

# Opinion

*"The popular refrain heard is that sensational news, even at the cost of some people, sells."*

**Pulikal Bhaskar**

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## Just who is that mysterious Mr. X?

X is an interesting character in the alphabet. First, it is perfectly symmetric.

Secondly, it is capable of exiting various emotions all by itself. Who can forget the twinge of remorse when one finds it across the answer after grading in the term paper? Remember the jingle bells, Santa Claus, the smell of cakes, gifts and a surge of joy when you come across Xmas? Then that tightness in the chest, when you are asked to get an X-ray for some suspected ailment? Of course it is an eternal favorite not only of Spelling Bees but also those who pursue the queen of Sciences, I mean, Mathematics. How many hours one would have slogged to find the value of mystique x in the problems?

The reason I have chosen X is for the convenience it affords to generalize. It is always embarrassing to point out to persons explicitly and talk about them. So let me name this person Mr. or Ms. X. X is a famous person. He(or she) can be an actor, writer, politician, singer or even a priest. He is rich, has a mass adulation from the public, is a nice person and you just can't find anything wrong with him. I am sure this description of a perfect person invokes certain uneasiness in all. No blemishes at all? What about his past? He must have done something in his childhood? What do his close friends talk about him? Certainly, he must be having some enemies? For getting the truth, there's nothing like hearing directly from their voices. He can't be that perfect?

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Well, the fact as everybody knows is, nobody is perfect including X. But there is always some thrill associated in finding the imperfections of X. Switch on any popular channel on the TV, the lead story for the day is all about the other seamy side of X. Open any popular news paper or magazine, the cover story is about a million dollar suit filed against X.

This strange obsession seems to be confined to living people only. Posterity seems to be kinder somehow. We marvel at the wit and story telling abilities of Oscar Wilde and are not concerned with his sexual preferences. We are only frustrated that Agatha Christie has fooled us once again in her thriller and do not bother about the "disappearance act" she performed in her real life. We prefer the world of Jeeves, Bertie Wooster and the members of the Drone Club to the German broadcasts of P.G. Wodehouse during the war. One logical conclusion could be, people are thrilled to catch a person not only with his pants down but also to watch his reactions and embarrassment on the face that may no longer be possible with the dead people!

This is not to say that X is always innocent. In fact a few Xs may really be criminal. If proved they should be punished by law. But what is not right is the proportion of coverage given for Xs in general. Quite a few may turn

out to be innocent and posterity may take a lenient view anyway. That being the case events like these should not get such undue publicity. On the other hand, if Xs are guilty why should they be benefitted by this additional publicity? The popular refrain heard is that sensational news, even at the cost of some people, sells. People love such news. It is media blaming the public for the taste and in turn people blaming the media. It is a vicious cycle difficult to break.

There are many more things happening in the locality, country and the world worth knowing and demanding an in depth coverage. Why not concentrate efforts to present such events in an equally arresting and interesting way? It is quite a challenge which all creative people, which the media abundantly possesses, should welcome. Going by the present trend, it may not be long before (or has the stage already been reached?), before newspapers become gift-wrapped presents. People have to throw out the cover and dig into the insides for small print to read real news. People will start switching on their TVs just in time to catch the weather report, with the belief that what follows will be real news. In fact, I suspect, there is already a large population precisely adopting more of these techniques to avoid exposure to X-Bashing.

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