

TANA BANA: Volume 17: February 2024



Editor's Exclusive

LIFafa: Unveiling the Female Psyche

Once again, we invite you to turn the page to a new edition of Tana Bana — Population First's monthly newsletter. This edition revolves around a unique theme close to our hearts: **Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress: Inspire Inclusion.**

Beyond the big picture made of statistics, we women share the essence of being through our stories. We thread these tiny moments together, crafting intricate narratives that become more than mere stories. Though our masks and histories differ, we live the lives of each other as we share the joy and pain transcending all. For in each other's stories, we truly belong.

We asked our women, *"What one rule must the government pass to achieve gender equality?"* to witness how their souls intertwined without being aware of each other's existence.

"Paid allowance to the primary caregiver after the child is born." Asmita, 33, Mumbai, marketing consultant.

"Special workplace quota for new mothers who took a career break." Gurpreet, 38, Delhi, HR executive.

"Death punishment for rape and sexual assault, including child sexual abuse. Also, awareness programs for parents about child sexual abuse." Soumya, 45, Navi Mumbai, homemaker.

"Providing educational stipends, stationery allowances, bicycles, and mobile phones to girls promoting gender equality from a young age, following West Bengal's lead," Anuwara, 32, Domestic Worker, Thane.

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“Investing in women-owned businesses, giving allowance for the first few months to encourage more companies to open by women, Koser, 40, Pune, IT Professional.”

This International Women's Day, themed "Inspire Inclusion," we explore the diverse voices that paint a picture: true inclusion requires a multi-pronged approach, encompassing economic support, workplace flexibility, safety, and entrepreneurial opportunities. By implementing these policies, we can inspire a future where women reach their full potential.

Responsive Budgeting: How governments can allocate resources to address gender inequality.

Financial Literacy for Women: Building economic independence and financial resilience for all classes of women.

Closing the Gender Pay Gap: Transparent pay practices, negotiation strategies, and advocacy.

Workplace discrimination and gender bias: Equal opportunities, No gender-based discrimination, celebrating women's successes, work-life balance.

Investing in Women-Led Businesses: The economic impact and how to support them (all business scales).

India's vast potential is untapped: women, comprising nearly half the population (48%), contribute only 18% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Closing the gender gap in employment could unlock a significant boost, with one study estimating a potential 30% increase in India's GDP.

Furthermore, a McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) study highlights that advancing women's equality globally could add \$28 trillion to the global GDP. This is an exciting possibility for India: a potential annual GDP boost of \$770 billion by 2025, exceeding business-as-usual growth by 18%.

This edition of our newsletter brings you a stimulating conversation with Ms Ritushree Panigrahi, a transgender activist, and an expert-authored article by Prof Vibhuti Patel about women in the financial web and their rights to achieve financial freedom.

We also detour into the rich world of literature, featuring a captivating review of a book authored by Krishna Sobti, a luminary of Indian Hindi literature. Her masterful storytelling will ignite your mind with the possibilities of life, offering a fresh perspective on the richness of life's final chapter.

As you reach the end of this curation, take a look at the "Happenings" section for the scoop on this month's exciting events of Laadli and AMCHI.

I sincerely thank Dr AL Sharada, Director of Population First, for entrusting me with the editorship of this edition.

Varsha Alimchandani,
Population First.

“True inclusion requires a multi-pronged approach, encompassing economic support, workplace flexibility, safety, and entrepreneurial opportunities”

Budget from a Gender Perspective: Gender Audit of Interim Budget 2024–25

By Professor Vibhuti Patel, Gender Economist, a distinguished scholar with extensive experience in women's studies. Previously, she held faculty positions at the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and SNDT Women's University in Mumbai. She serves on various expert committees and working groups while contributing her expertise through numerous publications on diverse gender issues.

The interim budget serves as a framework for managing provisional expenditures over a short duration till the new government is formed after the general election, and it takes office at the central level. So, the interim budget presented on 2-2-2024 by the Hon. Finance Minister is meant to meet the financial requirements and tackle revenue considerations of the current government during this interim period.

Following the new government's inauguration, a comprehensive budget for the remaining portion of the fiscal year will be typically presented in July 2024.

In the post-independence period, India has implemented a range of significant social sector initiatives to address various challenges and improve the well-being of its

citizens that covers areas such as education, healthcare, women's empowerment, rural development, skill development, employment, special needs of socio-economic marginalised communities such as SCs, STs, PWD, and lonely elderly from the poverty groups. Significant challenges faced for the gender and social sector concerns in the current times are youth unemployment in the urban, rural and tribal areas, low work participation rate for women, food inflation and agrarian distress.

Former RBI governor Dr. Duvvuri Subbarao, in his edit page article in The Times of India on 30-1-2024, alerted the government, and I quote, "Consequence of jobless growth is inequality." He also avers that using the instruments of policies and financial allocation of the interim budget 2024-25 and fiscal measures for enhancing the purchasing power of the bottom 50% of the population can be improved. This will result in colossal consumption, more production and employment, higher economic growth, and reduced inequality.

The interim budget ignores social spending in favour of capital expenditure. Over the last decade, there has been a continuous trend of declining expenditures of the Union Budget for schemes for protective and welfare schemes such as Shelter homes, short-stay homes, Rehabilitation schemes for women survivors of violence, Pensions for widows and destitute women, Directly benefiting women, Crisis management of situations arising out of economic and socio-cultural subordination and dehumanisation of women; social service spending on education, public health, crèche, working women's hostels, housing, nutrition, water supply, sanitation-toilets, drainage, fuel, fodder and regulatory services for combat gender-based violence, such as funds for the State Commission for Women, Women's cell at the police stations, and Awareness generation programmes. Social sectors that ensure fundamental rights have declined as a proportion of GDP.



The Music of Solitude: A Novel by Krishna Sobti



By Megha Chakraborty (she/he/any!), a Queer filmmaker, Writer, Cinematographer, Marathoner, Musicaholic, and Self-proclaimed bookworm with a feminist punch.

This multifaceted film-obsessed artist explores the world through the lens of their camera and challenges social norms frame by frame.

Author Introduction:

Krishna Sobti, a star of Indian Hindi literature, captivated readers with her lyrical prose and insightful exploration of the human condition.

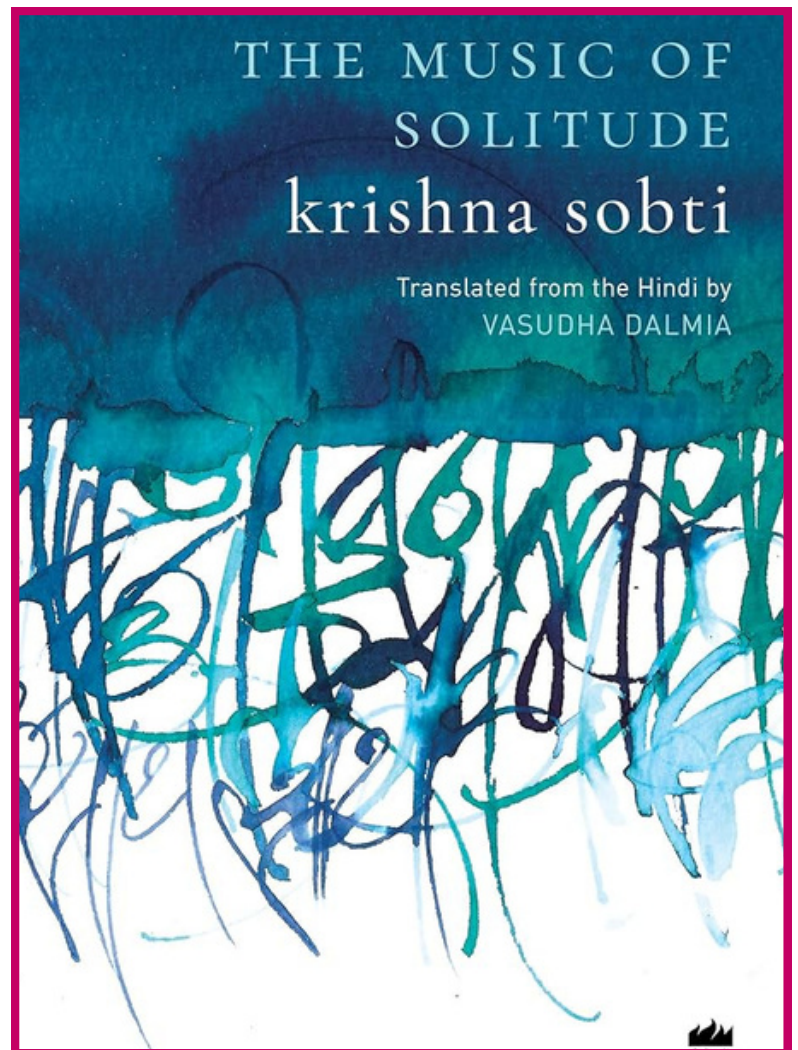
Her illustrious career garnered numerous accolades, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, and the prestigious Jnanpith Award, a testament to her legacy.

Krishna Sobti's 'Samay Sargam', which has been translated into English as 'The Music of Solitude' by Vasudha Dalmia, is not just a novel; it is a lyrical hymn that soulfully explores ageing, solitude, and the unexpected companionship that blooms in its embrace.

Sobti's prose paints a vivid and lyrical portrait. Her words flow like a raaga, with each sentence brimming with emotion and introspection. Instead of a tightly woven narrative, the story unfolds like music. A Song of Aging, Friendship, and Finding Yourself in the Autumn of Life.

The Music of Solitude tells the narrative of Aranya and Ishan, two senior persons who live next door to each other. They both live alone. Their relationship begins as neighbours, develops into a friendship, and matures into a shared exploration of solitude. They go on walks together, share meals, pay visits to friends and acquaintances, and talk. But there's an issue running through their wanderings, a formidable existential crisis – what do you live for when the end of your life is the next thing?

"Are comforts the same as happiness?"



Sobti presents a captivating contrast between its central characters. A spirited writer, Aranya lives life on her terms, fiercely independent and unafraid to express her opinions. Ishan, on the other hand, embodies stillness and order. He adheres to social norms and finds comfort in the concept of family despite the absence of one in his own life.

Set against the backdrop of Delhi, "The Music of Solitude" embarks on an intellectual journey, reflecting the freewheeling nature of reflective thought. The narrative explores the metamorphosis of both the city and its inhabitants. Despite their personalities' contrasts and their polite acceptance of one another's refusal to change in their autumns, they discover a different depth of truth via one another's lives—the truth about themselves rather than the truth about the world.

Mirroring the nature of its protagonists, "The Music of Solitude" evolves without a predetermined destination. The narrative gracefully navigates the emotional expanse of its characters, capturing moments of melancholy, warmth, budding romance, contentment, vulnerability, and even playful jabs that colour their conversations. Sobti's characters are not pitiful; you don't feel sorry for them. They are alone, yet their isolation is not synonymous with loneliness. They enjoy their independence and the silence it affords, finding solace in solitude as they guide the final chapters of their lives. "The Music of Solitude" presents a profound philosophical reflection that explores spirituality and the complexities of family dynamics.

"Is disappearing into the limitless, into Shunyata, the destiny of mankind?"

The novel confronts the universal experience of solitude in old age, even amidst family. Through poignant vignettes of supporting characters, Sobti compels readers to ponder a crucial question: do we surrender to societal expectations or embrace our remaining days with purpose and joy in the face of ageing?

*"Is
disappearing
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of mankind?"*

"The Music of Solitude" presents a complex feminist perspective as well. It celebrates female independence while acknowledging the constraints faced by women. The novel invites readers to engage with questions about societal expectations, defying stereotypes, and finding strength in solitude.

The novel pours itself into the reader's mind, a philosophically dense read yet feeling as light as a feather.

Sobti's writing explores the joys and struggles of ageing, with vivid characters facing relatable situations. The book contains thought-provoking conversations that will stay with you long after reading. On paying close attention to Aranya's and Ishan's exchanges – despite their differences, they develop a deep connection and rely on each other in surprising ways.

"The impression of experience can never let the mind know the intense bliss of innocence."

"The Music of Solitude" lingers long after turning the final page. Sobti's masterful storytelling leaves a lasting impression, prompting readers to contemplate the complexities of ageing, the enduring power of connection, and the richness of life's final chapter.

Laughter, Law, and Liberation

Ms Varsha, Programme Officer-Gender, Population First in conversation with Ms Ritushree Panigrahi (She/Her), A Transgender Woman, Lawyer, DE&I professional, Stand-up Comedian, LGBTQ+ activist, Corporate Speaker, and Columnist.

Ritushree is featured in the Makers India list for launching the "Ungender Forms" campaign on Transgender Visibility Day 2021 to promote inclusive gender options (Transgender & Non-Binary) on business platforms.

Fueling societal change with hope is Ritushree's mission. She believes personal stories laced with humour are the most effective tools for motivation.

Many feel humour/satire works better in changing transphobic mindsets than confrontation.

Would you agree?

Comedy works best when it comes to shifting mindsets. Humour makes information stick. People are more likely to remember a well-placed joke than a monotonous explanation. Most people wouldn't attend a two-hour seminar but package some humour into your message, and suddenly, it's relatable. Humor transcends barriers like gender and sexuality. If you can make people laugh, you've got their attention, and that's the key to getting them to listen, follow, and understand your message.



You wear many hats - activist/stand-up artiste/ lawyer, and so many more. Which is your favourite and why?

Activism comes naturally to LGBTQ+ people, myself included. Fighting for our rights is part and parcel of the journey.

My passion lies in diversity and inclusion work. It's a powerful way to grow myself while helping others in our community find success in the workforce and build visibility.

I love the complete creative control stand-up offers; it is one medium where you are the writer, director, and performer all rolled into one. It's all you on stage, captivating the audience. Overall, I follow my passions. If something stops sparking joy, as litigation and court visits did for me, I move on. Right now, I'm loving everything I do!

Could you walk us through your journey to becoming the famed Ritushree Panigrahi you are?

I was always Ritushree Panigrahi; I was born this way. Yes, I was hiding. Facing the reality that 97% of trans women have lost their homes and jobs after coming out was terrifying. However, in 2019, I found successful trans women on Twitter. They inspired me to live authentically. It showed how vital positive examples are, especially for those facing challenges.

After coming out to my family and everyone else in 2019, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery.

I tried many names, but nothing felt quite right. Then, it dawned on me! Inspired by my sisters' names, Banashree and Tanushree, I thought that if there was a third sister, it must have been Ritushree because we love rhyming babies. This name completed me.



What were some of the most challenging milestones?

The most challenging milestone was coming out to myself. Since childhood, I felt a disconnect. It wasn't until I was nine that I recognised I was transgender. I started experimenting in private, dressing up at home and later in my apartment, but societal pressure made me doubt myself. I'd stop for months, the guilt gnawing at me. Again, after six or seven months, the craving was back. In 2019, I convinced myself to stop altogether.

My family's pressure to marry intensified. They selected a girl for me, and when it was my turn to meet her, I had a severe panic attack. I felt like I was killing Ritushree. I had to be hospitalised, and my therapy began. The first step was saying no to marriage, not ever. It was a long journey from there, but I dared to bring Ritushree out and show everyone that she was gorgeous, happy, and capable of everything.

"The most challenging milestone was coming out to myself."

Several corporations and organisations are coming forward to employ transpersons. While they claim finding enough people for those slots is challenging, the trans community claims a lack of employment opportunities. What is your take?

Many companies like the one I joined recently, Welspun Enterprise Ltd., are leading the charge for inclusion! They're hiring a wider range of talented people, including LGBTQ+ folks and those from underrepresented groups. This is a big deal because many talented trans people stay hidden for fear of discrimination. Inclusive workplaces make them feel safe to come out and contribute.

Education should not be a barrier to employment. Tata has done it brilliantly. Companies can invest in training programs to help people succeed, especially those from marginalised communities like the trans community. Many companies are already offering internships and workshops to build skills. Instead of just looking for people with degrees, if you have the will, then focus on what people can learn and achieve. Qualification is a discriminatory word used against oppressed people.

Bollywood has begun - even obligatorily- increasingly doffing its hat at trans rights. While several continue to demonise the ones that humanise, they come with their own set of problems. Could you cite your examples and say if you agree?

Bollywood is evolving. We've seen impactful films like "I Am", "Fire", "Bombay", "My Brother Nikhil," and "Aligarh." While these were important, they only scratched the surface.

Now, there's a growing trend of LGBTQ+ representation, driven in part by the lucrative potential of this audience. This isn't just tokenism, but recognising that the trans-community is one of the most significant consumer communities. If you make a movie touching the subject, at least queer people will go and watch it.

Movies like "Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui" and "Taali" spark societal conversations. Similarly, films like "Maja Ma" and "Badhai Do" hint at a changing landscape.

This shift reflects a new generation entering the workforce – a generation more open and accepting of LGBTQ+ identities. Hopefully, Bollywood will move beyond representation and delve deeper into authentic stories. For now, they have just touched the tip of the iceberg. I would love to see a representation like Made in Heaven, where trans people play trans-person characters. It's a promising start.

The International Women's Day 2024 campaign theme is Inspire Inclusion. Would you agree that inspiring others to understand and value inclusion helps forge a better world?

International Women's Day celebration is primarily heterosexual. For it to be truly meaningful, it should be inclusive of all women, including LGBTIQ+ women.

Recently, I joined Welspun Enterprise Ltd, which embraced inclusivity on Women's Day by sending me a gift hamper. Some might see this as tokenism, but even these gestures send a positive message and demonstrate a company's commitment to diversity.

Women are a diverse group with a wide range of experiences. Otherwise, your woman's day will be only a seasonal heterosexual-led Women's Day celebration rather than progressive activism.

Even when talking about issues of women, only matters of this General heterosexual woman are given space. Supreme Court is not stopping you from celebrating LGBTIQ+ women, so why are you not doing it?

Please visit

<https://laadlimerilaadli.blogspot.com/2024/03/laughter-law-and-liberation.html> to read the full interview.

"Supreme Court is not stopping you from celebrating LGBTIQ+ women, so why are you not doing it?"

Launch of Laadli Media Awards 2024

Population First announced the 14th edition of the Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity 2024 at Hyderabad on 9th March 2024.

The call for entries was launched by Population First's former CEO, Dr A L Sharada, Justice Radha Rani, C Vanaja, the NWMI team and other dignitaries on the stage.

This initiative is supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) India.



Dr A L Sharada said, "We are pleased to announce the launch of the 14th Laadli Media Awards, to which all aspiring media professionals are cordially invited to submit their entries. These awards have been a powerful tool in elevating gender sensitivity as a fundamental journalistic principle, particularly for aspiring journalists. It serves as a vehicle for the media industry to acknowledge, inspire, and celebrate gender-sensitive content."

The last date for sending entries for all regions is 15th May 2024.

For more info, visit: <https://www.populationfirst.org/apply/>

About Laadli Media Awards

One of the most prestigious honours in the world, the Laadli Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, is conferred exclusively to support gender sensitivity in the media. Senior editors, journalists, media executives, and cultural icons participate in a year-long lobbying campaign that ends with the Awards ceremonies. The Laadli Media & Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity (LMAAGS) regional edition honours outstanding contributions made to the media in each of the country's four regions.



Janhvi's Journey: From Despair to Hope

It is hugely concerning that the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER – a nationwide household survey that documents the state of children's enrollment and learning outcomes in rural India), published on January 17, 2024, found that roughly 25% of children between the ages of 14 and 18 are still unable to read a Class II level text fluently in their native tongue.

Furthermore, over half of the 14 to 18-year-old children in rural India struggle with division (3-digit by 1-digit problems), a skill that is often required of children in Class III or IV. Additionally, over half of these youngsters cannot answer a fundamental three-digit division problem, typically taught in Classes 3–4.

Population First recognises how this burgeoning problem can mar lives with reduced access to opportunities for better income and quality of life.

The pandemic had further aggravated the situation, with children from tribal areas being pushed to make up for lost years of schooling without any extra support.

To help students lagging at school, who are likely to lose interest and drop out, Population First's AMCHI project, with the support of ATOS, has initiated special classes to bring them on par with the syllabus being taught.

Asnoli resident Jahnvi Dattatreya Satpute is an excellent example of how student-centric teaching can transform a youthful mind thirsty for education.

Despite her agricultural family's meagre means, Jahnvi strongly desires to learn. This fourth-grader of Asnoli's ZP School demonstrates the ability of education to change both an individual and her community.

Being merely eighth-standard drop-outs themselves, Jahnvi's parents personally know the importance of education, the lack of which is magnified several times because none in the family has a steady job. Their dedication, demonstrated by their readiness to go above and beyond their means to give their daughter the educational resources she needs, feeds her enthusiasm. The foundation of Jahnvi's fantastic development is a commitment both her parents share with her.

Jahnvi's story is a stunning example of how a student-centric supplementary teaching system unleashes the students' potential.



Since joining the supplementary classes, her reading fluency has improved, from knowing simple Marathi words to fluently reading passages. Likewise, her comprehension of mathematical ideas has grown beyond basic addition to subtraction, multiplication, and division, showcasing her increasing self-assurance and analytical abilities. She also went from being able to recognise the letters to being able to make phrases and read complete chapters in English, even when faced with difficulties.

These incredible advancements have not gone unnoticed. Overwhelmed with delight, her parents thank the instructors at Population First, an organisation that has undoubtedly been instrumental in her learning levels.

Hope transcends the individual level, and the whole Asnoli village community takes pride in Jahnvi's tale. Her story serves as a rallying cry for more funding allocation to rural education, empowering people and promoting the general development of communities like Asnoli.

Please get in touch with us if you wish to know more and support the initiative. Write to us at communications@populationfirst.org

“Hope transcends the individual level, and the whole Asnoli village community takes pride in Jahnvi's tale.”

Population First

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Laadli

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

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