that the youth have to deal with today. The dangerous phenomena are numerous: drugs, cyber-bullying, distraction overload, depression, anxiety, loneliness, insecurities, and declining mental health to name a few.





By Fr

Youth especially from the elite and privileged families are more extravagant in their desires, leading a luxurious lifestyle and knowing little of the boons of hard work. Most of us spend the majority of our time online. The online world has a lot of positive things to offer, however because we spend a long time online, whether it is on a smart phone, an Internet-connected gaming system or a computer, I think that we miss the vital opportunity to develop their interpersonal skills and build strong relationships. There is also the darker side of the Internet to consider like cyber bullies. But the solution isn't to keep us kids off the Internet, it's to help us build the skills we need to stay safe while online. Just like you taught us how to cross the street when we were little, start teaching us how to be safe online well before the teen years. Talk to us about what we do online and who we talk to. Teach us never to share personal information or photos with strangers and never to agree to meet someone we meet online. Teach us this right from a young age, we need it!

In our society there are many young people who cannot even afford to get proper education. Costly higher education in the private institutes and lack of basic amenities in the government or the government aided educational groups has proven to be a big drawback for our disadvantaged peers.

Sometimes, racism, discrimination against people of opposite gender, caste, creed or religion makes them a victim of emotional/mental disorders. Many of us are without hope or encouragement, discouraged and depressed to the point where we are suicidal. We look at the world around us, and we see no hope for the future. There is unrest and war throughout the world that we will inherit. Sometimes we really feel like we don't belong.

Another main problem that I've noticed is the communication gap between youth and the elders. We believe that we are old enough to take our own decisions for personal or social matters, while the elders just refuse to hand over this responsibility to us. The underestimating of our capabilities often limits our ability to grow, because we aren't trusted with bigger responsibilities and challenges. It could also lead to the underdevelopment of our personalities. Living in our comfort zones and completely enjoying the luxury which parents have provided can steal motivation and lead to laziness.



The most common problem we as young people face is peer pressure. Many of us hesitate in taking our parents' advice in different matters, particularly on issues sensitive to us and thus we land up in taking up the wrong decision. Recreational drugs and alcohol are taken as an easy escape from failure and the struggles related to success. I really feel that the real standpoint is that the young are the pillars of social, economic and political developments.

In many parts of the world, young people, like me, are still suffering from hunger, lack of access to education, health services and job opportunities, and are exposed to insecurity and violence. I strongly believe that we as a society should value the imagination, ideals and energies of young men and women, who are the future stakeholders of our societies. To ensure the thriving of the human spirit, we should place more trust in the newer generation and I believe that we should voice our opinions and thus prosper!

Be a voice,
not an
echo.

Speak up. Speak out.





CHAPTER 2

RESILIENCE

/rɪ'ziliəns/

noun *The ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult life events, stronger than before.*

The Depths

By Ruhaan Takalkar

The vast ocean... a benevolent giant. One that used to call out to me every time I wandered near it, but now.... silence. My mind used to be filled with curiosity. But now, it's all a blank, as hollow as an empty cup, which is too engulfed in fear to fill itself. Why fear you ask? Well, it all began that summer day...

Friday 13th December 2018, I still wonder why I went to the beach that day. I remember mom asking me "Who goes to surf in Capetown's icicle freezing waters!?" and all I had said was "me mom, me". The waves were crashing atop the shore's humongous boulders. Dad had come with me too and we both headed out to sea.

As we waited for some decent waves to show up, we spotted a couple of seals next to our surfboards. At the time dad was around 2 clicks north of me on the inland. Neither of us were scared of the seals as they were quite used to humans surfing there hence, they wouldn't attack. The wind had abruptly stopped blowing and even the tide had died down, I was disappointed. All of a sudden, all the seals swam away swiftly to an island nearby. My stomach instantly started churning and curling within itself. I should've realised, that was my instinct to flee.

The water around me started rippling. A fin started emerging from the depths of the deep blue.



My mind was spinning in circles and fear clouded my judgement. I was foolish to think I could out-swim it. The second I tried to swim away I could hear the waves pushing against me, as though I were in Jaws, the movie, itself. I started splashing to make a signal, for my father to see. My second mistake. It then knew exactly where I was. I could hear the fin of the monster slowly ripping through the water, making its way closer and closer. Then, my entire body was pulled under. I could feel every inch of that monster's teeth engraving themselves deeper into my leg. I heard it, "Crunch" and then I felt it, more precisely, I couldn't feel it anymore.

My leg was gone.

At this point I didn't know what I was doing. My leg was missing. The water around me had become a murky maroon and my eyes were slowly shutting, I thought I was done for. My body felt cold, not from the water, from the inside. I was hoping that I could survive but even the most strong-willed person gives up after a certain point.

The war being waged in my mind was exhausting and prolonged. Luck is an evil thing; it is never on the side of those who deserve and are in desperate need of it. My body had begun its descent into the deep blue and my mind had begun its downfall as well. I couldn't see anything (that was probably because my eyes were shut) and the last thing I felt before I fell unconscious, was a warm hand on my back.

So that brings us up to date: I woke up in hospital all bandaged. Something didn't feel right. Well actually, I couldn't feel anything left, if you get what I'm saying. My life after that day was never the same.

For a year I was in a wheelchair and after that I got a prosthetic leg, but it just isn't the same. My family and friends keep telling me how everything will become better, or how they know how I feel, or time heals everything. I know they are trying to help but none of them know what it feels like to look at something you once loved but now are too scared to even think about.

I have nightmares in the middle of the day. Whenever I pass the beach, my memories resurface.

Whenever I look at my surfboard, all the good memories are clouded with blood and fright. Whenever I'm washing my hands, they begin trembling. Nobody understands the chill you feel when everything goes blank, when your heart starts slowing down but you are still alive and dependant on it. They say when you go through a traumatic experience you have a better overview on life, but what they don't tell you is that you lose a part of yourself. I lost my love for the sea to fear. It's not that I wanted to lose my passion, but I'm like a helpless ant being mercilessly crushed under the foot of that memory.

There are many moments in our lives where we are forced to make a decision, either we push past the obstacles or we fall deep into a pit that will trap us for the rest of our lives. Luckily, I haven't reached that moment yet.

Everyday my parents tell me how I need to get back out there otherwise I'm always going to be afraid, that I need to... face my fears head on.

I agree. I think everyone needs to face their fears but, only when and if they are ready, and frankly, I'm not. I went through a life changing experience; my fright and anxiety are justified. Our society needs to learn that it is perfectly acceptable to demand for some time. We are human after all. I don't know when I'll be ready. It might be next week, it might be next month or even next year. But that is okay. Everyone reading this should know that you are only human and you take time to get over traumatic experiences. Don't listen to people telling you otherwise because- and this is my experience talking - its you who will decide when it's ok to feel comfortable and try again. You are dealing with issues that you need to resolve and lastly, it's you who understands your mind's composure so don't ever push yourself for anyone else.



if you want
the rainbow,
you got to
put up with
the rain

A SECOND CHANCE



BY ASMI KAWATKAR

*"Valuing time with your
family does not mean
you've lost ambition.
Define success for
yourself."*

A set of keys, a passport, a credit card
Were all that remained on the table
Besides a dark, navy overcoat,
Boasting a fancy designer label

A perpetual frown crowned his forehead,
A mouth that knew no smiles,
A stern, unmoving expression,
Of a man who had travelled miles

He had come far to see this place,
He called it home during his youth,
Now he only wanted to see its state,
Before he sold it, to tell the truth

A blanket of dust shrouded it all.
Emptiness had conquered the home,
Once filled with smiles and laughter,
Where many a child had roamed.

Sunlight slanted through the windows,
Conjuring up images in the dust,
Wind wailed through broken glass panes,
A lonely, moaning gust.

As he walked around the home now,
The memories sprung up fast,
His childhood flashed before his eyes,
A joyful, happy past.

In the kitchen he had helped with baking,
Stuck a finger in the batter if he was bold,
The hearth with its once roaring fires,
Now sat bare and cold.

The living room had seen intense conquests,
During evenings of family games,
The walls had groaned under the weight
Of numerous picture frames.

Dust gathered on his expensive shoes,
As he stood there, very still,
While other memories surfaced,
Dark ones, against his will.

The fights and the shouting,
As voices rose and fell
Before he stormed out of the house,
When the quarrels would not quell.

He remembered the dark stormy night,
When he had made up his mind to leave,
So consumed by ambition and hubris,
That he did not stop to grieve

To grieve for everything he had lost,
For all that he left behind,
The love and the care and the kindness,
How could he have been so blind?

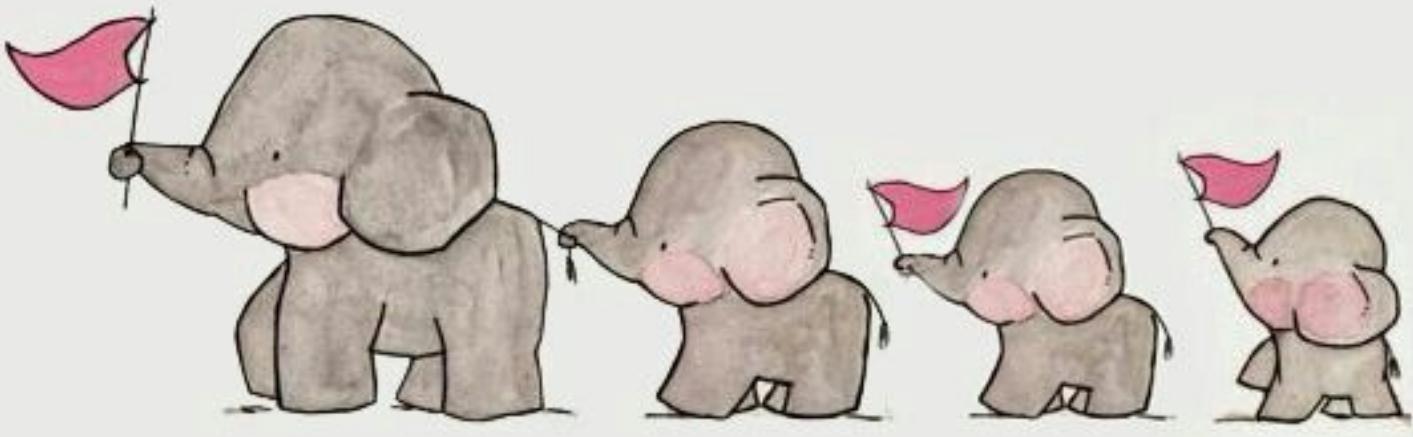
He remembered how they had run after him,
His parents had done all they could
To convince him to come back home,
But stubbornly firm he had stood



And now that they were all gone,
His siblings paid him no heed
They regarded him as that brother
Who they had lost to greed

He had built himself an empire,
And he had spared no cost,
But he had paid no heed to those,
He had once loved and now lost

He remembered that fateful day,
Just a few years ago,
When the dire news had arrived,
But he had no sorrow to show



For so long he had stayed away,
Keeping a lid on all emotion,
That this newfound irresistible urge,
Was a really strange notion.

He found himself in his bedroom,
Stripped bare, like all the rest,
Everything packed; cleared away,
At his own behest.

He had deserted them all,
Left his family for ambition,
But after all this time he realised,
His was a fruitless mission.

There was no point in being rich,
Happiness couldn't be bought with cash,
And suddenly his lid flew off,
The emotions rising up in a flash.

He stepped softly into the rooms,
Remembering the good times there,
His eyes widened in nostalgia,
Before tearing up in despair

His gold watch glinted in the sun,
As dirt settled on his suit,
Remorse and guilt rose up,
Leaving destruction absolute.

He sat down heavily on the porch,
Not caring for the stains of mud,
As he mourned all he had lost,
Connections severed in cold blood.

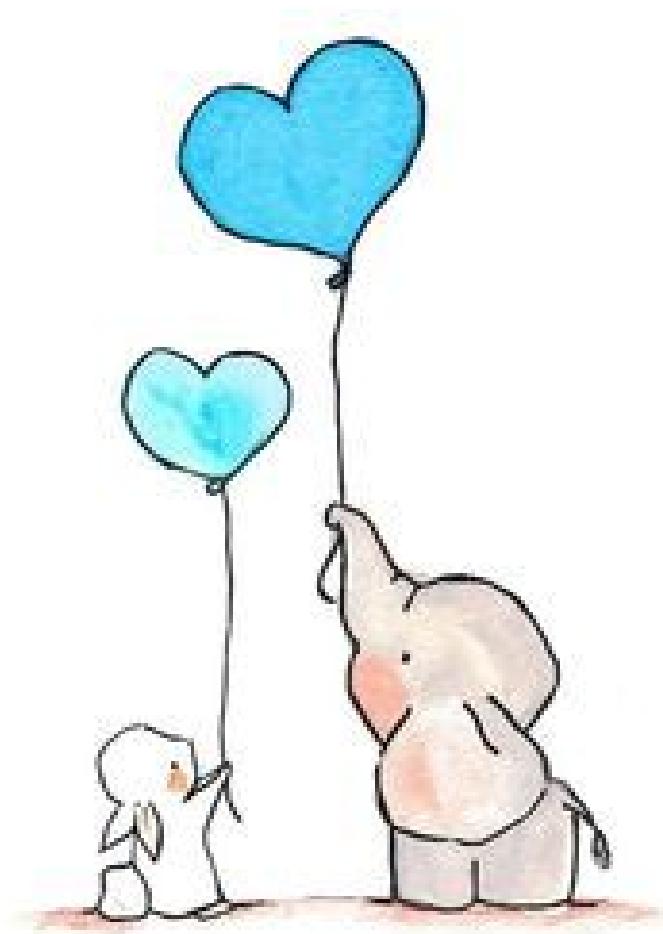
His eyes stung painfully,
As the tears began to fall,
Regretting all his wrongdoings,
He had never felt so small.

He had an empire, a fleet of cars,
Luxurious mansions to his name,
He owned hundreds of pairs of shoes,
But so futile was his fame.

Everyone looked up to him,
Be it in fear or respect,
But what they would never see,
Was him, alone in every respect.

Emotionless and distant,
He always had a plan,
He was stubborn and unrelenting,
But he was only the shell of a man.

He had no one to go home to,
No one watching his back,
No one to talk and laugh with,
Maybe this was a cruel payback.



Sometimes the biggest battles we fight are with ourselves.

Today, be thankful and think how rich you are. Your family is priceless. Your time is gold. Your health is wealth.

His parents had left him their home,
And he still couldn't fathom why,
Perhaps it was their way of saying,
That he still had to try .

As he sobbed alone in the yard,
With no smokescreen, no guise,
Feeling a little nudge to his foot,
He slowly quietened his cries.

A tiny puppy stood there,
Pawing his shiny shoe,
As if to say 'Hey don't worry,
I'll be here for you'.

Large brown eyes gazed up at the man,
And in this circumstance,
He saw this as an opportunity,
His only second chance.

He scooped the puppy into his arms,
A laugh bubbled out from him,
To see the wagging of the puppy's tail
Made everything seem less grim.

When they left the home that night,
He was grubby from head to toe,
And despite the day's happenings,
He had a smile to show.

The keys jangled in his pocket,
As the puppy bounded along,
The man had a spring in his step,
He was even whistling a song!

He felt light and unburdened,
But beyond and above,
Going home didn't seem so bad,
Now that he had someone to love.



A FLOWER DOES
NOT THINK OF
COMPETING WITH
THE FLOWER NEXT
TO IT. IT JUST
BLOOMS.

THE GIRL BEHIND THE FILTER

Medha Agarwal

She sat there crying on the floor, no one around her, no one knocking at the door. She hid herself and her tears in her palms. It didn't work They saw her, they saw it all and now she had no way out. She had nowhere to go.....she had to face them all.

A girl loved by everyone for her looks and social media posts, a famous girl who on camera led the perfect life, had the perfect style, got all the attention and was who was on everyone's mind.

All around her wanted to be like her, have the confidence she had, have the grace she had and be her, be in her shoes for a day, live her perfect life, but did 'they' know any of the truth? NO, because it wasn't to be known. It was what she never would in a million years want anyone to know.

She had hidden her reality, her life, herself, and everything about her behind filters. A girl so known in her school was not for her reality.

She was a human hidden behind Instagram filters and pounds of makeup to make her look like what people knew her as, and not who she was! Her whole life has been like this, not having the guidance and help had made her this way. Her whole life has been a lie!

Her life on camera was bright, filled with joy, happiness, perfection, and beautiful. But, was this the truth? No. The truth was that her life behind the cameras was not the same. It wasn't perfect. It didn't have joy or happiness. It was dark and fake. It was filled with makeup and filters and behaviour that wasn't hers, that didn't belong to her.

But was this because she had gone through something - a traumatic incident or had someone said anything or done anything to her? No. It was all in her mind. She always imagined incidents and was petrified by her own imagination. It was the self-doubt she had created on her own and not because of someone else.

Every time she stepped out, she was always a different person, someone who wasn't even close to her actual self. It was like her but in the mirror world. Someone completely opposite to what she is now.



IT'S NOT YOUR JOB TO BE EVERYTHING TO EVERYONE.

She was afraid of people not accepting her. She was scared that people would judge her and hate her and feel disgusted of her scars and her real self and her reality. So, she started covering her scars and her natural looks and also ended up covering who she actually was. She believed that she was going to be laughed at for the way she spoke and walked and sat and stood and any action she did. So, she changed her walk, her smile, her grace her everything.

She wore a mask everywhere she went just so that she was accepted, loved and cared for. She never had an identity, she created a fake one. This identity that she created to be loved and to bring happiness into her life had crushed her inside out. It had cost her her mental stability and her happiness. The reason she did all this never gave her the favoured outcome and instead caused more harm than she had already created for herself.



She never had confidence in herself. She was afraid to come out in public or in her school in her real identity. Her heart would start throbbing inside her chest, sweat dripping down her forehead, and her face would become pale just at the thought of what people would think about her. Would they accept her and include her in their group or any activity they do?

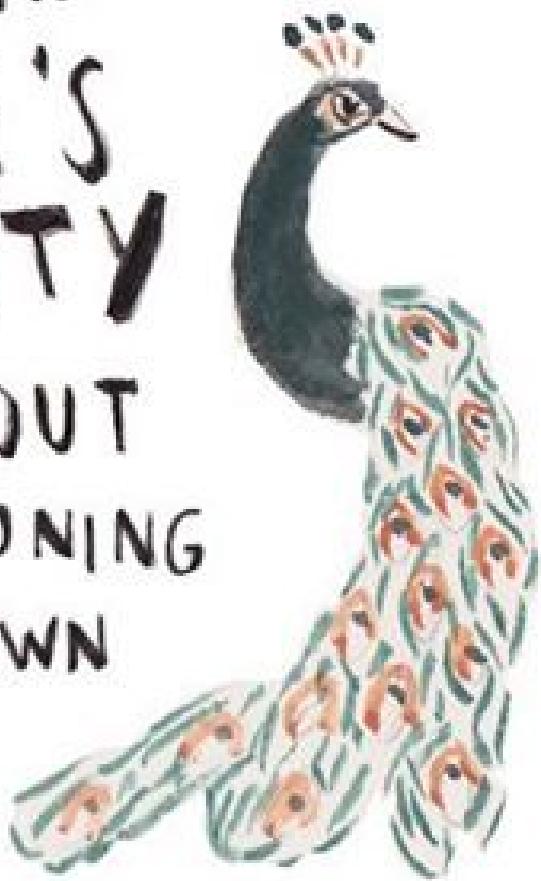
She started living under covers. Covers that hid her beautiful personality. Covers that she hated. Her vibrant dimpled smile that lit up the room. Her bright charismatic face that looked simply perfect. She hid all her beauty under covers without even appreciating or even liking herself even once.

The girl lived in a mist of clouds that filled her thoughts and her surroundings. She didn't know how to love herself and the importance of accepting who she was.

She always wished she looked different and if she could switch her place with someone more beautiful. Little did she know that she was beautiful inside out and there was no need to change.

Often people create self-doubt about who they are and how they look. Everyone compares themselves to people around them and end up putting them on top and start detesting themselves. So did this girl. Her insecurities and self-doubt had made her life miserable. She didn't have her own identity. Her self-doubt and not accepting and loving the way she was had caused her to ruin her life and live inside a bubble that only had covers and self-doubt.

ADMIRE
SOMEONE
ELSE'S
BEAUTY
WITHOUT
QUESTIONING
YOUR OWN





CHAPTER 3

REFLECTION

/rɪ'fleksʃ(ə)n/

noun Serious thought or
consideration

noun An idea about something,
especially one that is written
down or expressed



INTROVERSION

BY SIDDH MERCHANT

In the present day, being an introvert is not taken positively. It is viewed in a negative perspective and thus introverts are pushed to be more social and talk, ultimately being forced out of their comfort zone. Yes, man is a social animal and communication is undoubtedly one of the most important skills that must be mastered but here is where most people falter and slip away from the path that leads to understanding the true nature of an introvert.

Being an introvert is not the same as being shy. Yes the two groups are woven by the same thread but they ultimately form entirely different patterns. A shy person stays shut off because of fear of socializing. However, an introvert does so because they genuinely may not want to talk as they may be deep in thought and prefer silence to excessive noise and disturbance.

Mind you, it's not because they fear people or are afraid to talk it's just that they don't enjoy people's company as much as an extrovert craves it. An extrovert's social nature has been embedded in their nature and characteristic into the acceptable social norm. An introvert's silent nature has simply allowed the persona of an extrovert to overhang and engulf it; as a result it sends it into oblivion and makes it unnoticeable to most people leading to some serious misunderstandings.

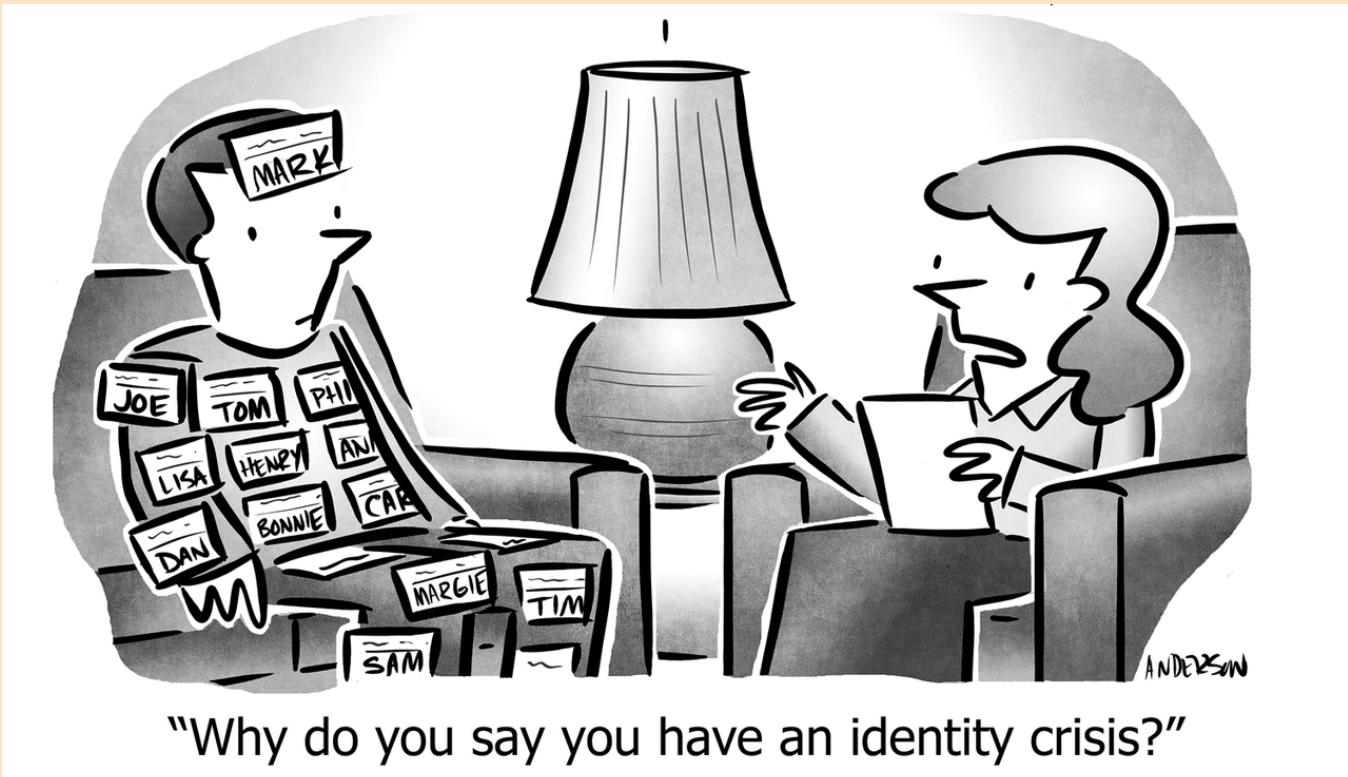


When an introvert sits in a corner and reads a book they are engulfed by their personal space and they tend to flourish in it. Their minds prove to be more expansive, imaginative and creative than their counterparts. As a result, they dwell in their own self and enjoy their own company.

Think of one introvert being equivalent to two different people. They enjoy having conversations with themselves, think about intellectual topics for hours together and dwell on their thoughts, living a separate life altogether. Because of this, they tend to look at the outside world with lesser interest and thus don't enjoy socialising.

To most people, the above is either not acceptable or it simply isn't understood. We introverts simply prefer the corner of the stage rather than the center. We prefer living in oblivion because it provides us with precious gifts like silence, serenity and peace. It is a place where symmetry thrives shunning away the pandemonium that is born out of the chaos of our present world. It is a place that can be remodeled, rebuilt and reformatted into something that can only be found by taking the route of imagination, it is our safe haven, our sanctuary, so please let us be there.

Don't pull us and drag us to the center of the stage. Don't be the wind that pulls us towards the eye of a tempest because, unlike most people, we are simply not suited to deal with the chaos and commotion associated with a social life.



IDENTITY

BY SHREYA ISHARANI

Every individual has gone through a phase in their life where they wonder "who am I?", "what am I?". We often hear people saying the world is changing. Humans try to alter themselves. They are under pressure. If society accepts them, they compare themselves to someone who is doing better than them.

Then what is identity? A characteristic by which a person or a thing is distinguished by their ideology, qualities, personalities and perspective.

Each person is unique due to their thoughts, actions and emotions just like the world revolving around us. We are invariably faced with tasks to accept, understand and appreciate a more diverse pool of thoughts and beliefs.

"We know what we are but know not what we may be"

- William Shakespeare

According to research, humans have a natural tendency to perceive different as 'bad' or 'abnormal'. We only feel comfortable among people with same taste, qualities or beliefs and therefore form communities with these people.

Thus people become obsessed with their race and culture leading to excessive prejudice and vanity. Naturally, a person starts to become insecure, start to judge a book from by its cover, becomes envious if another species is better- leading to disputes and detachment. This leads to discrimination and terrorism.

Man is greedy since he turns protective and selfish to achieve success. People often have a phobia of not having a reputation, fear of losing and not living up to their full potential. One starts getting anxious, stressed and jittery pondering about their life decisions.

Mostly people are forced to stay in the shadow of a dominant figure. They follow orders that they never wanted to..

We threaten, create a defence mechanism that socially influences them to adapt to our ways or isolate them as punishment. This leads to depression, panic attacks and anxiety

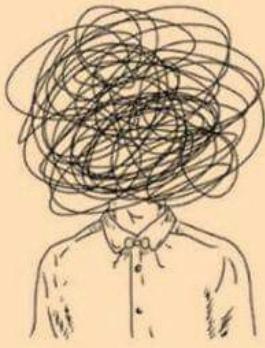
However, if people would only be open minded, give freedom to venture, let one experience, this would change their ideology about the world. With toil and determination, a person would change for better. Seeing them would encourage everyone else to change how they see themselves. In today's day and age, we find an assortment of ethnicities, religions, cultures etc. We all dream of becoming perfect and blend in with the society.





*People start to heal the
moment they feel heard .*

CHERYL RICHARDSON



THE STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

BY KIARA AGARWAL

"You can't live without fear, but you can learn to be okay with it."

A friend once said to me, "You can't live without fear, but you can learn to be okay with it". I've had moments in my life where I let my anxiety control a lot of my decisions in my life. I let it drive me away from necessary experiences. I regret not being able to control my anxiety and letting it control me. But with this, I learnt something very important; you can never completely be free of it, but you can seek help and learn how to keep it at bay. Our mental and emotional wellbeing is one of the most important things about ourselves and it should always be prioritized and not ignored.

There is a mantra that goes around, "No health without mental health". But why is mental health so important? Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It helps determine how we think, feel and react. Mental health is very essential in every stage of our life. In my experience, if you don't acknowledge and face your problems, they won't go away but they will just get worse. And over the course of your life, if you experience mental health problems, it will affect what you feel, think and how you react.

There are three main reasons why your mental health is so important. Firstly, your mental health affects your physical health. The mind and body are connected.



Any mental stress caused will affect the body's immune system. Stress and anxiety take a huge toll on our bodies and it makes it difficult for us to cope with the stress. Secondly, it is important for us to end the stigma and shame to lead better lives. It is important for us to talk about it so that others going through similar situations feel comfortable with sharing their story and trying to turn those feelings around. "Stigma begets shame. Shame begets destructive behaviors. Destructive behaviors beget deterioration of self." Lastly, mental health affects everything. Our mental health affects how we cope with life. Ignorance leads to a chain of emotional reactions such as hopelessness, sadness, worthlessness, anxiety, fear and loss of control.

Mental health is usually affected due to past experiences or trauma. This is usually different for everyone and affects their mental health in different ways. Some experience abuse or neglect while others experience social isolation and loneliness. Bereavement is one of the most common factors and it can seriously send a person into a downward spiral.

Grief affects us in different ways. When we are bereaved, we feel a range of emotions while trying to come to terms with a major loss in our life. Poor mental health can be rooted from factors in all areas of your life be it professional or personal. Some of my friends have poor mental health due to isolation, loneliness and, majorly, bullying. But even if things change for the better, the effects are still there. It helps to be aware how stressful change can be but it's also important to remember that the stress is probably unlikely to last. Therefore, it is important to take action if the effects are going to last a long time even after change has happened.

I have met many people in my life who either don't know that they aren't taking care of themselves mentally and emotionally. They are afraid to open up about their problems because of what people might think of them once they do open up. For some people, opening up is the hardest thing to do. For them, asking help makes them feel uneasy as it means that they have to surrender the control to someone else.

They also feel that asking for help makes them weak in other peoples' eyes. Some are simply in denial. The act of accepting and acknowledging the fact that they have a problem is just too much for them to comprehend. And then even after accepting it, they find reasons and convince themselves that they don't need help. I am one of those people that fear the vulnerability of confiding in a complete stranger. But in reality, therapy is nothing to be afraid of. It is a very calm process and you don't really have to talk about anything that you aren't comfortable with. When we feel better, we do better.

Mental health is important because we all deserve a peace of mind. What I have understood with my entire experience with my mental health is that it's our own limiting thoughts that hold us back as we think that we are broken and that we are not worthy. But those are the thoughts that we have to try and turn around. It doesn't make a person any less of one if they are experiencing mental health problems. When we value our mental health, we lead better lives. Mental health is as important as physical health. We must end the stigma because mental health affects everything and it is never too late to turn those thoughts around.



DREAMS

'LET YOUR DREAMS BE YOUR WINGS'

When I think about dreams, I think just like those typical Bollywood movies: pink fluffy clouds around, me being the queen, having giant white feather wings and flying in the sky - all free. There are no restrictions or anyone to stop me; it's my world where I can do anything, and I do not need to follow any orders or commands.

But in reality, none of this is true. We think dreams are just a figment of our imagination and they can never be transformed into reality. This is a major misconception; dreams can be turned into reality!

It's so easy to think about a dream, but achieving is painful, but worth it! People might say that only by doing a little more hard work, you can achieve your goal but I don't believe in those hypocritical suggestions. To reach your aim you need to work day and night because at the end you are not competing with those million scholars, it's you who you compete with.

Different people have diverse kinds of dreams: of being an extremely successful person in life, or being incredibly famous, or some other wondrous vision. Still, just by resting your face on your hand, sitting on a classroom bench, and looking out of the window, you will not go one step closer to your aim. All it will let you do is imagine even more enormous things that might never come true.

I personally dream of having two huge mansions one for me and another for my parents, getting into Harvard University, being a famous professional dancer - the list is never-ending. Especially in a teenager's head, there are millions of things he/she imagines, but the real question is "How do we turn them into reality?"



It's not exceedingly difficult, there's just a few simple steps. The first one is my personal favourite.

Number 1: Stop making excuses. Excuses are a vital part of life but avoiding them will make things so much easier. It just takes a little bit of punctuality while doing your work. By being regular with your work, you don't have to worry about making unique, silly excuses every day; it will let you be on track and help you to be even more focused.

Number 2: Be willing to fail. You might think this is a clichéd one, but it's one of the most essential pointers. In order to reach the success stage, you will have to cross through failure. Failure is not bad until it's repeated. It must be taken positively, and you must know how to amend the mistakes you made, which led you to failure. If you keep on repeating those mistakes, it will end up harming you. Failure lets you experience things so that you can be even more determined to reach the success stage.

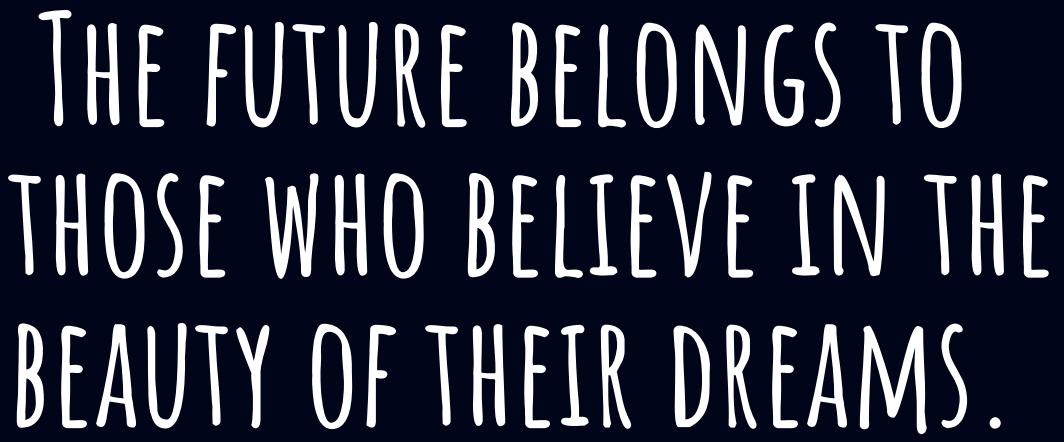


Last but not the least, **Number 3: Laugh when you want to cry.**

This might sound strange, but it helps. When things get rough and are out of your control, don't let that drag you down from your goal. Open your refrigerator, take a large scoop of ice-cream, and tuck yourself in a blanket and watch a movie or a show. This might seem too dreamy, but it will help you to cheer up your mood. Usually, during a bad phase in people's lives, they often take risky decisions, which later reflect poorly on their families; you do not want this. So, laugh and don't cry, do something that encourages you; take a day off and chill with your friends.

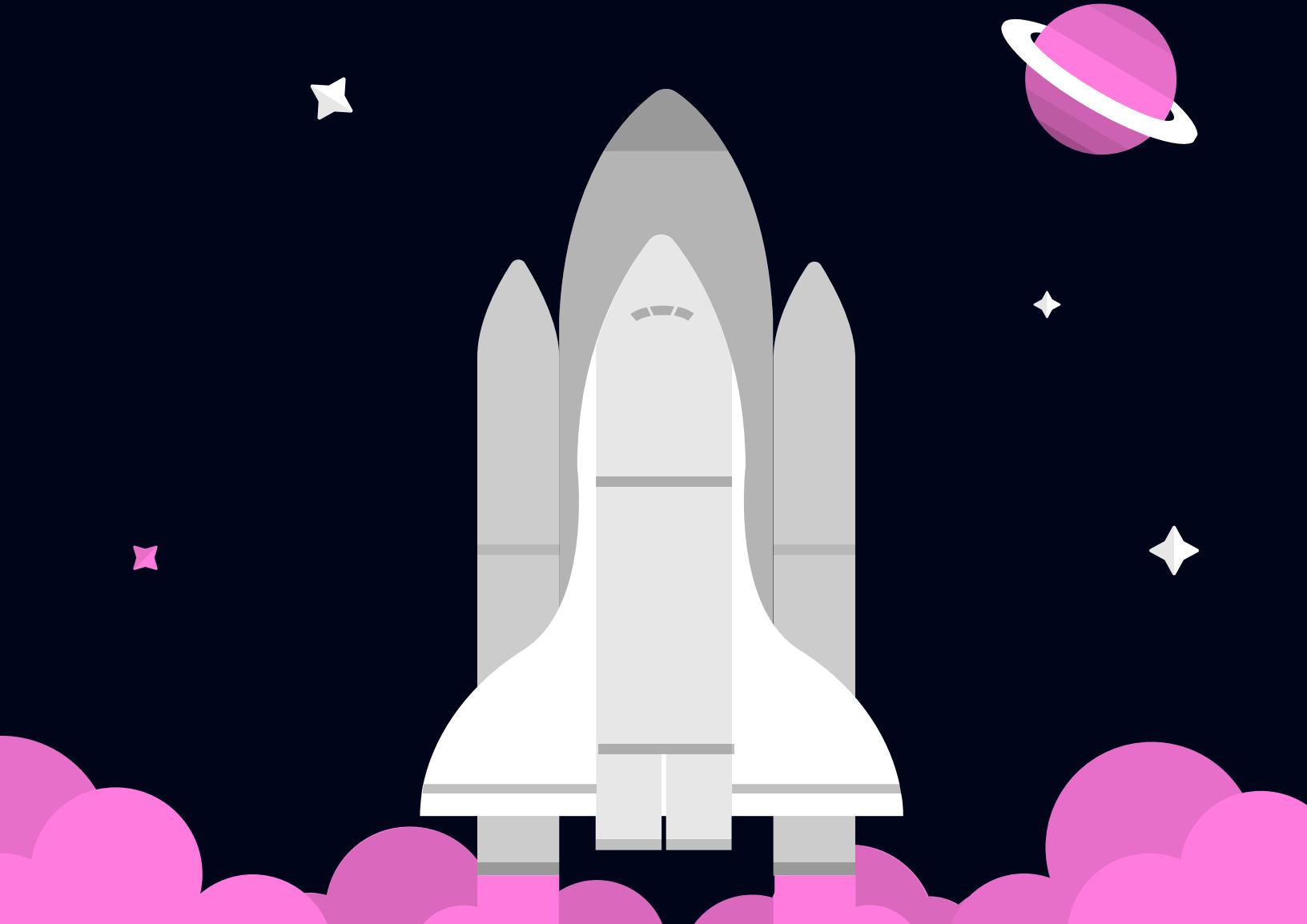
There are a lot of other things that you can look up on the internet but taking these tiny insignificant steps will make a significant difference for you and your future. It will help your dreams to become your wings, so that you can fly high and never stop!





THE FUTURE BELONGS TO
THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE
BEAUTY OF THEIR DREAMS.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT





CHAPTER 4

REALITY

/rɪ'āliti/

noun *The state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic notion of them*

noun *A thing that exists in fact, having previously only existed in one's mind*

GENDER EQUALITY?

BY RUDRAA HARBADA

One of the most significant manifestations of inequality worldwide is GENDER INEQUALITY. An extraordinarily strong feminist movement began towards the middle of the twentieth century, throwing light on the gross inequalities and atrocities that women suffer on a day-to-day basis, a need was felt to make changes in the law such that women could come on an equal footing with men.

I will be talking about a few problems that women in India face even after having laws for it.

Even after having several laws against this, child marriage is a prevalent problem in Indian villages. Every day thousands of kids are still being married due to the lack of education and narrow mind sets. Most of these teenage girls also get pregnant, which is very risky for them and their child. These babies are often premature, malnourished and not fit enough to survive. This pregnancy could be fatal for the girl too. There could also be many complications. This affects their physical and mental health a lot.

As a girl, I strongly feel that child marriage destroys the lives of the girls as they are unable to finish their education. They are unaware of their rights and might be uninformed like their parents which will lead to their kids also marrying early, causing this vicious cycle to continue.



Another issue is the abortion of female babies. This problem has significantly reduced since a law was introduced for this. The abortion of a baby only because she was a female is not at all acceptable. The punishment for this is 3-7 years of jail. However, if someone kills a person then the punishment is life imprisonment or death. I believe that the punishment of killing a girl child should be the same as killing a person: life imprisonment or death. This is an awful crime and ones who do this should be severely punished.

The rape of a separated wife carries lesser punishment, two to seven years of imprisonment, as compared to the prison sentence for the rape of any other woman: ranging from seven years to life. How can a crime like raping someone be overlooked if the woman was married to this man before? If a man rapes a woman or touches her without her consent, no matter who she is or where she is from, the charges SHOULD NOT change.

This is an example of a loopholes in our judicial system which allow someone like a rapist to roam around freely and fearlessly. This law also allows men to think that women and their bodies are objects and properties of men and they can do anything to them without facing any consequences.

One more law is the minimum marriageable age. For a boy it is 21, but just 18 for a girl. In my opinion, the legal age to marry should be the same for a girl and a boy as this sets a patriarchal mindset that implies that a wife should always be younger than the husband. Women do not have to be younger than their husbands. That is an old and outdated habit that came about because men had to be financially sound and had to have a means of supporting a spouse before they got married. By then they might be old, and needed a woman young enough to have children. Women died young due to bearing many children, so it worked out. Now that women can have careers and men can do the childcare, this stereotype should definitely be changed.

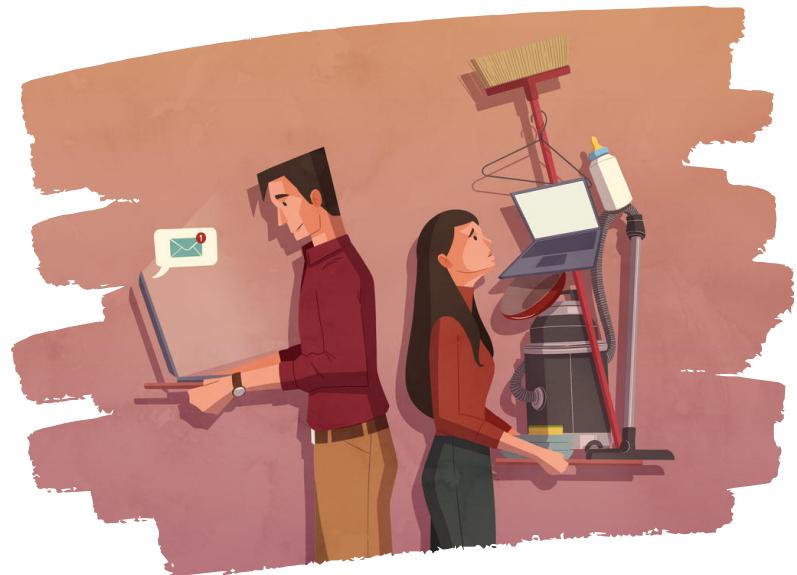
The next one I will be talking about is that women are still not equal guardians of their children. A father is legally considered the "natural guardian" of a child.

This law really proves that gender inequality is a prominent issue as a father is considered a more important guardian than the mother. A woman is equally capable of taking care and providing for her child as much as a man is. I believe this law should not exist and the court should decide which parent is more financially stable to take care of the kids. Moreover the child's opinion should also be considered. Each family is different so there should not be a standard law for this.

Why can't men and women have equal rights? Why must be one superior to the other? Why must a law favour one gender?

I think that laws should not be affected by gender of the person. They should be made in order to eradicate gender inequality not to worsen the problem.

One crucial step we can take is to make sure that men and women have a complete education and are also well aware of their rights. This will ensure that people demand justice and help others get justice too.

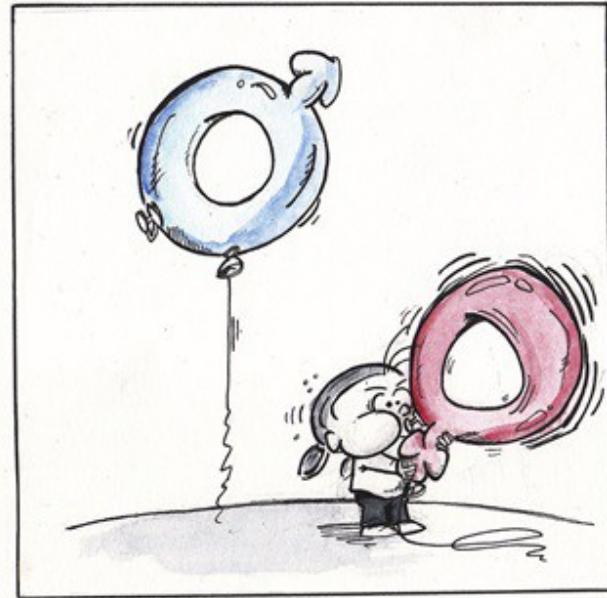


Swami Vivekanand said, 'Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing only, a Nation cannot march forward if the women are left behind' Strength is brought from union; separation results in weakness.

There is no doubt that we are in the middle of a great gender-norms evolution. There is evidence everywhere; the voices of women are heard in Parliament, courts and in the streets. While women in the West had to fight for over a century to get some of their basic rights, like the right to vote, the Constitution of India gave women equal rights with men from the beginning. Unfortunately, women in this country are mostly unaware of their rights because of illiteracy and the cruel tradition. Names like Kalpana Chawla who worked her way up into NASA and was the first women in space, and Indira Gandhi who was the Prime Minister of the Nation, and Mother Teresa are not representative of the condition of Indian women.

It is hard to bring agreement across society, but that is what we are moving towards when we agree on a Constitution and Fundamental Rights -one of them being gender equality. Gender equality is a fundamental right, and you cannot take it away.





EHR

ILLEGAL MARRIAGE

By Seher Singh

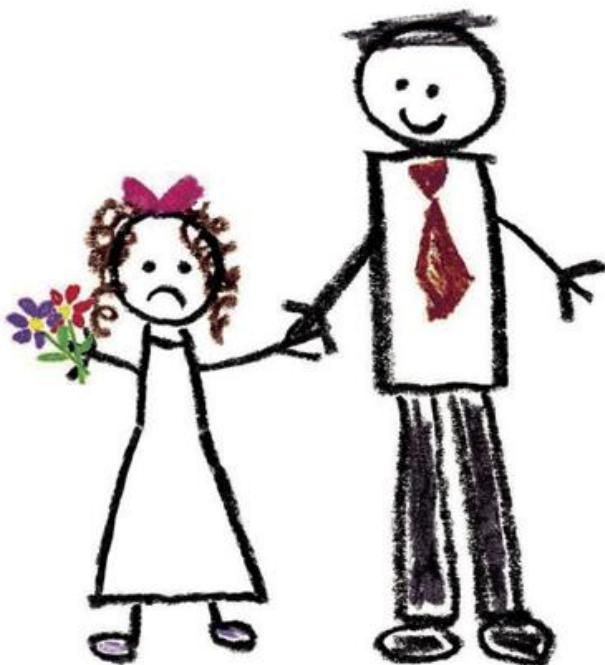
Can they vote? Can they drive? Can they have jobs?

NO!

Then how can they get married?

Let children be children.

What is the problem you may ask?



First of all, they are children!! At an age where they should go to school to learn and play, they are pushed into relationships and responsibilities only meant for adults. The boys are then supposed to work to provide for his new family, while the girl is expected to handle the entire household and have children at such a young age when their bodies and minds are not even ready to bear the burden. Is that fair?

In many cases the male is double the age of their child brides. This puts the girl under a lot of pressure not only mentally but also physically making her susceptible to diseases like STIs, diabetes, cancer, Psychiatric disorders and much more. This can cause complications at birth and passing of these diseases to the child maiming the innocent infant for life.

Now, to address the problem we need to understand why it happens.

There are mainly three reasons for this occurrence:

1. Religious beliefs.
2. Shortage of money.
3. Teenage pregnancy

In rural areas, these traditions have been going on for a long time, so it is only understandable that when the child age comes (of around 12/14) the parents wed the children off.

Parents of the bride, in poor households choose to give away the girl to reduce their financial burden.

Girls who fall prey to a teenage pregnancy are often forced to marry the impregnator due to religious ideologies and the societal pressures.

So, what can we do to reduce this?

Educating the less fortunate will be an amazing way to start. Let them know the negative effects of child marriage. This reduces the chances of parents forcing their children into marriage. Secondly, initiatives to educate and provide equality to girl children in general should be taken. This yet again prevents marriages like these from taking place.

Supporting laws that deem these marriages illegal and those that protect girls from this injustice, in addition to supporting feminism which provides equal rights to females also helps such cases.

Donating money to the poor to avoid such marriages and to NGOs that help the poor will also help these kids.

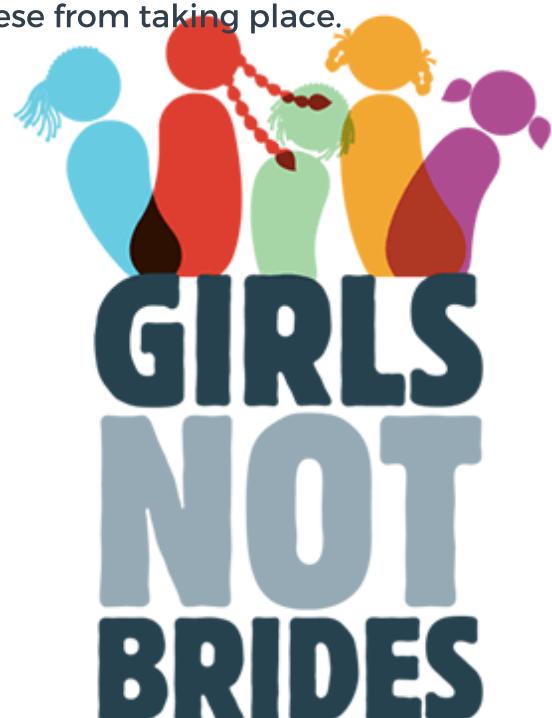




Illustration:
Siddhartha

Each year 12 million girls are married before the age of 18, that is 23 girls every minute, and nearly 1 every 3seconds. That is some heart shattering data. Every three seconds one girl loses her childhood. Don't you want to help her?

I am a 15-year-old girl. Thinking of being married at this age, specially without my willingness gives me shudders, I want all of you to think what you would have gone through if you had been married at that age, without love but under the pressure of duty to your family... Would you want your children to go through that? No, right? So, why don't we help those who are in that situation and try preventing others from being forced into the atrocious situation. Raise your voice, use your privilege to help the needy!

Sources:

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Condemning the Innocent

BY FARAH CHAUDHURY

As the world grapples with a multitude of problems, the ever-growing global issue of child labour is a huge problem. Child labour, the act of using a child to perform a task that would normally be done by a grown up in order to generate profit, is a problem that every country has, and does it hardest to get rid of. Not only does it deprive children of their childhood, it also hinders their emotional, physical and mental growth and development.

It exposes children to harmful and dangerous situations that no child should have to face. As an emerging developing nation, India must do its best to quell child labour and ensure that the future of our country grows up tall and strong.

There are many reasons that child labour is so prevalent, not only in India but all around the globe. One of the biggest reasons for this is poverty. Children born in homes with low income are generally considered a helping hand, someone to grow up to support their parents and themselves and are put to work from a very young age.

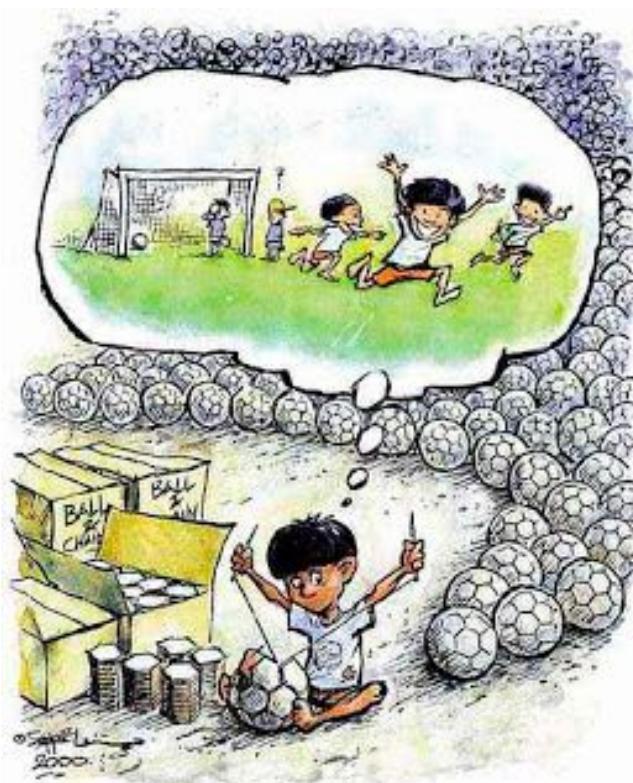
Poverty denies the child the opportunity to go to school and get a degree and forces the child to work in inhuman conditions with little to no pay, thus continuing the cycle of poverty and child labour.

Another major reason is due to the intricate work that is needed to be done with tiny, nimble fingers which cannot be achieved when done by a grown up. Children are forced to make fireworks and made to breathe in polluted air, their delicate fingers used in glasswork which is incredibly dangerous, to aid their family in cutting the crops and doing heavy field work, to pick heavy rubble and go into mines which are too tiny for a grownup to fit into.

These dangerous jobs put the children at a high risk of catching various diseases, losing limbs as well as dying and desensitizes them to the idea of death, after seeing so many of their friends die in such conditions, which is extremely alarming to a child's outlook on life and stunts their emotional growth.

In cases of extreme poverty, children are also sold to work in factories or other places that conduct illegal activities on them such as going as low as using them as test subjects for new products, medicine, make up formulas etc. The children work hard but still earn little to no pay, some are too young to even know if they are being paid.

Their feeble and helpless voices barely reach the masses and since they are so young and most are illiterate, they are unable to protest or raise their voices.



Most children who have fallen victim to child labour do not even have hope of ever escaping it and just work dejectedly, praying that they will even be able to afford a piece of bread and a glass of water at the end of the day.

Failed family planning and loophole riddled laws have yet to give these illiterate and poverty-stricken families any relief. It is now up to the government to take necessary steps needed to eradicate poverty and for the masses to raise their voices for those who do not have one.

Necessary practical steps should be taken to educate the children and funds must be raised to ensure that they go to school and have a bright and happy future. Our country will never progress if one child is happy and carefree while the other is oppressed and starved. The sooner child labour is upon the eradicated, the faster our world will be a better and happier place to be in.



ADDICTION

KRISH MONPARA

We do make "firm resolutions" every year. sometimes, better or just the same as the year before soi-disant "every year," don't we? But do we really mean it?"

"ADDICTION", addiction is something like having theatre popcorn and still not being satisfied [since you know the cause], it's like you're obsessed with some work or what I'd like to call distractions, that harms you, not physically but mentally too. If you care to accept, then follow me.

Addiction is just like a virus - it could be an obsession with games or unknowingly binge-watching Netflix episodes! It's contagious; others might get infected; that depends on their choice... It is intense enough to send you on a downward slide for days, ending up distressed. I think every person is vulnerable to addiction - ranging from the seemingly insignificant temptation to the dopamine rush - and they may not even realize it.

Addiction can get worse, becoming a vogue for teens....no, for everyone, even me. It even fooled me once and I felt TERRIBLE.

What causes it? What provokes it? Or What makes it last long and difficult to overcome? One word, "IT'S YOU". The way you accept or deal with things in life will directly or indirectly build up the next step. It is important to exercise control and not follow an absurd social trend, or excessively consume anything, however pleasurable it may be. In the end its YOU. You make all the difference.



HACKS FOR YOU & YOUR HABITS

There are numerous ways to overcome this problem by reaching out to your mentors, indulging in some hobbies [beneficial, indeed], joining extra-curricular activities or engaging with friends.

Let me a bit more specific and clear all doubts: consider a teen whose weight is the only thing preventing him/her from attending next months prom, so he/she starts to follow a solid-strong diet (unwillingly). But here's the problem, he/she's happily returning from the dance, happy with his appearance but the next day, the teen is back to square one. The diet is forgotten and they are back on the same diet routine—without any prospects of developing and maintaining that healthy diet.

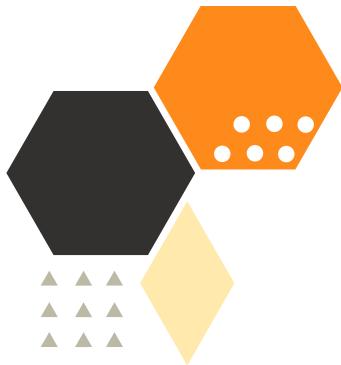
Now consider an instance where you progressively gave unhealthy food up, starting with something that's not too tough to give up and easy to live without. Continue this progressive cutting down of unhealthy foods and scaling up little by little, pushing up with willingness. Trust me, you'll transform like never before.

*"Live less out
of habit and
more out of
intent"*

But do realize it's a very slow process. Take heart...the important thing is to have begun and taken the road to a good life. It's better to recognise an addiction early before it encroaches strongly enough to destroy your happy life. Certainly, it will make you a healthy person living life wisely.

Listen, amigos. Everything is fine up to a point. Anything beyond a certain limit is bad and even worse can lead the point of self-destruction. You may live your entire life regretting your decisions and your actions. Change your present, or you will have to live with the past that turns your life into a nightmare.

No one would want that.



Meet the Authors



A SECOND CHANCE
Asmi Kawatkar



CONDEMNING THE
INNOCENT ; LISTEN
Farah Choudhury



THE STIGMA AROUND
MENTAL HEALTH
Kiara Agarwal



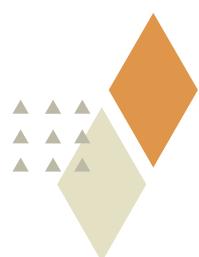
ADDICTION
Krish Monpara

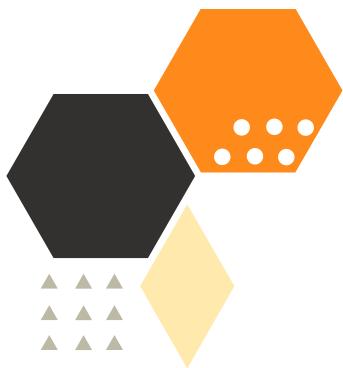


THE GIRL BEHIND
THE FILTER
Medha Agarwal



FOR ONCE
Nishika Sarma





Meet the Authors



**CRUSADERS OF
YOUTH**
Owais Bubere



GENDER EQUALITY
Rudraa Harbada



THE DEPTHS
Ruhaan Takalkar



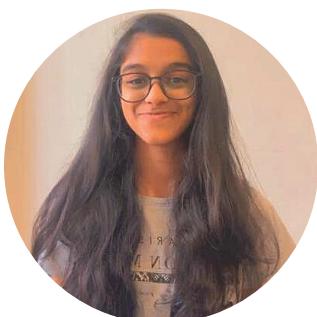
ILLEGAL MARRIAGE
Seher Singh



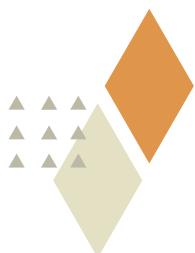
IDENTITY
Shreya Isharani



INTROVERSION
Siddh Merchant



DREAMS
Suhani Hingar



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Listen	Farah Choudhury
Condemning the Innocent	Farah Choudhury
The Stigma Around Mental Health	Kiara Agarwal
Addiction	Krish Monpara
The Girl Behind the Filter	Medha Agarwal
For Once	Nishika Sarma
Crusaders of Youth	Owais Bubere
Gender Equality?	Rudraa Harbada
The Depths	Ruhaan Takalkar
Illegal Marriage	Seher Singh
Identity	Shreya Isharani
Introversion	Siddh Merchant
Dreams	Suhani Hingar

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External sources have been cited where appropriate.