

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Over The Top shows are becoming tutorials for real-life criminals

It starts innocently enough — a teenager, bored and restless, watching a gripping new web series on his phone. The protagonist is smart, charismatic and broke — much like the viewer himself. By the second episode, he is hacking bank accounts. By the fourth, he is laundering crores of rupees. And by the finale, he is a legend in the world of online scams. The viewer, hooked and impressionable, is left wondering: If he could do it, why can't I?

This is not fiction. In Jharkhand's Jamtara district, young boys inspired by the web series Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega picturing phishing rackets targeting unsuspecting bank customers. Similar tales have emerged from other corners of India — youths attempting 'fake cheque' scams after watching Farzi, or adopting prison smuggling tactics seen in shows like Black Warrant or Inside the World's Toughest Prisons.

The recent incident at Colvale Central Jail in Goa bears chilling testimony to how such dramatised content is being translated into real-life criminal playbooks. Ganja balls, weighing nearly 1.4 kg, were found thrown over prison walls, an audacious and strategic move eerily similar to smuggling methods shown on Over The Top (OTT) platforms. The suspected recipient Manthan Chari, a high-profile accused already in jail for the Ahmed Devdi murder case. The alleged perpetrators included a minor, recruited perhaps because juvenile laws offer milder consequences.

What once served as late-night entertainment is now being replayed, almost frame by frame, in the shadows of society.

OTT platforms have revolutionised storytelling in India. These platforms provide access to bold, gritty and hyper-realistic content that traditional television would never dare to touch. But alongside their cinematic brilliance lies a darker truth, they may inadvertently be fueling a generation of criminals.

Take Farzi, starring Shahid Kapoor, where the protagonist runs a sophisticated counterfeit currency operation. Or Money Heist, which gained cult-like following in India and glorified bank robberies as acts of rebellion. Then there's Breaking Bad, where a schoolteacher turns into a methamphetamine kingpin, a cautionary tale in the West but often perceived as thrilling and aspirational by audiences here.

These shows, often inspired by real events, blur the lines between fact and fiction. Their characters are not evil caricatures but flawed heroes with charm, grit, and backstories that audiences empathise with. As a result, their crimes are romanticised — even justified — especially by vulnerable youth with limited opportunities.

In the district of Jamtara, the phishing scams popularised by the show were already being run by local gangs before the series aired. But after the show's success, the number of such cases reportedly surged across the country, with copycats adopting new tech-savvy tactics they learned on screen.

The Colvale incident reveals a similar trajectory. The method of throwing contraband over jail walls bypassing surveillance zones and timing the drop-offs to avoid detection was straight out of the digital crime genre. Goa's central prison security was breached not with brute force, but with screen-learned stealth.

Worse still is the involvement of minors. Just as in Jamtara, where teenagers were masterminds of large-scale phishing operations, real-life criminals in Goa appear to be using juveniles to run errands and take legal risks, a strategy taught, refined and glamorised online.

This isn't a call for censorship. Fiction, no matter how grim, has its place in any mature democracy. But the question is, are OTT platforms doing enough to contextualise the content they present? Crime shows rarely remind viewers of the real-life consequences faced by criminals. The screen fades to black after a prison sentence or a bullet to the chest, but in the real world, lives are destroyed, victims suffer trauma and families are shattered.

Additionally, many of these series are set in environments strikingly similar to those of the viewers — small towns, strained households and oppressive systems. The result is a dangerous sense of relatability. Young people see themselves not in the victims, but in the criminals and that inversion is deeply problematic.

The Colvale case must serve as a wake-up call for Goa's law enforcement, educators and OTT content regulators alike. The fact that a technique copied from an OTT series was executed inside one of the state's prisons shows just how porous the boundary between fiction and reality has become.

It also reflects the need to revamp prison security comprehensively. Despite earlier reforms including appointing a senior police officer as the prison's Inspector General, criminals continue to find new-age methods of communication and coordination, often aided by mobile phones and televisions that remain accessible behind bars. With increasing internet penetration and mobile access, the state's youth are just as susceptible to the glamorisation of crime seen online.

Charles Sobhraj once plotted intricate escapes with nothing but wit and charm. Today's criminals have a far easier toolkit — a smartphone, an internet connection and hours of 'training' disguised as entertainment. What used to be "don't try this at home" is now being practised at home and beyond.

Entertainment is not the enemy. But unfiltered access, unchecked influence and unquestioned imitation are. In the end, it's not the stories themselves, but how we consume them, that determines whether they inspire brilliance or breed crime.

comment



MARIAN PINHEIRO

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The history of education is deeply interwoven with political power, ideology, and control. Across centuries and continents, rulers have often interfered with education systems to consolidate their authority, promote specific ideologies, suppress dissent, or engineer social outcomes. These interventions have frequently led to the degeneration or collapse of educational standards, access, and institutional autonomy.

Historically this political interference has created a checkered development and decelerates progress of education and growth of human society and scientific progress. However, interference with education has remained a hallmark of autocratic authority and of dictatorships. Human history is replete with many such instances.

In Ancient China — Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BCE) made Confucianism the state ideology and embedded it in the education system. The imperial examination system based on Confucian texts led to intellectual stagnation. Other schools of thought like Legalism and Daoism were sidelined. It narrowed intellectual inquiry, contributing to long-term rigidity in governance and education.

In the Islamic Caliphates, (Umayyad and Abbasid) caliphs promoted religious education (madrasa system) while limiting Greek and philosophical texts, philosophy and science were purged, contributing to the decline of innovation.

In early Modern Europe, conflict between Protestant reformers and the Catholic Church led to a dual structure of education with competing ideological aims. This religious conflict intensified; schools became battlegrounds of ideology rather than centres of learning.

In Tsarist Russia Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855) imposed the doctrine of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" on education. Non-Russian languages and liberal thought were suppressed. Intellectual life was stifled; universities were heavily censored, creating fertile ground for revolutionary dissent.

In the 20th Century, the Nazi Germany, Hitler's regime, restructured education to reflect Nazi ideology—promoting Aryan supremacy and anti-Semitism. History and biology were distorted to fit racial theories; Jewish academics and students were expelled. Genuine scholarship

was replaced with propaganda and Germany's global intellectual leadership declined dramatically. In the Soviet Union, (1917–1991) Lenin and Stalin nationalised education, promoting Marxist-Leninist doctrine and purging "bourgeois" elements. Scientific thought was subordinated to ideology leading to the destruction of genetics research, critical thinking and academic freedom suffered. Elite institutions became tools of the state.

In recent times, in Maoist China (1949–1976), during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Mao Zedong encouraged students (Red Guards) to attack intellectuals and close schools. Universities were shut; education was de-professionalised. A whole generation lost access to formal education, with long-term impacts on scientific and economic development.

In the contemporary world, Taliban rule in Afghanistan, girls' education was banned; curriculum replaced with radical interpretations of Islam. Literacy plummeted; trained professionals fled or were silenced.

In Iran, (Post-1979 the Islamic Revolution) Ayatollah Khomeini's regime Islamised universities, purged secular faculty and revised curricula. Though technical education was preserved, humanities and social sciences were stifled. Brain drain accelerated; critical discourse and academic inquiry narrowed.

In the United States, the recent interference will polarise and adversely affect standards in quality and access. Consequences of interference will be intellectual stagnation, erosion of academic freedom, international isolation and brain drain. Donald Trump is the best illustration for Lord Action's words that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely", though there are many others like him even in India

Education thrives in environments of intellectual freedom, institutional autonomy, and cultural pluralism. Whenever rulers have attempted to dominate or manipulate education systems, the result has been the degeneration of educational quality, innovation and societal resilience. Though political motives may vary, the historical pattern is clear: sustained interference for ideological or authoritarian ends often leads to educational collapse or long-term damage that may take decades to reverse.

Education should be free and creative because it is both a human right and a foundational pillar of a just, prosperous society. When education is free, it removes socio-economic barriers, ensuring that every individual—regardless of background—has the opportunity to reach their potential. This not only promotes equality but also fuels innovation and economic growth by tapping into the

talents of a wider population. Creativity in education is equally essential. Rigid, standardised systems stifle critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are increasingly vital in the modern world. A creative educational environment encourages curiosity, exploration and the development of new ideas—skills that underpin progress in science, technology, arts, and civic life. Free and creative education nurtures informed citizens who are capable of participating meaningfully in democratic processes, resisting manipulation, and contributing to social cohesion. In contrast, commodified or ideologically constrained education leads to inequality, intellectual stagnation, and civic disengagement.

Unfortunately, India seems to be moving towards, a government controlled education, which will stifle not just growth and creativity but even employability.

The clamour for implementation of NEP 2020, seems to be directed at control than for ensuring quality in education. Though NEP specifically insists on two basic requirements from government one is increased funding to 6% of GDP (NEP para 26.2) and less governmental controls (NEP para 8.1) Yet the State governments are doing exactly the opposite and claiming to be implementing NEP. A tragedy of paradox which will ultimately diminish the quality of Indian education.

The belief amongst the political bosses and bureaucrats that since government is funding, they should have a greater say in controlling education, but the truth is that, government fund is tax payers money, for which the tax payers expect and anticipate a better quality education, which will enable their wards greater opportunities to improve their standard of living and the governmental interference is counter to all such expectations.

How crucial is government funding to enhance the quality of education? Modern China is a live illustration. China's transformation into a technological powerhouse is deeply intertwined with its educational reforms. China fostered innovation, scientific research, and technological education with generous State funding. China collaborated with a number of renowned world Universities and invited scores of foreign scholars to teach in China. The Chinese government has consistently prioritised education in its budget allocations. Substantial investments have been made in building infrastructure, developing curricula, and supporting research initiatives. Now China is reaping the harvest of its funding and encouragement to education as a 'technological giant' and a large-scale producer of technology based products.

(The writer is a Professor of Law & an education consultant)

Trumpism in education

people's edit

CURSIVE CURSES AND CAPSULE CONFUSION

CS KRISHNAMURTHY

Once went to a pharmacy with a prescription that looked like a snake doing ballet on paper. Bewildered, I handed it to the pharmacist, who glanced at it briefly and said, "Ah yes, this doctor always gives this medicine." He handed me the strip with such confidence that I almost felt he was the one who needed a degree in decoding rather than the doctor in prescribing. I later cross-verified it with the doctor who nonchalantly confirmed, "Yes, that's the one." For a moment I thought — should I trust the doctor or the pharmacist?

This curious conundrum is no laughing matter. Dr Shantagiri Mallappa, an Ayurvedic practitioner from Karnataka, thinks so too — and he's on a mission to fix it. In 2003, he launched the Karnataka State Doctors' Handwriting Improvement Association to clean up the script of the medical fraternity — one uppercase letter at a time.

He claims, and rightly so, that illegible prescriptions aren't just a running joke; they're a serious health hazard. Imagine confusing Arkamine with Artamine. One manages blood pressure, the other battles allergies — a small slip could lead to serious side effects.

Dr Mallappa has been tirelessly conducting camps to improve doctors' handwriting and insists on using uppercase letters in prescriptions, even citing a gazette notification mandating it. Alas, this law is largely ignored — probably because it doesn't come with a fine or a fail grade.

And yet, there are converts. Bengaluru-based endocrinologist Dr K M Prasanna Kumar decided to go digital years ago after a case worker politely pointed out his "calligraphy" was unreadable. "I installed a computer and printer in my clinic and started printing prescriptions," he says. "Not only does it eliminate confusion, it helps in medico-legal cases too." That's some healthy advice — literally!

Historically, doctors have never been praised for their penmanship. In fact, bad handwriting is often synonymous with a medical degree. During my school days, my teachers would raise an eyebrow (and a ruler) if my writing slipped into 'doctor mode.' But now I wonder — perhaps our medical professionals have just been misunderstood. They're seeing patients at breakneck speed, often writing in between sips of tea and rings of the mobile phone. Can we expect calligraphy under such pressure?

But here's the irony — the same doctors who scribble like spiders on a roller coaster can sign off medical certificates with impeccable clarity and wield surgical instruments with rock-steady precision. Selective skill?

One cheeky pharmacist once confided to me, "If a prescription is too neat, I get suspicious." He added with a wink, "Doctors are the only people who write for others, but expect only 'we' to understand it." It's true. The average person cannot decipher a prescription. Unlike regular writing where context helps, a single wrongly interpreted letter in a prescription can send you from cough syrup to cardiac pills.

This situation has become so endemic that some countries, like the United States, fine doctors for illegible prescriptions. In 2010, a study found 37 errors per 100 paper prescriptions in New York alone. India doesn't have such data — perhaps because we don't know what was written in the first place!

Technology, though, is offering hope. E-prescriptions, where the prescription is printed or directly sent to the pharmacy, are slowly catching up. It's already mandated in some urban hospitals. This not only saves time and reduces error but also helps maintain digital records for medico-legal and chronic case tracking.

And do women doctors — with their supposedly better handwriting — fare better?

At the heart of it all, is the patient. The one who neither knows what has been written, nor dares to question it. When a line of ink holds the key to your health, clarity should not be optional. It should be a prescription in itself.

Until then, as a patient, my humble prayer is: Dear Doctor, spare the squiggles. Type it out or write in uppercase. My life may depend on your 'L' not looking like a 'Z'.

And to Dr. Mallappa, kudos! You may not be curing cancer, but you're definitely curing confusion.

