

Newspaper Clippings

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Sirsi boy argues for euthanasia as fundamental right, wins debate

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

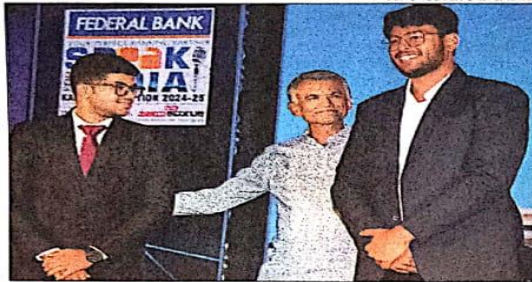
Bengaluru: Karkihakkalu is a small village, about 25km from Sirsi town. No one there had heard about debating until 2023, when Prateek Hegde reached the semi-finals of Speak for India event, an inter-collegiate debate competition. In 2024, Prateek reached the finals, and in 2025, he emerged as winner of the Karnataka edition, bagging Rs 2.5 lakh and a trophy, leaving the village joyous.

The BCom final-year student of JSS SMI UG & PG Studies, Dharwad, was adjudged winner of the contest, an initiative by Federal Bank Hormis Memorial Foundation in association with The Times of India and Vijay Karnataka, Tuesday. The finals were held at Kristu Jayanti College.



"This was my last chance to attempt the competition, and I am glad I made it. Students in villages have no exposure; they do not know about such platforms or how to improve their communication skills. After hearing about my experiences here, about 40-50 students from Sirsi participated in the district-level competition in Udupi," said Prateek.

About 5,000 students from 600 colleges participated in this competition. In the finals, Prateek argued for the topic, 'Euthanasia should be made a fundamental right', against Chandan M Naik, a psychology and



OPPOSANTS AT FINALS: Chandan M Naik (L) and contest winner Prateek Hegde with revenue minister Krishna Byre Gowda

journalism student of MES College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Bengaluru.

Prateek presented his points in Kannada, actively listening to his opponent, who articulated in English. The competition permits students to take the debate in their preferred language. Madhu YN, engineer and writer; Keertana Venkatesh, assistant professor of law, National Law School of India University; and K Narayana Gowda, ex-vice chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences, were the judges.

Son of a retired KSRTC employee and a homemaker, Prateek's journey in the debate contest was not easy. "My father is a public speaker and I took inspiration from him. When I participated for the first time in Speak for India, I did not understand English. I could not follow the arguments of my opponents or the questions the judges asked me. My first task was to learn the language. Last year, I got in touch with a few people and sharpened my skills," he said.

B'luru boy represented state in National Youth Parliament
Chandan, on the other

hand, was a debutant at Speak for India. A regular at debating contests, he was at the Parliament of India, representing Karnataka for National Youth Parliament competition.

"I started debating when I was in class 6. I realised how important communication is in any walk of life. So I honed my skills, attended Toastmasters and started mingling with NGOs and a student organisation, where I was exposed to public speeches," he said.

Chandan is preparing for civil services and will attempt his prelims this May. Raised by a single mother, he lives in Mahalakshmi Layout, west Bengaluru.

"The best part about Speak for India are its topics. They are contemporary, interesting and current. It calls for a lot of hard work to research, gather data, find court rulings and prepare your arguments," he said.

On Tuesday, about eight semi-finalists debated in two separate rounds. Each group debated on 'AI takes away our privacy' and 'Mandatory drug testing for students in colleges'.

'Open dialogues promote youth empowerment'

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Bengaluru: Speak for India Karnataka edition received widespread appreciation for promoting open speech and discussions among youth.

Revenue minister Krishna Byre Gowda, who was the chief guest Tuesday, asserted the need for such engagements for democracy to thrive. "Democracy is under threat today. Irrespective of the pitfalls of democracy, it's still far better than any other form of governance. Eternal vigilance is the only guarantor of democracy. To have that democratic spirit, we need debates, discussions, agreements and disagreements; these are essential aspects of a democracy," he added.

"Dogmas lead to autocracy, and autocracy leads to dictatorship. Dictatorship leads to exploitation and suppression of people. To prevent that, we need to be eternally vigilant, for which we need to have an open mind," he said.

Fr Augustine George, principal of Kristu Jayanti College, said: "This is not just a debate, it's a movement that empowers voices, nurtures leadership and builds qualities. It is not just a platform to speak, it is a celebration of democracy and intellectual courage. It gives our students and youth a chance to express their views on topics that are relevant and will shape our nation," he said, adding that it helps in cultivating critical thinking, encouraging research and promoting healthy argumentation.



“When we started in 2014, there was a candidate who was visually-challenged and he reached the semi-finals. Then he went back, cracked the civil service examination, and became an IAS officer. And in 2019, he came back to Speak for India — not as a candidate, but as a judge for the finals. This is a classic and motivating example for all of us. Many participants in yesteryear have reached prominent positions in various fields



Dilip B, zonal head | FEDERAL BANK, BENGALURU

“While we get invited to functions like inaugurations or dance competitions or modelling, debating is rare. I think it's a great opportunity and a great platform for students. It was such an entertaining debate here. I really liked the confidence of the participants on stage



Milana Nagaraj | ACTOR

“All the three topics that were identified were timely and contemporary. A lot of thought process has gone into it and the young generation ought to be made fully aware of these topics. I congratulate each contestant; they're truly an inspiration to all others. It is very essential to take part in this type of activity because it engages your mind



K Narayana Gowda | EX-VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND JUDGE AT EVENT