







RAJEEV KUMAR BELIEVES GENUINE CARE AND INTEGRATION FOSTER A COMPASSIONATE, FEARLESS EDUCATION SYSTEM



## Redefine success in education



ent built-in-flaws. They unintentionally label vulnerable individuals, leading to isolation and exclusion.

**The need for a change in approach**

Exclusionary approaches worsen the struggles of victims and hinder integration. A paradigm shift is needed to ensure immediate and inclusive support in critical moments. The key to prevention lies in keeping students integrated, and free from stigma or fear.

There is also the point of early detection and flexible assessment. Instead of labelling weaker students at semester-end, early detection through performance in initial assignments or behavioural signs such as missed classes and reduced interaction can help before there is a crisis. A flexible assessment system that is tailored to the varying strengths and interests of students is an effective solution. It should be noted that the same size does not fit all. Offering assignments of different difficulty levels is an approach that supports vulnerable students, boosts their confidence, and ensures that no one is left behind. The writer's successful implementation of this method over three decades highlights its potential to transform student outcomes.

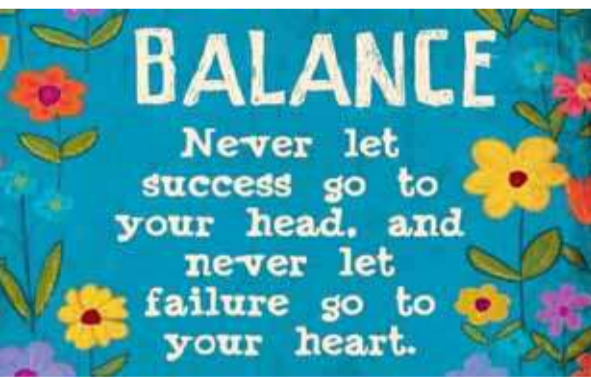
This approach does not require reducing academic rigor for all, as doing so has its pros and cons. While it may ease stress for some, it could also affect the global competitiveness level and reputation of elite institutions.

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## India must push back to protect its interests

**I**ndia's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Washington was brief yet impactful, with significant developments marking his engagement with U.S. President Donald Trump. Taking place less than a month after Trump assumed office, the meeting positioned India among the first few nations to establish high-level diplomatic engagements with the new administration. The joint statement released post-meeting reflected a mix of economic and strategic discussions, with a notable emphasis on trade and investment. The launch of 'Mission 500', aimed at achieving \$500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030, alongside initial talks on a free trade agreement, underlined the economic focus of the visit. India's commitment to purchasing more U.S. energy, oil, and defence equipment is expected to contribute towards reducing America's \$45.7 billion trade deficit with India. A significant structural shift came with the introduction of the COMPACT framework, aimed at fostering military, commerce, and technological cooperation. The rebranding of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) to TRUST further reinforced commitments in semiconductor, AI, and quantum computing collaborations. Additionally, the approval of Tahawwur Rana's extradition to India marked a crucial development in counterterrorism cooperation. Beyond the optics of camaraderie, the visit underscores the pragmatic nature of India-U.S. relations. The transactional aspects, particularly on trade, energy, and defence, recall elements of Trump's previous term. Notably, Modi's visit did not seem to ease concerns over counter-tariffs or immigration policies affecting Indians in the U.S. As India moves forward in engaging with the new administration, a balanced approach—asserting its interests while fostering collaboration—will be crucial in navigating potential challenges and leveraging opportunities for deeper bilateral ties. The upcoming Quad Summit in Delhi will serve as another platform to reinforce these commitments and further strengthen strategic cooperation between the two nations.

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**THE FINANCIAL WORLD**

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**S**tudents invest immense efforts in securing admission to premier educational institutions. While many are able to turn their dreams into reality, others get left behind. There are times when both students who are unable to get admission and those who join these institutes take extreme steps. A victim's mother once said, "I gave him an IIT dream." Despite various preventive measures, students ending their lives is a tragic loss.

In 2024, around a dozen suicides were reported from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT); there have already been over 100 cases in the decade, 2014 to 2024. In 2025, there have been incidents reported from IIT Indore, IIT Kharagpur, and the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, and six cases of admission-seekers in Kota in Rajasthan, which is famous for its coaching institutes. According to the 2022 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, there were 13,044 student suicides in India, or 7.6% of all suicide cases. Among these, 2,095 were linked to examination failure.

These tragedies have sparked much concern. In 2023, the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, called for a humanitarian approach, urging "all stakeholders to help students beat negative thinking and take study pressure in a positive way". The Supreme Court of India has directed academicians to explore innovative out-of-the-box solutions. The Council of Indian Institutes of Technology has proposed a slew of measures while the University Grants Commission (UGC) has included a representative of the vulnerable group in the Grievance Redressal Committee to effectively safeguard their interests.

In January 2025, the Supreme Court, addressing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by the families of victims, directed the UGC to collate data on the establishment of Equal Opportunity Cells (EOCs), complaints received, and action taken reports from all universities, as per its 2012 regulations. Despite these interventions, the effectiveness of these measures remains questionable.

**Cause analysis**

Academic stress and caste-based discrimination remain the primary causes of these tragedies. But there are several other factors. It is a misconception that this is an issue that concerns only academically weaker students. There are cases of high achievers, including an Olympiad winner, taking drastic measures. Additionally, students face societal pressure to "succeed", along with the 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) syndrome and constant comparison with peers. Setbacks and mental health struggles that young people experience are often stigmatised, while failure is viewed as a personal flaw. Institutional policies tend to be reactive rather than preventive, leaving students to chase unrealistic standards with little room for recovery or personal growth. This creates a cycle of isolation, despair, and hopelessness.

A Lancet Commission Report (2022) acknowledged that many of us experience some degree of mental ill health in our lifetime, but tackling stigma and discrimination is essential to changing the status quo. Stigma and discrimination in mental health not only violate basic human rights but also deepen marginalisation and social exclusion. To reduce stigma effectively, policies based on social contact should be prioritised, empowered, and supported to drive meaningful change.

### The effectiveness of existing measures

So, are the measures-in-place counter-productive? Current prevention measures



APAR GUPTA SAYS RANVEER ALLAHBADIA AND SAMAY RAINA ARE JUST PAWNS IN DIGITAL MEDIA BATTLE

## The danger of a digital censor board



**T**here is a moral panic over a show called India's Got Latent. Much of the furore centres around some crude remarks made by a YouTuber, Ranveer Allahbadia. His remarks have been condemned by Chief Ministers, a Parliamentary Standing Committee, and even the Supreme Court.

On India's Got Latent, which was conceptualised and hosted by comedian and YouTuber Samay Raina, judges attempt to critique the "latent" talents of aspiring performers. Dank humour defines the show. Both Mr. Allahbadia and Mr. Raina enjoy immense popularity as YouTubers, especially with young people. Mr. Raina is a rising sensation who shared the KBC stage with Amitabh Bachchan and Mr. Allahbadia was extolled by the Prime Minister himself as 'Creator of the Year'. While many may say that their online reach is the reason behind the moral panic, the two YouTubers are mere pawns in the great game for control of our digital media.

Notwithstanding the Supreme Court's curt remark that Mr. Allahbadia has "a very dirty mind," the law separates moral repugnancy from criminality. In *Apoorva Arora v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi* (2024), the Court quashed criminal prosecutions for foul language in an OTT show called *College Romance*. The Court demanded an objective test for obscenity, focusing on whether sexual or lustful thoughts were aroused and not on whether words were "decent". The Court further explained that coarse language, however distasteful or improper, does not automatically become obscene.

Its ruling is directly relevant here: Mr. Allahbadia's comments, at worst, constitute a risqué jest rather than actual obscenity. Yet fury and legal intimidation often eclipse constitutional principle.

The second legal provision which has been invoked against India's Got Latent is Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which provides the Indian government with the power to block access to a website, as revealed by Kanchan Gupta, a Senior Advisor, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Curiously, "decency and morality" do not fall under the grounds for blocking websites under Section 69A. This statutory limit was exposed as far back as 2010, when the government tried to block the pornographic website *Savita Bhabhi*. Legality, however, has not stood in the way of the Union government's expanding appetite for censorship, as seen in the surge of blocking orders, which has been aided by the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. Blocking decisions remain

shrouded in secrecy; courts typically avoid striking them down.

### Question of regulation

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's push for a sweeping Broadcasting Bill gathered steam before the general elections and then returned in a form that placed online creators in the same bracket as traditional broadcasters. Earlier, there was a public outcry against provisions of the Bill. Now, thanks to the recent clamour for stronger censorship, the Bill has received momentum. The Parliamentary Standing Committee of Information Technology, headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey, has now urged the Ministry to propose new regulations and amendments. The recent controversy has different actors playing to a familiar script: a public uproar leads to new rules which arm the government with sweeping powers.

On January 15, 2021, Amazon Prime's *Tandav* released, and was immediately accused of insulting religious sentiments. This led to criminal complaints, government intervention, and an apology from the creators, who cut supposedly offensive scenes. Yet multiple FIRs persisted, targeting actors, producers, and Amazon Prime's India head. Amid calls for censorship, the government on February 25, 2021, introduced the Information Technology Rules. Part III now covers digital news media and OTT platforms, albeit under ambiguous jurisdiction. However, what is interesting is that to escape the clutches of criminal prosecution, OTT platforms have entered into a Faustian bargain. They now

invite censorship powers of the Ministry to escape a visit to the police station or writ petitions before different High Courts. The price to pay is the discontinuation of any web series which, through its themes or dialogues, poses difficult questions to our society or political leadership. Hence, it should not come as a surprise if popular online creators, including those associated with India's Got Latent, plead for clemency in the coming weeks by pleading for "regulation" on digital platforms such as YouTube.

This present moment in time is not simply an outcome of a single controversy. Nor is it just an example of rising online vulgarity fuelled by cheap data and ubiquitous teleconnectivity. As Yamini Aiyar and Neelanjan Sircar have argued, the Indian state has undergone a fundamental change in its political economy where technology has enabled direct benefit transfers as a form of tribal allegiance rather than a right guaranteed by the constitution. Calling it techno-patrimonialism, they state that it has advanced within a framework of the Prime Minister's political appeal that relies on "a mix of cultural nationalism and welfareism populism". Hence, it should come as no surprise that political parties, after competing on direct benefit transfers, are now advocating for digital censor boards. This may explain why the entire state and large sections of society have been spurred into action by a distasteful joke.

Apar Gupta, advocate and founder-director of the Internet Freedom Foundation. Views are personal.

### BOOKS: REVIEW

## New book explores three centuries of short stories

**S**alman Rushdie's depiction of a 'Sea of Stories' in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* resonates deeply with the essence of the contemporary short story—a fluid and ever-evolving entity shaped by myth and history. A.J. Thomas, in his meticulously curated anthology of Indian short stories spanning three centuries, emerges as a modern-day Scheherazade, weaving together tales that captivate and challenge in equal measure.

A major strength of this collection is the presence of familiar yet ever-enchanting narratives. Readers will find themselves revisiting cherished classics, such as Tagore's *Kabuliwala*, where the heart-wrenching call of "Mini, batcha, Oye Mini batcha" immortalized on film remains unforgettable. S.K. Pottekkatt's *On the Riverbank* transports us to childhood innocence with Unni's search for a dragonfly's red tail, while Premendra Mitra's *The Discovery of Telenapota* draws readers into a mysterious journey, mirroring the

allure of adventure tales. Satyajit Ray's *Two Magicians* leaves us spellbound, a testament to his genius in storytelling beyond cinema.

Beyond nostalgia, the anthology's power lies in its ability to immerse the reader. Many stories evoke the darkness of a pre-electricity era, their eerie atmospheres bringing to mind Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's *The Blue Light*, where readers become active participants, gripped by terror and anticipation. The ability of these stories to transport us back to childhood wonder and fear makes them particularly compelling.

While the collection celebrates human resilience, love, and memory, it does not shy away from pain. The oppressive weight of caste, the deeply ingrained inequities of privilege, and the horrors of Partition-era loyalties find space in these pages. The presence of poverty is an ever-looming specter, portrayed with stark realism. The contrast between tenderness and suffering ensures that the collection is as thought-

provoking as it is entertaining.

The arrangement of stories, moving from older authors to contemporary ones, also allows for an evolving narrative—one that shifts from the lyrical and mythic to themes of modern-day struggles. Thomas acknowledges the influence of early publications, such as *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, in shaping his literary journey. Having also edited *The Greatest Malayalam Stories Ever Told* (2023) and served as an editor for *Indian Literature*, his experience in curating voices from varied backgrounds shines through in this anthology.

As the collection progresses, modern concerns take center stage. Themes of patriarchy, environmental degradation, and social stigmas gain prominence, demonstrating how short stories remain relevant in addressing the pressing issues of our time. In *Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi's The Smell of Bamboo Blossoms*, translated from Assamese by Aruni Kashyap, the cyclical flowering of bamboo unleashes an infestation of



100 Indian Stories: A Feast of Remarkable Short Fiction from the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries Edited by A.J. Thomas. Aleph: 856 pages; Rs 1,499

rats, destroying crops in Arunachal Pradesh, paralleling a rat plague in Surat, Gujarat. This interplay of folklore and real-world crises underscores how intricately human lives remain tied to nature's unpredictable rhythms.

Ruskin Bond's words in the foreword ring true: "Honour the writers. Salute the translators. Celebrate the short story." Whether it is a grandmother who transforms into a crocodile or a metaphysical duel between magicians, the anthology offers a rich tapestry of narratives that demand to be savored at leisure. Each story is an invitation—one that rewards patience and curiosity in equal measure.

For readers seeking a blend of nostalgia, social critique, and literary brilliance, A.J. Thomas' anthology is an invaluable addition to any bookshelf. Its stories, drawn

from multiple languages and eras, remind us of the timeless power of storytelling in understanding the past, confronting the present, and imagining the future.

One of the anthology's most commendable aspects is its attention to translation, which acts as a bridge between linguistic cultures. The translations retain the original charm, wit, and depth of the stories, allowing them to reach a wider audience. Thomas ensures that the richness of each regional tale is preserved, making them accessible to those unfamiliar with the original language. By doing so, he highlights the sheer diversity of Indian literature and reinforces the idea that storytelling transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Moreover, the translators play a crucial role in not only maintaining the authenticity of the stories but also in capturing the nuances that make each tale unique. The anthology pays tribute to their meticulous work, recognizing that the art of translation is as significant as the act of writing itself. This collection, therefore, stands as a testament to the value of translation in fostering cross-cultural appreciation and literary unity.







