

SOARING TEMPERATURE

In recent years, the world has witnessed an alarming rise in temperatures, with heatwaves becoming more frequent, intense, and widespread. The summer of 2025 has further reinforced this trend, as regions across Asia, Europe, and North America report record-breaking temperatures. From bustling metropolises to rural farmlands, no place seems immune to the heat. These soaring temperatures are not just uncomfortable—they are deadly, and they are reshaping ecosystems, economies, and lives.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the first five months of 2025 have been among the hottest ever recorded. Countries like India, and parts of the Middle East have experienced temperatures exceeding 50°C, while southern Europe and parts of the United States have been scorched with prolonged heatwaves. The average global temperature in May 2025 was 1.45°C above pre-industrial levels, nearing the critical 1.5°C threshold set under the Paris Climate Agreement.

Even colder regions are not spared. Canada's Northwest Territories recorded highs of 34°C, a temperature more typical of subtropical zones. Greenland's ice sheets are melting at an accelerated pace, and the Arctic Circle, once an icy haven, is warming nearly four times faster than the global average.

The most significant driver of soaring global temperatures is climate change, caused primarily by human activity. The relentless burning of fossil fuels—coal, oil, and gas—has pumped billions of tons of greenhouse gases (GHGs) like carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere. These gases trap heat, leading to the "greenhouse effect" and steadily warming the planet.

Deforestation, industrialization, and unsustainable agricultural practices further exacerbate the issue. Urbanization plays a role too: cities are known for the urban heat island effect, where concrete and asphalt retain heat, making urban areas significantly hotter than surrounding rural zones.

Soaring temperatures are not just a matter of discomfort—they pose serious health risks. Prolonged exposure to extreme heat can lead to heat exhaustion, heatstroke, dehydration, and aggravation of pre-existing conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. The elderly, children, outdoor workers, and people with limited access to cooling resources are most vulnerable.

The death toll from heatwaves has increased significantly. In India alone, over 1,200 people have reportedly died due to heat-related causes between April and June 2025. Hospitals are overwhelmed with patients suffering from dehydration and heatstroke. Public health infrastructure in many developing nations is under severe strain.

High temperatures have disastrous effects on agriculture. Crops like wheat, rice, and maize are sensitive to heat, and prolonged exposure can reduce yields dramatically. In South Asia, farmers are reporting withered crops and delayed planting seasons due to water shortages and erratic rainfall.

Livestock are also affected, with higher mortality rates and reduced productivity. This, in turn, pushes up food prices, affecting millions of low-income households and threatening food security.

The economic impact is wide-ranging. Heat-related productivity losses, higher energy demands for cooling, and damage to infrastructure from heat stress are costing countries billions. According to a 2024 UN report, climate-related heat stress could cost the global economy \$2.4 trillion annually by 2030 if no mitigation is undertaken.

The rise in temperature also wreaks havoc on the environment. Glacial melt, sea-level rise, wildfires, and loss of biodiversity are direct consequences. In the Amazon, Australia, and California, wildfires are becoming a year-round threat, driven by hot and dry conditions.

Marine ecosystems are struggling as ocean temperatures climb, leading to coral bleaching and declines in fish populations. Many species are being forced to migrate or face extinction as their habitats become uninhabitable.

While the outlook seems grim, there is still hope—if immediate action is taken. Governments must invest in climate-resilient infrastructure, expand green cover, and shift rapidly to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydro.

Meaningful Theatre Training can Transform Personalities

■ MOHD YASEEN

When the world is constantly shifting its focus between innovation and tradition, the need for meaningful and enriching training is more urgent than ever. Training that transcends the boundaries of mechanical instruction and breathes life into the learner's spirit—that is what defines true enrichment. And in the realm of performing arts, a few have embodied this philosophy as compellingly as Sumeet Sharma, a theatre practitioner whose life's work has revolved around education, training, personality development, cultural rootedness and instilling a great reverence for Indian Ethos amongst children and youth through theatre.

With over three decades of committed practice in theatre-acting, training, and direction—Sumeet Sharma's contributions have not only enriched the artistic landscape of the region but also shaped the lives of thousands of students, artists, and enthusiasts. His career exemplifies how training in theatre, when thoughtfully planned and meaningfully executed, can become a powerful tool for personal growth, social understanding, and cultural awareness. Sumeet attributes his understanding of theatre and how to utilize it for the larger benefit of the society to his theatre mentor Padmashri Balwant Thakur. In addition to this, having got trained under the benign guidance of the theatre icons during several short/long workshops, he has tried to imbibe the learning into part of this personality, just to name a few Prof. G. Kumara Verma, Padmashri Neelam ManSingh Chowdhary, Prof. Mahendra Kumar, Dr. Shaveta, his teachers during Masters in Theatre. Sh. Rudra Prasad Sengupta, Padmashri Niranjan Goswami, Ms. Anuradha Kapur Ms. Kirti Jain, Mr. Adil Hussain, Dr. Abhilash Pillai, Mr. Harish Khanna, Mr. Roysten Able and many more visionaries of theatre who have shaped the National Theatre with their incredible work.

Sumeet Sharma is a postgraduate in Indian Theatre with distinction from the prestigious Department of Indian Theatre, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He is also UGC NET qualified in Performing Arts (Theatre), further validating his academic and professional authority in the field. But beyond his qualification, lies a journey of constant engagement, innovation, and dedication towards the deeper purpose of theatre.



In 2008, Sumeet Sharma was honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi's Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar, a national recognition conferred upon young and promising talents in the field of performing arts. This award, a milestone in any artist's life, was not just a badge of honour for Sumeet but a reinforcement of his belief in the transformative power of theatre. He is also a recipient of a National Scholarship under the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India.

His journey in theatre began as early as 1993 with Natrang Jammu, and over the years, he has worn many hats—actor, director, trainer, and educator. What sets his work apart is not just the volume of it but the intent, quality and efficacy with which it has been pursued. His theatre is not confined to the proscenium stage or elitist enclaves. Instead, it reaches classrooms, community halls, rural grounds, and auditoriums across the country, where he works with children, young adults, and aspiring artists.

Sumeet Sharma's core focus has been the use of theatre as an effective tool of education and personality development. In a system often preoccupied with rote learning and examinations, he offers an alternative model where self-expression, empathy, confidence, and communication are given centre stage. His workshops have empowered children and youth to find their voice, confront their fears, and build a sense of self-worth and discipline. His sessions go beyond script and performance; they help participants discover the richness of teamwork, listening, spontaneity, and responsibility.

The impact of his approach is best reflected in the words of those who have directly experienced its magic. Alpana Sharma, mother of two of his students, shares a moving testimony:

"Theatre became a magical catalyst in my children's lives. It wasn't

just about scripts and stages; it was a journey of self-discovery. My shy one found his voice, blossoming with confidence. The energetic one channeled her liveliness into captivating performances, developing discipline and focus. Through shared laughter and collaborative storytelling, they learned empathy, teamwork, and the sheer joy of creative expression. Theatre didn't just teach them to act; it taught them to truly live."

This sentiment echoes across many households, where Sumeet's training has sparked not just artistic ability, but life skills that shape young minds for years to come.

Sumeet Sharma serves as Drama Instructor at the Department of Students Welfare, University of Jammu. Here too, his role is not limited to mere conventional training. He consistently works to kindle a deep reverence for Indian culture and ethos among students in addition to explore their inner selves and facing the surroundings with self-belief. In an age of growing detachment from roots, his efforts serve as a cultural bridge—connecting the youth with the wisdom, values, and vibrancy of Indian traditions through theatre. He has directed remarkable theatre productions with the students of Design Your Degree like Bhisham Sahni's 'Kabira' and Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's 'Rashmirathi' which received accolades from all quarters. His hilarious yet thought-provoking Skits with the University students have been adjudged Best in Zonal and National level Youth Festivals where Universities from all over India come forward with their best talent. He has been the coordinator of the first ever Certificate Course in Theatre initiated by SIEDC University of Jammu which received encouraging feedback from the participants. He also coordinates the Training Outreach Programme of the Department of Students Welfare in

which students from far-flung areas get an opportunity to get training in performing arts by the experts in the field.

His creative work also reflects his cultural commitment. Sumeet has acted in over 40 plays, many of which are Dogri-language productions staged under the banner of the renowned theatre group Natrang. These plays have travelled far and wide, with more than 1100 performances across India and abroad. They are not mere entertainment pieces but carriers of the linguistic and cultural heritage of Jammu and Kashmir. Through these, he has helped preserve and promote the Dogri language, offering it the artistic respect and audience it deserves.

Participation in more than 40 national theatre festivals organised by leading institutions such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National School of Drama, and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, among others, has further refined his artistic outlook. These platforms have not only provided national exposure but have also enabled him to engage in rich artistic exchanges, enhancing the depth and scope of his training modules.

Travel, too, has been a powerful teacher in Sumeet's journey. His extensive tours across the country and abroad, as actor and assistant director, have enabled him to absorb diverse theatrical styles and pedagogical approaches. These experiences have deepened his understanding of theatre's universal appeal and its adaptability across contexts. What he brings back from these journeys enriches the students and artists he mentors, offering them a broader perspective on art and life. Over the years, he has directed around 50 plays involving children and adults alike. Each production under his direction is a carefully constructed educational experience. He is known to nurture

even the most hesitant participants, creating a safe and inspiring space for exploration. Many of these plays have gone on to earn acclaim, not just for their aesthetic value but for their ability to raise important questions and set a fertile ground for healthy debate.

What stands out most in Sumeet's methodology is his human-centric approach. Training, for him, is not about imposing knowledge but about enabling discovery. He encourages introspection, dialogue, and collaborative creativity. His sessions often blend games, voice and movement exercises, improvisations, script readings, and rehearsals in a seamless, organic flow that keeps participants deeply engaged. This holistic model of training builds not just performers but thinkers and doers. Other than games and activities, he relies more on the emotional connect with participants, which when occurs, transformation becomes possible, effortlessly.

At a time when educational and professional systems are re-evaluating their purpose and methods, Sumeet's work offers a valuable template. He shows that training can be a joyful, liberating, and enlightening process. He proves that performing arts are not peripheral indulgences but central to shaping complete human beings. His theatre is as much about social responsibility as it is about artistic excellence. It is about invoking awareness, instilling sensitivity, and cultivating imagination.

His impact is not just felt in auditoriums or on certificates, but in the lives of individuals who discover their potential through his guidance. From shy schoolchildren to aspiring theatre artists and effective communicators many owe their personal breakthroughs to his compassionate training style.

Sumeet Sharma represents what meaningful and enriching training should look like. Rooted in knowledge, elevated by experience, and driven by a vision to uplift others, his journey in theatre is a testament to the timeless power of learning that touches the soul. As he continues to inspire new generations through his work, one can only hope that more educators, trainers, and institutions take a cue from his path and infuse their efforts with the same passion, depth, and humanity.

(The writer is a National Scholarship and Fellowship Holder from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India in the field of Theatre)

The NAMASTE Scheme: A new tool in context of environmental justice

■ DR RAKESH VERMA

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) in India, on the occasion of World Environment Day, initiated a significant step towards environmental justice and the empowerment of marginalized communities through the launch of the Waste Picker Enumeration App. This application, operating under the expanded ambit of the National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) Scheme, represents a concerted effort to formally recognize, profile, and integrate Waste Pickers into the nation's burgeoning circular economy. This initiative underscores the government's commitment to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by this informal workforce, simultaneously promoting worker dignity and fostering sustainable waste management practices.

About the NAMASTE Scheme

The NAMASTE Scheme, a collaborative endeavor between the MoSJE and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), was conceptualized with the primary objective of ensuring the dignity, safety, and sustainable livelihoods of sanitation workers in urban areas. Launched in 2022 and slated for implementation across 500 cities until 2026, the scheme aims to revolutionize the sanitation sector by transitioning from hazardous manual scavenging to mechanized and dignified sanitation practices. Its foundational principles rest on eliminating fatalities among sanitation workers, fostering a skilled workforce for all sanitation tasks, and providing avenues for alternative livelihoods. A crucial aspect of the scheme is the collectivization of sanitation workers into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), empowering them to manage sanitation enterprises and assume a more significant role in urban governance.

Objectives of the NAMASTE Scheme

The NAMASTE Scheme's overarching objectives are strategically designed to create a comprehensive support system for sanitation workers:

- Achieving Zero Fatalities:** This paramount objective seeks to eliminate deaths and injuries among sanitation workers, primarily through the promotion of mechanized cleaning techniques and the provision of adequate safety equipment and training.
- Ensuring Skilled Workforce:** The scheme emphasizes the development of a skilled workforce capable of operating and maintaining sanitation machinery, thereby professionalizing the sanitation sector and reducing reliance on manual intervention.

3. Alternative Livelihood Opportunities:

Recognizing the vulnerability of sanitation workers to displacement due to mechanization, the scheme provides vocational training and support for transitioning to alternative livelihoods, ensuring economic stability.

4. Worker Collectivization: Empowering sanitation workers through the formation of SHGs facilitates their collective bargaining, access to resources, and participation in the management of sanitation services, fostering a sense of ownership and entrepreneurial spirit.

Key Components of the Scheme

The NAMASTE Scheme is underpinned by several critical components that collectively aim to improve the socio-economic conditions of sanitation workers:

- Health Insurance Coverage:** Extending health insurance benefits under the Ayushman Bharat scheme to sanitation workers and their families provides crucial financial protection against health emergencies, a significant vulnerability for this demographic.
- Livelihood Assistance:** This component focuses on vocational counselling and skill development programs, equipping sanitation workers with transferable skills that can enable them to explore diverse livelihood opportunities beyond traditional sanitation work.
- Capital Subsidies for Sanitation Machinery:** To promote the adoption of mechanized cleaning, the scheme offers capital subsidies for the purchase of essential sanitation machinery, making it accessible to individual workers or SHGs. This reduces the physical burden and hazards associated with manual sanitation.

Waste Picker Enumeration App Details

The newly launched Waste Picker Enumeration App signifies a pivotal expansion of the NAMASTE Scheme's scope, specifically targeting the informal sector of Waste Pickers. The app's primary function is to profile and enumerate approximately 2.5 lakh Waste Pickers across the country. This systematic enumeration is designed to grant them formal identity and integrate them into the social protection framework. Key benefits envisioned through the app include:

- Issuance of Occupational Photo ID Cards:** Formal recognition through ID cards provides Waste Pickers with a legitimate identity, facilitating access to government schemes and services.
- Health Insurance:** Similar to other sanitation workers, enumerated Waste Pickers will gain access to health insurance coverage,

mitigating the health risks associated with their occupation.

3. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): The provision of PPE is crucial for safeguarding Waste Pickers from occupational hazards, including exposure to infectious diseases, sharp objects, and toxic substances.

4. Skill Development Opportunities: Offering skill development programs aims to enhance their existing skills in waste segregation and recycling, and potentially train them for alternative, safer livelihoods.

Impact on Waste Pickers

The integration of Waste Pickers into the NAMASTE Scheme through the enumeration app is anticipated to have profound impacts on their working conditions, livelihood security, and social standing. By formally recognizing them as vital contributors to urban sanitation and the circular economy, the government aims to:

- Improve Working Conditions:** Formal recognition can lead to better access to designated collection points, safer working environments, and reduced harassment from authorities or other stakeholders.
- Enhance Livelihood Security:** Formalization can lead to more stable income streams, access to credit, and opportunities for collective bargaining, moving away from precarious daily wages.
- Strengthen Waste Picker Collectives:** The initiative will actively support the formation and strengthening of Waste Picker collectives (SHGs). These collectives are envisioned to play a significant role in managing Dry Waste Collection Centres (DWCCs), thereby enhancing their control over the waste value chain and fostering entrepreneurial ventures. This shift from individual, often exploited, labor to collective enterprise empowers Waste Pickers with greater agency and economic leverage.

Knowledge Products Released

The launch event also marked the introduction of two crucial knowledge products designed to inform and guide the mainstreaming of Waste Pickers:

- Resource Guide on Mainstreaming Waste Picker Collectives as Service Delivery Partners:** This guide provides practical frameworks and strategies for integrating Waste Picker collectives into formal waste management systems, highlighting their potential as efficient service delivery partners for urban local bodies and private entities.
- 'Charting Change: Socio-Economic Vital Information of India's Sanitation Workforce 2023-2025':** This publication offers a compre-

hensive data-driven overview of the socio-economic status of India's sanitation workforce, including Waste Pickers. It provides vital insights for policy formulation, program evaluation, and targeted interventions to improve their welfare.

Social, Economic, and Cultural Effects on Society and Waste Pickers

The NAMASTE Scheme, particularly with the inclusion of Waste Pickers, is poised to usher in significant social, economic, and cultural transformations for both the Waste Picker community and the broader Indian society.

Social Effects:

Enhanced Dignity and Respect: The formal recognition of Waste Pickers as essential service providers, rather than mere informal laborers, will significantly uplift their social standing. The issuance of ID cards and integration into formal schemes can reduce the stigma and discrimination they often face from the public and local authorities. This recognition fosters a sense of dignity and belonging.

Improved Health and Safety: Access to health insurance, PPE, and training on safe waste handling practices will substantially reduce occupational health hazards, including injuries, infections, and chronic diseases. This leads to a healthier and more productive workforce.

Reduced Child Labor: Formalization and improved livelihoods for adult Waste Pickers can reduce the necessity for children to engage in waste picking, enabling them to attend school and access education, thereby breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Community Empowerment: The emphasis on forming SHGs will empower Waste Picker communities by fostering collective action, mutual support, and increased bargaining power. This strengthens their ability to advocate for their rights and access resources.

Increased Public Awareness and Empathy: The government's public recognition of Waste Pickers' contribution is likely to raise public awareness about their vital role in waste management and environmental sustainability, potentially fostering greater empathy and support from the general populace.

Economic Effects:

Formalization of Livelihoods: The scheme aims to transition Waste Pickers from an informal, precarious livelihood to a more formalized and stable one. This includes consistent income, access to social security benefits, and potentially, formal contracts.

To be continued

When the Sky betrays: A plea for passenger assurance and accountability

■ RUCHI CHABRA

Yesterday's tragic crash of the London-bound Air India flight 787 has left the nation in shock and mourning. The loss of innocent lives, dreams cut short mid-air, and families shattered forever, demand not only our grief but also serious introspection. Investigations are going on. If technical snag was a key cause of the crash, it raises an urgent and troubling question: Who was responsible for certifying the aircraft as airworthy?

Airlines operate on trust. Passengers board flights with the implicit belief that every protocol has been followed, every technical check completed, and every safety standard met. They are required to submit declarations, comply with stringent baggage rules, undergo security screening, and follow in-flight instructions with diligence. Shouldn't the same rigour and accountability be expected—demanded—from the airlines?

The truth is stark: passengers are innocent consumers. They do not possess the expertise to inspect engines or verify maintenance logs. They simply pay the fare as prescribed and expect to arrive safely at their destination. That expectation, at the very least, deserves a written assurance from the airline that the aircraft they are boarding has been thoroughly inspected, approved by competent technical authorities, and deemed safe for take-off.

If the fault lies with a single negligent technician, then he must be held accountable. If it is a systemic lapse or a team failure, then the entire technical crew, including supervisors and certifiers, share the blame. If the reason is something else, surely it will come out. What cannot and must not happen is the shifting of responsibility away from those whose duty it was to prevent such a disaster.

Today, people are scared to fly.

The recent incident has rekindled deep fears in the minds of passengers and their families. Every goodbye at the departure gate now carries an undercurrent of dread: Will this be the last one?

In light of this tragedy, it is time for the Airport Authority of India, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs to consider a new, urgent policy:

A mandatory, passenger-accessible, pre-flight safety assurance—declaring that the aircraft has passed all technical checks, signed off by the responsible authorities.

This is not about ticket pricing, baggage allowance, or in-flight meals.

This is about human lives. About men, women, and children who fly not expecting to vanish into flames or fall from the sky—but to safely touch ground at the other end of their journey.

It is time to make safety visible. Let trust in our skies not be blind—but informed, certified, and earned.

(The writer is Principal, DPS Jammu)