

ICFAI Foundation for Higher Education

(Deemed-to-be University under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956)

IFHE Campus, Donthanapally, Shankarpalli Road,
Hyderabad 501203, Telangana, India.

Editorial Team

Dr. S. Vijaya Lakshmi
Ms. Indu Perepu
Dr. Kalaa Chenji
Dr. V. Padmavathi
Dr. P.L. Jayanthi Reddy
Dr. Kotari Sridevi
Ar. Asha Devadas

e-News Letter Layout & Design

Mr. P S R A S V Prasad (CRC-Dept)

C0ordinator

Mr. Muralidharan Pasula

CONTENTS

Editorial (When Caregivers Become Pa-tients: The Hidden Cost of Cancer)	1
Prof. Rose Conferred Distinguished	
Impact Award by Academy of Manage-ment	2
Guest Lecture on "Intentional Inclusion: Empowering Women to Belong and Lead"	3
Guest Lecture on "Balancing Be-Yond Boundaries: Women, Work and Life in Today's Corporate World"	3
Prof. Pooja Choudary Makes Significant Contributions to Research, Academic Engagement and Knowledge Creation	4
IFHE Consolidates Institutional Research Priorities Across Diverse Academic Disciplines	4
Women and Insurance: Bridging the Gender Gap in Financial Protection	5
Awareness Program on "Beyond Appearance: Building Body Confidence and Positive Self-Image"	6
Guest Lecture: She Chose Her Path: A Journey of Challenges and Change	7
THE LAST DÉJÀ VU (Story Writer: Pavithra T.V. (26BSPHH01C1500))	7

When Caregivers Become Patients: The Hidden Cost of Cancer

The facts surrounding cancer among Indian women are deeply alarming. According to the National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, one woman dies of cervical cancer every seven minutes. India accounts for nearly one-fifth of the global burden of cervical cancer and records the highest number of cervical cancer deaths in the world. The picture is equally concerning for breast cancer: for every two women diagnosed with breast cancer in India, only one survives. India ranks second in Asia and third globally in terms of cancer incidence, making cancer one of the country's most pressing public health challenges.

A research paper presented in 2022 highlighted an interesting trend. While cancer affects women in India at higher rates than men, more women than men survive the disease. This makes India an outlier, as globally men account for more than half of all diagnosed cancer cases, and the lifetime risk of developing cancer is considered nearly equal for both sexes.

The study also revealed significant differences between urban and rural India. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in urban areas, whereas cervical cancer remains the leading cancer among women in rural regions.

Over the years, Indian women have become increasingly vulnerable to cancer due to changing lifestyles. Factors such as delayed pregnancies, unhealthy dietary habits, physical inactivity, obesity, and sedentary lifestyles have contributed to the rising incidence of cancer. At the same time, higher survival rates among women have been attributed to earlier diagnosis, greater awareness, and improved healthcare facilities. Lower consumption of alcohol and tobacco among Indian women has also helped reduce the prevalence of certain cancers. Public health campaigns focusing on women's health have encouraged regular screening and early diagnosis, significantly improving treatment outcomes. As one cancer specialist observed, women are more likely to visit hospitals for reproductive healthcare, providing opportunities for early detection, whereas many men rarely seek medical care until symptoms become severe.

Recognising the growing burden of cancer, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched a large-scale screening programme for three major

cancers. The initiative identified breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers as the leading cancers affecting women in India. Effective cancer control requires sustained efforts in public awareness, prevention, early detection, and timely treatment. Both breast and cervical cancers can be successfully treated when diagnosed at an early stage.

Unfortunately, in India, breast cancer is often detected only at Stage III or Stage IV, leading to significantly higher mortality than in many developed countries. Globally, around 90% of women diagnosed with breast cancer survive for more than five years, whereas in India only about 50% achieve the same outcome. Similar trends are seen in cervical cancer despite the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine having been available in the country for more than two decades.

Beyond the statistics lies the human reality of cancer among Indian women. In most Indian households, women are the primary caregivers. They manage the home, cook, raise children, and care for elderly family members, often placing the needs of others before their own. As a result, many women neglect their health and postpone seeking medical attention even when they experience warning signs.

For many women, a cancer diagnosis brings not only physical suffering but also emotional and social hardship. Instead of receiving support, some are made to feel like a burden on their families. One cancer survivor recalled that when she was diagnosed and prepared to begin treatment, her family's primary concern was not her health but who would take over the household chores. Members of her extended family repeatedly asked how soon she would be able to resume cooking and managing domestic responsibilities. A palliative care counsellor reported witnessing women returning to household work immediately after chemotherapy because they had no alternative.

Financial hardship further compounds the problem. Many women discontinue or avoid treatment because they fear becoming an economic burden on their families. In some heartbreaking cases, women have been abandoned during treatment due to the high cost of medical care. A single mother shared that when she required hospital treatment, her brothers and relatives refused to accompany or assist her. A senior oncologist recounted seeing husbands abandon their wives during cancer treatment. She described one particularly disturbing case in which a wealthy husband refused to pay for his wife's treatment despite her breast cancer being diagnosed at an early and highly treatable stage. In contrast, women often stand firmly beside their husbands throughout illness and treatment. Such incidents reveal the persistent gender inequalities that continue to shape healthcare decisions in India.

Lack of awareness further worsens the situation. Many women remain unfamiliar with breast self-examination, and even those who are aware often

delay seeking medical advice because of fear, stigma, or denial. In rural areas, many women first turn to alternative therapies before consulting qualified medical professionals, resulting in precious time being lost. Even after diagnosis, some women refuse treatment because they believe the financial burden on the family is too great. These delays contribute significantly to India's high cancer mortality rates.

Cancer among women in India is not merely a medical issue—it is a social, economic, and gender issue. Improving survival rates requires more than better hospitals and advanced medicines. It demands greater awareness, affordable and accessible healthcare, routine screening programmes, widespread vaccination against HPV, and the removal of stigma surrounding cancer. Most importantly, society must recognise that a woman's health is not secondary to her responsibilities at home. Every woman deserves timely healthcare, dignity, compassion, and unwavering family support. Only when these changes take place can India truly reduce the burden of cancer among its women and ensure that fewer lives are lost to a disease that is often preventable and treatable when detected early. ♦

Prof. Rose Conferred Distinguished Impact Award by Academy of Management

Hyderabad, August 2026: Prof. Rose has been conferred the **Distinguished Impact Award** by the **Academy of Management (AOM) Community Accelerator Program** at the recently concluded **AOM Annual Meeting**.



The prestigious recognition acknowledges Prof. Rose's outstanding leadership, dedicated service, and significant contributions toward advancing the mission of the Community Accelerator Program. The award highlights her continued commitment to fostering academic excellence, collaboration, and meaningful impact within the management education community.

Congratulating Prof. Rose on this notable achievement, the leadership of **ICFAI Foundation for Higher Education (IFHE), Hyderabad**, expressed that the recognition is a proud moment for the entire institution. Her accomplishment reflects the high standards of scholarship, leadership, and service that she brings to the academic community.

The Distinguished Impact Award further underscores Prof. Rose's valuable contributions to the field and her commitment to creating a positive and lasting impact through academic and professional engagement. Her achievement serves as an inspiration to the faculty, researchers, and students of IFHE. ♦

Guest Lecture on "Intentional Inclusion: Empowering Women to Belong and Lead"

Hyderabad | March 7, 2026: The Centre for Women Development (CWD) and Club Aaina organized a thought-provoking guest lecture on **"Intentional Inclusion: Empowering Women to Belong and Lead."** The session focused on the importance of fostering inclusive environments that empower women to participate meaningfully, develop confidence, and take on leadership roles.



The lecture emphasized that intentional inclusion goes beyond representation and requires creating spaces where individuals are valued and respected irrespective of their gender, background, or identity. The speaker highlighted **diversity as a key driver of innovation, collaboration, and organizational success**, while stressing the need to provide equal opportunities and address unconscious biases.

A key theme of the session was **inclusive leadership**. Participants were encouraged to become leaders who listen actively, appreciate diverse perspectives, support equitable opportunities, and create environments where every voice is heard and respected. Through insightful discussions and real-world examples, the session encouraged students to challenge stereotypes, advocate for gender equity, and contribute to building more inclusive workplaces and communities.

The interactive session also provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on their own roles in promot-

ing diversity, equality, and inclusion. The lecture concluded with an engaging interaction between the speaker and the participants, leaving the audience with valuable insights into how intentional actions can create meaningful change in both personal and professional spaces. ♦

GUEST LECTURE ON "BALANCING BEYOND BOUNDARIES: WOMEN, WORK AND LIFE IN TODAY'S CORPORATE WORLD"

Hyderabad | March 8, 2026: The Centre for Women Development (CWD), in collaboration with **Club Aaina and Club Convergence**, organized a guest lecture titled **"Balancing Beyond Boundaries: Women, Work and Life in Today's Corporate World"** on 08 March 2026. The session focused on the growing importance of maintaining a healthy balance between personal and professional responsibilities in today's dynamic corporate environment.



The lecture highlighted how work-life balance plays a crucial role in promoting personal well-being, career growth, sustained productivity, and professional fulfilment. The speaker shared valuable insights into navigating workplace challenges, managing multiple responsibilities, and building resilience amid evolving professional expectations.

Drawing from practical examples and personal experiences, the session encouraged participants to develop confidence, adaptability, and a positive mindset while pursuing their career aspirations. The discussion also emphasized the importance of creating inclusive workplaces where diversity is respected, equal opportunities are ensured, and every individual feels valued and empowered.

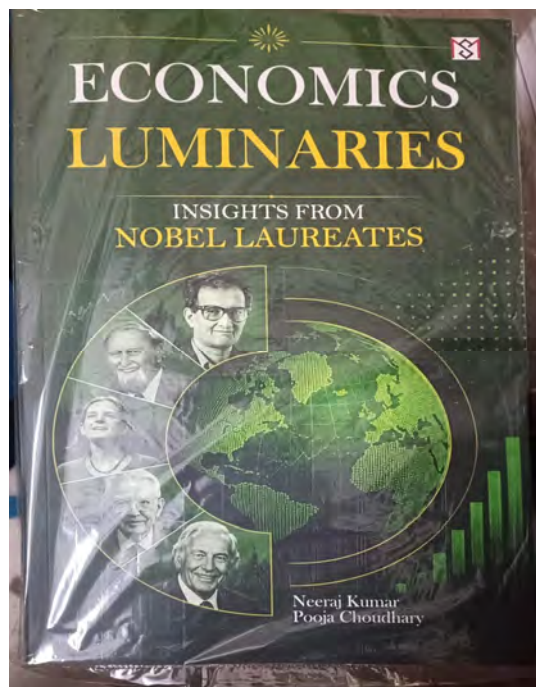
Special emphasis was placed on **women's empowerment and leadership**, encouraging participants to overcome barriers, embrace leadership opportunities, and make meaningful contributions to organizations and society. The session concluded with an engaging interactive discussion, inspiring students to strive for excellence while adopting a balanced, inclusive, and purpose-driven approach to their personal and professional lives. ♦

Prof. Pooja Choudary Makes Significant Contributions to Research, Academic Engagement and Knowledge Creation

Prof. Pooja Choudary has made several notable contributions to academic research, scholarly publishing, faculty development, and professional engagement during June and July 2026, further strengthening her academic profile and contribution to the field of economics and sustainability.



Prof. Pooja Choudary served as **Co-Chair of the 18th Doctoral Thesis Conference**, organized by the ICAFI School of Social Science in collaboration with IGIRD, Mumbai, held on 4–5 June 2026. Her role in the conference contributed to fostering scholarly discussions and supporting doctoral research and academic exchange.



She also co-authored the book *Economics Luminaries: Insights from Nobel Laureates*, published on 24 June 2026 by Malik and Sons Publishers and Distributors. The book, bearing ISBN 9392459173, reflects scholarly engagement with the contributions and ideas of distinguished Nobel Laureates in Economics.

Further strengthening her research portfolio, Prof. Choudary published the paper titled **“Does rail transportation matter for climate outcomes? Evidence from public transport systems in Asia”** in *Frontiers in Environmental Science* in April 2026. The journal is indexed in Scopus and ranked in the Q1 category, highlighting the international relevance and academic quality of the research.

As part of her continued commitment to professional learning and research capacity building, Prof. Choudary participated in a **7-Day Online Faculty Development Program on Advanced Research Methodologies**, organized by the Department of Entrepreneurship and Management, IIT Hyderabad, from 29 June to 5 July 2026. The programme provided an opportunity to enhance research skills and gain exposure to advanced methodological approaches.

Prof. Choudary also presented a research paper titled **“Assessing the Effect of Governance on Environmental Performance in the Presence of Sustainable Finance Mechanisms”** at the **National Seminar on Indian Knowledge Systems and Modern Innovations: Pathways to Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability**, organized by the Department of Earth Science, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya, held on 11–12 June 2026. Her presentation addressed the intersection of governance, sustainable finance, and environmental performance, contributing to contemporary discussions on climate resilience and sustainability.

These achievements reflect Prof. Pooja Choudary’s continued engagement with **research, academic collaboration, scholarly publication, professional development, and sustainability-oriented knowledge creation**, contributing meaningfully to the institution’s culture of academic excellence. ♦

IFHE Consolidates Institutional Research Priorities Across Diverse Academic Disciplines

Hyderabad, August 2026: The ICAFI Foundation for Higher Education (IFHE), a Deemed to be University, has consolidated its institutional research priorities across a wide range of academic disciplines, strengthening its focus on interdisciplinary research, faculty collaboration, sponsored projects, and doctoral supervision.

The consolidated Research Priorities Brief provides a structured overview of areas where faculty expertise, ongoing scholarship, and emerging industry and policy relevance converge. The document is intended to

guide faculty in aligning individual and collaborative research agendas, developing sponsored research proposals, supporting doctoral supervision, and identifying cross-disciplinary research partnerships.

Focus on Management and Economics

Under Management, IFHE has identified research priorities spanning Marketing, Finance, Operations & IT, and Human Resources. Key areas include consumer behaviour, digital marketing and Banking 4.0, sustainability and green marketing, corporate governance and ESG, financial stability, supply chain and logistics management, healthcare operations, Industry 4.0, leadership and organisational behaviour, employee well-being, digital transformation, and the future of work.

The Economics research agenda focuses on global, financial and development economics as well as environmental and energy economics. Priority areas include foreign exchange dynamics, international business and debt crises, financial economics, tourism economics, India's development issues, environmental pollution, energy efficiency, climate change and CO₂ emissions, and sustainable development.

Strengthening Engineering and Science Research

The Engineering & Sciences domain encompasses a broad spectrum of emerging and established research areas. Civil Engineering priorities include structural engineering, construction materials, geotechnical and transportation engineering, environmental engineering, and sustainable infrastructure. Mechanical Engineering focuses on robotics and AI, mechatronics, MEMS/NEMS, manufacturing, industrial engineering, automobile engineering, materials and design engineering, and the Industrial Internet of Things.

In Computer Science & Engineering, the priorities include Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Cyber Security, IoT, Blockchain, Cloud Computing, Data Analytics, and Software Engineering. Electronics & Communication Engineering covers VLSI design, embedded systems, signal processing, communication systems, wireless networks, IoT, and semiconductor technology.

Research priorities in the basic sciences include materials science, nanotechnology, quantum and computational physics, organic and analytical chemistry, environmental and polymer chemistry, applied mathematics, statistics, optimisation techniques, numerical methods, and mathematical modelling. English studies further contribute through technical and professional communication, English language teaching, literature studies, soft skills, and Natural Language Processing.

Emphasis on Humanities and Interdisciplinary Research

The Humanities domain complements the broader research ecosystem through areas such as Psychology, Sociology, Economics, Ethics, Human Values, and Management & Behavioural Studies.

The consolidated priorities are intended to serve as a living institutional reference, with periodic review and updating based on faculty inputs, accreditation requirements, and the evolving research mobilisation strategy. This approach reinforces IFHE's commitment to creating an environment where disciplinary expertise can intersect with emerging societal, industrial, technological, and policy challenges. ♦

Women and Insurance: Bridging the Gender Gap in Financial Protection

Women constitute nearly half of India's population and make significant contributions to household welfare, agriculture, informal employment, and the broader economy. Yet, their access to formal financial protection, particularly health, life, and pension insurance, continues to lag behind that of men. Addressing this gender gap is essential for strengthening financial inclusion, household resilience, women's economic independence, and inclusive national development.

Women face a distinct set of health risks that are often inadequately addressed through conventional insurance products. These include cervical, breast, ovarian and uterine cancers, maternity-related risks, PCOS, infertility treatment, osteoporosis, arthritis and other age-related conditions. Marginalized women may additionally face malnutrition, anaemia, deficiency disorders, HIV/AIDS, unsafe or early deliveries, recurrent pregnancies, urinary and vaginal infections, and maternal mortality. Reliance on family-floater policies or employer-sponsored group insurance can leave women, particularly homemakers and women outside formal employment, inadequately protected against these gender-specific health risks.

The need for independent life insurance protection is equally important. The economic and social consequences of the untimely death of a woman extend far beyond the loss of earned income. Women contribute through paid employment as well as unpaid domestic work, childcare, eldercare and household management.

The loss of a working woman can create significant financial pressures relating to EMIs, children's education and dependent care. Similarly, the loss of a homemaker can impose substantial replacement costs on a family because of the unpaid services she provides. Recognizing the economic value of such contributions, the Supreme Court of India has emphasized the importance of appropriately assessing the contribution of homemakers in legal and compensation matters.

The **Married Women's Property (MWP) Act** also provides an important mechanism through which married women can structure life insurance protection for the benefit of their families. Policies taken under the MWP framework can help safeguard policy proceeds and ensure that nominated beneficiaries, including children, receive the intended financial protection.

Retirement security presents another major concern. Women generally have longer life expectancies than men and may experience higher healthcare and morbidity-related costs in later life. Career interruptions arising from caregiving responsibilities, gender pay gaps, healthcare expenses, divorce or widowhood can further weaken women's retirement preparedness. Pension products, annuities and life insurance solutions can therefore play an important role in providing predictable retirement income, protecting women against longevity risk and reducing the possibility of financial hardship in old age.

Historically, the insurance sector also placed restrictions on the acceptance of proposals on female lives. Following the nationalization of life insurance business, women were broadly categorized into those with earned income, unearned income and no income. Although the insurance landscape has evolved considerably, women outside conventional formal employment, particularly homemakers, informal workers and marginalized women, continue to face barriers in obtaining adequate and independently owned insurance protection.

Health insurance illustrates the gender gap particularly clearly. Women are more likely to be insured as dependents under a spouse's or parent's policy rather than through individually owned policies. Such dependent coverage can become inadequate or disappear during periods of separation, divorce, widowhood or other major life transitions. Premium affordability, limited awareness of women-specific benefits, documentation requirements and uneven distribution networks further contribute to the problem.

Several **structural barriers to women's insurance access** remain significant. These include gaps in financial and insurance literacy, dependence on family-based coverage, income and documentation constraints, limited distribution networks in rural and semi-urban areas, and concerns regarding mis-selling and trust. Self-help groups (SHGs), Business Correspondents (BCs) and other community-based channels could play a greater role in taking appropriate insurance products to women who remain outside conventional distribution networks. India's relatively low insurance penetration also highlights the scale of the opportunity. Increasing women's independent access to insurance can simultaneously deepen financial inclusion, expand the insurance market and strengthen household protection against health, mortality and longevity risks.

There is therefore a strong case for developing **women-centric insurance solutions** that address the complete life cycle of women's financial protection needs. Such products could incorporate gender-specific critical illnesses, maternity-related coverage, preventive health screening, fertility-related treatments, long-term healthcare needs and retirement protection. Dedicated insurance and pension solutions can also help women

build financial independence and protect their families against unforeseen economic shocks.

The need is particularly urgent for two broad segments: **commercial insurance solutions tailored to the needs of economically active women, and social insurance mechanisms designed to reach marginalized and financially vulnerable women.** Strengthening both segments can help reduce gender-based financial vulnerability, support poverty alleviation and social justice, and accelerate India's progress towards more inclusive economic development.

The time has come to move from treating women primarily as dependents within insurance frameworks to recognizing them as independent economic participants with distinct health, life and retirement protection needs. ♦

Awareness Program on "Beyond Appearance: Building Body Confidence and Positive Self-Image"

Hyderabad | July 24, 2026: The Centre for Women Development (CWD) and Club Aaina, the official Social Awareness and Women Development Club of IBS Hyderabad, successfully organized an awareness program titled **"Beyond Appearance: Building Body Confidence and Positive Self-Image"** on 24 July 2026.



The session featured **Dr. K.S.M. Manikanth Babu, Director, Department of Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, Ikigai Hospitals**, and **Dr. Sumeera Farhath, Plastic, Aesthetic & Reconstructive Surgeon, Ikigai Hospitals**, who shared valuable insights into body confidence, self-acceptance, and the importance of developing a healthy and positive self-image in today's appearance-conscious society.

The speakers emphasized that true confidence comes from embracing one's individuality rather than conforming to unrealistic beauty standards. The discussion explored the psychological impact of body image concerns, the influence of social media, and societal expectations. Students were encouraged to focus on self-worth, mental well-being, and personal

growth while developing a positive relationship with their appearance and identity.

The experts also highlighted the importance of making informed and responsible decisions regarding aesthetic procedures, emphasizing that such choices should be guided by personal well-being and informed understanding rather than external pressure or the pursuit of societal validation.

The interactive session provided students with an opportunity to openly discuss their concerns and seek expert guidance on body image, confidence, and self-esteem. Through practical examples and engaging discussions, participants gained a deeper understanding of self-acceptance, respect for individual diversity, and the importance of promoting body positivity in both personal and professional spheres.

The program concluded with an engaging question-and-answer session, during which students actively interacted with the speakers and sought clarifications on various aspects of body confidence and self-image. The program successfully reinforced the commitment of **CWD and Club Aaina** to promoting mental well-being, self-confidence, inclusivity, and holistic personal development among students. ♦

Guest Lecture: She Chose Her Path: A Journey of Challenges and Change

Hyderabad | August 3, 2026: The Centre for Women Development (CWD) & Club Aaina, the official Social Awareness and Women Development Club of IBS Hyderabad, successfully organized a guest lecture titled “**She Chose Her Path: A Journey of Challenges and Change**” on 03 August 2026.



The session was delivered by **Ms. Anindita Mookerjee Sinha**, a distinguished **Communications Expert, Advocate, Thought Leader, and Mentor**, who shared her inspiring professional journey of overcoming challenges, embracing change, and building a meaningful and impactful career. Drawing from her personal experiences, she encouraged students to view obstacles not as limitations but as opportunities for growth and transformation.

Ms. Sinha emphasized the importance of **self-belief, adaptability, resilience, and perseverance** in achieving personal and professional success. She highlighted that every challenge presents an opportunity to make a choice, and that the choices individuals make ultimately shape their future. Students were encouraged to step beyond their comfort zones, embrace continuous learning, and pursue their aspirations with confidence despite societal and professional barriers.

A significant focus of the lecture was **women's empowerment and leadership**. Ms. Sinha spoke about the importance of challenging stereotypes, creating opportunities through determination, and driving positive change through effective communication and purposeful leadership. She also highlighted the vital role of **mentorship, networking, and lifelong learning** in building successful careers and making meaningful contributions to society.

The session concluded with an engaging **question-and-answer interaction**, during which students actively participated, shared their perspectives, and sought guidance on career development, leadership, and overcoming personal and professional challenges.

The guest lecture proved to be an enriching and inspiring experience for the participants, encouraging them to embrace change with confidence, cultivate resilience, and pursue their aspirations with purpose. The session further reinforced the commitment of **CWD & Club Aaina** to empowering individuals through awareness, leadership development, and meaningful social impact. ♦

THE LAST DÉJÀ VU

Story Writer: Pavithra T.V. (26BSPHH01C1500)

*|Some things and places feel uncannily familiar!
Some sayings haunt us till the very last breath! |*

|They say Deja vu survives only for a few seconds of time!

But mine survived long enough to kill me! |

“Pavi! Hurry up! You are always this late for everything. I don't know what you would do if you got married someday, if you are this late”, my mom shouted from my room's only entrance, making her sentence a monologue.

“Coming mom” ... I shouted back in exhaustion from selecting which earring to wear for the wedding.

That was my cousin's wedding.

Ours, was a nuclear family – mom, dad and my two monkeys...ah my siblings, elder sister, a brother and of course me- the middle child.

I completed my Post graduation from Delhi and came back with a job, posted to my own hometown...

Filled with laughter, little arguments, and the kind of chaos only that a family can create...this was our life; Simple and ordinary.

Until that one day...

A day that I can never dream of...!

That was the day it all began!

[Wedding Scene]

"There you go, we're here. You have been lecturing me since I've got on the car's steering. I've got us on time!" Time ticking: 12:00pm! (In my Analogue watch)

I said not observing my mom who already got out and was busy talking to the seemingly familiar faces...and I was a fool talking to myself in the car.

As I stood before the gates of a palace, a gush of instinct washed over me...

The entrance is covered with bright colours of flowers and terrifically beautiful...but there's something at the backend of my brain pushing me to think about the breeze, the towering gates, everything felt familiar. My heart whispered... 'You've been here before'...

For a moment, I could almost predict what lay inside. Before I could even answer my posterior brain.... there's a voice calling me out...

"Pavi! Come here! You need to see who's here!" mom's call again

"Coming mom!", "This place seems eerily familiar" (muttering to myself moving towards mom) ...

"Come see your sister(cousin) how beautiful she looks in this bridal outfit"

ME: "She looks gorgeous ma! ..."

Not more than me though (side eye and immediately bursting into laugh)! ...

Everyone: HA HA HA HA "(echoing laughter)

Then Again, my focus shifted towards the palace, and this time a little bit keener towards the person, who was looking at me with a familiar kind of expression. He was looking at me, as if he knew me well...

Me muttering to myself: "Do I know him? Even though, why is he looking at me like that?"my mom interrupts my thought process again...and we were walking towards the same person who was looking at me earlier. A little bit closer and yes, we could see him!

Mom: "Pavi! Meet Uncle Kal Nayak...he has been with us since childhood...do you remember him?"

He was my uncle from Mumbai. "Mama!" (Nickname for an uncle, that I used to call him). He was that type of person, that if laughter had a face, then it would've been his. He was always funny, cheering and was everyone's favourite....

Cut to current scenario: "Hi Mama! How are you? It's been long, since I met you...How is Mami? She didn't come?"

Mama (Uncle): "No, Pavi ma, she is sick. That is why she couldn't come"

Me: OH! I'll talk to her on the phone later...You too take care mama. Recently the weather has really been bad. Ok mama I'll go meet my other cousins. They are waiting for me since morning!" (a soft grin and I disappear into the crowd)

My cousins: "Hey Pavi! Come lets click a picture!"

"Ya coming!"and yet after a few clicks there seems to be a shift of my thought to my siblings. "Hey where are Nitu and Anni?" I ask to my cousins and they say they don't know

I have tried calling them, and my phone's battery is got down to 33%...My sister was the one to lift the call at the last ring, "Where are you guys? we are clicking pictures here!"

My sister: "Bro, we...a...rr...ee.....Park...ing....lo...tt..." I, not being able to hear even a single sentence properly.... said "Bro, I'm not able to hear you properly, tell me exactly where you are!" "Parking Lott!" screaming voice of hers as if network has some issues with me, connecting right after I have asked her."

I proceeded towards the parking lot excusing from there...It was a strange feeling as if someone was calling for me to capture me in an instant...

Nevertheless, I was there and saw my sister, parking my car as well...getting down she spoke:

"Bro this valet parking guy has some nerve. He parked our cars only, in a cross manner" I shuffled and told her to let go as this was the wedding time and wanted to keep the vibe and all. As we spoke about our other cousins who were forwarding towards us.... We met them and our little nieces who were 6-8 years old...and we were forwarding towards the main hall (3rd floor), from the parking stairs as suggested by my sister.

THE FIRST DEJA VU

...As we were approaching for the steps to reach the main hall via steps...Me with my sister walking alongside, my brother in the front leading us the way, mom and dad with the cousins, immersed in the conversation.... The people who came with me (around 6-7) started disappearing one after one. One minute in, then, I would look for the people who came with me and would say... "Where did my brother go?" and every time I thought,

My phone chimed as I looked at it (text message). Before I could even reply to that, I felt something has stopped beside me, the footsteps that had long

gone...and here I was in the corridor. Alone and still, trying to accept what was going on around me....

For a moment, my brain started thinking logically, "They might have went ahead of me, while I was into my mobile...."

But Panic took over Logic for the moment...

"Mom!?, Akka!?...Where are you?" I shouted as my voice echoed through the corridor.

I looked around, convinced enough that everyone had disappeared.

But....then, the voice

"Pavi! We're right here"

Mom was standing right beside me.

My sister stared at me with a puzzled look on her face. "Broo...Are you in this world? Why are you shouting like we are aliens who live far and can't hear...We are right beside you, the whole time."

I stood there, still trying to figure out what happened just now, dumbfounded.

Had I imagined it?

Or something happened that others haven't noticed...

Just before my sister snaps me out of it, there was a glimpse of my mama(uncle), standing there at the end of the corridor. He's smiling, I remember! That's when, I blink.

He was normal...talking to the relatives, everyone seems in the wedding mode.. So, I ignored it.

"Just a weird moment, nothing more" (I said to me assuring and assuming everything is fine)

"Already lost? The wedding hasn't even started yet" ...said my sister teasingly. Everyone around me burst into laughter.... I've also brushed it off and was laughing against the weird moment. Maybe I was just tired by the work the previous day.

Cut to the Main Hall scene_____

Children were running around us and having fun in their own way...We sat at a place having some quality time,(with my cousins), which lasted for a few minutes...and there comes a question from one of my cousins'...

"Hey, you don't put makeup, right? but how does your skin stay this healthy? You're glowing!... May be yours is the next wedding? Ahem?" (teasing me sarcastically)

"Shut up okay!(teasingly)... you're not going to see me blush anyways...because my sister is before me...just in case to remind you. Thanks for the complement though" ... (grinning and side eye towards them).

"Hmph...anyways I need to go reapply my makeup. Your sister is having my eyeliner; we'll go fetch it and head to the wash area. (cousin)

"Come on join us, Oh Beauty!" (sarcastically) [another cousin]

"The event is going to start soon!" one of the cousins insisted on going to the wash area near the staircase.

PART -2: THE STAIRCASE

We all. Headed towards the wash area, which was near the staircase...

And then suddenly while I was walking and was nearby to the place, I need to arrive at.

A person walked straight right to me and greeted me;

A face;

Which is Familiar,

Uncontrollably familiar,

He smiled,

"Hey! Remember me?"

I had to run my brain's memory for that.... but Nothing found its way back!

"I'm sorry...have we met before?" then instantly the smile on the opposite person's face faded.

"You will", the short phrase from him, which gave me a sudden chill, that ran down my spine....

"Paviii!" my cousin's call from across the corridor interrupted my thought process...

And I instinctively turned towards the voice, ignoring the person who seemed weird to me. And when I looked back,

The corridor was empty!

No one except me was standing there. I shook my head in disbelief thinking that I was overimagining again.

A ping! (From my cousin: "Bro we are at the 5th floor, the main floor's washroom is under maintenance...see you here")

"Enough now!" (I muttered to myself and started getting back to the floor again)

I used a staircase to get back to the floor she mentioned in the chat.

I started climbing towards the 5th floor....

One floor...

Then another,

And another, ...

The floor never came...

That exhausted me but also gave me a sense of something weird that is happening again around me...Regardless of what was happening, I was out of breath, and I stopped at a floor which was never ending at a point, to take a moment and at least observe what's around me.

Standing there taking heavy breaths...

My mama, who came behind me at the end of the corridor, and says smilingly,

"Beta! Lost your way?"

Before I could even answer him, there was a call from my sister form behind, calling me out.

"Hey Pavi, where have you been? Our cousin, Sapna is looking for us from 30min....The hall is this way" ...

But my eyes linger there at the end of the staircase which seems eerily empty and familiar.

"What are looking at?" she asks, "Nothing, just---"

I tell her...not so sure about whom I just saw.

Cut to the Wedding scene_____

Mom, dad and every other relative were very emotional at the time of the sacred knot tying memory, of the bride and groom, and I was too sharing their emotional moment.

And then we enjoyed some good dance to the beating music and were partying around as celebration took over...

I clearly remember my mama was taking pictures of us while we were happily dancing around hitting all the beats with our dance moves...and then our cousin and the groom joined, and we came down in a pattern, leaving the floor for them to dance.

Something at the backend was running in my mind....

When I saw my mama, the picture flashed from before..."I found something in his hand.... which was barely visible to me and there was something on the floor as well"...as my sister interrupted me to get me out of that loop, I only remember some parts of the memory.

THE CLIMAX OR THE BEGINNING?

The truth begins here....

Now, my brain isn't imagining things, it is remembering something from the past...

"But what's that?" ...that remains.

This time it was different and scary too...

My mom insisted me to get the gifts from upstairs;

To get there, the only way I've got, is the staircase....and I refused because something inside me screamed that "Not again you fool!"

I then had to get to the staircase again forcefully, as there was my sister clicking photos with my niece and my brother lost somewhere with his phone in the hall, I had no option though!

Yet again, I went to the staircase and reached the floor I wanted (My mind: "So, there wasn't a problem with the staircase, but why was I imagining things and that too...why was my mama there?"

There again I saw him (mama), even I knew something that was going wrong, I wanted to ask him about the thing, as I was seemingly seeing him only, in all of my delusions. The smile in his face slowly started fading.

Before I could approach him taking a step, His head was turning this side but the plot twist appearing here, is that his body wasn't in his place but turning backwards.

I was petrified enough, to speak any word or breath coming out of my mouth,

Thought of running was too late but possible enough to reach the staircase again.

As he was approaching me with a knife in his hand with blood stains on it, he spoke with a smirk lining up on his lips...

"OH! there you are!

So, you remember everything then?"

Then there was a gush of memories flashing me through the flashback which---

FLASHBACK

My mama was a goofy and smiling person around everyone! ...until one day I had to see him in his darker side.

When I was Eight, we had attended a same type of wedding from the past, which had brought closer to the memories of my mama who was a murderer in his darker side but never was visible to our naked eyes.

Until that day which brought me to the same floor and stopped my thoughts....

HE, MY MAMA, KILLED A PERSON (HIS RIVAL)

And I had to witness it from the end of the corridor, as an eight year old

Questions that rush over me...?

"Why is Mama holding a knife? why is that uncle lying on the floor? Is this a game?

Before I could process all of that, I sneezed and let the sound out, alerting my mama...

He could see me and stared at me; I could now only freeze rather than moving....

Before he could even approach me, I fainted.
That's how vaguely I remember anything.

He was puzzled now,
"Does she remember?"

Before he could do anything to me or to save me
without the knowledge of the family members having to
witness this scene...he had to be cautious (He finished
his business of taking away the body of the victim)

After a few hours,

I woke up at a hospital and wanted her mom (my
mom), she hugged me tightly that I could barely
breathe properly.

I tried to explain, "Mama....knife...blood.... un-
cle..."

But...The words weren't coming together.

The more I tried to remember my head hurt more.

All I could remember was climbing the staircase.

Everything after that...was just gone.

A gush of relief wave was sinking my mama's
heart...But deep down, did he want to kill me?

Or make me forget about everything?

Did I forget everything?

Or it was buried deep down there?

.....

CURRENT SCENARIO

Everything flashed in front of me, like a movie
sequel, and I was instantly in denial.

"NO... NO... THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE"

"MAMA? HE WOULD NEVER..."

THIS ISNT REAL!"

Then every fragment suddenly connects to the in-
cidents before...

"So, it wasn't Deja vu...I wasn't imagining...I was
remembering."

Something worse that I realize.... "He Knew I'd
seen him...All these years he knew!"

My body starts trembling.

Breathing becomes irregular.

My legs feel weak.

"The man who brought me chocolates, the man
who always supported me, the man whom I called Ma-
ma.....is a monster I'd been running from all along!"

Tears streamed right down my face...

He smiled!

Not lovingly,

Not warmly,

But an evil smile that crept up when I saw him...

"I wondered how long it could take!" (says Mama)

"My mind....it buried deep inside...but not going
to bury it anymore!" (me)

All I could do was run to the available staircase
door only to find a locked door behind me. I pulled the
handle desperately...

!Locked...!

"Mama!" my voice broke

He walks towards me slowly

No screaming, no rushing, just calm. That's scari-
er than I could ever imagine

"Do you think you can get away with this?"

"SOME MEMORIES ARE BURIED BECAUSE
THEY SHOULD STAY BURIED!"

!!!!STAB!!!!

I scream out of my
lungs...!!!!AHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

The knife pierced my chest!

Pain shot through every inch of my skin and
nerve of my body.

Everything faded in front of my eyes into dark-
ness...

.....

!!GASP!! (ME)

I sat upright in my bed, nothing, no wound, no
blood.

"So, it was just a dream?"

I laughed nervously, trying to calm my racing
heart.

"It felt so real."

Still shaken, I got out of my bed and walked to-
wards the kitchen for a glass of water to calm me
down.

Halfway there and, a sharp pain across my chest.

I frowned down and saw that slowly a crimson
colour of blood stained my shirt.

My hands trembled as I touched it.

"Blood, Real Blood!"

There it was underneath my shirt, a freshly
stabbed wound.

I stumbled backward and my eyes fell on the side
of my bed.

A knife lay on the floor with blood stains. And
beneath it an old wedding invitation

Venue: THE ROYAL PALACE Date: Tomor-
row! ♦