

Alarmed on an aircraft carrier

A Prime Minister and a shriek

RAJ MOHINDRA

In 1969, Indira Gandhi spent a day at sea with the Navy. She embarked on board INS Vikrant, which was flying the flag of Vice Admiral S.M. Nanda, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command. Captain Chandu Kuruvilla was Flag Captain.

With Admiral Nanda's penchant for planning, every step of the visit was gone into minutely. He advised the Prime Minister's Office that she ought to be accompanied by a chaperone. This suggestion was duly accepted and Nandini Satpathy, Minister attached to the Prime Minister, was deputed to accompany her. I was Staff Officer to the C-in-C and was liaising with R.K. Dhanwan, Personal Assistant to the Prime Minister, for the administrative details.

When it was established that it was a Mysore rat, we promptly killed it!

The Prime Minister was accommodated in the Captain's night cabin and the Minister in the adjoining day cabin. Captain Kuruvilla had taken care of every aspect of the visit, including tight security arrangements in consultation with the PMO.

In the middle of the night, however, there was a loud shriek from the Captain's cabin. This was followed by an even louder shriek from the adjoining day cabin! The security detail outside the cabin was baffled and dumbstruck. The Admiral and the Captain were informed forthwith of the mysterious shrieks.

At this moment, Nandini Satpathy peeped out through the curtains of the Captain's cabin and informed the security that a rat had entered Indira Gandhi's cabin. She said the Prime Minister was scared of rats! Meanwhile,



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Indira Gandhi came out and sat on a chair in the day cabin, looking distinctly distraught. All hell broke loose and no one knew what to do.

By now, Captain Kuruvilla arrived, followed by Admiral Nanda himself. Captain Kuruvilla took charge of the situation. He asked the First Lieutenant to get hold of the ship's rat-catchers immediately to trap the rat. Quickly ending the chaotic situation, he assured Nandini Satpathy that four specially trained professional rat-catchers had been assigned to trap the offending creature.

It transpired the next day that a rat had stuck its neck out of the 'punkah louvre' opening in Indira Gandhi's cabin to have a quick peep at the Prime Minister.

The following evening there was the usual 'mess night', which traditionally becomes a hilarious event after the toast to the President is offered.

Captain Kuruvilla gave a sparkling speech, laced with humour. He apologised to the Prime Minister for the unwanted intrusion the previous night. He assured her that a board of enquiry had come to the unmistakable conclusion that it was not a 'Vikrant rat' but a 'Mysore rat'. Madame Prime Minister, Captain Kuruvilla added with charming nonchalance, the moment it was established that it was a Mysore rat, we promptly killed it!

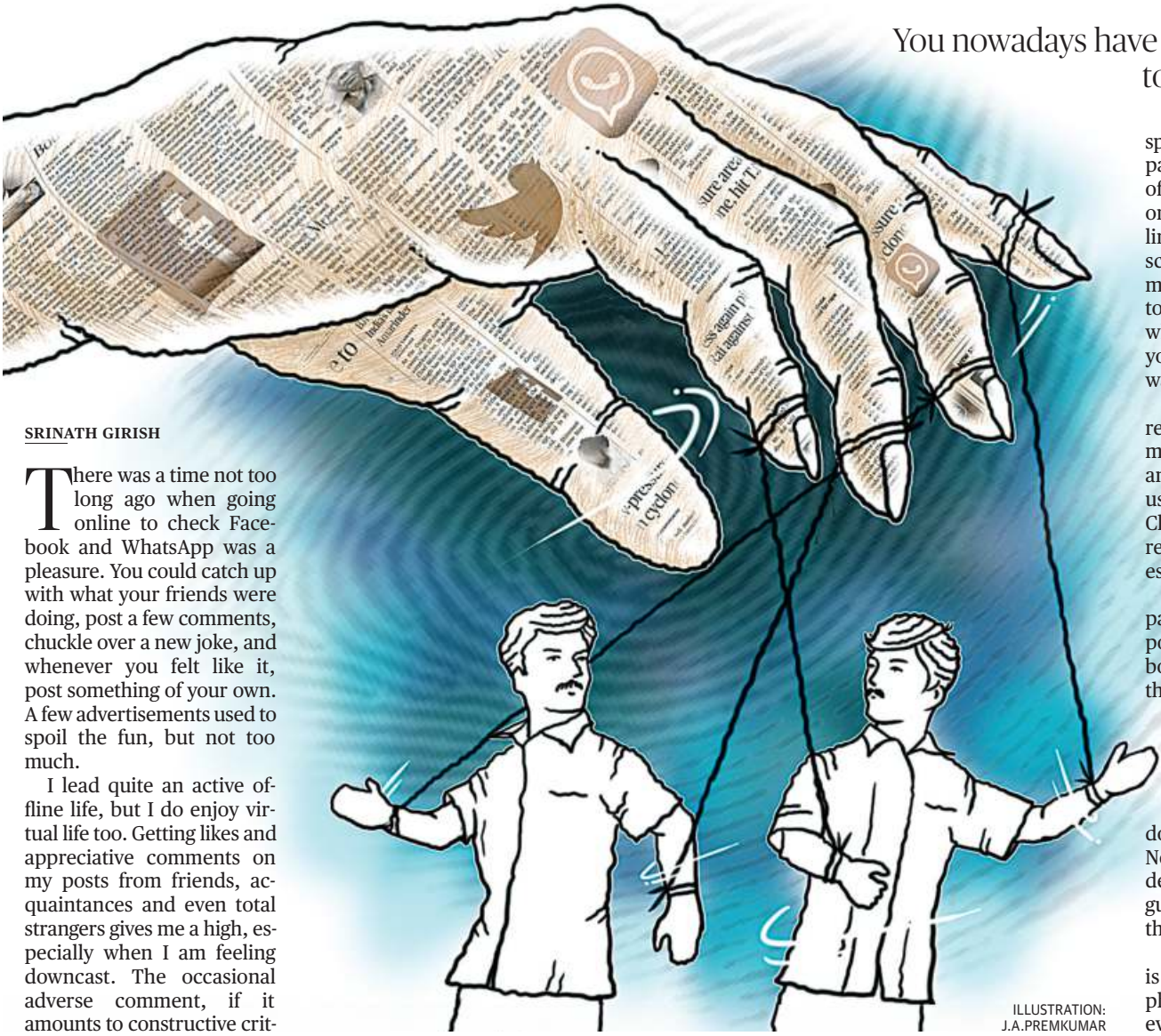
The Prime Minister had a hearty laugh.

Captain Kuruvilla was possibly alluding to INS Mysore, the cruiser that was also participating in the exercises. Incidentally, S. Nijalingappa, the Congressman from Mysore, was leading a revolt against Indira Gandhi at that time, which led to the Congress split in 1969.

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The social media overdose

You nowadays have to scroll through hundreds of forwards to get to see at least one worthwhile post



SRINATH GIRISH

There was a time not too long ago when going online to check Facebook and WhatsApp was a pleasure. You could catch up with what your friends were doing, post a few comments, chuckle over a new joke, and whenever you felt like it, post something of your own. A few advertisements used to spoil the fun, but not too much.

I lead quite an active online life, but I do enjoy virtual life too. Getting likes and appreciative comments on my posts from friends, acquaintances and even total strangers gives me a high, especially when I am feeling downcast. The occasional adverse comment, if it amounts to constructive criticism, is also welcome.

This does not mean that I am not so naïve as to believe all the praise that comes my way; I take it all with a pinch of salt. But the fact is, like all

normal human beings, I like it. Praise is definitely a morale-booster, it makes you strive to do better.

But what is happening to

Facebook and WhatsApp these days? Switch on your data connection and watch helplessly as hordes of hate messages, doom messages,

and inane jokes flow in, clogging your mobile space and worse, warping your mental processes.

All over, people are either

ILLUSTRATION: J.A.PREMKUMAR

Green blood versus pink guavas

When appearances colour perceptions and influence thought processes as well

UMESH KUMAR

I have always preferred train journeys. My preference for trains must have taken root when I was a child. Staying far away given my father's job, the family would usually take long-distance journeys twice a year to connect with relatives in the village. We would always travel in the sleeper class.

Sleeper class: the microcosm of our society. One can always feel the pulse of society by travelling in this particular railway class.

Last year I chose a train from Secunderabad to Varanasi. Just when the train was about to leave, a couple in the mid-30s entered my compartment with their two sons. One could easily guess that there was not much of an age difference between the children. It took a while for the family to settle down.

By overhearing the couple's conversation with other co-travellers, I came to know that the family had come to visit Hyderabad on a pleasure trip. Meanwhile, the younger son started to ask for the window seat that I was occupying.

The boy looked at the

mother and the mother turned her face towards the father. However, I could notice that the couple felt uneasy to ask for my seat. The person occupying the opposite window seat had already gone to sleep. So the other option was also closed to them. The boy's cry got louder with every passing second. Finally, the father looked at me. I offered my seat to the boy as his cries were disturbing my reading of an interesting novel. Now, the boys started to take turns to enjoy the window-view. Children always have that fascination!

I was wearing a long green kurta freshly stitched from my favourite tailor in Hyderabad. My long beard, spectacles and a bag full of books seem to have caught the attention of the mother. She was gazing at me continuously and whispered something in her man's ear.

Suddenly, the father asked me, 'Are you from Hyderabad?' I was puzzled for a second. I have lived in quite a few Indian cities though not more than three years at one place. In Hyderabad, I stayed for five years. "Yes," I said instantly. "What is the pro-



ILLUSTRATION: SATWIK GADE

blem of this MP of yours and his brother? Always giving hate speeches against our religion?" He asked again. I didn't say reply. I didn't know what it was about.

After a while, the boys lost their fascination for the window-view. They started to roam around, climbing to and then coming down dangerously from the upper berth. If one would be climbing the other would be dragging his leg. The boys created a sort of commotion. In spite of the parents scolding them, they were going out of control. Suddenly, the mother said, 'Hey! Come down... otherwise the 'bearded uncle' will beat you!'

This is unfair, I thought to

myself. Most Indian parents use it as a ploy; they present strangers as villains to scare their unruly children. The couple used my personality a number of times to control the boys. It seemed to work for them.

The next morning, the travelling ticket examiner came, for the first time. I was still asleep. The calling out of my name by the ticket checker 'shocked' the couple. Once the TTE left, the man asked me, 'O! You are from our religion?' His wife seemed relaxed now. The boys were still asleep. However, silence pervaded amongst us after my discovery. I got down after an hour.

On my way home, I was

puzzled how the colour of my kurta had turned my blood green in the eyes of my fellow passengers!

After a few days, my wife and I went to a market. A boy was selling fresh guavas. Atop his stall he had kept a freshly cut guava with pink pulp. My wife was excited, 'This type we get in my place.' So we purchased 2 kg.

However, back home, the fruit would come out with white pulp, every single time. We felt cheated. We called the boy-seller names. My wife even declared that we live in a city of thieves.

But there was a twist in the tale. We found that the last three guavas had pink pulp! The boy was not at fault, we realised. We never asked him whether all the guavas were of pink pulp.

Actually, we had committed the same mistake as that of my co-passengers. We were reminded of what Carl Jung said: 'Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves'. Both the parties failed to understand that the colour of human blood is red – not green or pink!

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The secret ingredient

NEETIKA LAL RAI

What is happiness? Is it something that comes from outside or from within? Well, it's a tricky question. Anything that gives us pleasure gives us happiness. But sometimes this warmth is a bit dim because we don't feel happiness from within... our heart and mind are filled with certain thoughts that prevent us from imbibing happiness.

I came across a line in a magazine, "Happiness comes from within, it is not served in a plate, it is you who has to feel it." One should find solace and happiness in small things. Happiness is scattered all around you, you have to discover it yourself. We don't need expensive holidays, just a quiet, long drive with your loved ones can energise you for months.

Beautiful and expensive gifts won't give you the pleasure you're searching for; a few heartfelt words are enough for this virtue called happiness. Money can't buy happiness. Sometimes smaller things can do wonders than the bigger ones. So, beautiful people, enjoy every moment of life and respect it.

Seeming ambiguities over the definition of a family unit

A case to search for alternatives in order to overcome the patriarchal element in the existing structure

AARTI MANGAL

Recently one of my friends shared his experience of not being able to secure a flat on rent because owners typically wanted to rent only to someone who is staying with a family. This brought into focus the prejudiced mindset of people and led me to think about the 'family' as a unit.

In a country such as ours one encounters a lot of prevalent biases simply by going out in search of a house. Some of the manifest biases are on the lines of caste, religion, food preferences and the 'character' of the person. Character is often decided on the basis of whether he/she has a 'family', meaning husband, wife and kids. Those who stay alone, be it a girl or a boy, who might or might not be having the stereotypical kind of family in the wake of such prejudices, often find it difficult to se-

cure a house for themselves. Here one needs to ask whether conforming to the stereotypical image of the family is good enough evidence to prove character.

I had barely started giving it a thought than glimpses from my primary school social science textbooks, now called EVS, started rolling in front of my eyes. I recalled seeing images of a family and a home in the textbooks with the title 'my home' and 'my family'. This image usually had a circle around it besides an encircled image in which there was a man figure, a woman figure, a girl and a boy. One may not find a direct relationship between the circle and the image under it, but undoubtedly it reinforces the stereotypical image of the family as the 'ideal', undermining the alternative structures of a family. Certainly this puts a lot of pressure on those who deviate from the

stereotypical notions. Why are we obsessed with having 'families' of our own? Why do we make it a parameter to determine the character of a person? Are family units that sacred? Or does having a family correct the character of those in it? This needs a deconstruction.

Do we have enough evidence to believe that the family is a holy unit? Data on the rates of incest, honour killings, marital rape, domestic violence and dowry deaths have a different story to tell. Many such crimes originate within the structures of the family. According to a report from 2018 there were more than 300 reported cases of honour killings in the preceding three years. The National Family Health Survey 4 discloses that 31% of married women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence inflicted by their

husbands. It also mentions that around 78.6% of never-married women in the 15-49 age group who faced sexual violence had never told anyone about it.

On domestic violence, the survey reports that one in every third woman above the age of 15 in India has experienced domestic violence.

Another report in 2016 maintains that every single day, 21 women are murdered

for dowry in India. Similarly, a report released by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007 notes that 52.91% of boys and 47.09% of girls were abused in the family environment, of which 88.6% were abused by their own parents. Further, 83% of half the children who reported having faced emotional abuse were victims at the hands of their own parents. These are instances of

tangible violence in the form of reported cases, leaving out unreported cases. The full facts will certainly provide a grim picture. Most often, those who are subordinate to the head of the family are expected to behave obediently even if it means violation of their dreams, desires, dignity and rights. The suicide rate and the rate of mental health disorders would further reveal the kind of suppression and pressures one goes through while not being supported by their families.

The existing structure of families as such is an outcome of patriarchy, and the patriarchal rules and norms on which families run cannot be free from oppression and violence until we have alternative structures and get rid of patriarchal mindset.



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