

O HERALDO

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Rhea Chakraborty can move on, but the lessons can't be forgotten

So finally, she was neither a witch, nor someone who practised black magic. The CBI closure report on the investigation into the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput has cleared the name of his then partner, Rhea Chakraborty - nearly five years after the actor was found lifeless in his apartment on June 14, 2020. The closure of the investigation has vindicated Rhea's stand that she was in no way responsible for his death, but it can't give back to her what these five years of a sensational media trial, name-calling, ostracisation and lost work opportunities have taken away. Will the public ever know the extent of damage done to her mental well-being over these years?

When Sushant was found dead in his Mumbai apartment, the initial investigation seemed to point to suicide, with no signs of foul play. However, as the case garnered media attention, various conspiracy theories began to take root, many of which unfairly targeted Rhea. The media's thirst for sensationalism, compounded by the public's fascination with every twist in the case, led to a dangerous escalation of baseless accusations. Allegations of abetment to suicide, financial misconduct, and even links to drugs were levied against Rhea, painting her as the villain in a story that was far more complex than the headlines suggested.

Despite the absence of evidence supporting these allegations, Rhea was arrested in September 2020 by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), in connection with a drug-related investigation. She was in jail for 27

Rhea's lawyer, Satish Maneshinde, has been vocal about the "untold miseries" she endured due to the media's relentless pursuit of a narrative that portrayed her as guilty before any legal proceedings had even taken place. The closure report filed by the CBI confirms what many had known all along - Rhea had no involvement in Sushant's tragic death. The findings also unequivocally stated that the cause of death was suicide, with no foul play or conspiracy involved.

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After the closure of the case, veteran actress Soni Razdan referred to the media treatment of Rhea as a "modern-day witch hunt" in an open letter. Razdan, along with other Bollywood celebrities like Dia Mirza, has been vocal in expressing their anger and frustration at the way Rhea was treated. Razdan's call for accountability resonates deeply - who will be held accountable for the immense distress Rhea faced, for the damage done to her reputation, and for the injustice of putting her through a media trial before a real one could even begin?

Rhea's experience exemplifies the toxic nature of modern-day media trials, where the presumption of guilt replaces the presumption of innocence, and the courtroom becomes a mere formality for a judgment already passed in the public eye. Moreover, while Rhea's name was dragged through the mud, few questioned the systemic issues that contributed to the tragedy in the first place. Sushant's mental health struggles, his professional isolation, and the pressures of the entertainment industry were all minimised in favour of scapegoating individuals like Rhea. The media's focus on sensationalism rather than serious, fact-based reporting only served to complicate the investigation, diverting attention away from the real causes behind his death.

Now that the CBI has filed its closure report, one can only hope that this marks the beginning of some semblance of justice for Rhea Chakraborty. It is imperative that the media takes responsibility for its role in perpetuating a narrative that was both damaging and unfounded. However, the question remains: will the same media outlets that once demonized Rhea now offer an apology, as called for by figures like Dia Mirza and Soni Razdan? The case is a stark reminder of how, in the age of instant news and social media, the line between fact and fiction can easily be blurred, and the damage done can last far longer than any investigation or trial. It is time for the media to acknowledge the harm caused and to reflect on the consequences of its actions. This is not just about Rhea's story; it is a lesson in accountability, responsibility, and the need for a more ethical approach to journalism.



ROBIN ROY

Delimitation: The North, South divide

The Joint Action Committee on Fair Delimitation, which met in Chennai on Saturday, unanimously adopted a resolution stating that any future delimitation exercise undertaken by the Centre must be carried out transparently, with full consultation and deliberation taking all stakeholders into account.

In this article, let's delve into the issues of delimitation and find out how things would be affected and why the southern states are so concerned.

What is delimitation?

Delimitation is the process of redrawing parliamentary and assembly constituencies to reflect population changes. The idea is to ensure that each constituency has roughly the same number of people living in it.

Delimitation is also directly linked to size. States with larger populations get more representatives in Parliament than States with smaller populations.

The Constitution says...

The Constitution lays clear guidelines for the delimitation process through Articles 82 and 170.

Article 82: After each national census, Parliament must pass a Delimitation Act to redefine the boundaries and number of Lok Sabha constituencies.

Article 170: This governs the delimitation of State Legislative Assemblies, determining the number of seats in each state based on population data.

As per the Election Commission of India, "Delimitation literally means the act or process of fixing limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies in a country or a province having a legislative body. The job of delimitation is assigned to a high-power body. Such a body is known as Delimitation Commission or a Boundary Commission.

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Delimitation executed in the past

Delimitation has taken place in India four times - 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002.

Until 1976, after every Census, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and State Assembly seats were redistributed across the country. However, during the 1976 emergency, Indira Gandhi's government froze seat allocation to ensure that states with successful family planning policies did not lose representation. This decision was formalised through the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution, which halted any change in the number of Parliamen-

tary and Assembly seats until after the 2001 Census.

However, in 2001, when the constituency boundaries were redrawn, the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies remained unchanged, primarily due to Opposition from southern states.

After the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced that the Centre would undertake two major tasks - the national census and the delimitation exercise.

How will delimitation impact?

Delimitation will reshape parliamentary seats based on population. While north Indian states will gain more seats, southern states may see minimal changes, with Tamil Nadu expected to be among the most affected.

It may be noted that by 2026, India's population is expected to reach 1.42 billion and thus in the south, Karnataka may see an increase from 28 to 36 seats, Telangana from 17 to 20, Andhra Pradesh from 25 to 28 and Tamil Nadu from 39 to 41. Kerala, with the slowest population growth, may lose a seat, dropping from 20 to 19.

Meanwhile, in the north, Uttar Pradesh could see its seats rise from 80 to 128, and Bihar from 40 to 70.

SHAH SPEAKS

Even as Union Minister Amit Shah addressed concerns over delimitation in southern states, assuring that it would not lead to a reduction in their parliamentary seats, there is considerable amount of heartburn. He said on February 26, "I want to reassure the people of South India that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has kept your interest in mind and will make sure that not even one seat is reduced. And whatever increase is there, southern states will get a fair share, there is no reason to doubt this."

The next delimitation exercise is expected after 2026, following the completion of the next population census. For a fair representation, the process aims to balance the population-to-MP ratio across constituencies. This factor has left Tamil Nadu and other South Indian states worried. The DMK argues that the South Indian states have successfully implemented population control measures, as a result, it could lose political clout.

Why Are Southern States opposing?

Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka are worried because the delimitation on population will disproportionately benefit states in the north, which have higher population growth rates. For instance, states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan are projected to gain significantly more Lok Sabha seats due to their larger populations. In contrast, southern states, which have achieved lower fertility rates through ef-

fective family planning policies, may see their representation stagnate or even decline.

DEBATE UPON FOLLOWING TOPICS

Federalism and Fair Representation: Southern states argue that delimitation based solely on population undermines the principles of cooperative federalism. They strongly feel that factors like economic contribution, tax revenue, and development indicators should also be considered in determining representation.

Population Control Policies: States that have successfully controlled population growth fear they will be disadvantaged. Tamil Nadu, for instance, has one of the lowest fertility rates in India, a result of decades of investment in education, healthcare, and family planning. Critics argue that rewarding states with higher population growth could disincentivise such efforts.

Political Power Shift: The potential increase in seats for northern states could shift the balance of power in the Lok Sabha, giving them greater influence over national policies. This has raised concerns about the marginalization of southern states in decision-making processes.

Constitutional Challenges: The current cap of 543 Lok Sabha seats, set by the 42nd Amendment in 1976, may need to be revisited if delimitation leads to a significant increase in the number of constituencies. This could require constitutional amendments and broader political consensus.

However, the goal is to ensure equal representation by maintaining similar population sizes across constituencies.

Flashback

Pre-1976: After the Censuses of 1951, 1961, and 1971, seats in Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and state Assemblies were redistributed.

42nd Amendment (1976): During the Emergency, Parliament froze the total number of seats until the 2001 Census to prevent states with higher population growth from losing representation while implementing family planning measures.

2001 Delimitation: While constituency boundaries were redrawn, the number of seats remained unchanged due to opposition from southern states.

Impact on Lok Sabha

The number of seats each state receives after delimitation will depend on the base average population that a future delimitation commission establishes.

In 1977, each MP represented an average of 10.11 lakh people. Ideally, constituencies should be evenly distributed around this average.

(Robin Roy is a senior journalist and former Senior Associate Editor, O Herald, Goa)

people's edit

ROLE OF PARENTS IN SHAPING READING HABITS OF CHILDREN

PRANAY SAWANT DESSAI

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents". - Emilie Buchwald.

Reading is a gateway to knowledge and lifelong learning. Developing an inclination of reading at a premature stage for children can open abundant potential across academic triumph. Reading from an early age can shape a child's learning ability hence parental guidance in reading from a tender age of a child is crucial to nurture and sustain a child's reading habit.

Since time innumerable people had developed the habit of reading books to gain knowledge. In the past books were the lone facilitators of knowledge and were believed to be the ladder to the room of wisdom only few conquered. Since the passage of time technology has evolved many folds and the advent of computers and other electronic devices like kindle has brought about a big change in how we perceive information. Today in the fast information digital age where we prefer to read news over social media than newspaper, reading is merely limited to mobile screens and people are losing the interest in reading and are more inclined towards social media, hence the art of reading is more valuable than ever.

The disastrous situation that we are encountering today is one of the banes of technology. With the advent of AI, the technology has evolved so much that the social media algorithm makes sure that it displays only the things that we like to watch to keep us engaged in their apps. This shows us that we are slowly becoming slaves to the technology which was meant to better the humankind. Today, not only adults, but also children are seen addicted to smartphones. Hence the shift to the traditional medium i.e., books becomes essential. In the study of National Literacy Trust, Fewer than 3 in 10 (28.0%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they read daily in 2023 which shows a 26% decrease in the number of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read daily in their free time since 2005. While the teachers at school are doing their job of inculcating reading habits and values among school children, the foundation of reading habits happens at home. Parental involvement in a child's reading habits plays a crucial role as children find it more interesting than just viewing it as a school chore.

Many parents find themselves helpless when their child chooses a smartphone instead of a book but children tend to learn and follow things by observing their parents. If they see their parents with smartphones, however interesting the book you give them, what they will want is the smartphone. One step that parents can take to fathom out from this is to start a bedtime habit of reading out interesting moral story books to their child which has interesting pictures in them to keep them engaged and focused in the book. There are a lot of creative books available in the market like 3D books, pop-up books to create an interest for books in children. Taking children to a book fair and letting them select books of their choice is also a good way to indulge them in reading.

The benefits of reading are immense, to name a few it helps develop cognitive skills, vocabulary, enhances writing and communication skills and many more. Warren Buffet, Barack Obama, Bill Gates and Elon Musk are habitual readers. Fostering a reading habit in children is not only to excel in academics but making them a responsible citizens of tomorrow who can think critically. In an era of digital distractions, parent's role is even more vital in developing the love for books among their children. A child, who reads today will grow into an informed, imaginative, and knowledgeable adult tomorrow by proving that books remain timeless gateways to wisdom and success.

Audit of storage facilities for flammable material

It is learnt that two days after a major fire and explosion engulfed the gunpowder storage unit at Naqueri-Betul, the authorities on Saturday have reportedly sealed the unit as a precautionary measure.

The police have initiated its own inquiry into the incident. Be that as it may, in order to ensure safety and compliance, an audit of all flammable material storage facilities in the state should include a thorough inspection of storage areas, cabinets, containers, ventilation, and documentation, focusing on fire safety and hazard control. Gunpowder should be stored in a cool dry place.

The storage area should be free from any possible sources of excess heat and should be isolated from open flame, furnaces and heaters. There should be adequate natural ventilation or mechanical ventilation should be installed in order to remove flammable vapors. Fire extinguishers should be readily available in the storage area. Installing fire detection systems in areas where

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flammable materials are stored is also vital. There have been instances of explosions reported in storage facilities for fireworks besides factories manufacturing fireworks and even shops storing them. Fireworks should be stored away from direct sunlight and flames. Sheds, garages or containers specifically designed to store fireworks can all be the best options. They should be fire-resistant and have proper ventilation.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Protect heritage sites for posterity

Hundreds of people (comprising of locals, members of Save Old Goa Action Committee (SOGAC), activists, environmentalists and others) gathered in Old Goa on Sunday to protest and call upon the State government to stop the ongoing work of the proposed mall project at the world heritage site near the Basilica of Bom

Jesus and which is being developed by the Tourism department in spite of the fact that construction cannot be permitted within 100 metres of any heritage site.

On one hand, this government is heard talking of promoting spiritual tourism in the state and on the other is seen making all-out efforts to destroy/sell even such world famous historical holy sites to business-minded outsiders.

It would be prudent enough if this government respect religious sentiments of Goans, protect archaeological/holy heritage sites in the State and preserve them for posterity.

Jerry Fernandes, Saligao

grievous injuries inflicted on him by a group of fanatic criminals involved in the violence.

The conscience of those big men who are alleged to have triggered the violence, arson and murderous attacks should be pricking them if they have one in them. One really wonders how long the country has to face such unwarranted communal and religious flare ups that result in the death of many besides torching of houses and properties of innocent and poor people.

Tharcus S Fernando, Chennai

Lokayukta post lies vacant

The inaction on the part of the state government in filling the post of Lokayukta, which has been vacant, has not only brought proceedings under its jurisdiction to a standstill, but also raised doubts over the delay in appointment. When the state is grappling with allegations like corruptions

Stop stirring the communal cauldron

It is sad that one Irfan Ansari, a 40-year-old poor welder by profession, who had left home for the Nagpur railway station to board a train to Itarsi succumbed to the

from top to bottom level, the institution serves as an alarming signal about the government's commitment to combat graft and restore public trust. Stung by several indictments by the Lokayukta in cases involving corruption by public functionaries, govt amended the act to severely dilute the powers of the institution.

The amendments omitted provisions enabling complaints against public functionaries on allegations of nepotism, lack of integrity, maladministration and improper or corrupt motives. Past the government, didn't act on even one of the 21 reports that former Lokayukta Justice Misra submitted. He had also passed orders against two MLAs for disproportionate assets. Finding the system corroded and unable to take the findings to the logical conclusion, he reportedly said, "Only God can save the state. Why should public money be spent for nothing? If the Lokayukta Act is being thrown into the dustbin with such force, then it's better to abolish the Lokayukta. The powers of Lokayukta should be revised.

K G Vilop, Chorao