



## **DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITIES**

### **M.A. ENGLISH**

#### **SESSION- 2021-2022**

#### **The Impact of Social Media and Mental Health**

**Objective:** To access the impact of social media on mental health and develop a better understanding, mitigating harm, and promoting positive mental well-being in the digital age.

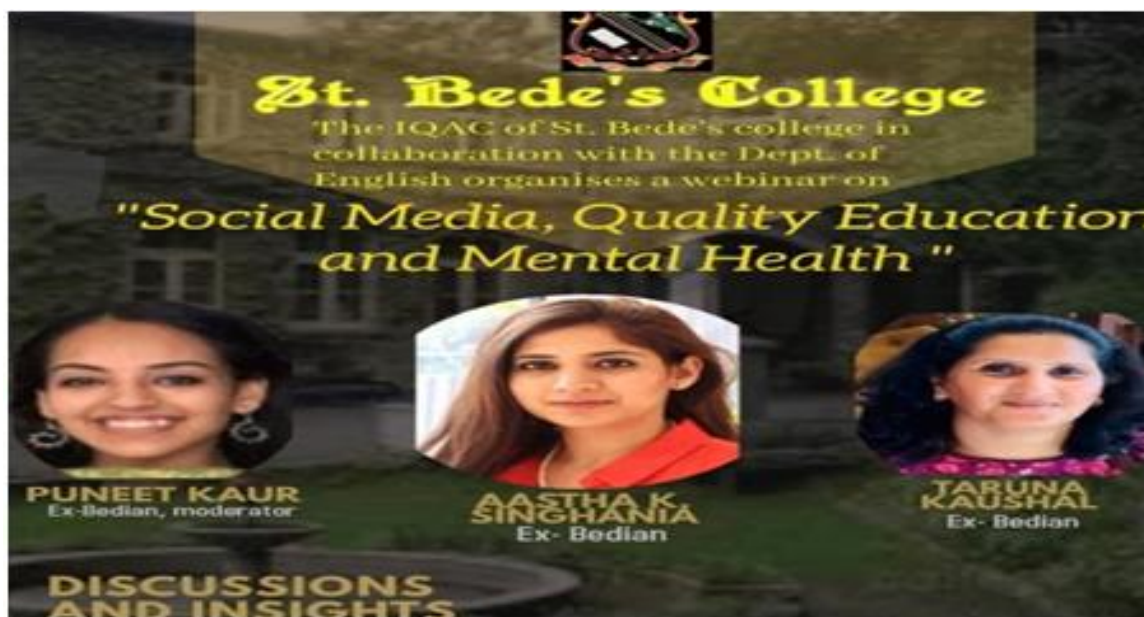
#### **Description**

A webinar was organised by the Department of English on July 15, 2021. Ms. Astha Singhania, Educator based in London, Ms. Taruna Kaushal, Counselor and Ms. Puneet Kaur, the event manager (who are also the alumni of the Department) were the experts for the session. The experts shared the online platform from three different countries and acquainted the participants with the impact of social media on mental health.

They discussed how one can mitigate the potential negative impacts of social media on mental health. They told the participants that it is important for individuals to practice digital wellness by setting boundaries, limiting screen time, and curating their online experiences. Social media platforms and society as a whole also have a role in addressing these issues through responsible design, moderation, and awareness campaigns. They also emphasised that understanding the balance between the benefits and drawbacks of social media and making informed choices about its use is key to maintaining good mental health in the digital age.

#### **Outcome:**

- **Comparison and Self-esteem:** The students got to know that social media often presents an idealized version of people's lives, which in turn leads to a feeling of inadequacy and low esteem in individuals.
- **Body Image and Eating Disorders:** They realised that social media creates unrealistic beauty standards promoting unhealthy body image ideals. This at times can contribute to the development of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction.
- **Social Isolation:** The participants were made aware of the fact that social media is also one of the main reasons for the feelings of loneliness and depression in today's time.



### **Webinar – The Great Healer: Literature in the Times of the Pandemic.**

**Objective:** To explore the possibility in which literature can serve as a historical record, and also discover how it captures the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of individuals during pandemic. How it can be useful in documentation of experiences through personal narratives, diaries, poetry, or fiction.

### **Description**

The Department of English organised a Webinar on Pandemic Literature on September 9, 2021. The resource persons were Prof. Praveen Kumar and Dr. Anupama Jaidev Karir. Prof. Praveen Kumar spoke on the topic “Crisis Creativity and Hope”. In his presentation Prof. Praveen Kumar discussed two texts “When the Breath Becomes Air” by Paul Kalanithi and “The Plague” by Albert Camus. He delved into how Pandemic literature voices solidarity and binds us with hope for a better future. Dr. Anupama Jaidev Karir spoke on the topic “Required Writing and other Imperatives: Pandemic and Poetry”. She spoke about the volumes of poetry written during the times of the pandemic and brought to perspective the myriad poets who could be read for a better insight into the collective consciousness of people in the times of the



*Department of English*  
*St. Bede's College, Shimla*

crisis. The webinar was streamed live on YouTube channel. The participants were the students and teachers of St. Bede's and other colleges of Himachal Pradesh.

**Outcome:**

- Legacy and Documentation: The students got to know that pandemic literature can serve as a historical record for future use.
- Cultural Expression: Students identified literature as a form of cultural expression, which allowed the people to express their perspectives, identities and gave voice to the voiceless in the face of adversity.



**Workshop on Creative Writing**

**Objective:** The workshop aimed at encouraging students to experiment with different writing styles, techniques, and voices to find their unique authorial voice.

**Description**

The Department of English and the Editorial Board of the college magazine 'Echoes' organised a Creative Writing Workshop in the seminar room on November 17, 2021. Dr. Usha Bande, a renowned writer, translator and critic, conducted the workshop and introduced the techniques of creative writing. Through personal anecdotes and other short stories, she shared tips on effective writing. Dr. Bande emphasised on the importance of becoming aware of one's





*Department of English*  
*St. Bede's College, Shimla*

surroundings and noting down ideas coming to the mind and analyse and think deeply about them. The session was interactive, and the students had an animated discussion with her.

**Outcome:**

- **Improve Writing Skills:** It made the participants aware of their writing abilities as they got to know about elements such as grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and sentence structure.
- **Explore Different Genres:** The participants were introduced to various genres of creative writing, such as fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and drama, to broaden their writing horizons.
- **Publication Opportunities:** The workshop offered information on how to get published which provided insights to participants on how to submit their work in literary magazines or to various publishers.



**BOOK TALK**

**Objective:** The book talk aimed at develop an appreciation for Aga Shahid Ali as a poet and also introduce the students to contemporary writers of Indian English Literature.



### **Description**

The Department of English in collaboration with the library committee organised a Book Talk in the college library on March 10, 2022. Mr. Manan Kapoor, an acclaimed author was invited to talk about his book “A Map of Longings: The Life and Works of Aga Shahid Ali”. The book is a biography of Agha Shahid Ali, offering a rich portrait of the poet and the world he inhabited. It talks about a young girl, Inayat, who finds solace in the company of Gul, a Kashmiri pandit and Aaqib in between the insurgency and exodus in Kashmir.

The students pursuing M.A English were told to read little excerpts from the book a week prior to the event, which were then discussed with Mr. Manan Kapoor. He was pleasantly surprised at the deep understanding of the girls about the exodus and the psychological impact of it on the people of Kashmir.

### **Outcome:**

- **Promote and Develop Cultural Understanding:** This book talk was an opportunity for our students to understand and appreciate, Kashmiri culture and literature.
- **Celebrate His Legacy:** The students got to understand how Aga Shahid Ali's legacy lives on through his poetry and the impact he has had on subsequent generations of poets and writers.
- **Emotional Impact:** Some students were moved by the book talk, some of them were able to connect on personal levels with the themes explored by Aga Shahid Ali and his work.
- **Academic Interest:** The book talk generated academic interest in Aga Shahid Ali's poetry and life. Scholars and students tried to explore his works in more detail leading to academic research, and discussions.



### **AFTERTHOUGHTS**

**Objective:** This activity aimed at developing a critical and analytical mind of students.

#### **Description**

The students of M.A English were asked to read the short story 'Rudali' by Mahashweta Devi for a group discussion. "Rudali" is a poignant short story which explores the lives of women from marginalized communities who are professional mourners, known as "rudalis," in rural India. The story delves into the themes of poverty, exploitation, and the struggles of these women. The students discussed the story from the points of view of gender inequality, social injustice, strength of women, critique of traditional practice and humanisation of the marginalized class.

#### **Outcome:**

- **Inspiration for Creative Work:** The emotional depth and social relevance of "Rudali" inspired the students to create their own works exploring similar themes or drawing from the story's emotional resonance.
- **Cultural Exploration:** The story provides insights into the cultural practices and traditions of rural India.
- **Discussion and Debate:** The story sparked discussions and debates in the classroom, about the story's themes, characters, and the broader issues it raises.



*Department of English*  
*St. Bede's College, Shimla*

- Critical Thinking: "Rudali" challenged the students to think critically about traditional practices, societal norms, and power structures. It also inspired them to question these elements in their own societies and cultures.

