



Gita is a must-read at this US University



Straight from the horse's mouth



A journey into the heart of Man U



It's not so EC to fix the poll

MORAL COP DECONSTRUCTED

The stereotypical notion of a moral policeman is that of an illiterate thug who goes about vandalising art shows. But when you look for the human being behind the cliched image, what emerges is a more complex persona. Here we meet two moral cops, from different generations, and different cities, who allow us a glimpse into their lives and obsessions



Shivaji Vatar bears no resemblance to a policeman of any kind, moral, immoral or amoral. The 63-year-old activist of the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS) looks too frail to be an enforcer. Yet his track record as a moral cop out on a mission to save 'Hindu culture' is forbiddingly impressive. In all probability, it was his 'moral criticism' that inspired an Indian painter called MF Husain to flee his homeland and seek cultural nourishment in Dubai. For Vatar had launched a relentless drive against Husain and his 'anti-Hindu', works. He scuttled the auction of a Husain painting because it depicted Parvati in a 'compromising position' with Nandi. He bullied the mighty ABN-AMRO Bank into scrapping an entire range of credit cards that happened to feature Husain's works. And more recently, in January this year, he forced artist Nadita Das to remove her paintings from Jehangir Art Gallery because they showed Hindu deities without any clothes on.

Cut to Bangalore. Vasant Kumar Bhavani is the head of the Bangalore unit of the Sri Ram Sene, the Hindu activist group that has been in the news for seeking to rescue 'Indian culture' from the dirty habit of visiting pubs. At 32, Bhavani represents GenNext of the moral policing brigade. A commerce graduate, he wanted to become an air force pilot. But today, he is flying high in Hindutva politics and culture policing. Bhavani's grandfather, TM Munusomaya, was a freedom fighter and a Gandhian. One wonders what the Gandhian might have had to say about a grandson who adopts distinctly anti-Gandhian means to protect his country's 'Hindu culture'.

Vatar and Bhavani belong to two different generations of moral police. They do not fit into the media stereotype of moral policemen as goons who indulge in mindless vandalism. Both are well-educated. Vatar is a mechanical engineer

from Pune's College of Engineering, while Bhavani is a commerce graduate. But does education have anything at all to do with it? "I don't believe education can guarantee absence of fundamentalism. No matter how highly educated one may be, if your social conditioning — in your family, peers or in political circles — encourages you to turn violent, education is hardly a respite," says Nandini Sardesai, sociologist and member of the Censor Board.

In the case of Vatar, he was born into a farmer's family in a small hamlet called Upale in the Osmanabad district of Maharashtra. "I was brought up in a middle class family where religion was restricted to puja and arati only," he says. There was nothing in his upbringing to indicate that one day he will turn into a violent agitator striving to uphold the 'Hindu' faith. After college, he settled into a nice career. He worked

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with Talco Industries, and later with Mazgaon Docks. He retired as deputy general manager from the Shipping Corporation of India three years ago.

For much of his youth and adult life, Vatar wasn't unduly anxious about leading a suitably 'Hindu' life. "The change happened when I met Sanatan Sanstha's Jayant Athavale in 1989. He convinced me to pray for a few minutes every morning," he recalls. Even at this stage, Vatar's devotion to the Hindu faith remained distinctly spiritual for many years. Then, in 2002, Vatar came into contact with the HJS. With retirement on the horizon, the vacuum created by the absence of a full-time job could not be filled by gentle Hindu spirituality alone. He needed something more substantive to find an

outlet for his energies, to lend a purpose to his daily life. He found such an outlet and a purpose as a HJS member. The same year that he retired, he launched his agitation targeting Husain.

Today, Vatar conducts camps where he explains to youngsters, most of whom he believes are 'misled', how to respect 'Hindu culture'. To Vatar's credit, however, his moral policing begins at home: he does not allow his 11-year-old grandson to celebrate his birthday by cutting a cake. Instead, the occasion has to be commemorated through puja and the solemn application of tilak on the kid's forehead.

In the case of Bhavani, entry into the realm of moral policing happened through college politics. While his father was in the real estate business, he himself was an automobile spare parts dealer. During Ganesh Puja celebrations in 2007, the immersion procession being undertaken by Jai Bhavanio Sanga, an organisation of which Bhavani had been a member in his college years, was disrupted by some miscreants from another community. As tension mounted, Sri Ram Sene's Pramod Muthalik jumped into the fray, raising the temperature higher. In the course of defusing the crisis, Bhavani met Muthalik, and eventually ended up as his main man in Bangalore. Today, Bhavani has handed over his business to a friend, and is a full-time political activist and moral cop. "My role models are Bhagat Singh, Subash Chandra Bose and Chandra Shekar Azad," he says.

As for Vatar, he insists that he does not believe in vandalism. "But if people don't listen to us, then we have to act."

—G Sampath with inputs from Kiran Tare and Kareena Gianani in Mumbai and Vasu Devan in Bangalore

A trend that cuts across communities

The Sri Ram Sene's attack on pubs in Mangalore is only the latest instance of what seems to have become a growing trend of moral policing and cultural intolerance cutting across communities. Other such incidents include:

- Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen was forced to leave India after radical Muslim clerics in Kolkata, where she lived, issued a 'death warrant' against her because of her "repeated criticisms" of Islam in her books and speeches.
- Christian groups such as the Catholic Secular Forum wanted the film *The Da Vinci Code* (based on Dan Brown's novel) to be banned in India on the grounds that it "spread falsehoods about the life of Jesus Christ" and hurt the sentiments of Christians.

HOW TO

Make your date fun

Been there and done it all? With Valentine's Day coming up, you might want to do something different this year. Here are some ideas on how to plan a fun date — without going through too much trouble to organise it.

Know your partner

You need to delve deep and figure out what it is that makes you and your partner tick. Ask yourself what is unique about your relationship. This will help you get a fix on where you could take your partner for a 'fun' date.

Limitless possibilities

The venue for your date doesn't have to be elaborate to be special. Just because something is expensive doesn't mean it is romantic. You could plan a great date at home, regardless of where you live.



Planning spontaneity

It helps to have a plan. But what makes it more fun is if you let spontaneity take over your plan. Some of the best ideas are those you think of on the spot.

Theme up

If you've already done all the usual stuff, try something different. Plan a date with a theme to add novelty. Arrange the food and décor according to the theme. You can even rummage through your wardrobe to pick an outfit to match.

Surprise your partner

Even if you've been in the relationship for a while, make an effort to find out more about your partner; do something spontaneous or give your partner something that will surprise him/her.

Uniquely you

Realise that your relationship is unique and different. You and your partner should celebrate the differences as much as your similarities.

Go over the plan again

Just before you head out for your date, double check to make sure everything is set. Then, just go with the flow.

DO-GOODERS Twitter fans around the country will meet for an entire day of discussions and fun. But it's for a cause: Proceeds will go to charity. **NT Balanarayan's** in the know



A group of Indian Tweeters meet for water conservation

How tweet: Social networking in aid of water conservation

On 12 February, more than 175 cities around the world will host a festival for members of the micro-blogging site Twitter.com. Christened 'Twestival', it is slated to be an evening of fun, games and discussions that will also raise money for a cause: water conservation.

In India, while Mumbai is still getting its act together — as of now it has a website, <http://mumbai.twestival.com> — it is Bangalore that has taken the lead in organising a twestival. A small group of twitter users is trying to bring netizens together for the Bangalore edition of the twestival.

Offline meet-ups of twitter

users (or twitterati) are common and are generally called 'tweet-ups.' But a twestival is different — it takes team effort to make one happen. Funds generated by the event will go to an international NGO called Charity:Water.

The man who initiated it in Bangalore, Chaitanya K, a graphic designer, came across news of the event "just 10 days back" and decided to hold one in his city. "When I registered for the event, I didn't know I was the first person to do so from Bangalore. I came to be in charge of the city event by default," he said. Soon, he was joined by his colleagues and another twitterati, Hrish Thota, who agreed to help out.

Mumbai users can log on to mumbai.twestival.com or sign in to twitter.com and send a message to [@asfaq](https://twitter.com/asfaq) for details about the meet on Feb 12

In other countries, one is required to pay a token amount to participate in the event. But in Bangalore, considering that time is short, the organisers are employing innovative methods to bring in the funds. They have, for instance, developed a flash game

with in-game ad support. "The flash game, chi-chi, will keep the revenue flowing even after the event concludes. The game will live as long as such events do," he said. The team has other sources of revenue in mind too. "We plan to sell raffle tickets and are also looking for sponsors," said Hrish. "We're looking at holding a Nintendo Wii gaming tournament and also selling customised artefacts," Chaitanya said.

The Bangalore event is one of the few twestivals happening in the country, the other venues being Delhi, Pune, Hyderabad, Nizamabad, and if it works out, Mumbai as well.

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How did the twestival start?

In September 2008, Twitterati based in London decided to meet offline for introductions, some entertainment and a few drinks, and while at it, raise funds with a food drive for a local homeless charity. Planned in less than two weeks, the event was attended by close to 300 people. Similar events were held in Toronto, Vancouver and other places around the globe. Twitter was seen as a great way to bring people together for social causes. Acknowledging its popularity, organisers in London decided to host one every quarter.