

# Population First

VOLUME 8: DECEMBER 2022

## TANA BANA

Newsletter of Population First

### From the Editor's Desk

We are delighted to bring to you the 8th volume of 'Tana and Bana' the December, 2022 edition. The year 2022 ended on a high note with the 'Laadli National Awards' event which was once again held at 'Tata Theatre, NCPA' at Mumbai. It was so heartening to witness an auditorium almost packed to capacity.

We also initiated an interesting concept of senior screen writers mentoring students of film working on characters, particularly - empowered, confident and positive women characters.

We are also very pleased to share our initiative in the area of education which is making a positive impact on the children in the villages of Shahapur.

I thank Ms. Smriti Nevatia, a senior media personality, for reviewing the film 'Kantara' specially throwing light on the gender perspective, among others and Ms. Sathya Saran, the noted journalist and writer for reviewing our award winning book How are you veg? Dalit stories from Telugu

which voices the experiences of deprivation, denial and the deep-seated discrimination that Dalits face in India.

In 2022 we had the good fortune of working with several organizations, individuals and agencies and look forward to continued collaboration with them in the coming years as well, to build a better world for all, particularly for girls and women across various strata, abilities and communities.

We will continue to explore new avenues for reaching out to people with our message for of gender parity, equality and inclusion.

Please do connect with us with your thoughts, suggestions and any out of the box ideas!

We at 'Population First' wish a very happy and happening New Year to you all.

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## Reel Life

# Kantara Film Review by Smriti Nevatia

*Kantara released in September 2022 took the country by storm with audiences, critics and others appreciating the movie and declaring it as spectacular, visually delightful with splendid storytelling. It is also praised for its realistic depiction and authenticity. But there are others who find the film problematic on various counts. We have Smriti Nevatia, curator, selector, and jury for Film festivals, documentary script writer and teacher, writer-researcher on gender and sexuality, and writer, director, and executive producer for shows on TV, taking a look at the film going beyond its technical excellence and visual appeal.*



Having just watched Kantara (the highest grossing Kannada film ever) I find myself a trifle bemused by the superhit’s across-the-board appeal to personalities as diverse as Anurag Kashyap on the one hand and, ahem, Kangana Ranaut on the other, with a sprinkling of other celebrities singing its praises. Regular film critics (and random online reviewers too) have, between them, given it so many stars and thumbs-ups that Rishab Shetty, who has not only written and directed the film but also plays – with quite amazing energy and passion – the male lead, must be a happy man indeed.

Two main “controversies” seem to be swirling around Kantara. One concerns its alleged appropriation of certain pre-existing adivasi cultural practices, folklore, mythology and rituals into the rubric of latter-day Hinduism – which, in today’s political landscape, ties in neatly with the flattening, exclusionary project of Hindutva. Small wonder, then, that one entrant into this debate is the horror brigade called Sri Ram Sene. The second, which seems to have set off fewer disgruntled rumblings, is the critique that the film is an unabashed celebration of what we feminists (equally unabashedly, given the feminist-bashing that always ensues, as it has in this context too) call “toxic masculinity”. We shall return to these two allegations.

I did find much to admire: the creation of a credible fictional world – a visual-psychological- feudal-cultural landscape with a wide range of characters and specific interpersonal dynamics, against which an age-old tale of powerful overlords and eternal underdogs plays out, with the state in the form of a Forest Officer forming the third arm of the triangle; the invention of a very particular look-and-feel, sound-and-music aesthetic that earns the adjectives (re)viewers are using – “immersive”, “kinetic”, “spectacular”; how the story going back centuries – of a king and a demigod, a land and a people, a boon and a caution – and told in voiceover to a child, serves aptly to bracket the narrative. And yet Kantara often made me uneasy, and queasy. I shall attempt to examine why.

At the beginning, a bullock race through mud and slush, the film’s take on a north Karnataka tradition known as Kambala, both sets the tone for the visual richness and set-piece grandeur of the film,





## Reel Life

and uncovers the simmering tensions between the local rich man, descendant of the erstwhile king, and the poor villagers, many of whom are employed by him and all of whom still bear a traditional loyalty to his family. People have raved about the film's "electrifying climax" too, and I agree that "fight sequences" have rarely been so extended or so triumphantly choreographed: but I just kept feeling I was watching a Tarantino-meets-Obelix hybrid. The Tarantino parallels are evident in the near-stylised violence, the gory spurts of blood, and the camera and action pas de deux; but I favour my Obelix analogy more. The forest-dependent rural community living on lands from which it refuses to be ousted could well be the Gaulish village that fans of the 'Asterix' comics know and love; the landlord might pass as some former clan chief who's now just a powermonger playing both sides; the other side being the conscientious but out-of-his-depth new arrival, the forest officer in an undesirable posting – in a nutshell, the Roman Centurion; but it's the hero Shiva who is unquestionably Obelix, because what else can explain his favourite pastime – hunting and feasting on wild boars? And how else does he come by his indomitable strength and his fondness for bashing up hordes of opponents with the greatest of ease at every opportunity? The magic potion in Shiva's case seems to be his perpetually angry and resigned mother's fish curry that he so craves... an attempt to show us Shiva's softer side, perhaps.

Shiva needs all the softer sides he can get, because he's just a swaggering bundle of aggressive machismo otherwise, who believes the way to a woman's heart is through (a tight pinch of) her bare waist. His love interest doesn't seem to mind too much, proceeding in short order to fall headlong for her molester, let herself be scolded and slapped by him, apologise to him for doing her job as forest department employee, seek him out sexually

because he is clearly irresistible, and cook for and feed him when he's down and out. Remember we were to revisit that "toxic masculinity" angle?

As for the other controversy, with some people proudly claiming the film as an affirmation of "sanatan dharma" and others castigating it for the same reason, something that stuck in my throat was how the supernatural aspects – the narrative's main premise and driver – are not allowed to remain in the ambivalent, arguably more cinematic realms of metaphor, imagination, or cultural expressions of shared faith, but are made into tangible manifestations. One of the more moving and vivid strands in Kantara consists of Shiva's hallucinatory episodes, or nightmares, that derive from his experience as a child of seeing his father vanish in the forest while performing the Bhoot Kola, along with his own preternatural sensitivity to the forest's sights, sounds – and, as it were, resident spirits. However, when a demigod intervenes to revive the battered, apparently dead protagonist, giving him super strength and jaw-dropping stuntman abilities that he uses to vanquish a whole legion of armed enemies, the surreal has been made far too real. "Possession" is normalised; as is violence for the sake of justice. And in another parallel from literature that I cannot help referencing, especially given the varaha (boar) factor, the demigod's repeated jump scare roar of 'Waaaaa!' reminded me (no disrespect intended to the original folk tradition) of the correct call for pigs in PG Wodehouse's immortal short story 'Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey'.

The actual Bhoota Kola performance sequences are indeed stunning both aurally and visually; and Shiva's soft side finally comes into its own when he dons the sacred garb and make-up he has till then abjured, and dances into his appointed daiva form, becoming forgiving and compassionate, even womanly.





## Field Notes:

# Shine on Amchi

### Child-friendly teaching model bridges learning gaps post-pandemic!

The pandemic has brought out the digital divide between boys and girls because for various social-cultural reasons boys have better access to mobiles to benefit from digital classes. What is not acknowledged or talked about is the class divide. Pupils from remote tribal villages are particularly at a disadvantage. Almost two and a half years of loss of schooling have pushed them to be almost illiterate. Particularly, the primary school children who were just in the process of learning the basics - alphabets, numbers, simple additions, multiplications, etc.

### Gaps in learning levels

It was observed that a student who were learning the basics of English, Marathi, and Maths two and half years earlier were now suddenly thrust into advanced classes without a complete grasp on the fundamentals. This has also been reiterated by Zilla Parishad School teachers, who themselves have tried hard in conducting bridge classes for the students as per the government regulations, but were unable to bring all the students up to the same levels. "We have a lot of work and a lot of pressure to complete the decided curriculum," said Mr. Vekhande, a teacher from Masavne school, "so as a teacher we cannot go back and teach basics to the students again, because we have limited time to complete the curriculum. Also, the students who are good at basics need advanced lessons. Unfortunately, we are neither able to help students who need support with their basics nor the latter." Therefore, there is a gap that needs to be filled.

### Bridging the gap, integrating children into schools

Keeping this gap in mind and the need to bring students up to levels where they can cope with the class curriculum, Population First's (PF) AMCHI

initiative has undertaken an education project supported by the crowdfunding platform Give India and its 2021's 100 Heroes Campaign where PF was able to raise 2.6 lakh rupees for the initiative for 100 to 120 students from classes 5th to 7th. The project aimed to provide support to students who are weak in basic language and mathematics skills through both provisions of workbooks and access to teachers post-school hours. Apart from supporting children in their education, the project also provided some basic employment opportunities to educated women of the village. The project also focused on advocating for WaSH practices among children and mobilizing the communities to partner in improving the education levels of their children.

The project is being implemented in the Gegaon, Masavne, and Tembhurli villages of Shahapur for students from the 4th to 7th classes. The students who need additional support were identified by the zilla parishad school teachers, as they were well aware of the learning levels of their students







## Field Notes:

# Shine on Amchi

### Introduction of new pedagogic methods

Three women teachers were selected from within the community and a two-day intensive training was conducted for them by Maharashtra State Education Board recognized teacher trainer, Mr. Ismail Sheikh. He familiarised the village teachers with new pedagogic methods of teaching young children with a special focus on peer learning and group learning methodologies. He also oriented the AMHCI team in focusing on the competencies of students by breaking the fundamentals of the subjects into three categories.

### Incredible improvements

*The teachers have conducted two hours of intensive classes for the children five days a week since the beginning of the project in August 2022. After completing five months of the project, a test was conducted for students attending these classes in Gegaon village; and the results were promising. Fifteen students who were unable to identify the alphabet five months ago were now able to read the English words. In Marathi, 23 students were not able to read the complete paragraphs with a complete understanding of the text, now they can read paragraphs with full comprehension of the text. In Maths, similarly, we found that 26 children who were unable to solve simple addition and subtraction questions earlier were now able to solve these questions easily.*



Seeing the success of the students, a meeting was called for parents, teachers, SMC members, and even PRI members. The incredible improvement shown by the students in just five months of dedicated work by the teachers and the interest shown by the students were shared. All the stakeholders especially parents and teachers were extremely delighted by the results and decided to continue sending their children to these classes. Listening to the work of teachers like Karuna and the incredible impact it has had on children, all the stakeholders especially parents, SMC members, and PRI members agreed to contribute towards the payment of remuneration for the teacher, with every parent agreeing to pay Rs. 100 per month towards teacher's remuneration. PRI members have also decided that they will prioritize solving any issues the classes, students, or teacher face in the future.

### A ray of hope

Bhaskar Dongre, SMC member of Gegaon said, "These classes are very useful for the students because I observed my daughter, Anita, was not able to identify the alphabet when she began her class 5, in June this year. But now she is easily able to read English words. This shows the result of the classes which was started by PF. This class is like a new hope for me for better education for my daughter. Therefore, I will support the class and the teacher will ensure it does stop in the future."



## How are you veg? Dalit stories from Telugu

By Joopaka Subhadra, Stree-Samya Books | 2021

**How are you veg?** by Joopaka Subhadra won the Laadli Media Award for Gender sensitivity under Book – Fiction and Translation category. We have Satya Saran, Consulting Editor with Penguin Random House India, former Editor of Femina, author. Teaches fashion journalism at NIFT, a stage actor, and curator 'The Spaces between Words' reviewing the book for us.



Every barb, insult, attempt at submission, and show of strength against those considered lesser mortals finds place in this scathing collection of stories by Joopaka Subhadra.

Each of them carries a real hurt for the receiver, but also twists the knife in the heart of the sensitive reader to tap an unknown font of guilt. Guilt at committing at least some of the sins that conditioning-caused mind-sets may have occasioned, guilt at a continued silence despite knowing others commit these sins, guilt at never ever raising a protest that could make a real difference.

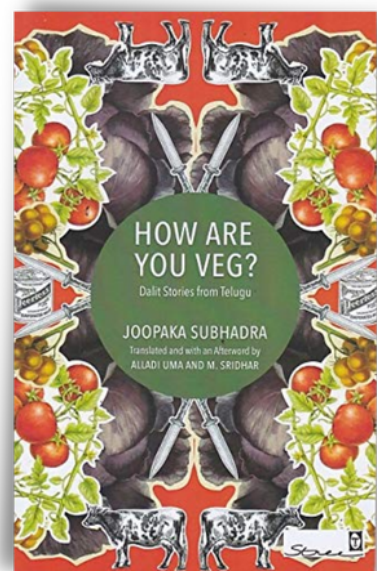
There is no escape. These stories, seemingly fictional, are meant to hurt. They are real, experienced, and the author hopes to share the pain if not as an experience for the reader, at least as pricks of conscience.

Each story is told with no frills. Each protagonist is real, the school girl, the office worker, every one of them a breathing, thinking and dreaming human being who shares the hopes of countless others of the same age, regardless of station in life. And each story starts off with the protagonist walking, working, moving closer to her goal; a better job, a better life, an upward mobility or even the simple desire to excel in the examinations.

Yet, just when the goal seems within reach, grievous hurt is aimed at her. Which makes even the achievement desired pall as the wounds fester in the mind.

Most of the stories go beyond the traditional physical abuse of the victim, that was the stuff of stories of the past. Awareness of the dangers of physical abuse because of caste, has filtered into our psyches; so, the abuse is verbal, or emotional or just a denial of rights. Despite the fact that we live in a nation where the Constitution proclaims everyone equal, regardless of the cradle of caste that their birth has thrown them into.

The reality is very different, as these stories tell. The simple act of borrowing a pen so she can write her examination without fear of her pen running dry or breaking a nib, is painted by the higher caste mother of the borrower's friend as an unspeakable act of outrage. The offending daughter is scolded for her thoughtless act of friendship, the pen, now offensive as it has been touched and used by a lower caste person is thrown away. Of no use to anybody, not even the girl in need.





### How are you veg? Dalit stories from Telugu

By Joopaka Subhadra, Stree-Samya Books | 2021

Obviously based on real life sufferings experienced by the Madiga women who are the most oppressed Dalits in Telangana, these stories tells us that education, success, and a good job provide no safety from oppression and victimisation.

It's definitely not arm chair reading. It's a book that should, with its no holds barred translation that uses words with power, spur a change, or at least an awareness about the need to change.

It tells us, that while the Dalits across India are climbing out of the cesspits the higher castes had thrown them into centuries ago, and through hard work and sincere effort are trying to carve out new lives for themselves; it is the higher castes who still remain trapped in their insecurities and worn-out beliefs and continue to suppress, oppress and cause emotional and mental harm.

Yet, as in real life, the author has surmounted these and skirted the pitfalls to find not just her station as an equal but also a voice that can cry out against injustice, others labelled with the Dalit label have been finding their place in society as equals.

Now, if only the rest of the country would wake up to their potential.



## Happenings

# Gender sensitive Stories in Odia Media

As a part of its mandate to create a supportive ecosystem for the media person, gender analysis of publications from a particular region is being undertaken each quarter. The previous quarters focused on select English publications from the western regions, the Telugu media from the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and the Hindi Media Northern region. In quarter 4 (Oct-Dec 2022) Odia publications were studied. Reproduced are excerpts of Rakhi Ghosh's notings and the selected stories.

Rakhi Ghosh started her career 20 years back as a city-reporter in a vernacular newspaper "Dharitri", and thereafter shifted to English newspaper "The Asian Age" and then joined a television channel Odisha TV as a reporter-cum-newsreader. Since 2014, she has been working as a freelance journalist and contributing to various print and digital platforms. Recently she has also forayed into documentary film making and launched her own website [storiesodisha.com](http://storiesodisha.com) to publish stories from grassroots which are less covered in mainstream media.



In a state which is traditionally and culturally male dominated and where media, especially print media, is largely dominated by male journalists, finding gender sensitive reports is definitely a tedious task. Thankfully, there are a few women journalists who are working hard to produce well-informed gender sensitive stories.

With nearly 20 years of experience in Odisha media in all streams -print, television and web, I have noticed how stories /issues with gender lens are invisible in front page, unless there is a sensational rape or gang rape report or any announcement/reports related to women. In late 90s' when I began my career in journalism the gender understanding to write a news report, feature or story - be it on political, economic or on environment issues or on governance from a gender lens was not there. Thus, it is not far from truth if we say the content of Odia language newspaper is by the men, of the men and for the men. Inter-sectionality of gender with issues of tribals, dalits and other nomadic tribes is hardly given any priority in a state where 40 percent people belong to SC & ST communities.

took four major dailies – The Sambad, The Sakala, The Prameya and The Dharitri from October 2022 to December 2022 and did a small analysis of reports published in this period and how they are different from other stories. In Odisha, reporters

rarely get by-lines so most stories can be taken as by staff reporter.

The Winning stories:

1. **Jhia boli mari deuchanti ! - Killing because they are girls - Sambad, October 29, 2022 by Gargy Satpathy**

[https://m.sambadepaper.com/imageview\\_14052\\_197395\\_4\\_71\\_30-10-2022\\_0\\_i\\_1\\_sf.html](https://m.sambadepaper.com/imageview_14052_197395_4_71_30-10-2022_0_i_1_sf.html)

[https://m.sambadepaper.com/imageview\\_14068\\_183750\\_4\\_71\\_30-10-2022\\_9\\_i\\_1\\_sf.html](https://m.sambadepaper.com/imageview_14068_183750_4_71_30-10-2022_9_i_1_sf.html)

The story was written by Gargy Satpathy, who is working as a reporter with The Sambad. (There is no by-line)

The story says though NFHS-5 report shows that the adult sex ratio has improved with 1036 women per 1000 men, the child sex ratio i.e., the number of girls per 1000 boys is steadily decreasing. Out of 30 districts in Odisha state, in 15 districts the number of girl children stands at 900 and in 3 districts it further declined to less than 700. The situation is acute in developed districts like Cuttack, where the literacy level of people is far better than other districts. Her story also points out how government failed to sensitize people and was callous towards taking stringent action against the culprits. She highlights the data of both NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 to show the decline in the numbers.





## Happenings

### Gender sensitive Stories in Odia Media

#### 2. **Khusi re Aniyamitata (Irregularities in providing Khusi Sanitary Pad) - The Dharitri, 19 November, 2022 by Sharmistha Panigrahi**

The story emphasizes on how, even after school sessions have started after Covid-induced lockdown and young girls are regularly attending schools, girls are being forced to miss their classes because of irregular supply of sanitary pads. The story has no interviews of any school going girls but it discusses how the programme has failed to reach its target population. The report has interviews of female teachers and few officers at the district level where they accepted that due to various reasons the pads are dumped in stores but have not reached to schools.

#### 3. **Sukhua Khalare hantasanta Mahila Matshyajibi (Plight of fisher women at dry fish factories) - The Sakala, 11 November 2022 by Pratyasa Mohanty.**

<https://www.sakalaepaper.com/clip/147614>

The story highlights the hundreds of women residing in fisher community villages and working in dry fish factories to earn their living. They are underpaid, have to work for long hours and the work is also seasonal. There are a number of women from neighbouring state West Bengal who migrate to work in these factories to earn and support their families. These women have worked from their adolescence and now their daughters are also helping them to support them financially. Some of them said, due to lack of schools and safety they bring their daughters along with them. She highlighted in her story that since these women are not recognized as workers they are not able to get compensation from government during off-season, when fishing is banned in rivers and sea. The migrant women are not entitled to get government schemes. Single women (widows and unmarried women) working in dry fish factories face more difficulties than local women folks.

#### 4. **Pothichitra Silpi Gaon Abahelita (Village of pattachitra artists is neglected - The Prameya, 30 October 2022 by Rajashree Sahoo.**

<https://prameyaepaper.com/edition/18498/puri/page/9>

She highlights the struggles of women artists of Pattachitra villages whose husbands migrate to cities to support families financially. Due to apathy and lack of government support to support artists, the male members migrate to cities to work in construction sites for their living. The women members who are also artisans are trying to keep up the craft alive along with their daily household burden. She has visited one artists' village Nayakpatna in Puri district, where she interviewed women artisans about their everyday struggles. They take out time from their daily household chores to doing Pattachitra work to save the art work from vanishing. Some of them also said, because they are women and are not able to bargain well, they do not get better price from tourists who purchase pattachitra work from them.

#### 5. **Abhaba anatana bhitare mahila safei karmachari (Plight of women sanitation workers) - The Sakala, 14th November 2022 by Pratyasa Mohanty.**

<https://www.sakalaepaper.com/clip/151745>

She highlights the problems of women sanitation workers working under Urban Municipality. Because of their caste and gender these women are paid less than men sanitation workers. She highlights that these women work as sanitation workers to support their family financially while shouldering the daily household chores. Some of them suffer from occupational health hazards such as TB, COPD and other health problems as they are not being provided with safety gears-masks, gloves and glasses. They are unable to leave the work as no one will employ them because of their caste.



## Happenings

# Two-day media workshop on gender reporting at Bhopal

Journalists from Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh came together for a two-day residential program at Bhopal to gain insights into reporting on various issues from a gender perspective. Seven sessions and a panel discussion took the attendees through topics as diverse as education, gender-based violence, media and gender representation, post-covid media and challenges for women, and more. The initiative was supported by United Nations Population Fund, The royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi, and Women and Child Development Department, MP.

Faculty included Pushpendra Pal Singh, chief editor Madhyam, Suresh Tomar, joint director WCD, Dr. A.L.Sharada, director Population First, Sunil Jacob, State Head, UNFPA, Madhya Pradesh, and Anurag Sonwalker, State Program Officer, UNFPA, Madhya Pradesh.

Dr. A.L. Sharada, welcomed the attendees and set the stage for the proceedings in her ice-break session. Anurag Sonwalker in his welcome note spoke about the raison d'être for the workshop and highlighted the importance of media in ushering societal changes.

Four sessions were held on day-one. These included, two sessions on Status of women in India: Striking Stats, Women in Media and Women and Media which were conducted by Dr.A.L. Sharada while the session on Gender, Sex and Patriarchy was taken by Suresh Tomar. The final session Reporting on GBV was taken by Anurag Sonwalker. He took the attendees through a series of reportage on gender-based violence and showed how media portrayed such cases in rather insensitive manner that often placed the onus of the crime on the women themselves. He also shared the various alternative ways of narrating an incidence which were more respectful to women.

Globally acclaimed documentary by Santoshee Gulabkali Mishra, a journalist, documentary filmmaker, and investigative researcher, **Mumbai 400008 - A Story of Betrayal, Pain and Desperation**, was screened at the end of the day. followed by a Q&A session with the director. The audiences had several questions to ask of the Director who was present in person for the interaction which continued over the dinner.

The day two commenced with a recap of the previous day by Dr. Sharada. The participants shared their learning. She then went on to take the attendees through an understanding of as well as provide insights into unconscious biases and how they play out while representing various section of the society. While noting how deeply rooted the biases and divides are, she urged them to question these positions and sensibly portray women.



The next session Diversity and Inclusion in Media Reporting, was taken by Pushpendra Pal Singh. He said, "Diversity naturally works towards mitigating differences and initiating an expansive environment which allows all sects to thrive, while monotony keeps views limited. It is important that media not only in its reporting but even in its organization embraces diversity." The final Session was on Gender-Biased Sex Selection by Sunil Jacob looked at how to report on a subject that often is open to misrepresentation. He cautioned the participants



## Happenings

### Two-day media workshop on gender reporting at Bhopal

to be very careful while reporting on the issue and not use any language, sign or symbol which may criminalize abortion which under specific circumstances is a legal right of a woman in India.

The final session was a panel discussion that looked at how gender sensitive media is. Titled Women in Media the panel comprised Brajesh Rajput, noted journalist, Bureau Chief, ABP, Shruti Kushwaha, CEO, MP Breaking News, and Anurag Dwary, Senior Editor, NDTV. The panellists noted how women reporters were at the receiving end of the patriarchal mindset. Citing the example of the pandemic they noted that they not only were burdened with the increased workload, but they also had to weather stark working conditions without access to proper facilities while reporting from the field. A number of them were laid off as it was felt that men were more suited to the altered requirements.





## Happenings

### It's Celebration Time Once Again

After a hiatus of two years, the award ceremony for the national edition of the 12th Laadli Media & Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity (NLMAAGS) was held at the prestigious Tata Theatre, NCPA, on Tuesday the 29th of November. Noteworthy work in journalism, advertising, films, television, theatre, and books was felicitated at the function. Mr. Arne Jan Flølo Honorable Consul General of Norway in Mumbai and Ms. Andrea Wojnar, Country Representative, UNFPA India, were the guests of honour. Noted film personality Nandita Das was the chief guest. It was attended by a glittering ensemble of stellar personalities. The initiative was once again supported by UNFPA and the Norwegian Embassy in India.

Each year the National Awards recognize pioneering change-makers who through the dint of their persistent work and vision have called out the structures that resist gender equality. This year the Laadli of The Century award was presented to Ela Ramesh Bhatt for impacting the lives of thousands of women, for giving us a working model of women's empowerment, and for initiating the women's cooperative movement in India. The Laadli Lifetime Achievement award was presented to Indira Jaisingh for ardently advocating for social justice and women's rights, while the Laadli Gender Champion Award which was instituted in memory of the triumvirate of the Indian Feminist Movement, Gail Omvedt, Kamla Bhasin, and Sonal Shukla was presented to Advocate Varsha Deshpande, who has been courageously working to save and protect the girl child through judicious implementation of Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 2002. Kausar Munir was presented the Laadli Woman Behind the Screen Award for stepping into hitherto a male bastion in the film industry and establishing an undeniable place for herself as a poet, lyricist,

and dialogue writer. For her undeniable contribution to the world of theatre, Rohini Hattangadi was presented with the award for Theatre.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Gangubai Kathiawadi was felicitated in the theatrical release, Hindi category, while Gargi was recognized as a Regional theatrical release. Sherni directed by Amit Masurkar was awarded in the OTT category. Porgai (Pride): A Film On The Revival Of Lambadi Art was awarded as a documentary. The award for web series was presented to Delhi Crime Season 2 for spotlighting the grit of the two fearless women who stand undeterred in the face of crime, political nexus, and patriarchal systems. A motley of advertisements was recognized for its gender-sensitive portrayals and these include BBDO INDIA's When We #Seeequal, We #Sharetheload for Ariel, Shreyansh Innovations #KanyaMaan for Manyavar Mohey, Ogilvy's The Tale Of 2 Lajjos for Project Nanhi Kali, BBDO India's The Story Of Sushila for P&G Shiksha, Coconut Films' Home for Royal Enfield, Lowe Lintas Delhi's Manjha Google India, DDB Mudra's It's Just A Period for Stayfree, Django Digital's My Story. Period for Lemme Be!, and Dentsu Webchutney's 'The 'Marriage Conversations' for Tanishq

This year four books were recognized for their gender-nuanced content. Shormistha Mukherjee's autobiography Cancer You Picked The Wrong Girl, Manjima Bhattacharjya's Non-Fiction Intimate City, and Joopaka Subhadra's fiction translated from Telugu, How Are You Veg: Dalit Stories From Telugu were the winners from English, while, Sumitra Mehrol's autobiography Tute Pankhon Se Parwaj Tak won for Hindi.

The event maybe viewed [here](#)





## Happenings

12th Edition of The National Laadli Media and Advertising Awards held at Tata Theatre, NCPA, Mumbai







## Happenings

# Decoding Women in Films - A workshop on Character Work



Before we aspire to be change agents, it is imperative that we develop critical thinking to question what is given, what is seen as normal and accepted and what needs to be changed. 'Decoding Women in Films - A Workshop on Character Work' did precisely that.

Population First in collaboration with Screenwriters Association, Mumbai had launched an interesting initiative with students of three courses at Usha Praveen Gandhi college - BMM, BA (Film and TV), MA (Media Management). Titled 'Decoding of women on screen'. The initiative was spearheaded by SWA which had announced a contest for students to pick up a female character from a film, analyse it from a gender perspective and present how they would be rewriting her character.

The participants chose female character from existing feature films and described in 500 words, why they found the characterisation to be problematic, and how they would reimagine the character with a gender-sensitive lens.

25 entries were received which were read by five jury members, who joined the event on 9th December as panelists.

The high-profile jury panel consisted of:

### **Moderator Cum Mentor:**

**Ms. Suhani Kanwar:** She is known for her contribution as a screen writer to Lipstick Under My Burkha (2016), Leila (2019) and Dil Bekaraar (2021).

### **Panelist Cum Mentors:**

**Ms. Nidhi Bisht:** is an Indian casting director filmmaker, lawyer, actress and writer. She is one of the earliest members of 'The Viral Fever (the comedy drama)

**Ms. Yashna Malhotra:** BAFTA Newcomers fellow, Yashna holds an MFA in Screenwriting from the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, which she received in 2020. She is also a Sloan grant recipient, and was a finalist

for the Sloan Grand Jury Prize awarded by the Museum of the Moving Image.

**Ms. Shazia Iqbal:** Her Film 'Bebak' had won many awards and earned her international acclaim. She is also associated with scripting of the original Netflix series, 'Sacred Games'.

**Ms. Arati Raval:** Is a much sought-after writer for OTT platforms, who debuted with 'Interview' a short film in the web anthology 'Feels like Ishq' on Netflix and is currently engaged in many projects with OTT platforms

The five panellists had gone through the 25 submissions from the students and selected the ten best write-ups to feature at the event.





## Happenings

### Decoding Women in Films - A workshop on Character Work

The ten students selected and the characters they chose to review are as follows.

1. Kareena Ramsay - Isabella Swan from Twilight.
2. Amit Ranjan - Zoya from Ranjhana
3. Mahika Bheda - Nandini Raichand from Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham
4. Harsh Salunke - Preeti from Kabir Singh
5. Vanshika Bansal - Anjali from Kuch Kuch Hota Hai
6. Akshat Manish Kochar - Mary Jane in Spiderman
7. Vatsa Sharma - Ayesha Mehra from Dil Dhadakne Do
8. Aarav Trivedi - Neelam Mehra from Dil Dhadakne Do
9. Roshni Sanghani - Aarohi from Aashiqui 2
10. Ameya Keni - Lt. CDR JoAnne Galloway from 'A Few Good Men'

The major issues identified in the characterization of women are as follows:

1. They are voice less and docile. They were shown as only supporting their husbands and other male characters in the story (Nandini Raichand from Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham)
2. They are not shown as standing up for themselves or the others (Neelam Mehra from Dil Dhadakne Do)
3. They are passive sufferers (Nandini Raichand from Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham, Neelam Mehra from Dil Dhadakne Do)
4. Women who are not feminine are not sexually attractive (Anjali from Kuch Kuch Hota Hai)
5. They are shown to be liking being dominated and abused by men (Preeti from Kabir Singh)
6. They actually acquiesce to the male dominance

and power (Lt. CDR JoAnne Galloway from A Few Good Men)

7. They have no identity or agency (Isabella Swan from twilight)

8. Even when they are projected as otherwise empowered, they are not shown as asserting their position or rights (Ayesha from Dil Dhadakne Do)

9. Negative portrayals show them as manipulative, erratic and unpredictable (Zoya from Ranjhana and Arohi from Aashiqui 2)

The presentations were followed by animated conversation between the presenters, panelists and the audience.

While discussing the presentations the panelists made the following observations:

1. It is important to acknowledge that women can also be mean, self-seeking and cruel and project them also in stories as such in a well-rounded and nuanced fashion
2. While there is nothing wrong in telling stories of toxic masculinity as in Kabir Singh, it is important to show final redemption which the film fails to do and ends up glorifying and celebrating the toxic masculinity.
3. Similarly, telling the story of a stalker as in Ranjhana is not the problem, what is problematic is the fact that the story is told from the perspective of the perpetrator with sympathy and not from the perspective of the stalked woman and its impact on her.



## Happenings

### Decoding Women in Films - A workshop on Character Work

4. It is important to understand how women negotiate the power equations. Both Ayesha in Dil Dhadak Ne Do and Lt. CDR JoAnne Galloway in A Few Good Men acknowledge the gender power equations and negotiate them in their own way.

5. However technically perfect a movie is, if it perpetrates and normalizes stereotypes and violence against women, it fails to be a good movie, said the panelists, citing the example of Kantara. The film hypes hyper masculinity and undermines the choice and agency of the main woman protagonist.

In her opening remarks Dr.A.L Sharada, thanked Mr.Anjum Rajabali and SWA for their consistent support to the cause of Laadli and thanked the panelists and the participants for their enthusiastic participation.

The event maybe viewed [here](#)



# Population First



Laadli

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

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