Thrissur Pooram
An embroidery of culture and unity

Kessiah Joseph

In the heart of Kerala, amidst the lush greenery and the echoes of ancient rituals, lies a festival that transcends time—a celebration that weaves together the threads of tradition, unity, and the indomitable spirit of the human soul. Thrissur Pooram is the grand spectacle that has enthralled generations and captivated the world with its vibrant colours and pulsating rhythms.

Imagine stepping back in time to the late 18th century to Kerala, alive with the spirit of festivity. It was a time when Maharaja Shakthan Thampuran, a visionary ruler, walked the corridors of power. It was during this era that the seeds of Thrissur Pooram were sown, destined to bloom into a mosaic of cultural heritage and communal harmony. Speaking to The Communique, Vinod Kandemkavil, author of the book THRISSUR POORAM, enunciated the rich history behind the festivities. "The story begins with a twist of fate during the grand festival of Arattupuzha Pooram. Torrential rains lashed trapping devotees and shrouding the festivities in despair. The depths of adversity weaved a silver lining- Maharaja Shakthan Thampuran, the benevolent ruler who dared to defy history. In a moment of inspiration, he issued a proclamation: "Thrissur Pooram would be born, a festival to rival the grandeur of Arattupuzha and unite the hearts of his people.""

He also highlighted, that on the auspicious day of Pooram in the Malayalam month of Medam, Thrissur Pooram unfolded—a spectacle unlike any other witnessed before. The Vadakkunnathan Temple, with its towering spires and hallowed grounds, became the epicentre of divine revelry. Two temple groups, Thiruvambadi and Paramekkavu, took centre stage, their rivalry infused with camaraderie as they vied for supremacy in the exchange of ornate parasols, known as Kudamattam.

But Thrissur Pooram was more than just a competition; it was a celebration of unity and tradition—a tapestry woven with the vibrant hues of Kerala's cultural heritage. The Pooram festivities kick off early in the morning with the procession of Kanimangalam Sasthavu, followed by similar processions from six other temples. A significant highlight is "Madathil Varavu," a grand musical performance featuring over 200 artists and various traditional instruments. Another major event is the Ilanjithara Melam, a vibrant ensemble of drums, trumpets, pipes, and cymbals, starting at 2:00 p.m. inside Vadakkumnathan Temple. The Pooram also boasts the spectacle of more than 50 decorated elephants, adorned with ornate he addresses, Kolam designs, bells, and ornaments. The Paramekkavu and Thiruvambadi groups ceremoniously enter and exit the temple, culminating in a face-off with the exchange of colourful umbrellas atop ornated elephants, he added.

Kandemkavil emphasizes the secular nature of the Pooram, stating, "All religious communities actively participate, with Muslims contributing to pandal works and churches providing materials for the umbrellas." The celebration ends with a dazzling fireworks display, lighting up the sky with a symphony of colours and sounds, marking the culmination of this electrifying extravaganza.
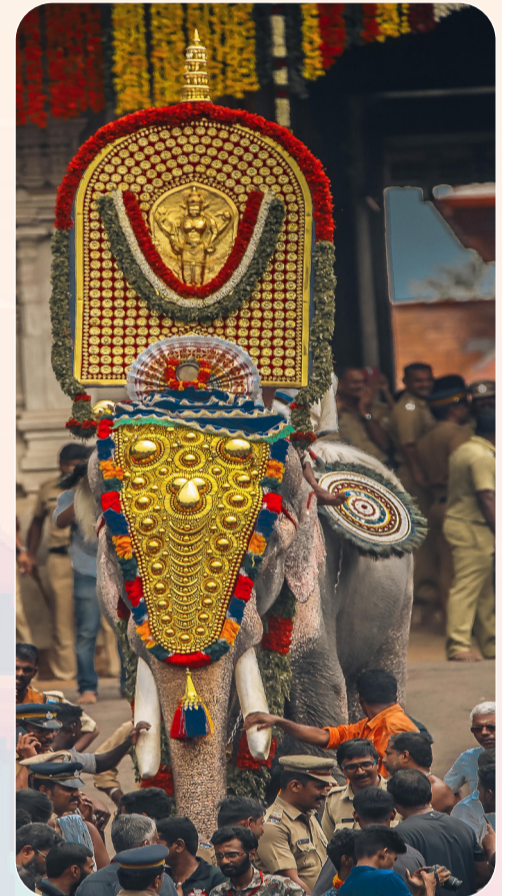
Thrissur Pooram celebration   **Kiran Chandran**

Over the centuries, Thrissur Pooram has evolved and adapted, but its essence remains unchanged. It is a celebration that transcends religious boundaries, bringing together people from all walks of life in a spirit of harmony and camaraderie. From the flag hoisting ceremony to the grand procession and the spectacular fireworks display, every moment of Thrissur Pooram is imbued with the magic of tradition and the warmth of community.

Onlookers at Thekkinkadu Maidanam   **Kiran Chandran**

Safety concerns persist over mRNA COVID vaccines in the west

Kushal Varma J V

Concerns continue to rise in the US and the Western world about the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines.

In a recent string of peer-reviewed studies, experts around the world have called for a moratorium on modified mRNA vaccines such as Pfizer, Moderna and Jansen. One such study published by Cureus on 24 January 2024, which scrutinised and scientifically deduced the threats posed by these vaccines titled, 'COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines: Lessons Learned from the Registrational Trials and Global Vaccination Campaign', was retracted on 26 February 2024.

What did the retracted study consist of?

The study critically examined the data from reports on trials of COVID-19 mRNA vaccines during its testing phase.

It is important to note that mRNA vaccines only have Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) by the FDA and are not licensed.

The authors noted that the authorisation process was extremely rapid. Pfizer's vaccines completed the process in seven months as compared to the usual 10-15 years which is required to discern the safety of the vaccine. The only other vaccine which has undergone a shorter testing period is the development of the world's first mumps vaccine in 1967, which had undergone 4 years of testing, which is still longer.

Many trial findings were misconstrued in the reports and the usual protocols weren't followed as per the study.

For instance, the validity of the tests was compromised since, out of the 22,000+ trial participants, a total of 3,410 consisted of participants with suspected/ unconfirmed COVID-19. This was fur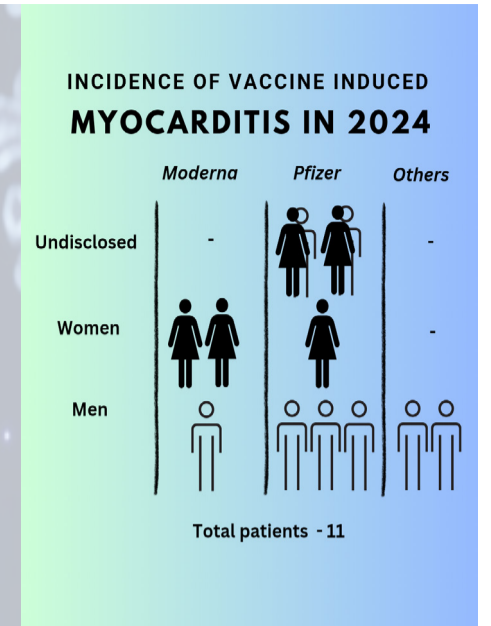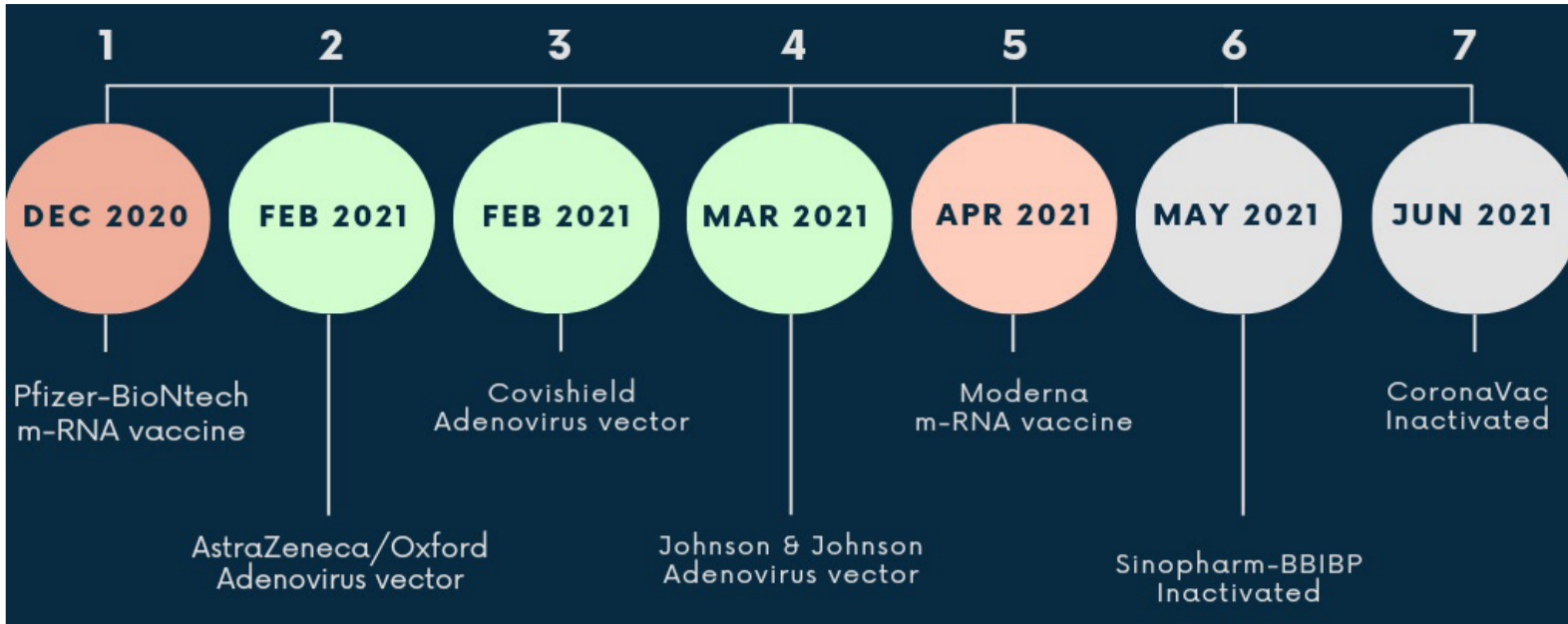ther exacerbated by the fact that the cases being counted in the trials were PCR-positive patients with mild infections, not moderate to severe illnesses.

It was also revealed that many deaths in the trial occurred after the cutoff date (when the reports were starting to be compiled for approval from the FDA), therefore, the actual mortality data ultimately ended up being inaccurate.

A total of 38 participants died, out of which 14 subjects experienced cardiac-related issues leading to their demise. However, Pfizer's reports failed to make note of it. Apart from cardiac issues, the study also highlights several other serious adverse events (SAEs) attributable to the vaccine. These include but are not limited to, cancer, autoimmune disorders, haematological disorders, reproductive disorders and neurological disorders. The paper also touches upon the possible political and financial incentives,

1 DEC 2020 — Pfizer-BioNtech m-RNA vaccine
2 FEB 2021 — AstraZeneca/Oxford Adenovirus vector
3 FEB 2021 — Covishield Adenovirus vector
4 MAR 2021 — Johnson & Johnson Adenovirus vector
5 APR 2021 — Moderna m-RNA vaccine
6 MAY 2021 — Sinopharm-BBIBP Inactivated
7 JUN 2021 — CoronaVac Inactivated

Graphical representation: Pratham Basu　　　　　**Source: Saleh et al. (2021)**

INCIDENCE OF VACCINE INDUCED MYOCARDITIS IN 2024

Total patients - 11

Graphical representation: Pratham Basu　　**Source: VAERS data**

Contd. from pg 1 which may have played a key role in undermining its scientific evaluation process. Massive investments were made in mRNA vaccines in the USA. The study suggested calling for a global moratorium on mRNA vaccines.

Post retraction:

The retraction notice states that the conclusions of this study are considered to be unreliable due to the concerns about validity of some of the cited references and a misrepresentation of available data.

Peter A McCullough, one of the authors of the study, disagreeing with the retraction stated, "If the journal did not think that the conclusions were supported by data/citations, why accept it? Why go through all this to have it retracted?" In an interview, he deemed it to be "a stunning act of scientific censorship".

This statement assumes importance in light of subsequent studies that emerged supporting the call for a global moratorium.

What does the latest data suggest?

Concerning another study by Peter, it was inferred that nearly 100 have died in 2023 from COVID-19 vaccine-induced myocarditis.
The latest data for 2024 revealed that 11 cases of myocarditis have occurred out of which 9 were induced by COVID-19 vaccines, namely Pfizer (6 cases) and Moderna (3 cases).
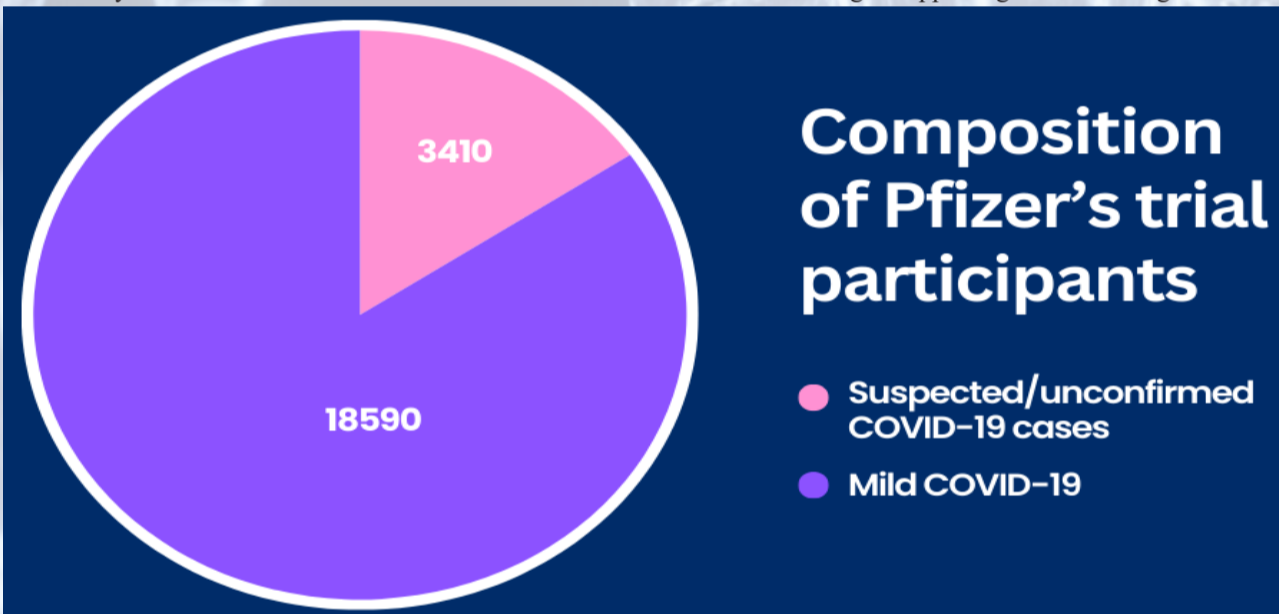
The victims include 3 females, 4 males and 2 individuals of undisclosed gender. The majority of the victims are aged above 40, with the youngest being a 17-year-old male.

While the dataset is smaller, the alarming trend of COVID-19 vaccine-induced myocarditis continues.

USA authorities' take on the issue:

In an attempt to get the authorities to address the issue, Zachary Stieber, a reporter at Epoch Times tried to get a FOIA reply from CDC regarding COVID-19 vaccine-induced myocarditis. He received a 148-page report regarding the same on 8 March 2024, however, every single page of the report was completely redacted.

On the other hand, the FDA funded a research paper, authored by Patricia C Lloyd and colleagues. It claims that the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines outweigh the risks. However, it has not been published or peer-reviewed yet.

Composition of Pfizer's trial participants

3410 ● Suspected/unconfirmed COVID-19 cases
18590 ● Mild COVID-19

Graphical representation: Pratham Basu　　　　**Source: Mead et.al (2024)**

Cultural clashes and violence: Unmasking Meghalaya's hidden social turmoil

Sadhika Dasgupta

Meghalaya is dubbed to be the 'Scotland of the East', and is largely considered by many to be a rather peaceful state compared to other regions of India. In recent times, however, it has witnessed frequent clashes between tribal and non-tribal communities.

Meghalaya has witnessed several incidents of violence across the state for over four decades now. The Hindu Bengalis in Meghalaya are often treated as Bangladeshis or outsiders. Any non-tribal in the region is addressed as a Dkhar (outsider) by the tribals.

Manas Chaudhuri, the owner and former editor of Shillong Times mentions that around 90 per cent of jobs reserved are for tribals. He explained that the state has implemented job reservations for its tribal population, leaving non-tribals feeling marginalised and restricted from all opportunities. This has led to non-tribals migrating out of the state.

Chaudhari feels that tribals must accept the fact that non-tribals also matter and that any form of discrimination is unlawful. He further added that these tensions require acknowledgement from tribal communities, strong administrative actions, and enforcement by law. "I am afraid it may not go away; I don't see it going away. It has gone into the system. The ecosystem is full of intolerance towards the non-tribal," he opined.

Shushit Choudhury, the president of the Meghalaya Linguistic Minority Development Forum (MLMDF), spoke about an incident that occurred during Diwali in 1979, wherein two troublemakers from the tribal group vandalised goddess Kali's idol and beat up worshipers. Choudhury also gives us an account of similar attacks, organised by some tribal groups, that continued in Meghalaya. In 1987, violence broke out against Nepalis and other communities, leading to a year-long curfew in Shillong, leaving many people to seek refuge and live in schools used as camps after the destruction of their homes, jeopardising the city's

An illustration of unrest in Meghalaya　　　　**Pratham Basu**

economy and education. Choudhary and his wife have stood up against this continual injustice, expressing their concerns through peaceful protests and even resorting to a hunger strike in 2022.

In another instance, a clash erupted between the Khasi Students Union Members (KSU) and the non-tribals, leading to the death of a KSU activist, after a conflict erupted during a public meeting held for an anti-citizenship act at Ichamati on February 28, 2020. The clash broke out after some KSU activists assaulted non-tribals, provoking the non-tribals in the village to come out to defend them.

Rajib Chowdhury, a journalist and the managing editor of South Asia View and a news associate of the BBC condemned the incidents and expressed his concerns, stating that the incident has only worsened the situation of the minorities in the area and that shops rented to non-tribal businessmen were on fire. He stated that CAA is not applicable in the state of Meghalaya, as the provisions of the Act will not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, as included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Citing an incident involving a Sikh lady who was pelted with stones by bus drivers, Rajib talks about the struggles of the Sikh families living in Punjabi Lane who have been fighting for their land, despite residing for over two centuries. He explained that approximately 300 families currently reside there and are being constantly targeted.

The station house officer (SHO) of Shillong police station gives us additional insights about the incident. He recounts that the situation was very tense between the people of the tribal and Sikhs living there in May 2018, and till today, two sections of the CRPF are guarding the entry and exit points of the Harijan colony. A blast took place on March 9, 2024, in Punjabi Lane, where one person was injured. No other major damage was caused, and the investigation suggests the blast was caused by an IED (improvised explosive device) device blasted by the HNLC (Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council) to show their existence.

The subtle art of STUDENT entrepreneurship

Pratham Basu

Amidst the vibrant energy of classrooms and the constant grind of meeting deadlines, a common trend has emerged that bridges the world of academia and ambition — Student Entrepreneurship. In the wake of pandemic challenges, three remarkable students, Navya Agarwal, Nishani Sahoo, and Anmol Abhipsa, seized the opportunity to channel their creative energies. Venturing to Bengaluru for their studies, they discovered a market for their artistic talents, igniting the spark of small business ownership. What began as a means of expression soon evolved into thriving side ventures, not merely driven by financial gain, but by the desire to articulate their unique identities.

Just do it

Anmol (Theeuonia), Navya (Vende), and Nishani (The Beige Artist) all stressed the importance of taking a risk and having faith in one's talent. "You might regret not exploring a business idea if you never take the first step," said Anmol, an art business owner. They highlighted that despite facing obstacles and uncertainties about success, taking the first step is vital as it kick-starts your business idea and paves the way for it to flourish.

Jack of many trades

Being a student entrepreneur involves wearing several capes while being a full-time student, but running their own business has taught them the craft of pitching and bargaining with customers, negotiating with suppliers, learning the local language Kannada, mastering design software, collaborations, soft skills, and time management. Additionally, they've also learned to price their products appropriately to ensure their efforts are duly recognised and valued.

Artistic identity

Navya, the owner of 'Vende', emphasises that her business is not solely motivated by financial gain but rather fueled by her passion for creating art. 'Vende' is a small business specialising in custom tote bags, jackets, and t-shirts. While initially uncertain about sales, Navya has since established herself as a prominent figure within her college community, recognised as the go-to person for all things art. A recent moment of pride for her was when her college department approached her to provide a custom tote bag as a token of appreciation for a guest lecturer.

'The Beige Artiste' is a small business offering a diverse range of products including portraits, digital art, polaroids, stickers, and handmade jewellery crafted

@theeunoiaa

@beigeartiste

@vende__

from resin. For Nishani, the true satisfaction lies in the ability to translate her clients' raw ideas into tangible pieces of art, which outweigh the monetary gains. Across the campus, she is affectionately known as 'the beige artist,' recognised for her artistic skills and strong online presence.

Safety net and scape

Anmol, the owner of 'The Eunoia,' emphasises how her student business has been a source of strength during challenging times, providing a sense of self-worth and financial independence. Despite grappling with anxiety and stress, painting custom art pieces for her clients kept her headstrong. While aspiring to become an investigative journalist in the future, Anmol sees her art and business as a cornerstone to return to as she continues to navigate life's journey.

Challenges

As a student entrepreneur, the biggest challenge is being able to manage time for studies and business. Nishani, who is also the head of the anchor's association in her college, recalls staying up until 3 am to finish her orders. The lack of high-end devices has hindered her content creation journey but she has made "do with phone-based designing software" to run a thriving business.

Being in their final years of degree, both Navya and Anmol find it hard to devote time to their businesses amidst the pressures of academics, often leading to longer order completion times.

Support systems

The three student entrepreneurs owe much of their success to their college entrepreneurship cells and supportive friends. These friends have been there to help with setting up stalls, sharing design ideas, teaching technical skills, and buying their products. Though doubtful at first, parents have become strong supporters, seeing their hard work and ability to manage both school and business. The E-Cell in their respective institutions has been crucial in providing them with the space to set up stalls for their businesses during various fests. Nishani, recalls the inception of her business idea at her first stall at an exhibition for the Women Empowerment and E-cell in her college that garnered a lot of interest from students and teachers who pushed her to pursue her hobby as a business venture.

In the landscape of 2024, when the picky Gen Z populace craves bespoke creations, the rise of student businesses for customised products helps them transcend the mundane homogeneity of mainstream products.

Snippets of student-owned-business products   **Pratham Basu**

Eyes wide open: Protecting yourself in the digital wild west

Anu Priya M

In the era of fast technological innovation, cybercrime has increased at a rate never before seen in India, particularly in IT hubs like Bengaluru. The dark web presents a danger to people, companies, and governmental organisations equally as the country continues its digital revolution. Bengaluru has emerged as a leader in the fight against cyberattacks in recent years.

As per the data released by the city police of Bengaluru on January 3 2024, merely 1,271 of the 17,623 instances that were reported in 2023 have been cracked. Up to 14,285 instances remain under investigation, demonstrating the volume of cases and the ongoing effort by investigators to catch up. Apart from registering cybercrime cases in all police stations, senior police officials said the reporting has improved by converting alerts from the cyber tip line, the National Cyber Crime Reporting portal (NCRP), and complaints received at 112 into FIRs.

Social media's introduction has given hackers more ways to take advantage of gullible people. Facebook's parent company, Meta, discovered more than 400 dangerous applications in 2022 that aim to steal login information from mobile users. These applications highlight the widespread prevalence of cybercrime on social networking platforms by tricking users into disclosing critical information under the pretext of benign tools like picture editors or business utilities. The rate of youth crime has risen to 40%, and nearly 56% of the crimes are committed by those aged 16-25.

Youth, at most times, in such cases are themselves victims. Many qualified youngsters are drawn to committing crimes due to the scarcity of jobs. Also, peer pressure plays a negative role, which leads teenagers to earn money in easy ways.

Studies have revealed that policies and plans for educating young people and individuals about how to protect themselves online can be made more and more effective. Those under the age of 18 should exercise caution when interacting with strangers Cybercriminals prefer to prey on young adults.

Over 16 lakh cybercrime incidents have been reported in the country in the last three years. According to the information presented by Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, more than 32,000 FIRs have been registered since 2020.

Illustration of online vulnerability   **Pratham Basu**

Rai said the 'National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal' allows easy reporting of all types of cybercrimes and the incidents reported on this portal are routed automatically to the respective State and UT law enforcement agency for further handling as per the provisions of law.

"As per the data maintained, more than 16 lakh cybercrime incidents have been reported and more than 32,000 FIRs have been registered from January 1, 2020, to December 7, 2022," he said. The minister added, that the 'Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System' has been launched for immediate reporting of financial frauds and to stop syphoning off funds by fraudsters.

India has a 9 per cent higher need for cybersecurity professionals than the global average, and almost half (49 per cent) of companies that want to employ these professionals find it difficult to do so. It has been reported

that the recruiting procedure in this specific business might take up to six months. By the end of 2023, it was projected that India would lack almost three million cybersecurity specialists.

The shortage poses a serious challenge to enterprises' ability to effectively monitor their cyber security posture and respond quickly to emerging threats. Rajiv Sharma, founder and CEO of 'Nebulasafetech' said, "Even though not everyone is a victim of Cyber Crimes, they are nevertheless vulnerable. To keep themselves safe from internet stalkers, people should keep their personal information private. When it comes to sharing your personal information online, this is as risky as handing out your personal information to strangers in a public place. We live in a digital age, and cyberspace is not confined to one's limits, but to a whole world. In all countries, including India, cybercrime is therefore increasing day by day."

From school dreams to onstage success

Hemalatha Y N
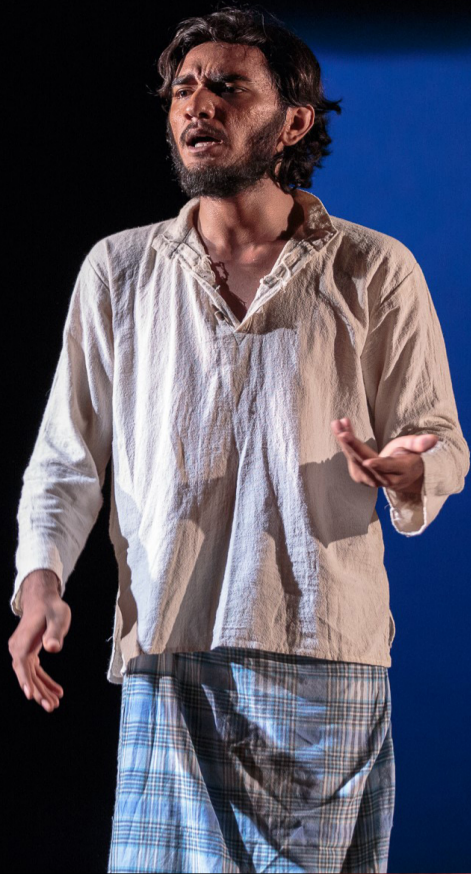
The Bangalore Players Theatre Company BPTC) - a theatre group in Bangalore, has been inspiring and nurturing artists for many years. Founded by a group of friends who shared a passion for theatre, the company has evolved significantly since its establishment. Starting with just four members, it has now grown to a family of over 35 dedicated artists. Vishal N Raj, a seasoned theatre artist with a passion for performing since his school days, shares his remarkable journey in the world of theatre. Starting with Natyadarpana under the guidance of Shri Abburu Jayatheertha, before acting had worked in various areas of theatre like backstage, production, properties etc. "After working for a few plays and acting in small roles, I started getting challenging characters to play, his dedication and hard work led him to become a part of the renowned Bangalore Players Theatre Company". Vishal's ability to connect with his characters on a deep level stem from his keen observation skills, imagination, thorough research and implementation of speech, movement and expression to bring characters to life in theatre. He believes that "Theatre is an ever-evolving art form, and there's always something new to learn and explore." One instance that stands out in his career is when he incorporated a personal life experience into his character, which resonated with the audience and earned him applause. To balance his passion for theatre with everyday life, Vishal prioritises his career in acting and manages other aspects of his life smartly. He credits his success in the industry to the discipline, hard work, love, passion and respect towards theatre and acting. He also highlighted that he stays inspired by watching different plays and films, seeking out challenging roles to grow both technically and emotionally as an artist. He also suggested that aspiring theatre artists should respect the theatre, maintain discipline, and work on developing skills like observation, imagination, body movements, and voice which encourages continuous learning through research and exposure to various forms of theatre and cinema, he added.

Srinidhi B S, founder of BPTC , at a play   **Srinidhi B S**
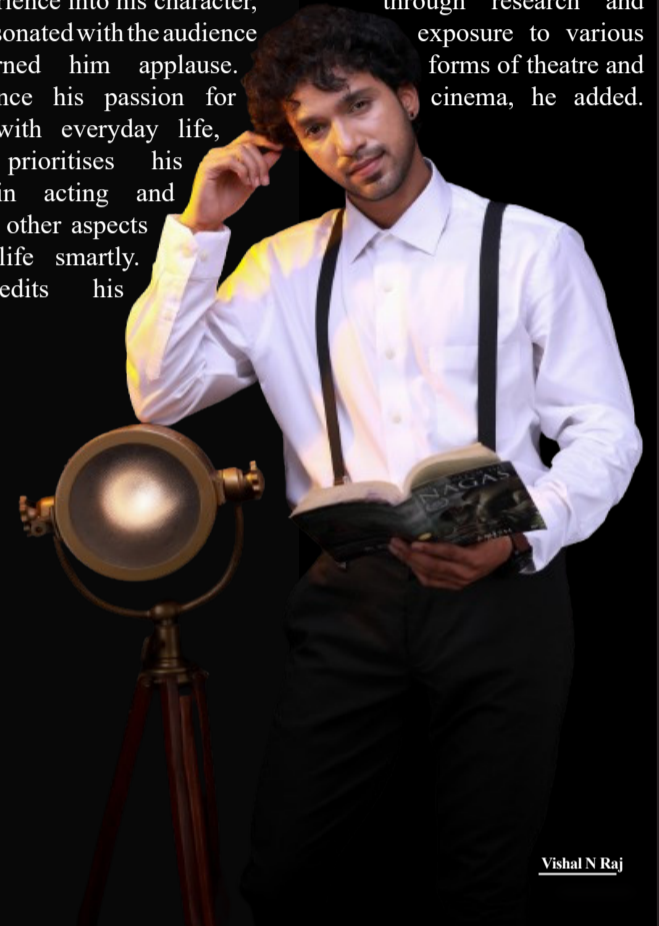
Vishal N Raj

The founder of Bangalore Players Theatre Company, Srinidhi BS, explains the origins of the company, its evolution, the impact of theatre on society, challenges faced by artists, balancing artistic vision with practical aspects, nurturing artists, maintaining a unique identity, future goals, and a message for aspiring theatre enthusiasts. Theatre has the power to impact society and bring about change by creating a bond between the artist and the audience, he said.

As responsible performers, they ensure to deliver a message to society in an impactful manner while providing entertainment. Speaking about the Challenges faced by theatre artists, he said they include managing situations on stage and navigating the uncertainties that come with the profession. However, Srinidhi believes that learning from these challenges is crucial for growth. During the pandemic, theatre artists faced the additional challenge of being overlooked by the government in new guidelines and rules, he added. BPTC supports artists within the company through workshops, theatre exercises, and placing them in different departments to explore their strengths and interests. After six months, they are shifted to other departments to gain a broader understanding of theatre. The company's unique identity lies in its democratic approach, where everyone has an equal opportunity to voice their opinions. Looking ahead, the company aims to provide a platform for aspiring artists, explore all forms of theatre, and perform Kannada plays globally to showcase the beauty and aesthetics of their language and culture, said Srinidhi. "Theatre welcomes everyone, but only keeps a few. Keep your intentions pure, and theatre will protect you. Live life to the fullest, enjoy the present, and embrace the world beyond social media and daily routines," he said.

Heatwave havoc: Environmentalist urges green solutions amidst crisis

Nidhi B

Heatwave is a weather condition characterized by prolonged periods of excessively high temperatures that can pose serious risks to the human body when exposed. Quantitatively, it is defined based on the temperature thresholds over a region in terms of actual temperature or its departure from normal. In certain countries, it is defined in terms of the heat index based on temperature and humidity or based on the extreme percentile of the temperatures according to the meteorological department. "According to the government's National Crime Records Bureau, there were 530 deaths linked to heatstroke in 2020. The National Disaster Management Authority counted just four heat-related deaths in the same year. The Crime Records Bureau counted 374 heat-related deaths in 2021. In March and April 2022, large parts of South Asia including India and Pakistan experienced prolonged hot weather. The month of March was the hottest in India since 1901. Temperatures were consistently 3°C-8°C above average, breaking many records in several parts of the country," Sandhya, an environmentalist said.

A direct and very apparent consequence of climate change is the rise in temperatures. In recent times, India has seen a steep rise in heat waves which induces multiple social, cultural, environmental and medical implications across the country, "The influence of climate change is very evident in a city like Bengaluru, the most identified one being irregular weather events such as extremely low rainfall. So, climate change has a direct impact and turns out to be the primary cause for increased heat waves," She added.
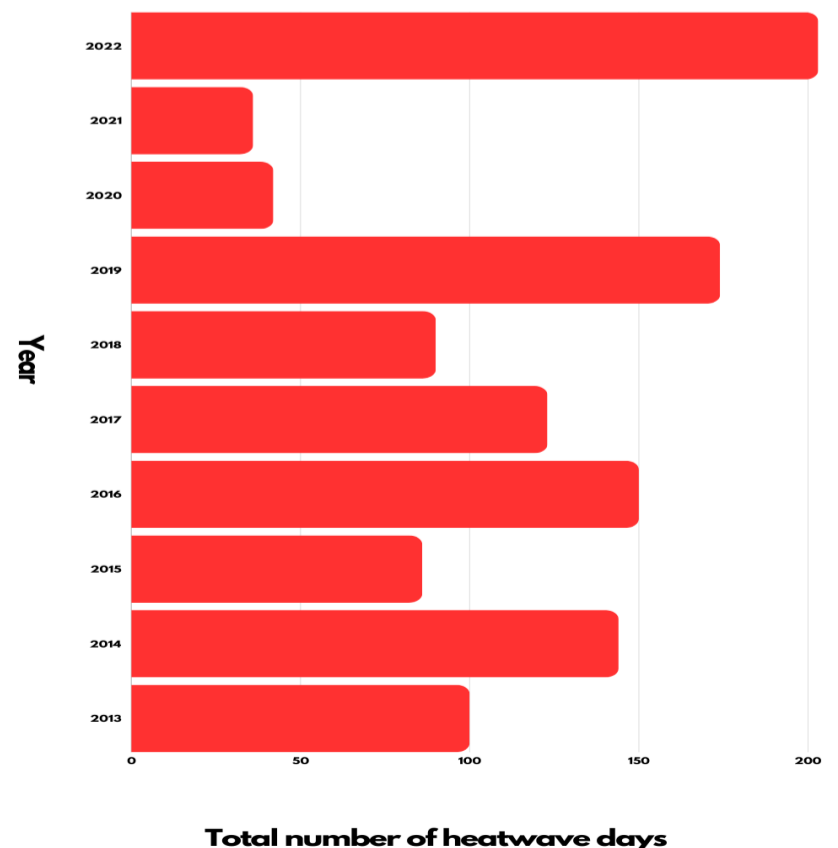
While discussing sustainability, she suggested that rainwater harvesting systems, as well as the preservation, and expansion of urban parks and boulevards in cities and towns, are some of the best examples of growing green infrastructure. At household levels, proper waste management, sustainable supply and use of electricity and rainwater harvesting systems can be adopted to create a greener infrastructure. "Public transportation can be used to combat heat waves as well as reduce individual carbon footprint thereby impacting air quality and pollution". Governmental organisations must give firms sufficient incentives for large-scale initiatives like these to be funded more easily and feasible, for the same to be implemented efficiently, says Sandhya.

She also highlighted the severe water crisis in Bengaluru due to extreme heat and low rainfall, which not only affects households but also has significant economic implications in the agricultural sector. This leads to reduced crop yields.
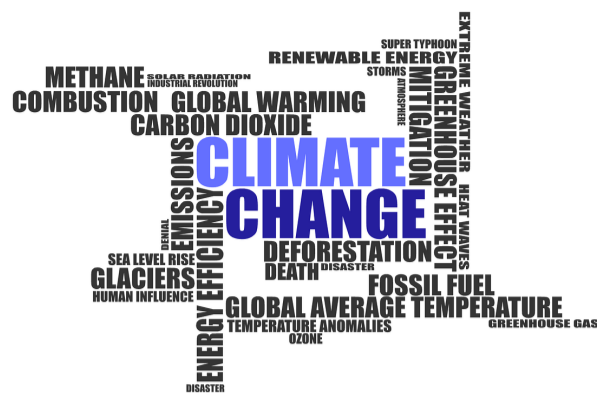
Heatwave Episodes

YEAR-WISE (TOTAL AVERAGE NUMBER OF HEATWAVE DAYS ACROSS INDIA)

Year (vertical axis): 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013

Total number of heatwave days (horizontal axis): 0, 50, 100, 150, 200

Graphical representation: Dattatraya Datta   **Source: Ministry of Earth Sciences**

disrupted food networks, increased use of pesticides, and potential health hazards for consumers.

Heat waves leading to heatstroke

In an interview with Sharvani MV, senior resident, ESIC Postgraduate Institute of Medical Science and Research Rajajinagar, she explained that a heat stroke is a temperature-related illness characterised by dysregulation of thermoregulation and elevation of body temperature, typically above 40°. When an individual experiences symptoms like weakness, tachycardia, dizziness, disorientation, lethargy, hypotension, has trouble breathing should be given immediate medical attention. Therefore, it is crucial to hydrate your body with enough fluids. Other precautions include taking a cold bath, using ice packs, avoiding physical exertion in the heat, and protecting yourself from the sun. These are some of the measures that an individual can take during the summer months.

She also highlighted a prevalent characteristic of heat sickness is cardiovascular inefficiency. Heat loss is hampered by any physiologic or pharmacologic obstruction to skin perfusion. A large number of patients are not aware that their drugs include a heat risk. Anticholinergic medications reduce sweating and decrease the body's natural cooling activity. "Medications like calcium channel blockers, beta blockers and various stimulants also inhibit sweating by reducing peripheral blood flow," she added

Beyond labels: Questioning the complexity of human identity

Sinchan Saha

In the mosaic of human diversity, the LGBTQ+ has been an umbrella term for inclusivity and acceptance. Over the years, community people have worked through laws, both for and against, to lay the foundation of what the community is today, where identities and sexualities across all ages are recognised, discussed and guided. Recently, there has been an expansion within this umbrella, including people identifying as disabled as well as another species, thus undergoing body modifications to fit that 'image'.

These additions reflect the evolution of identity, sexuality and learning. However, media portrayal of them leads to question the intersection of representation, acceptance and the original struggles of the LGBTQ+ and related communities.

Referring to the necessity for so many identities, Mihir Seth, a queer history student and activist says, "The sensation of difference, and subsequent disassociation from a normative structure of development, and in many cases, the punitive disciplining of non-normativity results in queer people often feeling like they lack the language to express what is happening to them – it is a discursive lack, an inability to vocalise what they go through that results in this need for creation or search of a language that can explain themselves. It is this very need that resulted in "gay", "lesbian" or "transsexual", the same way it is now creating "demi gender" or "abrosexual."

To understand why these newer additions should be talked about, we need to explore what the term means. The term 'transabled' refers to individuals who experience a deep-seated desire to live as an amputee or disabled person, often undergoing surgical procedures to align their bodies with their internal identity. Evolution News and Science Today describes transableism as a relabeling of Body Integrity Identity Disorder.

Similarly, "trans-species" identify as species other than human, while "otherkin" encompasses those who believe their souls are not entirely human, identifying with mythical or non-human beings.

"These terms are still experimental, not fully integrated into social discourse like 'LGBTQIA,' which took nearly 30 years to get established. Their acceptance undergoes internal queer scrutiny upon introduction, shaping inclusivity," Seth explains.

In an attempt to validate these ideas, recent cases of individuals from these communities going on 'strikes' and protests to raise awareness have been surfacing.

In September 2023, about 1000 individuals identifying as 'dogs' gathered near Germany's Berlin Potsdamer Platz railway station for a 'meetup', reported NDTV. This incident prompted the animal control unit to be called. In the video that went viral on social media, it is seen that the

Generalised misconceptions pose a hurdle to real progress   **The World Today**

members were communicating with each other through 'barking'.

Another incident reported on September 17, 2023, by Mirror UK, followed Jewel Shuping, a healthy 21-year-old woman from North Carolina, who identified as 'transabled' and became obsessed with going blind. She explained that she poured drain cleaners into her eyes to fulfil her lifelong dream. During an interview with People, Shuping stated that she had waited to get medical attention and that doctors tried to save her eyesight, but she eventually ended up losing it and is now almost completely blind at the age of 38. She added how she had been thinking about being blind since she was a child.

From a psychological perspective, Dr Olivia Ganguly, psychological counsellor, explains that by the books these are categorised under severe personality disorders. From her experiences and expertise, she explains how deep-rooted confusion or non-acceptance of one's self can lead to aggression and overexertion of the same.

On the same line, Bornona Barik, a journalism student and member of the LGBTQ+ community, expressed,

"We have come too far from setting boundaries or limits to what is acceptable and what is not, and that line has simply vanished."

Although this calls for social awareness and is a chance at evolution, many may argue whether the young population should also be exposed to this. Sociology Professor and PhD student, Anindita Sarkar states, "Nowadays they learn about new gender types from their friends. Naturally, their new ideas about gender are formed. Many times they think outside of the traditional way and in some cases new gender identities may exist among them."

Considering the argument "Is species dysphoria equal to gender dysphoria", Mihir describes it as potentially arising from a much larger anti-humanist strain of thinking, probably unconsciously. He concludes people who suffer from gender dysphoria cannot find the answers in the logic that mankind has for itself. It thus requires them to look beyond for a coherent logic of identity, either because of structural violence, inadequate expressive potential or a variety of other forms.

Complexities of identity and the layers that lie within   **Heckin' Unicorn**

Making sense of the water crisis in Bengaluru

Dattatraya Dutta

In pursuit of its ambition to become a global hub for innovation and technology through rapid urbanisation, the city of Bengaluru, unwittingly, has become prey to its ambition as it finds itself on the precipice of a water crisis.

Also called 'The Silicon Valley of India', Bengaluru is now struggling to manage its freshwater resources as a severe water crisis has hit the city. The
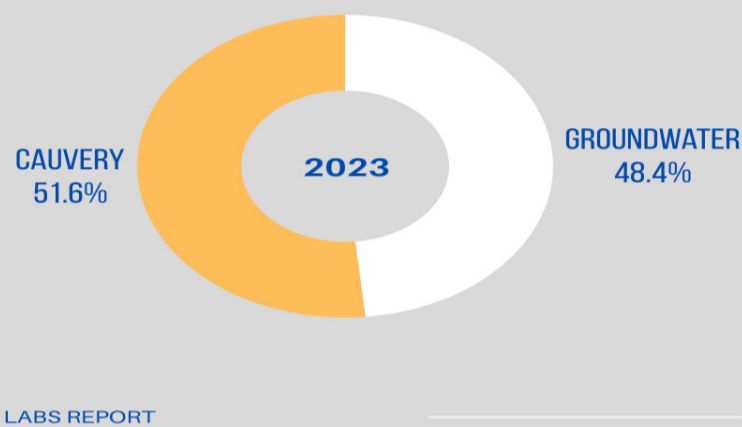

WATER USAGE OF BENGALURU CITY

Graphical Representation: Dattatraya Dutta   Source : Water Labs Report

gravity of this water crisis is more significant than ever as residents of the city are worried about this crisis unfolding amidst Bengaluru's peak summer season.

So what has led to this unprecedented and catastrophic water crisis? While there are several factors behind this sudden water shortage, this article aims to understand the role of rapid unplanned urbanisation in this catastrophic water crisis.

World Population Review estimates the current population

of Bengaluru to be around 1.4 crores, with a population growth rate estimated to be around 2.94 per cent each year. The city population grew a whopping 38 per cent between 1991 and 2001, which could be attributed to the IT boom that the city witnessed during the 1990s, leading to an influx of migrants in the city in pursuit of IT jobs, spurring the city's rapid urbanisation over the years.This exponentially

growing population parallels the city's rising demand for freshwater supplies. To understand this, let us look into the water requirement of the city before the IT boom and compare it to the water demand of the city in current times. According to a research paper by the International Journal of Technical Research and Applications, in 1991, when the city was witnessing the setting of shops from foreign IT companies, Bengaluru population stood at 45 lakh with

an overall city water demand of 612 MLD (Million Litres per Day). In 2024, however, with an estimated population of 1.4 crore, a Well Lab Research paper estimates that the total water demand of the city stands at approximately 2632 MLD, which is almost a four-fold increase in water demand.

The Well Lab study further indicates that to meet this increasing water demand, the city depends on two main sources of freshwater: Groundwater and the water from the Cauvery river. Groundwater accounts for nearly 50 per cent of this water supply, with a supply of 1372 MLD (Million Litres per Day), while nearly 1460 MLD is transported from the Cauvery River. But the problem here is the rapid depletion of groundwater levels in the city, as the research finds out that the groundwater recharge rate through natural water bodies and green spaces remains at an alarmingly low number.
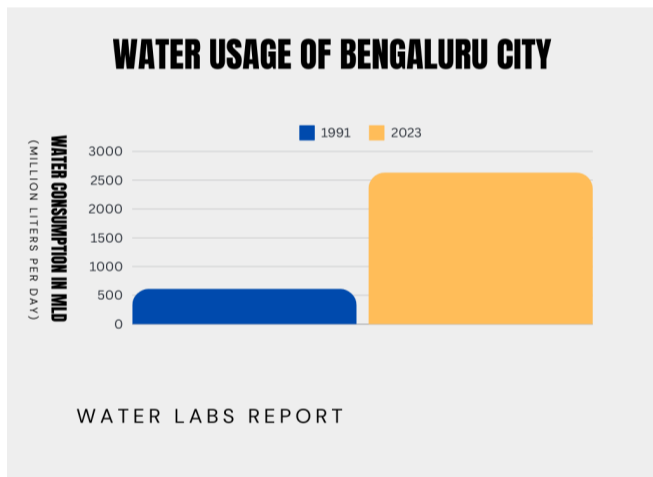
The city's rapid urbanisation has led to the city fostering its own ruins as it continually erodes what's left of the green spaces and natural bodies within the city, which act as sponges for absorbing rainwater. Based on the most recent complete data from the Karnataka State Natural Disaster

Water Source for Bengaluru

CAUVERY 51.6%   2023   **GROUNDWATER 48.4%**

WATER LABS REPORT

Graphical Representation: Dattatraya Dutta   Source : Water Labs Report

Monitoring Centre (KSNDC), the average annual rainfall the BBMP area receives is around 820–920 mm, which means the rainfall received within the BBMP amounts to around 1750–1970 MLD, but the natural rate of recharge of groundwater levels in the city through natural water bodies and green spaces is only 148

MLD or roughly 8 per cent of the annual average rainfall.

Monitoring and maintaining Bengaluru's water supply network has many challenges. The network consists of 6,000 km of pipelines, 60 booster pumps, 84 ground-level reservoirs, and over 52 overhead tanks in the city, making it harder to control the rate of non-revenue water (NRW), which is the water that has been produced and is lost before it reaches the consumer. Bengaluru has one of the highest rates of NRW in the nation. The American Water Works Association carries water estimates that Bengaluru has nearly 331 MLD of NRW because of various reasons like leakages, poor infrastructure, theft, etc.

Bengaluru should implement various strategies to tackle such challenges. One such strategy could be optimising its wastewater management, as there is a wide scope to expand

wastewater reuse in the city. The Well Lab research estimates that the total wastewater generated in the city amounts to around 1,940 MLD, but only one-third of the city's wastewater is redirected for external reuse, which means it is taken to Kolar, Chikkaballapur, and Devanahalli districts, where it is used to replenish both groundwater and surface water sources. The remaining water flows into lakes and runs off land to join rivers downstream. This means the huge amount of wastewater generated in the city is an untapped resource. Once treated to the required quality, wastewater can significantly mitigate freshwater consumption and be crucial in making the city water resilient during low rainfall years. Several sectors could substitute fresh water with treated wastewater- for watering the city's green spaces and the water-guzzling construction sector.

The crisis through a geological lens

Prajwal S K

Bengaluru's water crisis is worsened by a complex interplay of geological causes, primarily stemming from the city's distinct geological composition. With its foundation predominantly constructed of hard granite rocks, Bengaluru struggles with limited groundwater recharge, intensifying the depletion of its water resources.

Subhash Chandra, a well-known geologist, sheds light

on the complex geological aspects contributing to Bengaluru's water crisis. "The extent of Bangalore was 540 sq Km in 2007. There was a sudden expansion of Bengaluru without infrastructure and water facilities after 2007. Nearly 110 village limits were included in Bengaluru, and the city expanded from 500 sq Km to 800 Sq km. This resulted in the rapid exploitation of groundwater.

Bengaluru is situated on a basin divide. The eastern part of the city lies within the Ponnaiyar catchment area (435 sq km), while the western part is within the Arkavathi catchment area (365 sq km). Recently added villages have requested increased water usage. To meet their needs, bore wells have been dug, tapping into static water resources," he explained.

Borewells were initially

Drought-induced desertification   pexels.com

drilled for 40-60 metres of depth. When people got to know that water could be sought throughout the year with the help of bore wells, people started exploiting it without any limit.

Bengaluru's geological composition, mainly characterised by hard granite rocks, presents significant challenges for groundwater recharge. The impermeable nature of these rocks inhibits the infiltration of rainwater into the ground, limiting the replenishment of groundwater reserves.

There is a lack of significant aquifers in a few areas, which further limits the city's ability to efficiently store and transfer groundwater. The infiltration percentage of water got depleted leading to groundwater depletion. In the present day, only two per cent of the water is being infiltrated naturally through the soil. Murthy, a geologist, stressed how rapid urbanisation and extensive land use changes have actually worsened the situation. "As concrete jungles replace natural landscapes, the ability of the land to absorb and retain water diminishes, causing the depletion of groundwater levels. We should advocate for a multi-pronged approach that integrates geological retention with innovative water management strategies."

"To safeguard Bengaluru's water security, we must promote rainwater harvesting on a large scale. These nature-based solutions harness the city's geological dynamics to replenish groundwater reserves sustainably. By decentralising water supply systems and implementing efficient wastewater treatment technologies, we can alleviate the strain on Bengaluru's overburdened aquifers," he suggested. "Indeed, embracing technological innovations and community-driven initiatives is essential to navigating the city out of its water crisis", he added.

Nearly 50 years ago, water was physically tapped by drilling a well. It was originally around 6-7 metres wide and 8–9 metres deep. Since valleys constitute storage areas for water, much of the water was being drawn from those valleys. We call this dug well. Soon, people replaced it with a borewell as the dug well needed much effort and much of the area used to get covered by the dump by the dug well. Certain parts of Bengaluru still have dug well.

Youth and Women : A powerful voting force in upcoming elections

Shoaib Shakeel

Election season is here and the Election Commission is on an overdrive to register the first time voters. In a first, female voter registration crossed male voters during Special Summary Revision 2024 conducted by the Election Commission of India.

Youth registered in the young electors' age group of 18-29 constitute 2% of the total registered voters in the country. The largest electorate in the world now comprises 96.88 crore individuals who are registered to vote for the upcoming general elections. The 2024 general elections are scheduled to begin on April 19 and the results will be out on June 4.

There has been a 6% increase in registered voters from 2019 with a significant increase in registrations among youth, women and Persons with Disabilities (PwD) this year as per an official statement released by ECI.

In the previous general elections of 2009, 2014 and 2019 there has been a considerable growth in registered voters. The total number of electors in 2009 was 71.69 crore with 58.19% who voted in all Parliamentary Constituencies (PCs). In 2014 the total number of voters was 83.40 crore in all PCs with 66.44% electors who cast their vote and in the 2019 elections, the number of total electors

Gender-wise voting pattern (Fig in crores)

Year	Male	Female
2004	35	32
2009	37	34
2014	44	40
2019	47	44

■ Male ■ Female

Graphical representation: Dattatarya Dutta   **Source: Election Commission of India**

was 91.20 crore with 67.4% voter turnout.

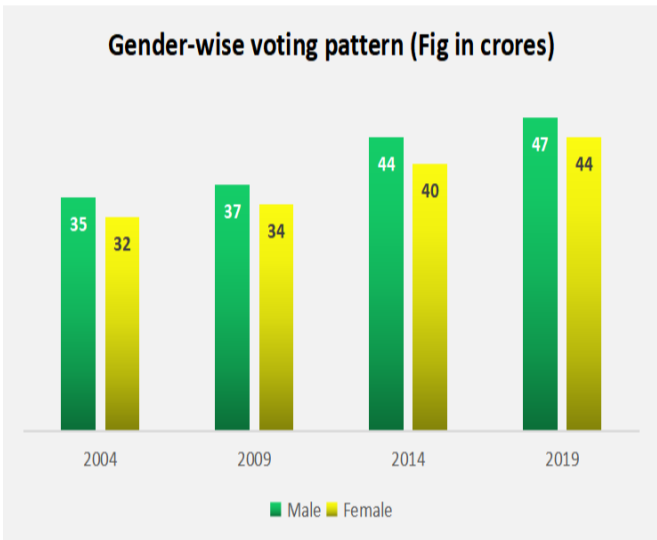According to the Final Electoral Roll released by ECI for the 2024 general elections, 96.88 crore voters have registered including 49.72 crore male, 47.15 female, and 48,044 third-gender. A total of 88.35 lakh voters among these are people with disability (PWD).

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's Youth In India 2022 publication predicts a 34.38% increase in the youth population in the country between 1991 and 2026.

There was an increase of 19 million in the enrolment of electors in the age group of 18-19 years, constituting 2.88% of total electors in 2014 and 2.10 % in 2019. A total of 1.84 crore electors registered under the 18-19 age group and more than 2 crore electors in the age group of 18-29 as per the final electoral roll for 2024 general elections released by ECI.

The ECI appointed Special Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs) at the constituency level to encourage youth engagement by facilitating youth enrollment directly from educational institutions, fostering greater civic engagement among the youth. The ECI introduced Advance Applications to 17+ youth, through which 10.64 lakh applications have been received about three subsequent qualifying dates of the year.

With the upcoming general elections, the number of citizens that have registered in the electoral roll has increased compared to earlier years with considerable growth in female voters, third gender, and PWD. As per data from an ECI report, the total number of voters also saw a considerable rise from 67.14 crore with 34.94 crore male and 32.19 crore female electors in 2004, rising to 71.69 crore electors with 37.47 crore male electors and 34.22 crore female electors, in 2009 the number increased to 83.40 crore electors with 43.70 crore male electors and 39.70 crore female electors in 2014 and 91.20 crore electors with 47.34 crore male electors and 43.85 crore female electors in 2019.

There is a notable increase in the number of female contestants from 355 in 2004 to 556 in 2009, to 668 in 2014 and 726 contestants in 2019. The inclusion of individuals from other genders was done in the 2012 electoral roll by ECI. In the 2014 general elections, 28,527

An illustration of ballot voting   **Dattatraya Dutta**

contestants under the 'other' category had registered. The number of registrations jumped to 39,075 electors of the third gender in 2019.
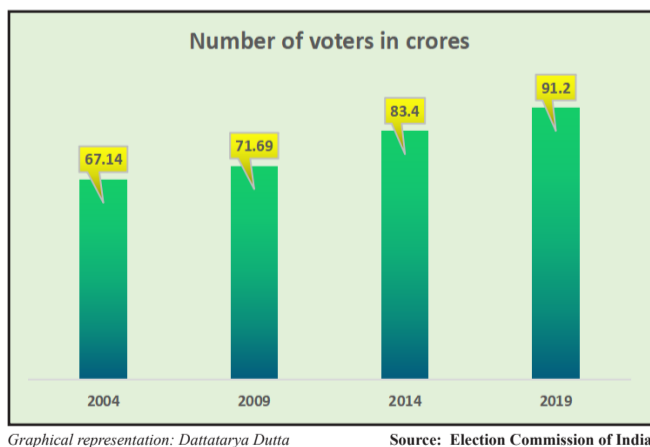
The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 mentions that electors having one among the 21 disabilities stated under the Act have been termed as voters with disabilities. Electors with visual impairment, speech and hearing disability, locomotor disability and others are categories classified as PWD voters.

The ECI for the upcoming 2024 general election has introduced the inclusion practise the identification of PWDs in the electoral database to facilitate voters on poll day.

Moreover, they have also organised targeted drives and strategies to enhance the electoral gender ratio and inclusion of third-gender communities.

In order to secure maximum participation, ECI has partnered with Google to provide easy accessibility of voting information in English and Hindi, tackle misinformation and prevent manipulation through advertising or other media to support and protect the integrity of the country's electoral system.

Number of voters in crores

Year	Voters
2004	67.14
2009	71.69
2014	83.4
2019	91.2

Graphical representation: Dattatarya Dutta   **Source: Election Commission of India**

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