



# Expressions

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## Street vendors' give thumbs up to cashless transactions

Bhargavi Singh

Photo courtesy: Bhargavi Singh

Out for a walk and suddenly have the urge to eat pani puri or a refreshing glass of nimbu pani but don't have any cash? Gone are the days when this used to be an issue. A few years back, it would have been hard to imagine a cashless India considering the digital literacy rate of our country, but now the scenario has changed a lot. One can pay almost anywhere online with just a few clicks.

While this shift was organic, the process was expedited due to the pandemic. An article published in the Times of India reflected that a comparative analysis conducted by a Fintech Company has revealed that digital transactions in India have grown by 52% since May 2021, with vendors large and small embracing the new era of payments.

Raju Yadav, owner of a pani puri and chaat stall in Lucknow, said, "I started online transactions after seeing the hesitation of customers to carry cash once the lockdown was lifted. Not only this, but I also listed my shop on Zomato and Swiggy to grow the business, and hence it became essential for me to learn how to use digital payments."

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## Editor's Desk

### 'Classroom teaching a clear winner always'

**S**tressed and being confined to homes, while studying in Online mode for well over one and half year during the worst phase of the pandemic, students used to literally cry asking when the campuses will re-open? and when they will get a chance to have face-to-face classes?



All those who had taken admission in 2020 were desperate to come and see their institutions. Despite warnings, they never like to be on-screen and prefer to stay muted (they were in their comfort zone unmindful what they are wearing and the place from where they were attending their Online classes). The commonest excuse used to be 'poor network' and 'power failure'.

On the contrary when the University announced re-opening of the campuses and made physical classes compulsory, we started receiving applications with a plethora of excuses from 'someone in family is ill and they have to take care of them,' 'personally unwell' or they had 'other responsibilities at home.' Few students also gave excuse of 'not having gone for vaccination' (quite surprising though) and to top it all others said they were 'happy to be in Online Mode as it was saving lot of expenses on accommodation & food etc.'

Technology did make our lives easier and more efficient. But online courses were never as beneficial as traditional-style classroom learning. While this convenience always looked nice, it lacked the interactive elements of traditional classrooms that help students develop crucial interpersonal skills for future. When in a classroom, students are often required to speak their minds. They may be required to give presentations or speeches. They must work cooperatively in groups of people with differing viewpoints. Online courses require none of that. Online classes will surely get us degrees but not actual learning.

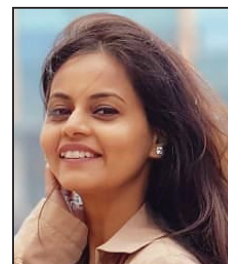
Students need to understand that face-to-face verbal feedback and constructive criticism from their professors, it also instils in them a motivation to improve their work and build upon what they've learned. Educational relationships and bonds give in-person learning and advantage over online learning.

Irrespective of the technology available, classroom teaching is the 'clear winner'. No amount of virtual learning can match the environment that one gets in the classroom. Studies suggest that children learn better through face-to-face interaction and group study also helps in developing the communication skills.

So earlier the better you re-join campus teaching. Cheers.

Prof (Dr) Sanjay M Johri

## 'Amity instilled confidence to face curve balls'



As we are close to the end-game of the pandemic, it would seem commonplace to say that life will throw a lot of curve balls at us. But, back in 2014, when I took the crucial decision to join Amity, I had similar thoughts in mind – To be prepared for the curve balls that life will throw me in the future, I needed good education.

My decision was driven by the fact that Amity will provide with me the three F's I was looking for in university – Faculty, Facilities and Friends for lifetime.

The top class faculty at Amity ensured I was swamped with daily assignments, on ground opportunities. Best-in-class facilities meant that I had everything at my disposal to do good work. This led to an internship opportunity at Radio Mirchi, Kanpur, as an RJ and copy writer. Winning the 'Best Bio award' at Via Media gave me a necessary boost of confidence. By

### ALUMNI CORNER

second year, I had realised that TV was the medium I liked most and I concentrated to-

wards making a career in this field.

All this rigour culminated in a paid position at Doordarshan, Lucknow for my final year. By this time, I could confidently say that Amity had made me ready to face any curve ball that life could throw at me.

I took bold risks to relocate to Mumbai with just about enough money to survive for 3 months. The good pedigree that Amity enjoys in the industry meant that I got an opportunity to work with one of the largest Mass Media TV channels in the country, Colors. This led to more opportunities with other big channels like Sony Entertainment Television, for whom, I worked as an On Set Creative Head.

More curveballs meant that the largest Media content investor in the country, Reliance, pulled the plug on a start-up I had chosen to work with – Jio Chat. But the all-round learning at Amity meant that I have a repertoire of skillsets that give me an edge in the sunrise industry of Social Media Marketing, in which, I have been working for the last three years, helping brands make their presence felt and bolster their marketing strategy in the Social Media space. The three years I spent in Amity mean that I will always be ready for any challenges I face in this industry.

Anmol Ratan Singh

Strategy Head – Moshi Moshi Bangalore  
BJMC- Batch 2011- 2014

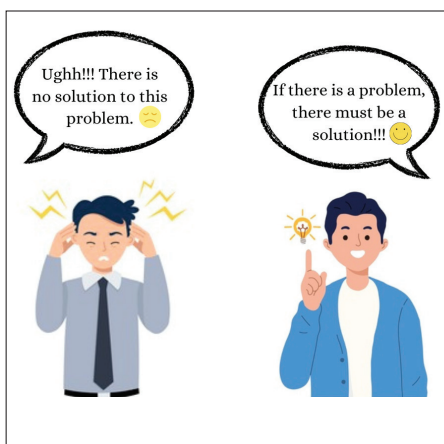


# Problem? No worries; focus on solution

Rinil Srivastava

Nobel laureate Albert Einstein had famously said, "If I have an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about the solution". This is human nature!

The Webster dictionary describes a problem as a question raised for an inquiry, consideration, or solution. So, if we are facing the same problem again and again, all we have to do is think differently. Shift our attitude and try something out of the box, and we will discover that we are far more powerful than any obstacle in life!



The thing that seems to overpower most of us in life, is the intensity of our problems. A person at the beginning of their career will never consider a 12th grader's difficulty to choose a college as major a problem. They might consider it trivial. In the same way a person with a well-established career might not deem the pressures industry freshers go through as a huge challenge. The gist is that every problem we face becomes the most difficult and impossible situation at that time. It is the approach that creates a distinction between people with problems and those that have the

answers to all of life's struggles.

In a discourse with JEE Mains aspirants about how they felt before examinations, the responses highlight the importance of approaching challenges from a different perspective.

Shaurya Verma, a school pass out from Lucknow, says "Before giving my 12th JEE Mains exam, I was full of stress, dread, and anxiety, and sometimes I felt irritated, which was not helpful at all."

Arman Singh, residing in Varanasi, says "Before the exam, I was not thinking much about the result and was concentrating only on the preparation. I have solely focused on my work as this exam isn't the end of my life. If this does not work, I can go on to pursue something more fascinating."

"I am concerned about whether I would be able to pass JEE Mains, but I was also sure that, whatever the outcome, I would perform to the best of my abilities," says Trisha Agarwal, of Lucknow.

The above bytes give us a glimpse into how dealing with your problems in an organised, inspired, and optimistic way can lead to entirely different mindsets and results.

As children, we were taught to let go of things, but as adults we have learned to analyse and nit-pick every situation, overanalyse it and turn it into a huge conundrum. It is now that we need to learn to step back when our problems overwhelm us, understand that negative thoughts create a lot of mental noise that not only gives us tension but also hinders our thought process.

When you sit back and practice silencing your mind, you'll be able to go beyond your thoughts, emotions, and feelings and connect to your inner self and try to deal with that problem with a different frame of mind.

## Street vendors' give thumbs up to cashless transactions

Continued from P1

Customers are going for the option of online payment at their favorite street shops as they are tired of getting the loose change in terms of toffees and their overall dependency on mobile phones has increased. Sharing the sentiment, Mariyam, a college-going student from Lucknow who loves street food, said, "I usually never carry a wallet or purse. I prefer to take my phone to the local market as it becomes easy and quick to pay through the online option."

While it was not easy for most vendors to get accustomed to this new normal, they overcame their initial inhibitions to keep up with the times. Santosh Kumar, owner of a small shikanji stall in Hazratganj, while sharing his experience, said, "I am not very tech-savvy and was a little hesitant in the beginning but my son convinced me to set up an account and start online transactions. I even bought a smartphone for this. My son is the one who looks after all the technicalities. I must say that this system helps a lot because many a times, both my customers and I are not having the change money."

While this is certainly a new thing for vendors and customers alike, Cashless India is a dream way closer than it looks. No matter what, these changes are a big step towards a digital nation. So, the next time you go out, remember to note how many street vendors nearby have started accepting online payments.

# Newspaper hawkers – A mirror of hard work



Anjali Singh

**H**ave you ever realized while sipping the morning cuppa and reading newspaper as to how did this piece of fine print reach your doorstep? The hawker, you will answer with a shrug. Yes, however, now picture the herculean effort that the hawker makes everyday to ensure that you do not miss your daily dose of news in fine print.

Riding their bicycles at the crack of dawn, newspaper hawkers are a living example of hard work. Silently getting their job done to meet the ends, while the city is yet to rise and shine, the hawkers set the bar of perseverance pretty high. However, as COVID-19 entered the world, the problems in the way of newspaper hawkers doing their jobs increased.

"Every morning when I open the main door of my house, I find a newspaper at the doorstep, a symbol of courage and dedication of the hawkers", says Reena Singh, a 29-year-old housewife living in the Faridabad district of Haryana.

Covid naturally dealt a blow to this profession as well with many hawkers returning to their village



es while some struggled to get the job done of the few odd people who were still subscribing to newspapers.

A 44-year-old newspaper hawker from Faridabad, Narayan Mishra shared the new challenges he faced during the Corona phase, "While sanitizers, hand gloves, face masks and safety guidelines became weapons to protect oneself, the pandemic almost brought our work to a standstill. Many people stopped subscribing to newspapers, while others asked us to follow Covid protocol measures strictly even though we were doing so."

With the advent of the new normal, difficulties for hawkers increased. Fear of Covid transmission, and the related stigma that came with the pandemic, made their lives more painful. Most of them went to their villages feeling that this was the end of the work. But some did their duty taking all the necessary precautions while fighting the battle of retaining their jobs in such trying times.

"My day starts at 4 am. Loading a bundle of newspapers and delivering them to subscribers by bicycle takes substantial time. I never take leave and laugh when subscribers ask me the secret of being so active. It is my duty, and I am happy with it. I have the identity of a newspaper hawker, and I am very proud of it", said Shyaam, a 24-year-old newspaper hawker from Gurugram.

"The pressure to survive and protect oneself and loved ones during the peak of the pandemic waves was paramount. There was an unexpected drop in the subscribers as well as income. Amidst the odds, we made sure to play our part. As the situation is improving, we are getting back on track", he further added.

Meanwhile, Prashant Singh, a



working professional from Gurugram says, “I buy newspapers from hard-working kids while going to office in the morning. The joy on their faces when they make a sale gives me so much happiness.”

**“While sanitizers, hand gloves, face masks and safety guidelines became weapons to protect oneself, the pandemic almost brought our work to a standstill. Many people stopped subscribing to newspapers, while others asked us to follow Covid protocol measures strictly even though we were doing so**

**Narayan Mishra** | NEWSPAPER  
HAWKER, FARIDABAD

**I buy newspapers from hardworking kids while going to the office in the morning. The joy on their faces when they make a sale gives me so much happiness**

**Prashant Singh** | WORKING  
PROFESSIONAL, GURUGRAM

With the advanced technology where news is just a click away, people still prefer to read newspapers, which has added to the burden of the hawkers, fighting to protect their livelihood. Even though the era of digitalization has no limits, there is perhaps no replacement when it comes to sipping tea and reading newspaper to start the day. Battling the ups and downs, newspaper hawkers are thus inspiring heroes around us, who carry unique experiences that mirror reality, hard work, confidence, and passion.

## Menstrual hygiene is still a far-fetched dream in slums

Drishti Vanaik

Even after a handful of active government schemes and efforts of countless NGOs, the success with regards to creating awareness on menstrual hygiene appears an urban reality. The situation may be better in some parts today, but it is far from ideal. With the dismal aspect of the sanitary pads still not considered as ‘essential’, the ground zero situation especially in slums and rural areas of the state’s capital remains disturbing.

During a visit to Kanchanpur Slum near Chinhat, Lucknow, Expressions Reporter spoke to girls and women to get a first-hand account of their information on menstrual hygiene. Their response raised serious concerns about the lack of awareness regarding such an important issue. Rashmi Da, a woman in her thirties residing in the slums mentioned, “No such products are being used”. Adding to it, another woman Poonam Akhilma said, “We don’t know what menstrual products are and use cloth during that time of the month”.

The gravity of the situation was being realized when in the context of sanitary napkins Rabia Begum, 70, quipped, “Yahan par ye sab nahi chalta”. Even the local chemist, Manan Singh added, “None of the girls or ladies living in the slums come here to buy sanitary pads”. Lack of knowledge on the subject accompanied by the weak financial status doesn’t let these women acquire a healthy period phase.

Just like Chinhat area, the situation in the slums of Aliganj and GomtiNagar is

rather alarming. While some women did not have an idea of what menstrual products were, most of the girls in their teens were completely oblivious of what periods are. Anu, a 19-year-old, mentioned, “I bleed every month, but I don’t know what periods are and why does it happen”. Aasmina, a 16-year-old said, “That time of the month is the same. I cannot understand what my body experiences during that phase, it’s all the same to me”.

A female bleeds every month, facing an abundance of pain, hormonal, and behavioural changes. To be hygienic and squeaky clean during that phase is the foremost priority but alas it seems to be a far-fetched reality for many girls and women even today.

Though, efforts have been made by organisations like Phia Foundation and others, to promote menstrual practices involving hygiene, to preserve health in backward areas, but are these efforts proving to be effectual or futile leaves a big question mark. Even after changing times and urbanisation, the remotest nooks and corners of the city are where we get to know the ground-reality of a situation

Many organisations have been trying to disseminate period-friendly knowledge, but it seems that the ground-reality is just the opposite of what is being expected. A better understanding has to be created with the help of better tools and techniques so that menstruation does not remain the clouded and hushed “time of the month” leaving countless girls and women as a pray to infections and diseases.



# ‘Journalists battled odds, loss during Covid but did their duty’

Sanjana Saxena

**W**hen the pandemic hit the nation, essential workers from every field were called forth to volunteer and help those in need including journalists. These frontline reporters were tackling misinformation widely prevalent in the society that was dealing with the deadly virus. They truly went the extra mile that finally helped quell fake news and rumours about the Coronavirus, vaccination among others.

To discuss all these issues, Amity School of Communication (ASCO) in partnership with UNICEF, organised an insightful virtual panel discussion on October 1 to instil

responsibility, empathy, and dedication amongst budding journalists. The discussion was headed by an illustrious panel of Sharat Pradhan, Independent journalist and political observer, Kamal Khan, Executive Editor NDTV (Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakh and), and Pranshu Mishra, Bureau Chief CNN News18 (Uttar Pradesh). Over 100 students from the department also took part in the discussion.

In her introductory remark, Sukhpal Marwa, Communication Advocacy and partnership consultant UNICEF Uttar Pradesh, reinforced the importance of children’s right to expression, life, liberty and education. “The first step to achieving this is being aware of these rights, which cannot be overruled especially amidst a crisis,” she emphasised.

Journalists, being the fourth pillar of our society, not only report the truth but also comprehend its effect on the society, its opinions, and consequences. Commenting on this, Kamal Khan said, "Be it a natural disaster, warzone or any situation; journalists are neither the victims nor the causers, but observers. However, this (Covid) was the first time when every journalist was, directly or indirectly, a part of the horrifying situation. Journalists were covering the misery, casualties and excruciating condition of hospitals and crematoriums, while fighting the battle to keep themselves and their loved ones safe. However, striking a balance between personal losses, challenges and entrusted duty, journalists worked round the clock to uphold their commitment to the society."

Pranshu Mishra elaborated on different phases of the global pandemic witnessed by the journalists. "It was around March 2020 when the outbreak of COVID-19 happened in our country which, was later followed by the nation-

wide lockdown. In phase one, we witnessed the concerns of people trying to figure out the impact of COVID-19 and a rather new concept of lockdown followed by migrant

**Journalists were covering the misery, casualties and excruciating condition of hospitals and crematoriums, while fighting the battle to keep themselves and their loved ones safe**

movement and economic slowdown wherein journalists were trying to seek the stories of those impacted by the virus. By the time we reached phase two, the crisis had grasped us tightly in its claws, and horrific instances became a routine, while many, including journalists themselves, succumbed to the disease. Amidst all such constraints, journalists were the watchdogs for

citizens forcing the government and establishments to wake up and respond to the crisis."

Meanwhile, Sharat Pradhan shared the tendency of truth being hidden amidst crisis and highlighted the responsibility of journalists, which increased manifold during such a crisis. He opined, "Journalism is a unique profession that demands a unique approach. Journalists have to report objectively and at the same time also need to dig deeper to seek the truth and thus take risks. It is a conscious decision to uphold both professional and social responsibility to bring out the best even amidst a crisis. This is what true journalism entails."

In these tumultuous times, the true test of dedication is journalists seeking news from the prohibited sources and ground zero, which was flooded with restriction to prevent covid outbreak. Our nod in respect to these unsung warriors can be channelling the motivation, perseverance, and patriotism to fight this global pandemic and emerge victorious.

**Striking a balance between personal losses, challenges and entrusted duty; journalists worked round-the-clock to uphold their commitment to the society**

**Kamal Khan**



# Gender equality: 'It's possible', say PHIA Changemakers

Vaishali Gautam

Gender has always been a topic of public discourse ever since we can remember. Since childhood, we have been hearing about gender equality and inequality. While many have witnessed and experienced the gender-based differences and accepted it as an ongoing social norm, only some of us dare to question it. But the bigger question is how clear our perception of gender equality is.

Recently, PHIA Foundation, an Indian charity organization with over 50 years of heritage and experience in development and humanitarian work, organized a 3-day gender sensitization workshop at Amity University, Lucknow. PHIA's changemakers, a group of students associated with the organization for the "It's Possible" gender equality campaign, attended this workshop to gain a better insight into several topics regarding the topic.

Stuti Mishra, project lead of 'It's Possible Campaign' (PHIA Foundation), while sharing the objective

behind holding this workshop said, "Our aim was to cover issues around gender and stereotypes associated with it. We also discussed at great lengths about identity, sexuality, gender-based violence, power, etc. We focused our discussions and activities around these topics with around 30 changemakers. We are expecting that the youth who participated in this workshop should take the learnings forward to their family, peers, and society as a whole."

The workshop was the epitome of learning along with fun activities. With the help of various activities, tasks, short presentations, and movies, the changemakers were enlightened with a deeper understanding of gender, blocks in achieving gender equality, and the ways of achieving it.

Students were also engaged in activities and tasks that not helped

raise awareness on the issue but also helped foster team spirit.

Ankita Bhatt, one of the changemakers and a student of Journalism & Mass Communication said, "It was indeed a thrilling & exciting experience to be a part of PHIA workshop as a changemaker. The workshop was informative and educative about gender- issues, outdated narratives prevailing in our society and the ways forward to change the mindset."

Sameeksha Srinet, another changemaker said, "Through this entire journey with PHIA, I can see a remarkable change in my thought process regarding gender and its identity. I got an understanding of what's right and wrong. There were numerous practices that I considered normal but now I can see how wrong they are in terms of gender equality. This makes me realize that my fellow mates and I will gradually and potentially transform into true changemakers for the society."

India ranked  
**140th**  
among 156 countries  
in the World Economic  
Forum's Global Gender  
Gap Report 2021

Photo courtesy: Vaishali Gautam



(Source: Frontiersin.org)



# Four more shots please, but in 'anonymity'

Patriarchal society plays spoilsport for women drinkers

Saumya Agrawal

Drinking alcohol is often seen as a sign of masculinity. It's hard for people to acknowledge how a grown-up man could be sober on holidays or even in evenings. However, on the other hand, for women, consumption of alcohol is associated with increased susceptibility and irresponsibility towards her own safety.

Sonia, a 24-year-old residing in Lucknow says, "My desire to drink a can of beer comes with an obstacle course. I can never feel safe drinking alone, or even with fellow ladies at a bar." A crowded beer shop is located at some distance of two kilometers from her residence. "Even if it's located nearby, I do not want to shop from there. A long queue with people staring unabashedly is something I wish to avoid."

It is safe to believe that when an infrastructure doesn't include women's need, it innately excludes them. Men's influence over public settings

The online delivery of liquor does provide a sense of safety as well as anonymity, but it however falls under patriarchal notions of the connection between alcohol and women

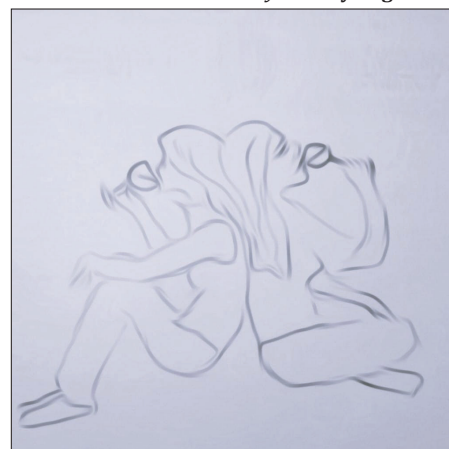
Shubra Agrawal

and wider social norms about who is supposed to drink, leaves women's experiences of buying alcohol not a very pleasant experience.

Shubhi, a law student residing in Lucknow explains, "Being a male-dominant space, local alcohol shops or thekas are generally established in shady areas, generally with few broken streetlights and odd settings."

Women are discouraged from drinking because of cultural norms, and therefore are thought to be 'obvious abstainers'. "Grand shops where alcohol is sold privately, for example Vina Alkohal in Lucknow,

Photo courtesy: Saumya Agrawal



are another option for women, and it is a preferred option for those who have the luxury, access, and also the liberty to drink. The catch though here is that liquor sold here is more expensive than usual. The very patriarchal values and 'morality' associated with the act of drinking, are influenced by class, caste, and more so by different genders", Shubhi further adds.

Women are not only the victims of various gender discriminatory alcohol use behaviors, but they are also directly impacted by men's drinking habits in terms of family impoverishment. Shubra Agrawal- a social activist, talks about the home delivery pattern of liquor. She says, "The online delivery does provide a sense of safety as well as anonymity, however, it falls under patriarchal notions of the forbidden connection between alcohol and women."

She elaborates further, "We have to be very selective of the places where we can consume alcohol and who is with us at the time."

Women aren't seen as the drinking class in India to begin with, therefore their safety isn't a general concern. The elite class that does drink in public are often met with obvious disdain. Women do end up paying more for fewer drinks while looking out for safety and that tells a lot about the discourse of women's drinking culture.

ON AN AVERAGE

1.2%  
of women in India  
consume alcohol

National average  
for men is  
29.2%

# Celebrations galore as festive season begins

Garima Dobhal

Photo courtesy: Garima Dobhal

**A**s we enter the festive season, it is pivotal to follow the precautionary measures while celebrating. Although the world is still grappling with consequences of the pandemic; people now want to enjoy the remaining part of the year celebrating, praying and enjoying the multitude festive events that began with Navratri and continue till Dev Deepawali.

During Navratri, beautiful pandals, decked-up temples and buzzing bazaars showed the enthusiasm with which people are welcoming the season especially after an unwanted and tough time. Manish Pandey, a 50-year-old owner of the Bondu Maha Pandal at Bhoothnath

**I saw people in huge crowds and without masks, not following the protocol given by the Uttar Pradesh government**

Vinay Sharma

Chauraha, Lucknow, said, "This time by the grace of Maa Durga, the festival of navratri has taken place with pomp. At the pandal, we are following all the safety guidelines. We are asking people to maintain distance and wear masks. This time special measures have been taken while preparing for festivals. I am glad to see the fun back."

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly left a bad taste especially



with the loss and gloom of second wave. But seeing the improvement in the circumstances, the door to celebrate the festivals in full swing rose up like a sign of happiness. Niharika Srivastava, a 32-year-old devotee at the same pandal said, "Last year it was appalling that we could not even go out with our family to worship Maa Durga. This year, we all got

an opportunity to go and worship following Covid protocol, which is more than enough for devotees."

While celebrations brought back the long-lost contentment, people could be seen neglecting the fact that they are still susceptible to the lethal virus. "Looking at the arrangement of the pandal near Bhoothnath Chauraha in Lucknow, I



saw people in huge crowds without masks, not following the protocol given by the Uttar Pradesh government. People are so engrossed in the celebration that they seem to have forgotten about the virus", opined Vinay Sharma, a 42-year-old working professional in Lucknow.

"We have come here to worship. The mask is for our protection, but it feels uncomfortable. So, we take it

off for a few minutes and wear it later. Since the weather is hot wearing a mask makes everyone uncomfortable", said Shubham Singh, a 23-year-old, college student who was amongst the crowd in the pandal.

The country celebrated navratri after a long gap, which embraced the spirit and enthusiasm of worshipping the goddess and participating in rituals. However, it failed when it

comes to following protocol, flouting guidelines, not wearing masks, and maintaining social distancing. While some say that the pandemic is over now, some feel that keeping the consistent protocols makes them uncomfortable and unable to enjoy the festival to the fullest. Albeit, the situation is under control, we have to insist on keeping it as it is or else it will become dire again.

# Lucknow's Ghughruon Wali Raat keeps Kathak legacy alive

Riddhima Srivastava

India is a country full of different cultures and art forms. Kathak is considered as one of the most vital genres of old Indian classical art forms. It has been said that in Lucknow, the city of Nawabs, Kathak originated mainly from the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, where artists, who had migrated from Delhi, used to perform.

The choreographers of the current form of Lucknow Gharana, also known as Kalka-Bindadin Maharaj Gharana, are eminent Kathak acharyas Pt. Kalka Prasad and Pt. Bindadin Maharaj.

The recognition that Kathak got, started from the Batuk Bhairav Nath temple. Kathak acharya Guru Kalika Bindadin initially gave Ghungroo to his three sons namely, Pt. Achhan Maharaj, Pt. Shambhu Maharaj, and Pt. Lachhu Maharaj in this temple. He had given Kathak a different identity in the whole country and even abroad.

Last Sunday of the month 'Bhaado' is observed as "Ghungruon Wali Raat" in Lucknow, wherein students learn Kathak, and dancers visit Lord Batuk Bhairavnath's temple to worship him. Trained Kathak artists pay homage to him by offering tatkar, amad, salami, tukdas, etc, and at the same time, novices start



learning Kathak by tying ghungroo in front of Batuk baba.

Kathak Shringaarmani Kumkum Adarsh (disciple of Pt. Lachhu Maharaj) still organizes the event every year to maintain the legacy of the tradition and to pass it on to future generations.

"Ghungruon wali raat is sacred for each one of us. It is believed that a student becomes a complete and a true artist after worshipping the ghungroos and performing in front of Batuk Baba" said Adarsh.

The 200-year-old temple of Bhairav Nath, an incarnation of the child form of Lord Shiva, is an age-old center of art practice. It is believed that it was here that the stalwarts of Lucknow Kathak Gharana have learned the glory of Kathak. Renowned dancers like Pt. Lachhu Maharaj and Pt. Birju Maharaj have learned their first steps of Kathak under the roof of this temple. Although the practice of tying Ghun-

groo in the temple had stopped since 1974.

Due to the outbreak of Covid 19, the "Ghungruon wali raat" is confined to a small gathering for the last two years. On being asked about the experience of witnessing the event, an eminent dancer and Kathak guru, Manisha Mishra said "Ghungroo is the heart and soul of a dancer; without Ghungroo we are just a common person in crowd; it is what makes us special. Devoting a night for its pooja fills us with positive energy."

For a person performing Kathak, Ghungroo received by his/her guru is like a degree of mastery in the art. "It is an incredible experience to get a chance to perform in front of Lord Batuk Baba and all of the chief artists attending the event. With the blessings of Baba and guru, there is a continual growth in our dance", said Shruti Sharma, a renowned dancer and Kathak guru.

# HSSSSSSSSSS tale

Sangeeta Pandey

What do you expect to find in your kitchen garden? Vegetables & fruits of course would be the standard response and even as you bob your head in agreement, well if only everything was this predictable! On a cloudy, rain-washed weekend, as I was busy inspecting my small landscape at noon, an involuntary shriek escaped me, as atop an aubergine plant (yes...our very own desi baingan/ brinjal), I found a spotted snake staring with hoodless eyes!

While I am sure that I had scared the serpentine poo-less too with my scream but the bugger kept its poise as it clung to the very top end of the plant and forked its tongue out. Involuntarily I took a step back and of course realizing my mistake, signalled to my brother who was staring at me bemused. "There is a snake?" I mouthed the words, careful not to make any abrupt movement and scare the serpentine further who still had its gaze fixed on me. This took my sibling by surprise as I pointed the finger towards the harmless plant that had become a vantage point for the coiled creature.

This threw my sibling into action as I signalled him to get my phone. A thousand things were running through my mind as to how to handle this 'serpentine issue' as my pet feline—Manza—was lounging in the garden while my mom, who by then had heard the news, was doing salutations to the 'naag devta.' I told her to remain indoors and not go for a 'live darshan' near the plant. After giving me a scorching glance, mum kept indoors.

Meanwhile, my brother got the phone, and I carefully clicked several photos following which I sent them to a wildlife enthusiast friend asking whether the reptile was venomous or not? Thankfully, the reply gave us a breather as it turned out to be a 2-feet long baby 'non-venomous rat snake'. "It's harmless. Let



it be in the garden", my friend said to which I did a double take. "Give me the number of a snake rescue team", I replied tersely in no mood to argue the point.

Thankfully, the rescue team from an NGO 'Paryavarnam Society' responded immediately to my distress call, however, since they were already on two other snake rescue missions in Telibagh, they informed that it would take some time for them to arrive. "Keep an eye on the snake and see that it doesn't escape," said Aditya Tiwari, president of the NGO.

Thus began an hour-long vigil as like 'Arjun' I had my eyes fixed on the snake, who by then got tired of human inspection, slithered down the plant and made its way into a crevice in a nearby wall that was covered by a foliage of grape vine. Never in our lives my sibling and I had observed our grape vine and all the cracks and crevices in that wall so minutely.

The snake, meanwhile, was enjoying playing peek-a-boo as it

sometimes reared its head and other times simply slithered back under the foliage. It was the longest one hour and finally the rescue team arrived and to my surprise, she was a lone girl—Devyani—who had been rescuing and rehabilitating wild animals for the last 6 years. It took her just 5 minutes to catch the snake with her hand. "It's harmless but has a very firm grip as rat snakes are exceptional climbers and can grow upto 6 feet," explained Devyani as she put the reptile in a rescue bag and then in her backpack. Devyani assured that she would rehabilitate the snake in a forest area and send a video. It was 4 pm and by then my entire 'khandaan' had been informed about the incident.

With one last look at my kitchen garden and the aubergine plant, I went to my room for a much-needed rest. Needless to say, Manza followed suit as the feline during the entire episode had maintained a safe distance but a tight vigil on the 'surprise weekend guest.'