

ADDRESSING GEN Z

One good thing that has come out of the CJP protests in Delhi last month is the focus on the young Indians. Though the purpose of minds behind it was different but its optics showed that youth of India think differently and therefore must be addressed and engaged differently. As usual, the BJP is a quick learner and the party and its government picked the threads and changed its lingo and expression to communication with masses, bulk of who are the youth. Being a great communicator, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is leading the change. He has always been good terms and abbreviations and connecting with the youth. He incorporates the Gen Z lingo in his speeches and makes it a point to compliment the young achievers and those doing extraordinary work in his Maan ki baat programme. He recently said that he believes that young Indians will not be swayed by rhetoric but by the rate of growth and progress made by the country. He referring to urban naxals and naraz phoopha (disgruntled uncle) is also in line with the approach.

THE FILM FESTIVAL

The International Film Festival is Srinagar has turned into a mega event with the who-is-who of the India film and entertainment industry descending in the Valley. Such a pool of talents gathering at one place sends good vibes and uplifts the thinking process of the local creators. The event must be celebrated and cherished. Soon, some naraz phoooha will emerge to speak against such an event; they can be ignored. All said and done the government has made excellent arrangements for the occasion and it would surely pay the UT in the coming years not only in terms of the filmmakers choosing J&K as locales for shooting and raising the revenue but in invoking the creative talents of the youth of the UT.

Delhi: A bipartisan record of neglect

Kushan Mitra

The death toll in the Satya Niketan building collapse has touched seven. Seven young lives snuffed out in an instant when a decades-old, code-violating building simply gave way. It came down barely a few metres from where a near-identical collapse killed two workers in 2022, in a structure the civic corporation had already declared dangerous, a warning nobody acted on. And every few years the story repeats: building-code violations and entrenched corruption killing Delhi’s own citizens, with no political will to fix it.

Three UPSC aspirants drowned in July 2024 in an Old Rajinder Nagar basement the MCD’s own inspection found had been illegally converted from parking into a coaching-centre library. In 2022, investigators found the Mundka building where 27 workers burned to death had no fire clearance and one exit for roughly a hundred employees.

Delhi Police told the Delhi High Court that at least 43, by some counts 45, died in the 2019 Anaj Mandi fire, in a factory that had deliberately avoided a legal power connection. Officials attributed the 2010 Lalita Park collapse, which killed around 65 people, to an unauthorised construction the civic body had cleared without scrutiny. And court records from the Uphaar Cinema case found illegally installed extra seating blocked exits during the 1997 fire that killed 59.

Earlier this year, fire tore through an illegally expanded bed-and-breakfast in Hauz Rani, killing at least 22 people — among them members of two Indian families and medical tourists from Africa, Central Asia and Bangladesh who had come to Delhi’s hospitals for treatment. The building was licensed for six rooms and was running twenty-five, with a single entry-exit point. Delhi’s building-safety failures are no longer a domestic story alone; foreign embassies are now watching too. IndianPolitical Analysis

Seven documented disasters across three decades — Uphaar, Lalita Park, Anaj Mandi, Mundka, Old Rajinder Nagar, Hauz Rani



and Satya Niketan — now account for well over 200 deaths tied, on the official record, to unauthorised or non-compliant construction. No party can be credibly absolved of a share, based on who held power when each regulatory failure occurred.

Congress-led governments ran Delhi for fifteen consecutive years under Sheila Dikshit, during which unauthorised colonies climbed into the thousands and regularisation became routine policy. When the Supreme Court ordered sealing of illegally used premises in 2006, a Congress-led central government pushed the Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Act through Parliament to stay those orders - legislation the Court itself later held was beyond the legislature’s competence.

The civic bodies that were BJP-controlled for the fifteen years before the 2022 municipal unification, whose engineers issue, or fail to withhold, building and fire clearances, were in charge when both Anaj Mandi and Mundka occurred. Successive central governments, including BJP-led ones, kept re-enacting the same “special provisions” shield in 2014, 2017, 2021 and 2023, and the current BJP-led Delhi government has launched yet another “as-is-where-is” regularisation drive rather than a safety audit.

The AAP governed Delhi from 2013 and

took charge of the unified MCD from December 2022. On AAP’s watch, over both the state government and the civic body, the Old Rajinder Nagar basement - per the MCD’s own findings — had been operating in violation of building bylaws for some time before the deaths occurred.

None of this requires speculation about motive: across three decades, Congress, BJP and AAP administrations have each presided over enforcement systems that repeatedly failed to prevent buildings that later killed people. A plausible reason is on the record too - when the MCD tried to seal illegal premises under Supreme Court orders in September 2006, trader protests turned violent and four died in police firing during a bandh.

That episode is widely cited as the moment enforcement became politically costly enough that governments have since preferred renewable moratoria to sustained implementation — a pattern the Supreme Court itself called a “cat and mouse game... to protect the vested interests of those having little or no respect for the rule of law”.

Delhi’s own disaster management authority does not dispute the scale of this unaddressed risk. The DDMA states plainly that the National Capital Territory falls in Seismic Zone IV, where shaking of intensity up to VIII on the Medvedev-Sponheuer-Karnik

(MSK) scale is “quite probable,” with two active fault systems — the Delhi-Haridwar Ridge and the Delhi-Moradabad fault — running through the territory.

The Ministry of Earth Sciences told Parliament this “severe intensity zone” rating stems from Delhi-NCR’s proximity to the Himalayan seismic belt and its Main Central Thrust, Main Boundary Thrust and Himalayan Frontal Thrust systems, where the Indian and Eurasian plates continue to collide. IndianPolitical Analysis

On what this means for buildings, the DDMA’s own assessment is unambiguous: “till date there is no legal framework to require that all constructions in Delhi must implement seismic code provisions,” so “most buildings in Delhi may not meet codal requirements on seismic resistance”. A gap the authority itself says leaves “a real potential for a great earthquake disaster in Delhi”.

Even where the government tried, follow-through fell short: the NDMA told Parliament in 2025 that a structural safety audit it commissioned for Delhi’s public buildings “could not be continued further due to the unsatisfactory quality of reports submitted by the implementing agencies”. This is not a hypothetical for dramatic effect; it is the Delhi and central governments’ own documented assessment of a risk a fire department can contain and a seismic event will not.

Three decades, seven documented mass-casualty events, and one official, unresolved seismic warning have outlasted every administration that has governed Delhi. That is public record, not partisan conjecture — and it is one voters and courts alike are entitled to keep asking every party in office to answer for.

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The writer is Director and the Printer & Publisher of The Pioneer; Views presented are personal.

GOD HAS HIS DOOR OPEN FOR ALL OF US

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

Sanjaya of the Mahabharata fame summarised at the end of the Bhagavad-Gita, “Where there is the Yogeshwara Shri Krishna and where there is the archer Arjuna, there will be opulence, victory, wealth and morality” (18.78). Don’t we want all these? I certainly do and much more.

Lord Krishna has offered a lot in the Gita. Sample these. In verse # 18.54, the Lord offers supreme devotion to Him to get started.

This will ensure supreme peace (18.62), which we all crave desperately; I do. Additionally, we can become ‘jeevan mukta’, that is, liberated while living in the present body (5.28). Liberation will follow at the end of the present life (18.62), if we stay focused. All troubles will come but go due to generous help from God (18.58).

We will experience eternal bliss (5.21). We will be appointed to a very special position as a God’s ‘nimitta’ (instrument), as Arjuna was (11.77), empowered to do big tasks. There will be nothing to fear (18.66); life will run smoothly (‘theek chalegi’).

How did Arjuna become so deserving? The very first step he took was to accept the position of a disciple of God (2.7). Addi-



tionally, he took shelter of Lord Krishna (2.7). In the same verse, he prayed for guidance. This culminated in Arjuna accepting what Lord Krishna had instructed him to do (18.33). Such devotion to the Lord had qualified him to receive the most confidential knowledge (9.1).

And Arjuna was wise enough to keep on enquiring, asking questions throughout the course of the Gita. Arjuna had good lineage. Most importantly, he was born with divine qualities (16.5). He was respectable (2.33). Arjuna was a follower of dharma - a necessary quality required to fight for it.

Thus, he became very dear to Lord Krishna, who called him His friend.

This is a lot. Still, we don’t have to get discouraged; I am not. Therefore, I started on this divine path. Before I give a brief description of it, let me brief you about my status then. I was confused and depressed. I had lots of attachments, especially to my material body. I was ignoring my duty towards my own self - a soul. I was not realising the real position of the Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent and really everything God (7.19).

Now good sense prevailed, and I cut a large photo of Lord Krishna from a calendar, got it framed, and hung it on the right side of my bed. The spiritual journey had started in the right earnest.

I began to pray for guidance and help. It was a humble, sincere and hopeful practice. I was prepared to learn and practise what I was learning. Intuitions began to come.

Reformations followed. I began to get what I really needed; protection was being granted to what was valuable to me (9.22). To cut a long story short, now I feel liberated (5.28). I am hopeful of getting liberated in this life itself (18.62).

The writer is a spiritual teacher and columnist; Views presented are personal.

What the Jauhar debate reveals about our fear of complex agency

Priyanka Chaturvedi

Recently, there has been a conversation. A controversy. Over a movie scene from almost a decade ago. An apples-to-oranges comparison made in an attempt to sound like a staunch feminist. But the take is so problematic that it does a huge disservice to women. And yes, it is important enough to debunk it, lest it become an ill-informed idea to propagate - about an act of Jauhar in the 14th century to a rape survivor in the 21st-century context.

There is a peculiar irony in some contemporary conversations about women’s agency. We say we want women to have the right to choose. And then, when some women in history made that choice — a decision that we find uncomfortable in this day and age — we decide that they could not possibly have been making choices at all, but were coerced into it.

Let us begin with something that should require no qualification whatsoever:

A woman who survives rape has a

right not just to live, but to thrive. And not just to live, but to live a life of dignity.

She does not become impure, dishonoured, damaged or less worthy of love, marriage, motherhood, work or happiness. The shame and criminal act is that of the accused who has committed the crime, and the dishonour is for him to bear — our laws must ensure that.

I can’t imagine I have to literally spell it out because some made it about a rape survivor choosing life over death, by comparing the 21st-century nation-state situation, which is constitutionally governed with recourse available, to a 14th-century princely statehood choice, where women chose Jauhar — choosing death over life in the face of impending defeat, captivity and sexual violence.

Firstly, they are not the same choice, if it isn’t already obvious.

But in case it still isn’t obvious to some brainwashed idea which was spoken recently and is being justified repeatedly — in one case, a woman is subjected to violence against her will. In the other, we are talking about

women confronted with an extraordinarily brutal circumstance in which they knew capture could mean enslavement, sexual violence and the loss of control over their own lives and bodies. You can find that choice tragic. But to say that the women who chose Jauhar were simply victims of patriarchy is not just misplaced but also an insincere argument.

Worse still, equating Jauhar to sati, as though they were interchangeable manifestations of one identical practice. They were not.

Sati was associated with the death of a widow following her husband’s death on the same funeral pyre as her husband, an abhorrent idea developed within particular social and cultural contexts. Jauhar belonged to the context of war, siege, defeat and anticipated captivity.

One was connected to widowhood — the other to warfare.

Sati was not just abolished but identified as a criminal act against women once India became a republic. And rightly so.

If we flatten every historical practice involving women’s bodies into one

convenient category called “patriarchy”, we stop understanding history and start using history as a prop for contemporary arguments.

Talking of contemporary history, not too long ago, in 2014, during the genocide in Iraq’s Sinjar region, many Yazidi women and girls chose to take their own lives rather than submit to systematic rape, torture and forced conversion by ISIS militants.

The idea that a rape survivor’s honour is destroyed by sexual violence against her is itself an obscene form of victim-blaming.

But does defending the right of a rape survivor to live require us to declare that a woman who chose Jauhar was wrong to make that choice?

A woman who survives rape in the 21st century or earlier is choosing life after an assault she did not choose. A woman who chose Jauhar, in the historical circumstances, was choosing death rather than anticipated captivity and violence.

Those are radically different circumstances.

One simple fact: a woman’s agency does not disappear simply because we

dislike the choice. We cannot say a woman is empowered when she makes the choice we approve of and brainwashed when she makes the choice we don’t.

I would rather ask a much harder question. Why is it that all through history, a woman’s body has been made a battlefield on which victorious armies asserted power?

Why is it that women have had to contemplate death as an alternative to captivity?

Those are profoundly feminist questions. And it isn’t definitely an illiterate argument that we have been subjected to.

The tragedy of Jauhar, or in the case of Yazidi women, is not that women chose death. Perhaps the tragedy is that the world in which they lived gave them only that one terrible choice to deal with. The question should not be of the women but the mindset of such invaders who looked at women as acquisitions to do as they pleased with them.

Also, to put sati, Jauhar and rape survivors into one basket is to construct a contemporary analogy out of

three profoundly different circumstances.

Sati was a practice that needed to end. Which we did.

Similarly, women who chose Jauhar should not have their agency erased merely because we, living centuries later, would make a different choice. Rape survivors have an absolute right to live. No woman should ever be told that her life is less valuable because of sexual violence.

There is no contradiction in holding all three positions. In fact, I would argue that this is what a genuinely feminist reading of history demands.

The goal of feminism cannot be to tell women what the correct choice is. It must be to build a world in which women have choices that do not involve choosing between their lives and their dignity.

That is the world we should be fighting for.

Not rewriting the choices of women who lived in another one.

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