



February 2019

# EMPOWERING TIMES



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Jay

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It's all about being  
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Krupali Bidaye



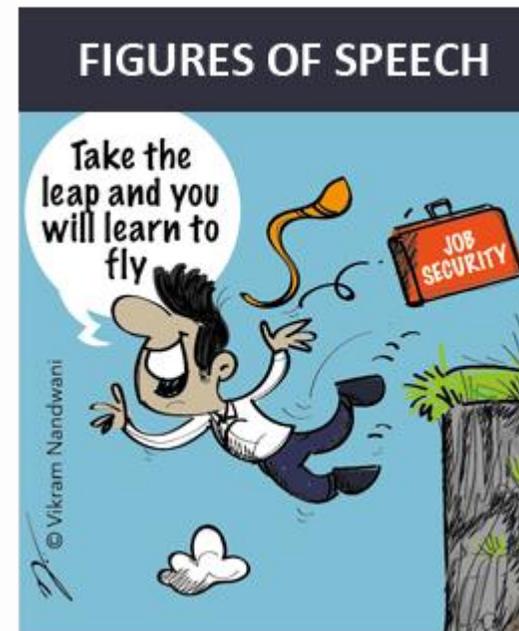
Dear Reader,

Former Technology Manager, Thejendra Sreenivas, is an Author & Life Skills Coach and is well on his way after launching his new eMagazine. Vasu Ramanujam bids adieu to his corporate life and has established his own media house, while Hemant Sharma is making remarkable progress in the educational and social sector. From their first innings in fulfilling the demands of their one-track corporate lives, what is common among the three personalities is the will power and drive to take on their second innings to fulfil a passion. The second innings phase has passion underpinning their new-found careers/ventures. We have highlighted only a few, but there are many others out there who are well on the path less trodden. ET this month features the theme, 'Second Innings'.

In the **Thinking Aloud** segment, **Jay** tips his hat to those who have chosen to be entrepreneurs of their new lives. In line with this month's theme, on the **Podium** we feature **Vasu Ramanujam, Thejendra Sreenivas** and **Hemant Sharma** who share their respective stories of why they embarked on a path less trodden on. In the **We Recommend** section, we reviewed **Flying High: My Story from AirAsia to QPR**, an autobiography of Tony Fernandes, a name synonymous with the low budget airline, AirAsia. **Krupali Bidaye** shares her thoughts on family life in the transgender context, in the **Voices** segment.

In **Figures of Speech**, **Vikram's** toon takes the plunge into his second innings!

As always, we value your opinion, so do let us know how you liked this issue. To read our previous issues, do visit the Resources section on the website or simply [Click Here](#). You can also follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [LinkedIn](#) - where you can join our community to continue the dialogue with us!



## THINKING ALOUD

### New Beginnings...

Jay

What is a fulfilled life? Philosophers have considered this question for years and yet no clear answers have emerged. For most of us, it means a 2.2 family: mother, father, two children, a house, a regular office job till 60 years, and then fade into the sunset, hopefully after a few years of retired life.

This model of work & family life has been put under severe strain in the recent years. The reasons are many - not just because of uncertainties at home & work. There are a number of persons who are now questioning the standard model of their life. And, concluding that they do have a choice to reconstruct their life in a manner where they are in control - and not be a victim of circumstances.

Call it a second innings or a choice made to reclaim their one life, either way these are individuals who have decided to craft a destiny of their making - rather than be living a notion that was pre-constructed to them by their parents or inherited by them due to prevailing circumstances.

I consider these individuals entrepreneurs, as I find appeal in Guy Kawasaki's definition that an 'Entrepreneur is not a job title. It is a state of mind of people who want to alter the future'. The trigger for this change may be different for each person. Be it facing a path that is not providing happiness or having reached a cul-de-sac in their life journey, they get creative in exploring new options when traditional approaches fail or are not worthwhile any longer.

What does it take to opt for the road less travelled? Is it desperation or courage? Extreme as both seem, what is

needed perhaps is a heady mix of both! Either way it calls for fortitude, for the choice made and the road ahead will certainly test your resolve. In the face of taunts of foolishness and recklessness, you need to be focused on your own idea of the future and sell the vision to oneself first. The dream of living a different paradigm from the conventional one has to be deeply internalized first and foremost. What starts off as madness in the eyes of others, later gets labelled as passion, often when success is achieved. But if you are on such a journey remember that it is a singular path of your own making. Consider yourself fortunate if others support you in your decision from day one. For, should you fail to achieve your new goal, there are Cassandras waiting to gloat in your distress.

Be that as it may, when your head hits the pillow at night - and you are in the twilight zone when you are neither asleep not fully awake - that is when the mind plays tricks on you and you ask yourself the question, what am I doing with my life? Granted that the answer may not always be absolutely clear to you. However, if you find yourself repenting another day lost in your life, then it is time to take charge of one's destiny and chalk a Version Two, as it were, of yourself. Not easy, I agree, but the question is do you want it badly enough? If you do, begin with a blue print of the success you envisage - and get started.

After working for years in high stress environments and in professions requiring them to be wired constantly, interestingly the choice of the second innings for some is a digital detox into a world far removed from their previous one. Nature beckons to them and they opt to go back into the lap of nature where personal fulfilment seems to emerge by living amongst physically challenging settings. For others, the new mission is to share what they have learned in their first innings with the many under-privileged or those deprived of the opportunities that came easy to the fortunate ones. Many more options exist - in fact, each individual can seek and create his or her own prototype, unrestrained by the typical boundaries of their previous life.

For the record, let it be clear that success is not a necessary condition or guaranteed in your new journey. Nevertheless, often those undertaking this step feel rejuvenated as the new actions are a break from the past and provide more meaning to themselves. No longer do they feel that they are going through daily monotonous motions in pre-programmed fashion, marking time till their batteries run out.

Not for them the conventional yardsticks of success or failure. What is labelled 'failure' by others is not so in their

eyes. Not giving themselves a new avenue for self-expression is the let-down of their lives - the process is more important than the end outcome. The day offers more meaning to them as they encounter fresh challenges that compel them to dig deep into their faculties and their sinews are tested regularly. They find new significance to their actions as their contribution begins to count and generate value in their own eyes. A new purpose beckons them - and they feel more alive!

Do all of us hear the voice in the head that chirps like a mysterious cricket in the darkness of the night? Am willing to wager it happens to all but most of us neglect it or push it aside or turn away and attempt to muffle the sound by forcing our head under the pillow! The vast majority of us will not heed it as we labor under the 'sunk-cost fallacy' that tell us that we are too invested in the present to be attracted by the siren songs of a world waiting to be explored. Surely, it is a personal choice and we need to respect those who stay with their life model that tells them that holding on to the present is better than chasing a chimera. So be it, but if you are one of those who are dissatisfied with the present, I would urge you to start-over or initiate something new and be an entrepreneur of your new life. The second innings could provide the fulfilment that you are seeking!

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## Podium

Vasu Ramanujam - Creative Director, Erango Media  
Thejendra Sreenivas - Author & Life Skills Coach  
Hemant Sharma - Advisor, Anode Governance Lab



*Vasu is the Creative Director at Erango Media LLP, a film production house and a publishing house. He holds a B. Tech and a Masters Diploma in Industrial Engineering from NITIE along with a National Talent Search scholar and a state-level gold medallist in Mathematics. He has worked with Alfa Laval, TigrSoft, CCTechSchool, Seacom, Entercoms and Erango in domains like Information Systems, eLearning, Film Making and Publishing. He is on the Advisory Board of Enterpriseforce, a Transportation optimization company. He is a Quiz Master and has designed and conducted "Musical Tambola".*

**ET: What could be the possible reasons as to why industry leaders and others are moving towards a different career path?**

**VR:** I have always wanted to write and to be known as a writer. However, I never had the courage before this to quit my career as a leader in the ITES fraternity and dedicate my time to writing alone. When my son Avi took up a creative vocation and started doing well, it gave me the fillip I needed to tip the scales. I decided it is time for me to pursue my lifelong ambition of being a writer. Strangely, as soon as I started writing seriously, I discovered other creative avenues almost immediately and am now involved in many creative pursuits (including writing) that make me feel energized at the end of each day. How I wish I had the courage to take this decision much earlier in my life!

**ET: Can you tell us more about your company, Erango Media? What are your future plans?**

**VR:** Erango Media started off as a film production house. We have made many films over the last 5 years, but I'd like to showcase two of them. "Lost & Found", starring Boman Irani among others, premiered at the Short Film Corner at the Cannes Festival 2014. "Coma Cafe", starring Satyadeep Misra, Mahesh Manjrekar and Aditi Vasudev among others, is a featurette which premiered at the Cannes Market in 2017, had two screenings in the Indo-German Film Week in Berlin in 2017, played at the South Asian International Film Festival in New York in 2017 (where it won us the "Audience Choice - Best Feature - Runner Up" award), and played at the Jaipur International Film Festival in 2019. Both these films were written and directed by Avi and produced, among others more experienced than us, by Lalita and me.

Currently Avi and I are writing two web series. One is a mythological thriller and the other is a series of shorts on how human beings react to extreme circumstances. Both will be taken up for production soon, in partnership with reputed production houses.

We recently added publishing to our bouquet of offerings. Our first book, "A Love Like Mine", an illustrated anthology of micro-poems on love by the reclusive, incognito, Instagram poet and philosopher Icarus (Instagram handle: @poetrybyicarus) is in pre-order stage and will be released in the first week of March 2019.

Releasing soon is The Quiver, a combination of the right environment and the right activities that can help couples fall in love. This is planned both as a physical box pack as well as an App on smartphones.

We also design logos, spaces, websites, social media campaigns, T shirts, phone covers, et al. In short, we will do anything in design.

Not sure what the future holds for us, but you can be sure that it will be full of innovative solutions from us for whatever the future throws at our customers (and us).

**ET: What is your suggestion to our readers who are on a quest to start off on an exciting entrepreneurial journey?**

**VR:** Identify one passion. Get started. Give your life to it. Be patient. Follow each turn of the road. Explore each fork in the road. Focus on quality. Do not worry about the money. Make common sense decisions involving everyone in the venture. Build a brand. Keep your customer happy. Be happy!

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*Thejendra Sreenivas is a Technology Manager with nearly 28+ years of experience in the IT industry handling a variety of technical roles and projects costing several bags of gold. He is also an Author Coach and conducts personalized coaching in self-publishing for aspiring authors. He has also written 20+ mild and wild books on several subjects. His inspiration for writing unique books comes from Toni Morrison who said, "If there is a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." In addition to writing books and coaching, he is also the Editor and Publisher of Self Improvement International a new eMagazine that covers and accepts articles on various useful topics.*

*Please visit his web cave - [www.thejendra.com](http://www.thejendra.com) for details of his books, coaching, and magazine information.*

**ET: Could you please share more about your professional life and what led to the decision to seek a different career?**

**TS:** I am basically an electronics engineer who graduated in 1988. After graduation, I started my career as a lecturer in a polytechnic college for a few months, and later got selected in HCL Computers as a Field Engineer to hardware support their computers in various public and private sector industries. Later, I moved to Blue Star Computers, which unfortunately closed. I got an offer from Dell Computers, Saudi Arabia with a two-year contract. After the completion of the contract, I came back to India and was waiting for a visa renewal, but that didn't happen as the business owner there had decided to wind up the dealership. Then, I got an offer from ANZ Bank in 1994 and had a fantastic marathon ride for about 24 years. In 2018, there was a major global reorganization and several departments, and our roles were made redundant. I opted to move out by taking a severance package that was being offered to employees. Over the years, I had also become a writer and self-published several books as a hobby (<http://thejendra.com/tejbooks.htm>). The changes in ANZ made me explore my hobby and make it into an income generating option as an Author Coach.

**ET: What are the challenges and concerns on taking on a different career path altogether?**

**TS:** Well, as with any major career moves, this was highly concerning for me and my family. But I was now

mentally prepared to give it a shot as I believe that one should seriously pursue their passion someday, at least, when they are somewhat mentally and financially prepared without jeopardizing their family needs. So, I started a small freelance author coaching concept from my home where I now help aspiring authors to self-publish their books and make it available globally on Amazon, Apple, Google, etc., in paperback and all electronic formats like Kindle, iPad, Kobo, etc. This coaching is quite recent, and I have had a bunch of people avail their initial workshops to start on their book writing journey. This is my coaching link - <http://thejendra.com/ARTICLES/Author-Workshop.htm>

**ET: Can you tell us about your role as an Author Coach and your new e-Magazine called Self Improvement International?**

**PK:** In my role as an Author Coach, I conduct two kinds of workshops - a Beginner and an Advanced workshop. The Beginner workshop gives the complete introduction to self-publishing, types of publishing, industry trends, overcoming initial fears, beginning your manuscript, writing tips, dos and don'ts, frequently asked questions, etc. The Advanced workshop is after you write your draft book and I guide you in the various stages of your book preparation, format your manuscript interiors for paperback and electronic formats, cover guidelines, uploading on Amazon and other sites. A course that will assist you till the published book is in your hands. In addition to coaching, I also started a monthly eMagazine called Self Improvement International. This was a sudden decision based on some magazine advertising emails that I received. I searched the web for how to start a magazine and found a site called Magzter that had a suitable revenue sharing model to publish a magazine. So, I started a small monthly magazine that covers useful topics like self-improvement, stress management, humour, frugality, leadership, resiliency, workplace issues, spirituality, life skills, satire, writing, publishing, etc. It is just three weeks old and I hope to grow it further by accepting submissions from other writers who wish to contribute. This is my

Magazine link: <http://thejendra.com/ARTICLES/SII-Magazine.htm>

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*Hemant Sharma currently, on his second innings, has chosen the education and social sector for building value. His contributions have been in capacity development of educational institutions, for both primary and higher education. Hemant's focus has been on improving organizational effectiveness of educational institutions through deployment of good management practices, systems and processes. In the social sector, Hemant's work has focussed on the governance system of panchayats and enhancing capacities of panchayats to deliver on citizen services, with special focus on education (government schools). Hemant has worked with Panchayats in Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.*

*Hemant's stint of 28 years across Indian and MNCs, included heading the HR function for the last 14 years at Danaher, Sun Microsystems India, PepsiCo, among others. He worked across varied sectors like automobile, healthcare, telecom, FMCG and IT, which has given him deep insights across industry/sectors. As a Business Partner to CEOs, Hemant honed his strategic skills which helped him to contribute at the organizational level rather than just HR. Hemant's experience as a management and HR Leader, enables him to contribute strategically, in strengthening education and governance practices.*

**ET: Why did you pursue a shift from a corporate role and take on a path less trodden on?**

**HS:** After almost three decades in the corporate sector and having headed the HR function for the last fourteen years of my corporate career, there was a desire to look for new challenges and learnings. I could have easily shifted to a consultant role within the corporate sector, but then I would have continued to play the same game. One of my friends gave a good analogy that I have been playing, for example, cricket and moving out of the corporate sector was like shifting from playing cricket to say tennis, with a different set of rules and skill sets to learn.

Also in the corporate world, the shelf life is limited today by age and increasingly I found that post the age of 50, the number of opportunities in the corporate sector are limited especially if you have hit the CXO level of responsibilities.

Having made the call to move out of the corporate world, I decided to learn a totally different skill and enrolled for the full time Masters course in Education at Azim Premji University (APU). This choice inadvertently took me to a totally different track than I had anticipated as APU's vision is to bring about a just and an equitable society. It exposed me to rural India through various field work and assignments. So, I picked up knowledge both on education as well as rural environments.

**ET: What has been the key learnings after moving out of the corporate world?**

**HS:** Well, humility to start with. When you move to a new sector, one is starting at the bottom of the heap and your position or status in your previous role has really not much value (specifically, if you move to the social sector or the education sector where others of your age have lots of experience in the field).

The big advantage of a 'second innings' is that one can pick and choose the type of assignments. One need not confine to one field or area. I currently work with educational institutions, covering early childhood education, primary and secondary schools and higher learning educational institutions, as well as in the social sector where I have been working to try develop the capacities of panchayats so that they can work to improve the government schools. I enjoy the freedom of multiple flavours of my assignments without being stuck in one organization or culture or sector, which is another big plus of a second innings.

**ET: With more professionals seeking a second career, what is your advice to those seeking a career path different from the corporate world?**

**HS:** Choosing a path outside the corporate world would require re-skilling. So firstly, one should identify a field or an area of study. This can be as wide ranging as the arts or the social sector or education. For example, at one stage I even explored doing a diploma course in baking from Europe. Secondly, one should be prepared to invest time and money in picking up knowledge and skills in the field which one has identified.

Management skills is actually a very generic skill set and can be applied almost in any field. That's the strength which we can all leverage on. For example, both in the social sector and in the education eco-system, I find that there is a large need of management skill sets. One can add value to institutions and organizations by bringing in management thought processes.

## We Recommend

### Flying High: My Story from AirAsia to QPR Tony Fernandes



*"You are only as good as your tomorrow."*

- Tony Fernandes

Hear Tony Fernandes, and the name brings to mind AirAsia, the low-cost airline based in Malaysia. Flying High is the autobiography of Anthony Fernandes (fondly known as Tony) and his inspiring story of how he made it this far in his entrepreneurial stints.

The book is interspersed with detailed events in Tony's life. In an easy to read tone, the autobiography speaks of his fun-filled, pampered childhood days. He admits that he wasn't as studious as much as his parents wanted him to be (especially his mum who was disappointed that he didn't want to grow up to embrace the medical profession).

He walks down memory lane and says that he owes much of his business success to his mum's entrepreneurial spirit and his dad's disciplined way of life. Despite the pampered childhood life that he lived, Tony brought up his own children differently. He admits to the fact that due to his busy work schedule, his marriage came to an end. The book echoes his love for music and sports.

After managing to turn AirAsia, a failing government-linked commercial airline, into a highly successful budget airline, he went on to start Tunes, a hotel chain, based on the no frills concept. His love for football led him to acquire a majority stake of Queens Park Rangers Football Club. In 2011, Tony announced that he had purchased Caterham Cars; Caterham Racing, also created by Fernandes, competes in the Grand Prix 2 Series.

Tony hates quitters, which is why he has constantly encouraged the people around him and his 20,000 Allstar employees to always dare to dream and make the dream into a reality through constant hard work and a 'never give up' attitude. Some events in his book show the emotional side to his personality (his daughter's Stephanie's graduation day left him all teary and, in another event, an employee of AirAsia who overcame all odds and became a first officer from a humble beginning of a cargo handler, are cases in point).

His humble personality leaves him unashamed of travelling in a train or of being spotted clicking selfies with the general public (he cites that this is also important to build his empire's image). He speaks of his ambitious goals of eventually starting a talk show after his stint with The Apprentice Asia. Tony has also been giving back to the society through his AirAsia Foundation and other social initiatives. Towards the end, he shares his key philosophies that are behind all his business ventures, continuing to convince readers that there is learning in everything in life (including chance meeting of people from different walks of life!).

Although the read is quite detailed, it is not overwhelming. One can sense the passion in all his entrepreneurial stints and his will power to push ahead. He continues to be grateful to all the people he has met in his journey and well, aims to keep flying high!

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## VOICES

It's all about being loved & accepted...

Krupali Bidaye



*Family is the primary institution of socialisation and is a space which impacts our life most strongly. But what happens when this space which is supposed to be one's source of strength turns hostile to a young mind? What happens when one feels misunderstood, judged, mistreated, hated, disgusted in this space, which should echo freedom of expression, choice, right to life, love, acceptance, inclusion and most importantly safety? The last issue narrated the story of a young Rishu, who was undergoing deep distress and emotional duress, due to not being able to understand why they (use of gender-neutral pronoun to refer to 'gender non-conforming' person) were different than others and being unaccepted by those around them. In this, crucial was the role of Rishu's parents and family, who thought that Rishu's choice of gender and sexuality were a 'mental' disorder. Almost all the young people who are gender diverse, undergo a similar trauma which begins with non-acceptance at home, which many a time pushes them out of the family to choose their own paths. In this issue, we explore, the significance of family in the lives of such young persons and how a humble initiative of 'Family Meets' (<https://youtu.be/3FLvz7PZI5U>) by a Mumbai based volunteers' group, Anam Prem, is breaking barriers and stereotypes to build bonds and make inroads for inclusion.*

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“After 17 years of leaving home to be on my own, I met my father at a traffic signal where he was in a rickshaw and I was clapping aloud asking for money from the commuters. Our eyes met, and while I had a spark in my eyes, his turned away to the other side, refusing to even acknowledge I was somebody who he nurtured from my birth for 15 years of my life. Yes, I looked different now, I wore a sari and applied make-up, exactly the way my

mother did. I am sure he remembered. But he looked away, the traffic light turned green, and his rickshaw passed by me, I remained standing there, while the cars around me kept honking. Those loud honks, the calling of the onlookers, in the middle of that busy road, made me realise that I was on the crossroads of life. That was the day, I came to a place I had begun calling 'home' and cried like hell, I sat up the entire night with glasses and glasses of beer", shares a tearful Gauri (name changed) a transgender woman (belonging to the *hijra* community).

'Family' has been the soft spot for many of my transgender friends. For some, stories of hurt and pain dominate, where parental non-acceptance had led to some wanting to end their lives. However, for a few whose families have stood by them, they share that they derived tremendous strength to sail through their struggles with the society and the 'outer world'.

Why is 'family' important for an individual?

Family is a space, where at a young age we create a world out of nothing. It is where a child begins to relate to the 'outer world' - to society, cultures, traditions, and creates a world view. It is a space which defines our relations with individuals and brings out meanings to those relations. But if this is so, then what makes a family or parents desert a child who is gender non-conforming? Can a mother really part from her baby just because the baby makes choices that are different and variant? Can we beat, hurt, kill, abuse, rape a young person just because their choices of gender and sexuality do not conform to social norms?

Why does this happen and how does this change?

There are many factors to this, one of them is our social conditioning, where we are taught only about two genders and their roles in the society. Anything divergent is mocked, criticised and censured, depending upon how much weight is assigned to it in terms of the family '*izzat*' or parameters of social status and dignity. So will the society accept a gender non-conforming child when their family accepts it or is it the other way around - once the society accepts the child, the family will accept it.

In resolving this dilemma, a Mumbai based group called Anam Prem stepped in to begin change with themselves. In an attempt towards 'mainstreaming' and inclusion, an experiment of 'Family Meets' were planned, where *hijra*

persons they met on traffic signals or who visited their homes for only occasions such as weddings or child births, were invited over high tea or a meal. The hosting family and the guests (*hijra* persons) spend personal time knowing each other beyond societal barriers of gender, class, caste, religion, and later shared their experiences to a larger audience. What culminated out of these meets were breaking of stereotypes, social taboos, stigma, patriarchy, and what was built upon was familial ties, long lasting friendships, making either side feel loved, accepted and dignified. These 'Family Meets' were revolutionary in the sense that they transformed social narratives of storytelling to young children who learnt to respect variant gender identities instead of calling them names such as '*chakka*', '*mamu*'; it gave a sense of belonging to transgender friends who participated and welcomed a change in their mindsets, attitudes and beliefs. What began in 2010 as a small experiment with 15 families, these 'Family Meets' now take place in various cities in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh.

While we are aspiring to bring a similar change of thoughts, attitudes, behaviours in the corporate world by encouraging diversity and inclusion, it may be crucial to consider bringing about this change 'from home to office' rather than the other way around. At the end of the day, home is a place from where we begin building our perspectives which mature with our other experiences of socialisation. Encouraging employees to participate in such informal and personal 'Family Meets' is a key to bringing about this change, sensitising the personal sphere of individuals before we move into their formal spaces of work. Anam Prem, as a part of its yearly initiative is encouraging corporates to participate in the 'Family Meets' experiment and personify the change they aspire to be.

As a part of Anam Prem's yearly inclusion initiative of Love and Dignity for transgender persons, a two-day event - The Third 'I' - Anandi Anand Gade - Joy for All, is being hosted in Mumbai on 19th-20th April 2019. The Trans and Hijra Empowerment Mela 2019, which has been the first of its kind platform in India, is encouraging empowerment through trans entrepreneurship and will take place on 20th April 2019 at Sanskruti Bhavan, Naravne Vidyalaya, Kandivali - West, Mumbai. Time: 3 pm onwards. Support the Mela through supporting Trans Entrepreneurship.

For details please write to us on [thethirdi.anamprem@gmail.com](mailto:thethirdi.anamprem@gmail.com)

## THROUGH THE LENS



Bird watcher and naturalist, **Rupesh Balsara** spots the Bullfinch, a bird that breeds across Europe and temperate Asia. It derives its name from the bird's front heavy, bull-headed appearance and mainly feeds on buds of certain fruit trees.

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