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Indian Railways

FACE TO FACE

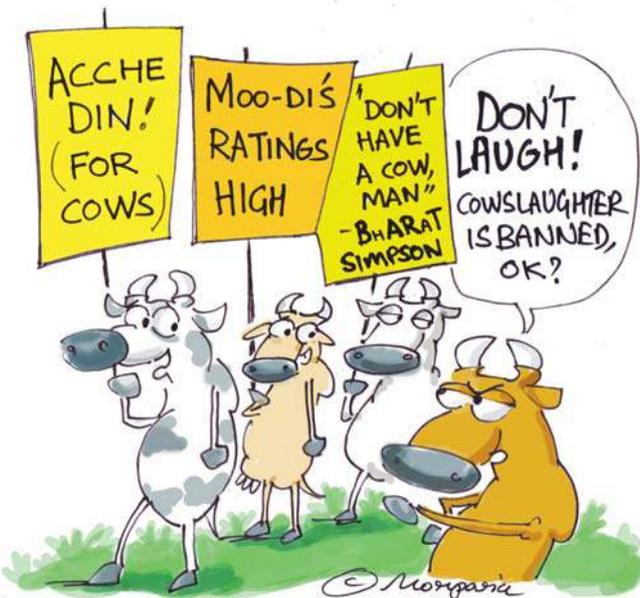
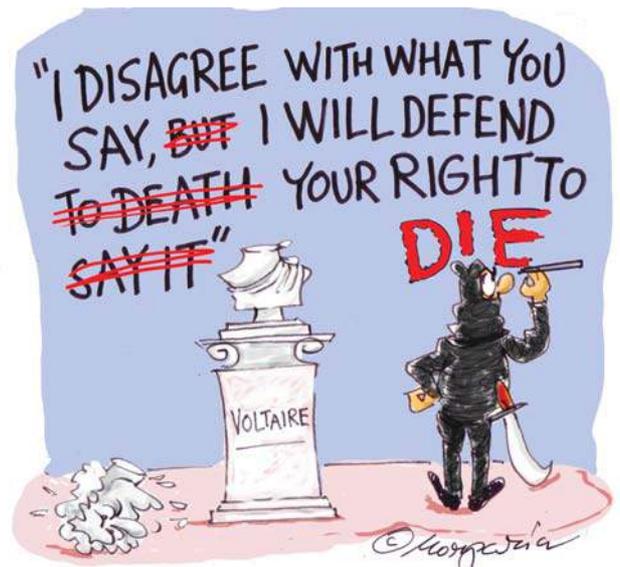
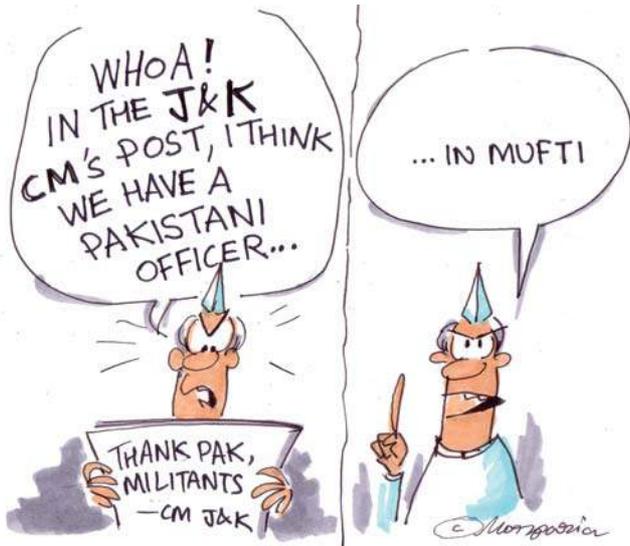
Suresh Prabhu

KNOW INDIA BETTER

Travel, Maharaja Class!

Great Indians: Daggubati Ramanaidu / Vinod Mehta / Major Udal Singh SM, SC

MORPARIA'S PAGE



E-mail: morparia@hotmail.com

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APRIL 2015

VOL.18/9

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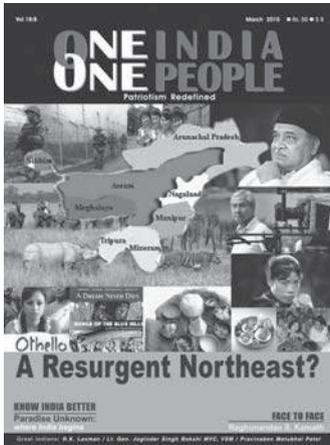
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Printed & Published by
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One India One People Foundation,
Mahalaxmi Chambers, 4th floor,
22, Bhulabhai Desai Road,
Mumbai - 400 026
Tel: 022-2353 4400
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e-mail: oiopfoundation@gmail.com
oiopsub@fouressindia.com

Printed at:
Graptone (India) Pvt. Ltd.
A1 /319, Shah & Nahar
Industrial Estate, S. J. Marg,
Lower Parel (W)
Mumbai – 400 013
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



“Slogan of unity and integrity”

I recently had the opportunity to go through your beautiful magazine ‘One India One People’. In particular, I read the March 2015 issue. The name of the magazine itself is the slogan of unity and integrity. The content is very informative and very different from the other magazines in the market. It is also very unique in its quality and content. I also liked the tone and language of the magazine. I hope to read your magazine on a regular basis. Once again, my compliments to your team and you for this magazine. Thank you.

– Mohd.Husain Sahil, received on e-mail



“Delighted with the Northeast issues”

I read with delight your two issues on Northeast. What a commendable effort in this day and age when most magazines and news media are only bothered about sensational news. I hope you keep up this effort and continue to carry similar articles. Kindly add some articles on food and health too on a regular basis. It would also be good to see some more articles on women’s issues, especially in today’s day and age when there is so much talk of women’s safety and crimes against women. We live in very uncertain times indeed and with so much unnecessary censorship happening, the real issue of women’s safety gets buried under all the rhetoric. Hope your magazine takes so more interest in this. Keep up the good work!

– Prerna Nair, Chennai

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A speed obsession

Millions of Indians travel by train, more than by air. And they will all be grateful for a clean and safe commute. So why this obsession with speed? V. Gangadhar urges Indian Railways to slow down.

I think the American do-gooder Ralph Nader had nothing else to do. And went on tinkering with everything which provided him with mechanical thrills. A private citizen, he took on the might of U.S. (United States) auto giants like Ford, Chrysler and General Motors, detected faults in their mechanism and stopped millions of them plying on the roads. They were taken back to the factories for repairs and then put back on roads. Detroit and other auto cities hated him but for millions of car owners, he was a kind saviour from auto-mayhem. He contested the U.S. Presidential election as an Independent, but since the U.S. believed it could not exist without cars and political party candidates, he was eliminated. But times have changed. Japan and South Korea have overtaken Detroit, and the U.S. car industry can no longer afford to contest the Presidential poll.

Indians have a different outlook. Most of us rely on rail transport and the network is vast. We are also emotionally attached to trains. Even as babies we are familiar with the phrase *chuk chuk gaadi*. Airplanes and zooming cars are for the affluent. Trains are for the masses, a category to which I belonged. Till I reached middle age, I was accustomed to travelling by Janata class in trains. Then came the Sleeper I, Sleeper II, AC Sleeper III and II and finally, occasional air travel. The early era of travel was bad. Along with thousands of people, I had to fight my way into one of the unreserved third class coaches and left the rest of the journey to God. Occasionally, God was great at providing me with a second class coupe for a trip from Bombay to Calcutta for an interview for a salesman's job, courtesy BATA Shoe Co. The coach built during British days had a bath room with a shower.

Other memories were quite unpleasant, the misery being caused by passengers who would not travel light or be clean. They were not co-passengers but mobs who had never heard of family planning and carried babies of all

ages without diapers. 'Make Indian Railways Your Home' screamed a poster pasted inside a Janata sleeper coach. Taking this to heart, the mobs cooked, ate, washed clothes and utensils inside the train, and the limited supply of water was exhausted before we reached Lonavala. But no one was bothered about the rest of the trip. Cursing, I got down from the coach every four hours at different stations to alert the station masters that we had run out of water. The Central Railways rose to the occasion and provided us water till the train chugged into Kerala.

Indians have a different outlook. Most of us rely on rail transport and the network is vast. We are also emotionally attached to trains. Even as babies we are familiar with the phrase *chuk chuk gaadi*.

The return journey was equally "exciting". The third class coach was slightly different. Almost every one of those travelled with huge sacks of coconuts. Enormous bundles scattered all over the coach and huge jack fruits carried by some of the passengers emitting their own strong flavours. While gastronomic juices flowed freely, I was certain that even the best airlines could not have provided such a magnificent treat.

Speed was not everything though many people repeated the phrases 'rushing off to catch a train'. Perhaps I am a bit old fashioned and am not happy with the phrase 'I am rushing to catch a flight'.

Basically I am scared of excessive speed and often advise the cab driver to slow down and take me to my destination in one piece. Na Mo is now talking of Bullet Speed trains as they have in Japan. I am excited that such trains will come to India one day. But will they operate under the *diktat* of Uma Bharati followers who may pull the alarm



chain every five minutes? I pity our new railway Minister Suresh Prabhu who has to deal with the same politicians and the same rowdy commuters. For them, at any speed, chain pulling is a major entertainment. ■

The writer is a well-known satirist.

A higher price to pay?

The Indian Railways may have a very busy passenger segment, carrying passengers equivalent to the world's population every year, but it also incurs humongous losses on this sector. A. Hari unravels the mystery behind this and tells us what steps need to be taken to make Indian Railways more cost and fare efficient.

INDIAN Railways is today one of the leading rail networks of the world as far as passenger numbers is concerned, as the number of passengers transported every year is equivalent to almost the population of the entire world. Still, the railways incurred a huge loss of around ₹ 25,000 crore during 2012-13 from the passenger segment. Indian Railways needs to initiate an action plan to make the passenger business profitable and attractive. This can be achieved only if there is a total rethink on the pricing strategy for passenger traffic.

At present, the charges are levied based on fares for various slabs of kilometres applicable to various classes of travel. Except for periodical revision of fares and changes in number of slabs, there is no major change in the basic concept of fixing the passenger fares for the last several decades.

The average rate per passenger per kilometre in terms of paise has been provided in the table given below.

Average Rate per Passenger per km (in paise)		
Year	in Paise	% Variation
1970-71	2.50	–
1980-81	3.97	59
1990-91	10.64	168
2000-01	22.90	115
2012-13	28.50	24

There has been a very marginal increase of 24% in fare from the year 2000 till 2012-13. The rate per passenger has increased from ₹ 22.90 in 2000–2001 to ₹ 28.50 during 2012-2013. Passenger fares on Indian Railways are among the lowest in the world and it does not recover even the cost of operating its passenger services!

Review of passenger fares

This article explores the need for drastic review of basic concept of fixing passenger fares in Indian Railways. In view of the dynamic changes in market conditions and severe challenges posed by competing modes of transport, it has become necessary to think of bold ideas, a few of which are outlined below.

1. Consider operational cost and pricing of competing modes: The passenger fare structure is presently based on factors

such as distance, class of travel and category of train. The passenger fares must cover at least the operational costs for different classes of travel. A gradual rise in fares at regular intervals must be made so as to ensure recovery of operational cost over a period of time.

The fare structure of other competing modes of travel must also be considered while fixing the passenger fare structure. There are different competing modes based on the class and the distance of travel. The severity of competition will vary between different segments across India. The regional ground realities must also be taken into account while fixing the fare.

2. Introduction of differential pricing: The concept of differential pricing can be introduced as a trial measure. Reduced fares can be considered for low demand routes where the occupancy of trains is very poor. Prices can also be reduced during off-season and non-peak hours in an otherwise high demand route. Indian Railways can consider the feasibility of introducing congestion pricing in routes where there is very high demand.

3. Introduction of segment based pricing: Now pricing is based on the distance travelled in terms of kilometres for all segments in our country. But there are huge differences in respect of various factors such as availability of alternative modes of transport, frequency and pricing of competing modes of transport etc., in various segments. For example, the ground realities in Mumbai–Pune stream and Chennai–Jolarpet stream are totally different. A different pricing strategy may be more effective in providing tough competition to alternative modes of transport and ensure better market share of passenger traffic. Zonal railways may be empowered to review pricing within a broad criteria fixed by the Railway Board. It is suggested that pricing may be varied for different segments for the same distance.

4. Higher pricing for short journeys in long distance travel: Another pricing differentiation could be that the price of a short journey on a long distance train could be higher than the price of the same journey on a short-distance train. This move will gradually shift short distance passengers to short distance trains so that a few stops can be removed from long distance trains, and they can be speeded up in a gradual manner.

5. Discounted fares for less patronised trains: A detailed survey by a professional agency about occupancy of reserved and unreserved accommodation is required to identify less patronised trains. The Railway Board may issue broad guidelines and also fix maximum discount which can be permitted for such identified trains. Poor occupancy may prevail between select pairs of stations and in such cases, discounts may be offered only between those stations identified by the respective zonal railways.

6. Variation of pricing based occupancy on different days: All trains are fully patronised during weekends and closed holidays. But during working days, the trains are not fully occupied. As an experimental measure the pricing can be reduced during week days to promote occupancy of trains. This move will reduce extraordinary pressure during weekends and also ensure that passengers prefer to travel by train due to availability of accommodation.

There is huge demand for lower berth and allotment of coupe in First Class A/C coaches. A portion of available lower berths / coupe can be allotted on payment of additional charges.

In view of the steady decline in the share of passenger traffic, it has become necessary for a total rethink on the existing fare structure in Indian Railways. There is a critical need for radical reforms in the passenger fare structure to facilitate Indian Railways in regaining the market share of passenger traffic.

Threat posed by low cost airlines

The margin between air and train fare has been decreasing with domestic airlines offering discounted tickets every now and then. Low cost airlines are giving stiff competition to upper class segments of the passenger business. But these top-end classes account for a small proportion of the total traffic carried by Indian Railways.

During July-September lean travel season, airlines offer very competitive advance-purchase airline fares which will compare favourably with second AC fares in Railways. In peak travel months (April-June and October-December), the difference in train and airfares will be significant and flying will be more expensive.

It is a normal trend that passengers move to flying when they are not able to get a confirmed ticket. Indian Railways is now running several premium and special trains to meet the demand from passengers. The threat from airlines, however, can be squarely met if issues of speed, comfort and convenience in inter-city travel are addressed.

Whoever has travelled by air, can easily understand the pain of reaching the airport, as they are mostly located in the outskirts of the city. This issue adversely affects the comparative advantage in terms of saving time and also causing

inconvenience to passengers.

Railways and airlines must get into local arrangements to share the business in such a way as to leverage the strengths of each other. Instead of competing with each other, they can try to complement their strengths and grow together, fully utilising their infrastructure to the optimum extent.

Making Indian Railways more competitive

There is an urgent need for expansion and modernisation of its network which has not been attempted due to paucity of resources.

The railway ministry plans to attract investments worth ₹17,000 crore during 2015-16 from various public sector undertakings, multilateral and financial institutions. The Plan outlay has been increased to ₹ 1 lakh crore for 2015-16, which includes a budgetary support of ₹ 41,000 crore. And for the next five years, the total investment has been set at ₹8.5 lakh crore.

Plans are afoot for roping in PSUs (Public Sector Undertaking) to partner the Railways in providing better connectivity to transport their raw material and finished products such as coal, steel and cement. Joint ventures are to be set up with states for focused project development, resource mobilisation and implementation within the deadlines.

Indian Railways plans to consolidate its share in passenger business, particularly, in long distance and medium distance segment by increasing the speed of passenger trains, and introduction of fast services between metropolitan cities up to 200 kms. Development of High Speed Corridors on selected routes is seen as another key strategy for inter-city transport. Indian Railways has planned to increase daily passenger carrying capacity from 21 million to 30 million in five years.

The Railways have recently planned several initiatives such as better ticketing facilities, improved catering service, better on-board house-keeping facilities, a helpline to address customer grievances, improved toilet facilities, upgradation of stations and increasing the speed of certain trains.

The implementation of new initiatives in a time bound manner will improve the competitiveness of Indian Railways and help it in arresting further decline of its market share in the passenger segment. The recent thrust on expansion and modernisation is likely to help Indian Railways to also improve its market share in the future. ■



The writer works as Chief Commercial Inspector in Southern Railways. He wishes to project a positive image of Indian Railways through his blog www.indianrlynews.wordpress.com He is passionate about inspiring youth through his website: www.inspireminds.in

Reflections on the railway budget

While lauding Modi government's maiden railway budget, **S. Ananthanarayanan** points out and questions some of its premises. A critical look at the budget and what it proposes.

THE budget announced this year for the Indian Railways has been cheered as one that is not obviously populist, and one that promises improvements in capacity, quality and safety. Let's briefly analyse the budget to appreciate how well the cheers are deserved.

Before we look at the numbers, a word about the nature of Indian Railways. The railway budget is a statement of revenue of about two lakh crore, which only just covers the costs incurred to earn this money. The numbers of revenue and expenditure of the last few years are: (See Table 1 below)

(all figures in crore)	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16 (proposed)
Revenue (receipts)	1,06,245	1,26,180	1,43,214	1,63,450	1,88,557
Expenditure	99,464	1,12,565	1,31,465	1,46,998	1,63,480
Surplus	1,126	8,226	3,740	7,278	14,226

(figures are from published railway documents)

A large part of the expenditure, largely staff salary and cost of basic maintenance, is fixed, as these items do not change with the level of traffic. The variable component, fuel being the most important, is the smaller part of the total costs. The result is that at a given level of fare and freight, an increase in traffic results in extra revenue but there is only a small increase in costs. On the other hand, a small drop in traffic leads to plunging revenue, but there is only small savings in costs. The key element of the budget, which is, whether income would meet costs, hence depends sensitively on the level of traffic.

It is in this context that we should view the progress of the levels of traffic, which is as follows: (See Table 2)

We can see that in the last four years, the goods loading has risen between 39 and 49 million tonnes each year. But in 2015-16, an increase by 85 million tones is proposed. As for passengers, there has been a falling trend in the last two years, which is proposed to be reversed, to effect healthy 251 million passenger increase in the coming year.

It is on the basis of this proposed increase in traffic that the ambitious growth plan, which is to be funded through

borrowing, which would be serviced by internal fund generation, largely depends. But even if the rate of growth of the economy accelerates as it is being said that it will, or the coal and energy sectors open up, it is not clear that about twice the growth in railway goods traffic, as compared to present levels, will happen in the short term.

Table 2

(all figures in million)	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16 (proposed)
Tonnes loaded (goods)	969	1,008 (ie, + 39)	1,052 (ie +44)	1,101 (ie, +49)	1,186 (ie, +85)
Tonne kilometers	6,67,607	6,91,658	6,65,810	6,88,500	7,42,691
Goods earnings (crore)	69,548	82,263	93,906	1,06,927	1,21,231
₹ per tonne km	1.04	1.19	1.41	1.55	1.63
Number of passengers	8,224 (ie,197)	8,421 (ie,-24)	8397 (ie,-47)	8,350 (ie, +251)	8,601
Passenger kilometers	1,046,522	1,098,103	1,158,743	1,117,419	1,184,465
Passenger earnings(cr)	28,246	31,323	36,632	43,002	50,175
₹ per passenger km	0.27	0.28	0.32	0.38	0.42
₹ per Pkm/Tkm ratio	0.26	0.23	0.23	0.24	0.26

(figures are from published railway documents)

As passenger traffic accounts for less than half the earnings, even with the rise in numbers of passengers estimated, the traffic that counts is goods traffic. While there is a proposed increase in loading, the published railway documents say that the lead, or the average distance the goods are carried, is planned at 626 km, which is the same as last year and less than previous years. The higher revenue is then to come mainly from the proposed higher loading and the increase in freight rates, which is also substantial, increasing the earning from each tonne kilometer carried from ₹ 1.55 to ₹ 1.63.

Freight rates v/s passenger fares

This brings us to the question of freight rates and passenger fares. The freight rates in India, when compared with rates in other countries on the basis of 'purchasing power parity', is



Union Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu presenting the budget in Parliament

among the highest. As the railways are infrastructure for movement of raw material and finished goods to markets, high freight cost certainly affects international competitiveness, which in turn discourages investment in India.

This is especially true when we see that the freight traffic in India bears much of the costs that should be charged to passenger traffic. Continuously over several years, passenger fares have remained substantially unchanged, while freight rates have seen increases, just to make ends meet, every year. A comparison of the ratio of the fare per passenger kilometer and the freight rate per tonne kilometer, in different countries, is revealing. The last row in Table 2 shows this ratio, and we can see that it is almost unchanged, around 25%, since years. The world over, the ratio is at least 85% and in some cases, it is 125%, which means the cost to passengers is quite high, compared to freight rates. In places like this, no doubt, the quality of passenger service, in terms of comfort, cleanliness and speed, is far higher than what the second class passenger enjoys in India. But the great difference in the differential against freight rates indicates that in these places there is real allocation of the cost of passenger comforts to passenger traffic, rather than load the costs on to freight. It is reasonable and predictable pricing of railway freight that would give industry the confidence to make investments needed to rely more on the railways.

The last time an attempt was made to raise passenger fares, the move was stalled by pressures from the political coalition. And then there was the positive step of linking fares and rates to diesel prices, a laudable move that has not proved immediately relevant, on account of the dip in oil prices. But this year, the government, which is in a commanding position,

had an opportunity to bring the element of rationality into passenger fares, and spare the burden on freight. But it looks like the opportunity to show the world that it means business has been passed up. In fact, the minister has stated publicly (and newspapers have reported) that passenger fares have been left untouched, although the published figures of the passenger kilometers and passenger earnings (last columns in the table) show that the earning per passenger Km has risen from 38 paise to 42 paise. This is some increase, at least, but the comparison with freight has scarcely improved, as freight rates have also gone up.

What will power the proposed investment?

The budget also proposes high levels of investments, in the coming year and the following years. The investments are sought to be funded by pension funds and banks, apart from private participation. Just as in the expectation of higher traffic, why such lending or investment is likely to happen has not been stated. The proposed investment of about ₹ eight lakh crore would call for an annual surplus of nearly one lakh crore to service. The present level of surplus is far below this figure and the tenor of the budget is one of adding amenities, which would involve costs. Unless there is a clear indication of where operating surplus, to meet cost of borrowings will come from, only government guarantees can bring funds into the system. And even if the funds were to be arranged, the fact of the matter is that there is short supply of materials and agencies to execute work. Even the present levels of provision for work like road over-bridges or subways, which concern safety, are not being fully consumed, for various reasons.

The other avenue mentioned is of Private Public Partnership (PPP). Although work financed in this way is also executed by the railway, PPP does bring in an element of private dynamism, apart from funds. But the experience has been that it is with plum, profitable projects, where the partner makes large returns that private parties are willing to associate. This need not necessarily be a deterrent, in the case of projects that will add substantial value, but the system of entering into PPPs needs to be through transparent bidding, and may still end up as cases where private parties benefit by embarrassing windfalls. ■



The writer is a Financial Adviser and Chief Accounts Officer, Western Railway, Mumbai, and later Member of the Railway Claims Tribunal, Mumbai. He also writes on current developments in science for non-specialist readers. Much of his work can be seen at the website: www.simplescience.in.

Did you know?

- The Darjeeling Steam Tramway (DST) began operations on the Siliguri-Darjeeling section in 1800.
- On April 16 1853, 3:35 pm, a 21-gun salute launched the first passenger train in India, by the Great Indian Peninsular Railway from Boree Bunder to Thane - 400 passengers, 14 carriages, three engines - Sindh, Sultan and Sahib. Journey time: 1 hour 15 minutes.
- On August 15 1854, the first train in East India ran from Howrah to Hooghly.

A British legacy still on track

*The biggest and arguably the best legacy the British left behind are the railways. Indian Railways today has one of the busiest and most extensive networks in the world. **Rajendra Aklekar** takes us back to that momentous day in 1853 when the first ever passenger train in Asia pulled out of the Bori Bunder station in Mumbai. While describing the wonder of it, he also dwells on some quaint railway anecdotes and practices that have survived till today.*

AS British railway historian Ian J. Kerr often puts it - No railroads, no India. The railways arrived in India in the mid-nineteenth century. Before the iron horse arrived, transportation modes here were primitive. Generations stayed in one place and followed traditions and practices for ages. Till then, the major form of transport were *palkhis* to transport people and animals like horses for rides and to ferry goods. The animals changed as per the region with elephants, camels and oxen. Water transport was another popular form of transport with most rivers then navigable, and ports being important trading points.

Cotton the catalyst

Cotton had been one key raw material that the British textile mills required and this was being procured from India. As the state of transport here was poor, by the time the cotton reached the shores from the country's interiors (where it grew), it was badly damaged in the long and slow transport process that involved bullock carts and animal packs. When there was drought and famine, bullock transport was further unreliable and there were instances when ships had to be kept waiting at the ports for goods that never arrived, as animals were either too weak or died on the way when they were driven all the way from the country's interiors.

With such slow modes of transport, dispersal of the military was also becoming a problem. It was felt that organising and dispersing the growing native population and faster deployment of troops could be better handled by a faster means of transport. The railways that were a contemporary and improving technology in Britain by then were thought to be an answer, and a proposal to build a railway line in India was first floated by Lord Dalhousie in 1843.

(Note: Technically, a small standard-gauge industrial railway, called the Red Hill Railroad, with rotary steam locomotives, had been started as far back as 1836 in Madras,

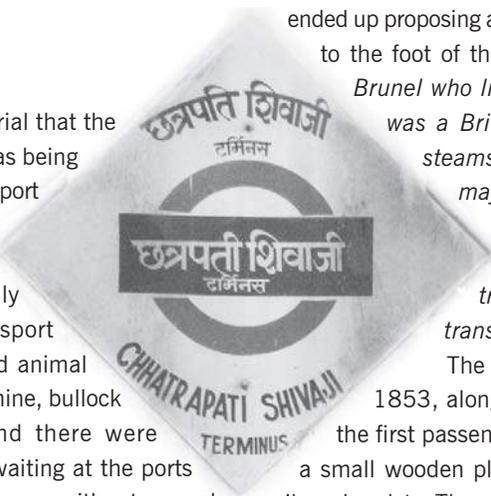
ferrying material for road building. Though the network shut down by 1845, it could qualify as the first ever rudimentary railway in India.)

And thus chugged the first passenger train in Asia

But Dalhousie's plan was for proper passenger runs. With encouragement from Bombay Governor George Arthur, a civil engineer named George T. Clark prepared tentative plans for a line from Bombay town. Clark, who had worked with Isambard Brunel, had come down to India in 1842 and ended up proposing an 89 kilometers of rail line from Bombay to the foot of the Western Ghats. (*Isambard Kingdom Brunel who lived from 9 Apr 1806-15 Sept 1859, was a British civil engineer who built bridges, steamships and dockyards including the first major British railway, the Great Western Railway; a series of steamships, including the first propeller-driven transatlantic steamship, revolutionising transport and engineering.*)

The plans worked out well and on 16 April 1853, along the reclaimed islands of Bombay ran the first passenger train in the continent of Asia. From a small wooden platform at Bori Bunder, all the way 21 miles ahead to Thane. From here, the railways spread far and wide never to look back. The East Indian Railway steamed out of Howrah a year later in 1854, and trains of the Madras Railway Company two years later in 1856. By 1880, the railway network had a route mileage of about 14,500 km (9,000 miles), connecting the port cities of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. One hundred and sixty-two years later today, Indian Railways, the premier transport organisation of India is the largest rail network in Asia, and the world's second largest under one management, running 11,000 trains everyday with 6,853 railway stations.

Here is a prime example of our respect for the age-old British legacy that has been inherited by us, preserved and continued.





The first passenger train in India ran between Mumbai and Thane on 16 April 1853

The first train

The train indicator at Mumbai CST station says 3:38pm Thane. It is a sunny April afternoon and the train is not much crowded at that hour in Mumbai. It is a “slow” train and reaches its destination Thane about 34 km away at 4:34 pm, trundling along 18 stations of the Central Railway on the way in exactly 56 minutes. So? There are local trains every three to four minutes and countless passengers along Mumbai’s rail network, what’s the big deal about this train ride?

Well. The Mumbai suburban railway caters to seven million passengers every single day. The two administrative zones of Western and Central Railway divide the crowd with the Western Railway (WR) Mumbai ferrying 3.5 million passengers and the Central Railway’s (CR) Mumbai division ferrying 4.0 million of them. While the WR runs 1,305 services, the CR runs 1,600 of them, making the Mumbai suburban railway one of the world’s densest rail passenger networks.

The 3:38 pm Mumbai CST-Thane train is just one of these. But few would know that the story of Indian Railways begins with this train. On a similar April afternoon, about 162 years ago in 1853, India’s first passenger train had made its debut from the same station, to the same destination and at the same time. It was an era when railways were a novelty and trains were magical demons. When the first train left from Bori Bunder station (now Mumbai CST) to Thane, the entire town had come down to witness the wonder, with the government declaring the day as a public holiday. Crowds thronged all around the way to watch the wonder pass by. The first train in Asia had started from Bori Bunder to Thane, a distance of about 34 kms, at 3:35pm. It had reached Thane in 57 minutes. The Central Railway Mumbai, to mark this first run, still maintains a Thane-bound train at the similar time, preserving the legacy.

Things have changed though. The original Bori Bunder station was a few hundred metres away in the north from today’s Mumbai CST, the original train ran at 3:35pm, but today’s train runs at 3:38pm adjusting to the huge timetable. But the time taken today with 18 stations is almost the same. It was after this first run that the railway network in this country never looked back. It went on to expand further and further to complete 14,500 kms in the next 27 years.

Bullock cart owners’ protest

The first month of the first-ever railway was a runaway success. Regular runs of the train had begun from 18 April 1853, and by 30 April 1853, the trains had ferried 21,922 passengers, earning ₹ 9,109, three annas and eight paise! The next month, in May 1853, the figure rose to ₹ 40,071, and by December 1853 to ₹61,413.73 Yet, even as the rail network took root, there was resistance from an unlikely quarter. Bullock-cart owners took up a fight with the railways. They were irate, not only because of the dwindling number of passengers, but also because of falling cargo supply. The railways were ferrying everyone and everything! To take control of the situation, bullock-cart owners began charging a fixed rate from the hinterlands to Bombay; it now made little economic sense for passenger traffic and cargo to disembark midway at railway stations. The bullock-cart owners’ plan was a success and proved to be a headache for the railway managers.

The railway budget

The much-hyped railway budget that the Indian government presents every year is another such British legacy. Only a few know that the concept of having a separate rail budget is



The Mumbai CST station building (Photo courtesy: BPT archives)

UP TRAINS		Arri	PF	Frequency	SN	No
Name	Origination	Time	No			
ASANSOL EXPRESS	ASANSOL	6:15	16	TUE	1	1234
CHHAPRA EXPRESS	CHHAPRA	6:15	16	THU	2	1234
AMARAVATI EXPRESS	AMARAVATI	6:25	12	DAILY	3	1234
NAGPUR EXPRESS	NAGPUR	7:55	18	DAILY	4	1234

'Up' and 'Down' trains - a British legacy

completing 83 years this year. The story of India's separate railway budget is equally fascinating as that of the subcontinent's railway line.

Multiple companies, private lines and a scattered system - that's how Indian Railways was in the 1920s. As the railways grew in the sub-continent, the issue of control and management by the government started becoming a complicated task.

To study the issue and recommend a solution, the government, in 1921, appointed a 10-member panel called the East India Railway Committee. As it was chaired by British "railway scientist" Sir William Mitchell Acworth (1850-1925), it came to be known as the Acworth Committee.

The committee recommended a unified management of the entire network and that "the railways should have a separate budget of their own and assume responsibilities of their income and expenditure".

Historian on colonial railways in India and professor of history at the University of Manitoba, Ian J. Kerr describes the Acworth Committee as "one of the most influential of the many committees that inquired into railroad matters during the colonial period".

The government accepted the report in 1924, and the railway finances were separated from the general government finances the same year, leading to an independent railway budget — a practice followed to this year.

The legacy of the station roundels

This is a small, but important legacy. The popular blue and red roundel that is ubiquitous at Indian Railway stations is also a British legacy. The signage also has a glorious story. The roundel was originally used by the London General Omnibus Company, London's principal bus operator between 1855 and 1933. In 1908, the Underground Electric Railways Company of London first used the solid red circle behind station name boards. London Transport chief Frank Pick, who was initially given responsibility for London Underground's publicity in 1908, made a disc out of the red roundel, asking designer Edward Johnston to develop and register it as a trademark. Johnston redesigned it and the red disc with blue station name became a popular signage throughout the system. The 100th anniversary of the roundel was celebrated in 2008. The design found its way to Indian rail stations, not clear which year, but is very much in use, oblivious to Pick and Johnston's contributions.

When the first train left from Boree Bunder station (now Mumbai CST) to Thane, the entire town had come down to witness the wonder, with the government declaring the day as a public holiday. Crowds thronged all around the way to watch the wonder pass by. The first train in Asia had started from Boree Bunder to Thane, a distance of about 34 kms, at 3:35pm.

The Up and Down

Well, the Up and Down that we see in railway timetables today is yet another English practice. Railway directions are usually described as *up* and *down*, with *up* being towards a major location, the zonal or divisional headquarters. Since British trains run on the left, now followed in India, the *up* side of a line is on the left when proceeding in the *up* direction. The original idea has come down from the days of mine railways when trains would run up the hills to the mines, and down to the ports. Tracks were laid from mines to docks. Normally, the mines were inland and higher than sea level, so the coal was transported down to sea level where the docks were.

The National Railway Museum

The most important repository of British legacy and heritage is the National Railway Museum (NRM) at New Delhi. Opened on 1 February 1977, the NRM is located over 10 acres of land with both indoor and outdoor exhibits. There are many unique exhibits that had once operated in various parts of the country, India's first electric train,

Did you know?

- Toilets on trains were first introduced in 1891 in 1st class and in 1907 in lower classes.
- First Reservation through the computer system commenced in New Delhi in the year 1986.
- First Electric coach ran on 3 February 1925, between Bombay VT and Kurla stations.



National Rail Museum, New Delhi

various iconic locomotives, Patiala State Monorail Trainways, Fairy Queen, the world's oldest working steam locomotive in operational service, Morris Fire Engine, the saloons of Prince of Wales, the Maharaja of Indore, the Maharaja of Mysore and various such exhibits. It also has a library and research facility.

More excerpts of legacy and metaphors

Today, at the site where the old Bori Bunder Station once was - somewhere near the electric locomotive shed, close to signals S-54 and S-48 - Victoria Terminus-bound trains, fast and slow, halt before entering the mega terminus. Operationally, this is to get a 'line clear' and a platform signal; metaphorically, this acts as a mark of respect for the original Bori Bunder Station.

India's first locos

The first locos remained in service for quite some time and the last one was seen 100 years after it was first put to use; it was commemorated at the centennial year of the Indian railways. ■



The writer is the author of *Halt Station India*, the dramatic tale of the nation's first rail lines, the bestselling book in transportation series on Amazon, and a journalist with the Times of India Group, Mumbai.

Important Indian Railway websites

S.N	Railway Unit	Website Address
1	Indian Railways	http://indianrailways.gov.in
2	Reservation Enquiry	http://www.indianrail.gov.in
3	Train Enquiry	www.trainenquiry.com
4	Complaints/ Suggestions	http://coms.indianrailways.gov.in
5	IRCTC	www.irctc.co.in
6	IRCTC Tourism	http://www.irctctourism.com
7	Central Railway	http://www.cr.indianrailways.gov.in
8	North Central Railway	http://www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in
9	Eastern Railway	http://www.er.indianrailways.gov.in
10	East Central Railway	http://www.ecr.indianrailways.gov.in
11	East Coast Railway	http://www.eastcoastrail.indianrailways.gov.in
12	Northern Railways	http://www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in
13	North Western Railway	http://www.nwr.indianrailways.gov.in
14	North East Frontier Railway	http://www.nfr.indianrailways.gov.in
15	North Eastern Railway	http://www.ner.indianrailways.gov.in
16	South Eastern Railway	http://www.ser.indianrailways.gov.in
17	South East Central Railway	http://www.secr.indianrailways.gov.in
18	Southern Railway	http://www.sr.indianrailways.gov.in
19	South Western Railway	http://www.swr.indianrailways.gov.in
20	South Central Railway	http://www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in
21	Western Railway	http://www.wr.indianrailways.gov.in
22	West Central Railway	http://www.wcr.indianrailways.gov.in
23	Konkan Railway	http://konkanrailway.com/
24	Delhi Metro	http://www.delhimetrorail.com
25	Metro Railway Kolkata	http://www.mtp.indianrailways.gov.in

Hear the whistle blow!

*These are exciting times for Indian rail commuters with a lot of talk of high speed trains, though there are those who scoff at such talk. **Sudhir Badami** explains how an effective network comprising high speed trains, bus and suburban rail will work well for both the commuters and the ecology.*

THERE is much talk today of new railway projects than the actual delivery of services to the 75 lakh commuters of Mumbai Suburban Rail System (MSRS). These new projects and the state of MSRS will be examined and analysed in this article.

Mumbai – a major hub

Mumbai is the commercial hub of the country and welcomes people for employment, livelihood, entrepreneurship and businesses, besides tourism. Those visiting Mumbai on business, travel by air from far, and not so far. Distances that get covered by an overnight train journey go as far as say, Ahmedabad, Nagpur, Solapur or Goa. People travel from these places by flight as well, enabling them to complete the business trip away from home base within 16 to 18 hours. Cities provide commercial activities, manufacturing activities and cultural activities among many other things. Inter city travel becomes necessary to fulfill these needs. As some cities get well connected by transport, people prefer to be living in their 'home' cities and commute to megacities or metro cities and return. With a growing economy, the number of trips collectively made by these people increases. It is also a possibility that if commuting is convenient, some people may commute on a daily basis.

The need for fast commute

Let us look at the travel pattern of people living in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). The 2011 Census revealed that about 125 lakh people live within the nearly 470 sq km Mumbai Municipal Corporation Area, and an overall 196 lakh live in the nearly 4500 sq km Mumbai Metropolitan Areas. What the 2008 Comprehensive Transport Study by MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority) revealed is that there are 57% who live within 3 km of their place of work, 69% within 5 km, 82% within 10 km and 89% who live within 15 km of their place of work. Only 11% travel longer than 15 km. But this number is as high as 22 lakhs for MMR or 14 lakhs for MCGM (Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai) areas. Many travel daily to Mumbai from

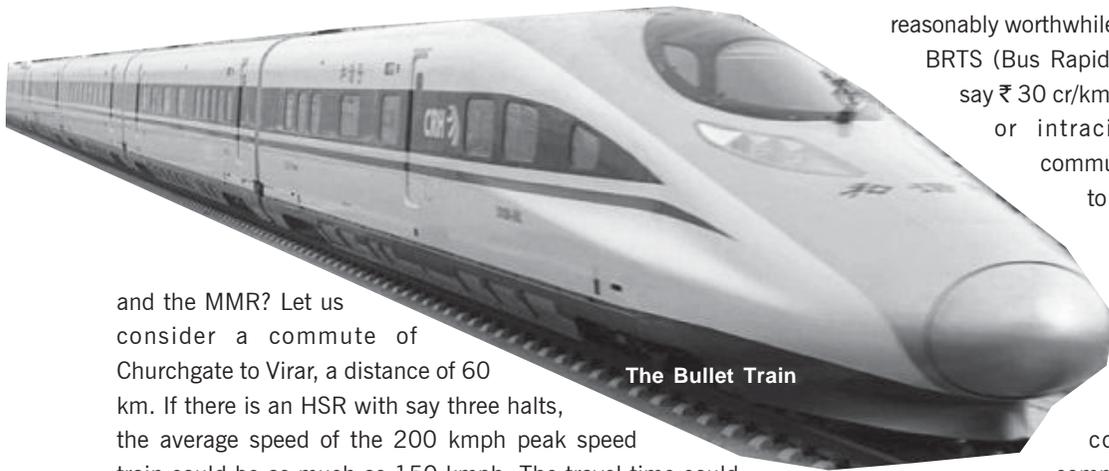
Virar (60km), Dahanu (120 km), and quite a few from even Surat (230 km) and Pune (200km).

The MMR itself has had a lopsided development taking place towards Gujarat on the Western Railway (WR) (formerly Bombay Baroda Central India Railway) route in cities of Mira-Bhayandar and Vasai-Virar as a natural corollary to the transit corridor. There are cities such as Thane, Kalyan-Dombivili, Ulhasnagar, Bhiwandi on the Central Railway (CR) (Grand Indian Peninsular Railway) Corridor which perhaps did not develop as much as on the Western Railway corridor due to the proximity of the entrepreneurial state of Gujarat, and in particular, Surat, while the Central Railway corridor led to the city of Pune, centre of education and culture. Things are changing now and there is greater demand on development of the entire MMR, clubbing with the Golden Triangle formed by Mumbai-Nashik-Pune. Thus the need to commute a distance of 60 to 100 km within one hour is becoming a reality.

Let us look at the existing MSRS. It comprises several stations on the WR main line, and several stations on the CR main line, as well as the Harbour line. The main lines of WR and CR, have each a pair of local lines on which slow trains run and fast lines on which trains with limited number of halts ply. The local lines and the Harbour line trains halt at every station, while the trains on fast lines do get converted to local by halting at every station in certain stretches, depending on the time of the day.

This enables the commuter to wisely select the train that reduces travel time on the whole. However, the tracks and the station platforms in the city are designed to a maximum train speed of 80 kmph. The reality is that to have higher speeds on these tracks does not make much sense, as the stations are not sufficiently far apart to run at a cruising speed of even 80 kmph over reasonable duration, except to far suburbs. At far suburbs, trials are on for speeds up to 120 kmph.

With this background, where do trains with speeds of 160-200 kmph called High Speed Rail (HSR), and those with 350 kmph speed (Bullet Trains) stand vis a vis Mumbai



The Bullet Train

and the MMR? Let us consider a commute of Churchgate to Virar, a distance of 60 km. If there is an HSR with say three halts, the average speed of the 200 kmph peak speed train could be as much as 150 kmph. The travel time could be as little as 24 minutes. If there are 'local' trains or public transport to other locations in that neighbourhood, door to door travel could be at most 60 minutes. There is scope for developing a high frequency low train capacity commute possibilities. An appropriate network of HSR will enable centres of urban growth outside the MCGM areas.

Making the case for the Bullet Train and BRTS

Similarly, developing Bullet Trains of peak speed of 350 kmph with halts at say Churchgate, Seepz, Borivli, Surat and Ahmedabad, rendering it an average speed of 300 kmph, will make the 550 km Mumbai-Ahmedabad journey just of two hours duration! Consider the overall air travel time. Journey to the airport begins by taking into account time taken by road congestion, check in, security checks, boarding, flight congestion, flight duration, landing time congestions, and baggage pick up and travel by road to the final destination. While Ahmedabad flight time may take an hour, the additional time will add up to three hours. The fact that one can board or alight at three additional locations enroute, makes this intercity rail commuting a huge attraction. What one must remember is that the carbon footprint of a flight is about 20 times that of the rail. As the intercity travel demands increase, we have to make sure that the carbon footprint does not significantly add to global warming and consequent climate change possibilities.

At ₹110 cr/km, the Bullet Train and the HSR could be a

reasonably worthwhile investment. Combine it with BRTS (Bus Rapid Transit System) network at say ₹ 30 cr/km, the commute, be it intercity or intracity and reducing flying commutes, would be the best thing to address commuting as well as environmental and global warming issues.

While one may agree that the existing MSRS needs to be upgraded to bring about safer commuting, comfortable commuting, inclusive commuting, level boarding etc, it surely is not in shambles. It has reached its saturation level and not adequate significant capacity for existing commuter volumes can be generated by the Suburban Railway System. The proposed Metro system will cost ₹ 850 cr/km if as planned (proportion of elevated and underground) or ₹ 1400 cr/km if wholly underground. Its capacity when completed, will be 72,000 persons per hour, while railway is carrying 1,80,000 pph in addition to its capacity of 1,80,000 pph. Metro will also take about 70 years to complete. This leaves the only option for Mumbai to go for, a well designed network of BRTS. Keeping intercity and intracity commuting, as mentioned earlier, improve the existing suburban railway system, airconditioning the trains to ventilate it well, ensure it is inclusive to persons with disability, the elderly, children and pregnant women, provide significant addition to road public transport capacity in MCGM and Thane and Mira-Bhayandar, and keeping the future needs of intercity commuting volumes and global warming in view, proceed with HSR and Bullet Trains projects. ■



The writer is an IIT Bombay graduate in Civil & Structural Engineering. He is on Government of Maharashtra's Steering Committee on BRTS for Mumbai and Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority's Technical Advisory Committee on BRTS for Mumbai. He is also member of Research & MIS Committee of Unified Mumbai Metropolitan Transport Authority.

Interesting facts

Longest station name: Venkatanarasimharajuvaripeta on the Arakkonam-Renigunta section near Chennai.

Shortest station name: Ib, near Jharsuguda in Odisha and Od, near Anand in Gujarat.

A renovated platform at Gorakhpur Railway Station in Indian state of Uttar Pradesh has become the world's longest, measuring 1,366m. Until recently, Kharagpur in the Indian state of West Bengal was the longest platform at 1,072 m.

The Dibrugarh - Kanyakumari Vivek Express is the longest running train on the Indian Railways in terms of distance and time. It runs from Dibrugarh in India's Northeast state Assam to Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu the southernmost state of India. In a little under 85 hours, the train covers a distance of 4283 km and traverses six states in India. This train route is currently the longest train route in the Indian Subcontinent and the train has 57 halts across its route.

Surviving the 'encounter'

So, how many times have you ranted against that 'slow' railway counter clerk and looked daggers at her? Please spare a thought for us, pleads **Nivedita Louis**, a railway counter clerk of seventeen years vintage. Her tongue-in-cheek account about life on the 'other' side will make you laugh. It will also make you think.

THIS is my 17th year at the Railway counters...yes, you read it right...s-e-v-e-n-t-e-e-n-th year and I am really astounded at my survival. Most part of my service has gone in answering enquiries. The toughest job in the planet next to being the American President, without Lewinsky, of course, is being a poor counter clerk in Indian Railways.

We had an integrated phone cum personal enquiry counter before the advent of present day automated enquiries, and our day started with ring-a-ring-a-roses. The shrill bell of telephones ringing was a nightmare with sirens - I once had five phones attached to me, in addition to personal enquiry where the queue length would give shivers to Tirupati Balaji! No wonder I am half deaf now, when my son says 'turn left', I hear it promptly as 'stand straight'.

Did you say 'aam admi'?

Who says the 'aam admi' can't question anyone? Given the right target (that would be me) every one of them feels like Big B and I shudder akin to the participant in the hot seat. From the usual "Which platform does the Gorilla Express (that would be Kurla Express) arrive?" to "What time does the Champak Gandhi (ahem...that is Sampark Kranti) Express arrive?" the questions shot are indeed rapid fire.

The most intelligent and technical question that the common man asks would be, "Will waiting list 199 get confirmed?" You have to answer that hypothetical question

by working out imaginary algorithms in your mind. Mind you, the answer has to perfectly satisfy the man. If you say it may get confirmed (be careful honey, use only 'may'), he incredulously looks at you and wonders...she must be a nut case, how can waiting list 199 get confirmed? If you say it is difficult for it to get confirmed, he is sure you must be terribly envious of his maiden journey with his maiden wife!

Then you have the timetable enthusiast who knows the trains in every nook and corner of the country by heart, yet he wants to test your prowess. He taps his fingers impatiently as you try to remember the number of Uttar Samparkkranti Express, was

it 12554 or 12445? He smirks at your intelligence or rather lack of it and with a wistful smile says it is 12445, and he travels regularly all over the country. You know pretty well that the old man is driven out of his house after his afternoon lunch by his

battered wife, who loves some rest. Armed with the timetable, he attacks me - the poor clerk at the counter.

In case the senior gentleman forgets his proverbial earphone, imagine you are dead and gone by the time your shift is over. You say two and he hears it 'who'. You say the train is at 7.25 and he definitely understands it as 7.45. Why don't the counters have a free earphone attached to each counter? They can come, slip it on, ask and move on, rather than testing the strength of our vocal cords. The height of the counters and the passenger never matches, it always happens that he is at the first floor shooting his questions and I am at the basement! Already a midget at 5 feet and sunken lower in my 2 feet chair, it is definitely a verbal volley



before he huffs and puffs, walking away, sneering at the 'deaf' counter clerk.

Next to attack me is the proverbial 'doubt Dhanapal' with his doubts galore. His preconceived notion that all counter clerks are born with the sole purpose of wasting his time doesn't help. He comes with a well prepared questionnaire, his question starts from what is the full fare to a destination in second class, then first class, AC three tier, two tier and then first AC. That is when you feel like he is going to let you go, unfortunately it doesn't happen.

Next round of questions start from what is the child fare in second class, senior citizen lady fare, senior citizen male fare and then comes physically handicapped person's fare and by the time I answer all his questions, he is sure as hell - Railway clerks are obsessed with numbers. He sits beside the counter, with a bunch of papers, adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing, with all his ten fingers...wait... twenty fingers, including his toes. Sitting at my counter, I do wish I could lend the poor man my fingers as well!

The next in line are the missus and the mister. She stands profusely sweating in the queue, happy that her husband has given her the freedom to stand ahead of him, and boy is she mistaken. She is only a soldier pawn moved forward, while he is the rook, destined to kill. As she approaches the counter, he pushes her aside with a swipe of his hand and starts shooting questions. A woman wouldn't know how to ask questions, right? After all, we belong to a nation that treats women like 'soooooftttt flaaawers'. Any doubts, ask lawyer M.L. Sharma!

Working in the booking counters, issuing tickets is no better either. My shift starts at ten in the morning, with no break in between till eight at night. As I sit keying away like mad, yelling and pushing away tickets and change, my stomach would be growling in hunger. It is again a wonderful coincidence that crowd peaks at lunch time when you long for food, and in the evening when your *chaai* sits silently near you, gathering skin. Don't you dare touch it, the man outside will pounce on you saying 'Government employees are always irresponsible...how dare she drink tea during the peak hour?'

The new ten commandments

So fellow railway men and women, here are your ten commandments to work successfully at the counter:

1. The customer is always right. Anything that is left for you to pick up is your dignity.
2. Never raise your voice against the customer. He may be plain deaf and you are wasting your energy.
3. How much ever pressure you get, don't ever dream of getting up and going to the loo during 'pee'k hour.
4. Never ask for change. With the fifty rupees reserve

cash you get to work in counters, you can become a la Jesus, shelling away change to the 2000 odd passengers you meet every day. The more you ask, the more unsuspecting crevices he will put his/her hands to pull out that wet five rupee note, and imagine if you can live with that after touching the note!

5. Don't, I repeat, DO NOT enter into an argument with the customer. Instead, close your eyes and imagine how his wife would have kicked his butt the moment he left for the station. You may even derive sadistic pleasure out of it.
6. Never turn aside and talk to your colleague in the next counter. You have a doubt or you have a question to ask, they have to wait for later.
7. Always believe in tit for tat. When the man outside gets sweat sodden note from his 'secret' hidden pocket under his pants, make sure that you also issue his ticket after duly picking your nose!
8. How much ever your stomach growls in hunger, please do not keep the 'closed' board. You have come to work, not eat to your stomach full. Instead, wait for all the trains to leave and if you are still alive, go taste the stale food!
9. Do not brush your teeth or floss if you are working in the night shift. You need to counter the 'alcohol' reeking smell of the drunken passengers with your special early morning breath. In addition to this, imagine you are in the midst of a jasmine scented garden while issuing tickets, when your senses are actually undergoing an olfactory attack.
10. Worship your in-laws and parents. They are the ones who are going to manage your children while you click away like mad at the counters. Your night shifts will be their nightmare; your absence when your kid is sick would be their time in living hell.

Life behind the counters is not rosy and sweet. The next time you encounter someone in the enquiry counter without a smile in her face, please know that she is over worked. Know that she has children back home who have locked themselves up in loneliness. Know that she has shouted out her lungs to people like you in her eight hour shift. Please acknowledge

her and think that a counter clerk is also 'human'!■



The writer is currently a Commercial Apprentice with Southern Railways. She is married with two kids. She has a B.Com and an MBA and is an avid blogger, social activist and voracious reader. You can read more of her writings at: www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com

Konkan Railway – India’s marvel

The Konkan Railway may just be 760-km long, but it passes through some tough terrain, making its construction a marvel of engineering. The Konkan region was given an economic fillip with the construction of this line, which the current railway minister hopes to develop further, says Dilip Chaware. He describes the challenges faced and the people behind the Konkan Railway project.

KONKAN Railway (KR) is an Indian marvel. The 760-km rail passes through one of the most difficult terrains in the world. Its completion within just eight years by Indian engineers is a global record, a unique feat of civil engineering. The financing model created for KR is still unmatched. KR now is expected to take a quantum leap with Railway minister Suresh Prabhu, who hails from Malvan in Sindhudurg district, announcing a plan to build a new 112-km railway line between Karad in Satara district and Chiplun in Ratnagiri district, at an estimated cost of ₹1200 crore. Once completed, this line will connect the Konkan region and the mainland and will eventually integrate with Indian Railways. The socio-economic benefits of this connection are immense.

This new line will generate considerable employment along the Konkan belt which has a coastline of about 720 km. According to the plans, many small and big ports will have a direct route to the heartland of India, thanks to this link. Presently, they are compelled to take a detour and travel long distances by road.

How the project began

The credit for launching the much-awaited KR project in 1989 goes to then Union finance minister Madhu Dandavate, railway minister George Fernandes, Maharashtra chief minister Sharad Pawar and Planning Commission deputy chairman Ramkrishna Hegde. KR decided to raise its own funding, construct the line connecting Mumbai with Mangalore as fast as possible, and repay the loans in a time bound manner.

The challenging assignment was entrusted to E. Sreedharan, a veteran railway technocrat already in retirement. Sreedharan became the first Chairman and Managing Director of KR.

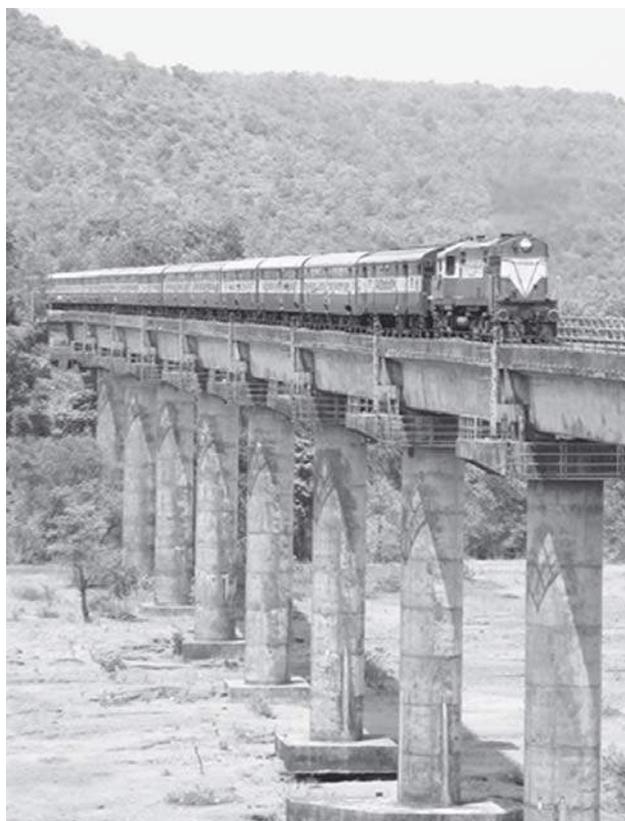
Sreedharan’s task consisted, inter alia, to :

- ♦ build 760 km of rail with least gradient
- ♦ build about 2000 bridges, big and small
- ♦ build 92 tunnels with total length of 83 km
- ♦ persuade over 42,000 landowners to part with their holdings
- ♦ interact with governments in Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka and Kerala
- ♦ raise ₹ 2250 crore from the public.

People were persuaded to give up their ancestral lands in the interests of the nation. They readily obliged. On its part, KR acted humanely and paid the land owners a fair price.

Heritage, community and religious structures were left untouched. Payments were delivered promptly. All this resulted in the completion of land acquisition within 12 months.

Many novel ideas were adopted. One of them was that the work was divided into seven sectors of around 100 km each. Every section was put under a Chief Engineer who had the freedom to take on-the-spot decisions. As a time saving measure, concrete sleeper plants were set up at Chiplun, Kudal, Madgaon (Goa) and Murdeshwar (Karnataka) to manufacture over a million sleepers for the project. Materials like cement, steel, rails and dynamite were stored in adjacent depots.



Quality control as per international standards was the keyword from day one. Total transparency in the bidding and the contract awarding process eliminated any chance of litigation. The financing model developed for KR is still considered the best. This is because it was for the first time in India that funding was raised without touching the government treasury for a rail project. The authorised capital of ₹ 800 crore was contributed by the Indian Railways and by Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra states. This was supported by issuing public bonds of ₹ 2250 crore.

Surmounting all hurdles, the project made good progress. In March 1993, the southernmost section of 47 km between Thokur and Udipi was inaugurated. This was followed by the northernmost section of 47 km between Roha and Veer in Raigad district in June 1993. The first passenger train on KR ran between Mangalore and Udipi on 20 March 1993. The service was extended by 51 km from Veer to Khed in March 1995, and by another 265 km from Khed to Sawantwadi in December 1996.

But Mumbai and Mangalore still remained to be connected. This was owing to a challenge posed by the tunnel at Pernem. Incessant caving in and flooding of the shaft was stalling work. It was finally completed in January 1998, taking almost six years. The formal inauguration of the entire stretch of 740 km from Roha to Mangalore took place on 26 January 1998, though the full route between Mumbai and Mangalore became operational from May 1998.

Konkan Railway's ecological initiatives

Konkan Railway will play a major role in railway minister Suresh Prabhu's vision of promoting eco-friendly initiatives. For instance, KR has decided to install a solar plant at Ratnagiri as part of its 'clean energy policy'. According to Prabhu, the policy envisages to employ solar and wind aero-generators wherever possible.

The proposed 350 KW-capacity solar photo voltaic plant, which will be connected to the state grid, shall generate about 3.8 lakh units of energy per year – sufficient to meet the entire energy requirement of Ratnagiri railway station and railway office.

The project will cost about ₹ 3.6 crore. The plant is expected to result in a saving of about ₹ 42 lakh per annum. There are plans to increase the generation capacity of the plant to 1 MW.

Another step towards environment conservation and waste management is a recently installed organic waste composting

Those who made Konkan Railway a reality



Arjun Balwant Walawalkar is regarded as the father of Konkan Railway. Born on 27 December 1897, he joined the railways in its engineering drawing department in 1922. In 1952, he published a booklet to advocate the demand for KR, held seminars and wrote extensively in local and national newspapers to propagate the idea.

Nath Pai, the Konkan MP, first raised the demand for KR in the Parliament. A captivating speaker, he died a premature death, but had generated enough support to take the demand further.



Elattuvalapil Sreedharan is famous the world over as the "Metro Man" for completing the Delhi Metro project in record time. He has changed the face of mass transport in India singlehandedly.

He was decorated with the Padma Vibhushan in 2008.

plant at its residential colony at Seawoods in Navi Mumbai. The plant will enable KR to manage by itself all the organic and green waste produced in the colony. After assessing the results, KR plans to replicate the system at some major stations and its residential colonies.

Challenges for KR are manifold. Still, priority needs to be given to doubling of the tracks and the monsoon precautionary measures so that the operations are not affected during heavy downpours. Prabhu has declared that these factors would be considered promptly. However, the main challenge of developing the region through which KR passes, economically,



needs highest attention. Nonetheless, in the decades to come, KR is bound to play a crucial role in India's development. ■

The writer is a veteran journalist who has covered state and national politics for over 35 years. He has successfully documented the careers of many chief secretaries of Maharashtra for archival purposes.

A Railway fact

There are two UNESCO World Heritage Sites connected to the Indian Railways – The Mountain Railways of India and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, which is an amazing blend of Gothic art with Indian architecture. The Indian Mountain Railways includes three railways – the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways, Nilgiri Mountain Railways and Kalka Shimla Railway. All three railways established more than a hundred years ago are fully operational to this day.

Spiritual journeys, literally!

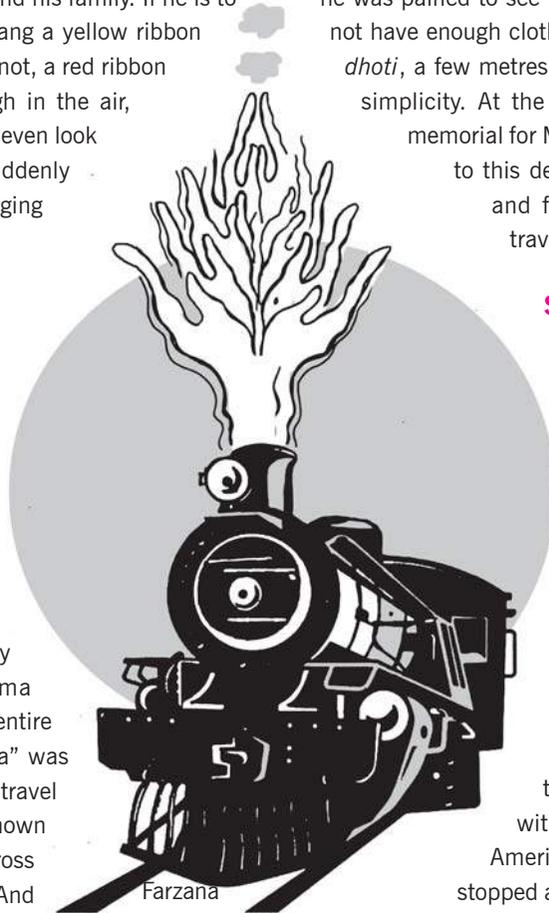
Trains have played a memorable role in most peoples' lives including of saints and freedom fighters. Om Prakash Narayan takes us on a gentle journey to acquaint us with the spiritual connection of the railways.

THERE is a beautiful story of a prisoner returning home on a train. Will he be accepted by his family? It's a big question in his mind for which a solution has already been agreed upon between him and his family. If he is to be accepted, the family would hang a yellow ribbon on their tree close to the track. If not, a red ribbon would be hung. Anticipation high in the air, the released prisoner is unable to even look out of the train window, when suddenly he sees lots of yellow ribbons hanging from the tree.

From Lincoln to Gandhi

Trains have always added that extra bit of meaning to a story like this. Always in the background, yet they have a powerful influence on the lives of many. It was on a train, that Abe Lincoln wrote his famous Gettysburg address. It is well known that India's freedom struggle began with a train journey in South Africa. That Mahatma Gandhi was able to inspire an entire nation to the echo of "satyagraha" was largely because he was able to travel extensively by train. It is well known that Gandhi traveled widely across the Indian subcontinent by train. And two stories relating to the Father of the Nation stand out for me: Once, one of his sandals slipped from his feet and landed on the track – he immediately took

off the other one and threw it as close as possible to the first, so that the finder of the shoes would find a pair! At Madurai, during September 1921, when Gandhi was travelling by train, he was pained to see that the majority of the population did not have enough clothes. Thus, he started wearing only the *dhoti*, a few metres of the loincloth that characterised his simplicity. At the Madurai Railway Station, there is a memorial for Mahatma Gandhi that stands testimony to this decision taken by him. Not just politics and freedom struggle, but spirituality too travelled on tracks.



Farzana

Swami Vivekananda's train journeys and other stories

It is said that Swami Vivekananda, during his travels across the Indian subcontinent, would travel by train only if somebody bought him a ticket. Otherwise, he travelled on foot. On his historic train journey from Ramnad to Madras in the then Madras Province, he drew unparalleled crowds along the track. Who could refuse to acknowledge the beacon of light from India, who rode the world of spirituality like a colossus, with the words, "Brothers and Sisters of America"? The train journey of Swamiji was stopped at many places by enthusiastic Indians, who wanted to see the turbaned hero of India.

Swami Vivekananda's Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, travelled by ship and later by train in the 1880s, when he wanted to

You should know

A bridge linking the International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT) at Vallarpadam with Edapally in the Kochi backwaters is the longest railway bridge in India at 4.62km (33 spans of 20m, 99 spans of 40m).

India's first sea bridge, the Pamban Bridge is a cantilever bridge on the Palk Strait. It connects Rameswaram on Pamban Island (Tamil Nadu) to mainland India.

Saraighat Bridge (1,492 m) is the first rail-cum-road bridge constructed over the Brahmaputra River.

see Varanasi and other places. When he landed in Mughalsarai, he missed the train to Varanasi and a high ranking railway official escorted him in his inspection carriage up to Varanasi.

A train journey from Madurai to Villupuram was an important part of the journey to self discovery of Sri Ramana Maharishi when he left his home during his early age. It seems trains have played a significant role in the lives of many saints.

Sri Paramahansa Yogananda, was compared to a train engine even when he was only a few months old. "Little Mother, Thy son will be a Yogi. As a Spiritual Engine, he will carry many souls to God's Kingdom", was how Sri Lahiri Mahasaya, (one of India's greatest saints), reportedly blessed Sri Paramahansa Yogananda when he was a small child. The prophecy came true when Sri Paramahansa Yogananda later went to America and captured the hearts of millions of people around the world with his classic, 'The Autobiography of a Yogi', where he reveals, perhaps for the first time in the history of such yogis, the intricacies of the search for God and Truth. The book, written in first person, with an eye for detail, is a veritable account of one of the most moving, personal, true stories of a person in search of God and truth.

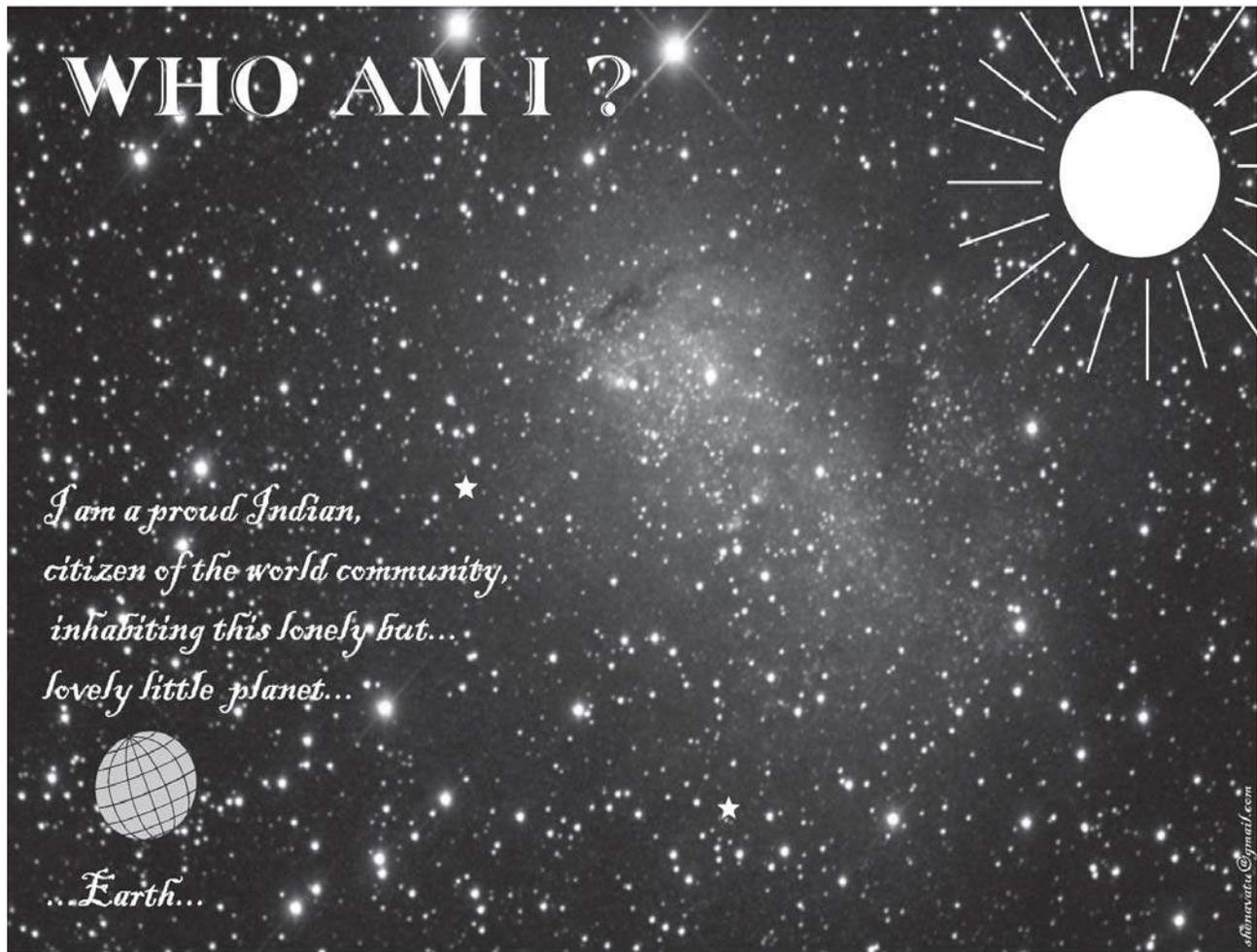
The book itself reads like a long train journey, with many saints in each compartment.

Sri Paramahansa Yogananda's father, Sri Bagabati Charan Ghosh, was a high official in the then Bengal Nagpur Railway, and thus, the comparison of Sri Paramahansa Yogananda to a train engine well established the monumental work that he would do later in life. Sri Paramahansa Yogananda himself describes his various train journeys in his autobiography. In some of the chapters, the narration is so vivid, it is as if we are actually travelling with the author in the train!

Trains have a distinct semblance to the journey of life itself, and that is why they are so powerfully appealing to children and elders alike. ■



The writer is the Public Relations Officer of the Madurai Division of Southern Railways. The views expressed here are his own and they do not necessarily reflect the views of the organisation he works for. He has a blog where he writes occasionally on topics like environmental pollution, meditation, spirituality, etc. He lives with his family in Madurai. He can be contacted at: omprakash_propgt@yahoo.co.in



Married to the railways...er, railway man!

*Being married to a railway man has meant being steeped in railway lore, its vast history and its heartbreaks, says **Shail Raghuvanshi**, whose husband works, talks and breathes railways. But then, she wouldn't have it any other way.*

WHEN I religiously and playfully took my rides in the toy train of Cubbon Park ages ago in Bangalore week after week and, enjoyed it thoroughly, I did not really understand the significance of railways as a medium of travel and transportation. Again, when my family headed north for our annual winter vacations, I loved every moment of our train journeys.

Everything fell into place (as far as the railway part of my life was concerned) when I got married to a railway man! It was as if the last jigsaw puzzle had finally fallen into place in my life. Though the importance of it did not strike me then, over the years, being part of the huge railway fraternity has made my life complete! And, when the realisation dawned, only then did I realize that I wasn't just married to a railway man, but like a newly married woman who doesn't just marry her husband but his entire family, I was being absorbed into the entire railway family!

Honestly, I hadn't taken into account the vast legacy left behind by the British to chug into my life without my permission. To top it all, my husband turned out to be one who lived, and loved the Indian Railways. He practically breathed railways! If the smell of perfume aroused me, it was the smell of heavy metal (pun intended) that energised him. Watching a steam engine chugging into a station gave him a kind of joy that I just could not fathom. Train, tracks, passing scenery – all made my husband become philosophical about life. My childhood train rides came nowhere near the ecstasy that my husband felt while going 'on duty' ('on line' in railway parlance) every other week.

I remember the time when I almost lost my husband in a railway accident in the year 2001. The train in which he was travelling on duty had plunged into a river bed crashing through the Kadalundi Bridge somewhere near Calicut. The seriousness of the incident dawned on me only when I saw the images on television while I sat huddled with my three-year-old son. Fortunately, my husband survived the accident and except for the call that he made to me sitting below the broken bridge asking me to not worry, I did not hear from him for an entire week. The fact that he was also a railway officer seemed to overrule the reality that he was a victim of an accident too. So, because he was miraculously alive he had to assist the rescue operations too! When he returned home (clad in the same dress for an entire week) he was in a real

mess. After having heard wails of families, of seeing bodies of children, women and men he lamented, "Good Lord! Why should such a tragedy take place? How did I survive this disaster while the next compartment passenger plunged to his death?" It took my husband a long time to overcome the inner conflicts and the nightmares of the accident.

So, did this unnerve my railway husband? If I had been in his place it certainly would have brought me to my knees. And, I would have switched jobs. But, railway men are made of sterner stuff I discovered, just like the innumerable ones working in the railways all over the country. There have been times when I have wondered as to how life would have been had I not been connected to the railways. Well! Lots of images popped up in my mind but nothing equalled the joy of being part of such a unique system, an institution in itself. It is not as if all is hunky dory in the railways. There are times when professional dissatisfaction does seep into family life leaving the inmates of a railway household as unhappy as the railway man himself. But then, that is part of any job!

Unlike before, now I can judge or sympathise both, railway travellers and railway employees in the same manner. Suddenly, the T.T.E. (Train Ticket Examiner) looking smart in his railway coat, the tea vendor on the platform, the porter – all speak of stories waiting to be told. Train drivers, guards, clerks, peons, officers – all breathe, live and love their railway journeys as I become an unseen spectator in their everyday lives. For good or for bad, the railway is part of their lives and they carry this emotion into their graves. Each one's experience is a saga in itself. Yesterday, I would not have even given it a thought but today, because I am married to a railway man, it makes a huge difference!

The intricacies of railway life, work and culture can push you or bend you and sometimes can even break you. But there is no running away from it as I realise that I am not just married

to a railwayman – I am married to the railway in him as well! ■



The writer is a freelance journalist, editor, content writer, book reviewer and poet. She has 20 years of writing experience in newspaper, magazine, radio, television and the internet. Her poems, short stories and articles have been published in leading magazines and journals.

KNOW INDIA BETTER



Travel, Maharaja Class!

Railways are an integral part of the Indian life. Whether it is a city's suburban service, or long distance passenger trains, they have their own lore, history and context. But luxury trains have long been considered a preserve of foreign tourists and the Indian elite due to its prohibitive costs, with a cloud of myth, awe and wonder surrounding it. Some of this cloud is lifted here, as we attempt to not only give you a glimpse into these trains, but also the rich cultural and historical ethos that they are rooted in. If you travel on these trains, you will quite literally experience the charmed and rather extravagant lives the Indian royals lived, not so very long ago.

**Text : Md. Masarrath Ali Khan
(Photo credits: The Luxury Trains, New Delhi, Cox & Kings Ltd, New Delhi)**



Palace on Wheels voted as the fourth best luxury train in the world

TRAVELLING by luxury trains is an enriching way of exploring the incredibly amazing and colourful tourist destinations of our country, without having to compromise on comfort. All meals, tours, guide and entrance fees to the monuments and cultural sites are included in the price. All you have to do is just recline and relax amidst the luxurious interiors thus far reserved for royalty, as the magnificent Indian countryside unfolds before your eyes. There are five luxury trains in India which operate between September/October to March/April. Let's look closely at each of these while also dwelling on the tourist destinations and attractions that these trains touch.



One of the restaurants aboard Palace on Wheels

Palace on Wheels

Itinerary (7 nights / 8 days): New Delhi, Jaipur, Sawai Madhopur, Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Bharatpur, Agra, New Delhi

The personal railway coaches of the erstwhile rulers of the princely states of Rajputana, Gujarat, the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Viceroy of British India were not being used by the Indian Railways after independence in normal passenger trains, as they had very rich and traditional interiors, adorned with sparkling chandeliers, Persian carpets and intricately carved silverware. These royal coaches were then used in designing



Palace on Wheels - luxury at its best



A tippler's joy - Palace on Wheels

saloon captain, a valet and an attendant to look after the passengers' personal needs. 'Palace on Wheels' was voted the 4th best luxurious train in the world in 2010 by global travel magazine Conde Nast.

The journey begins from Delhi's Safdarjung Railway Station, where you are garlanded and welcomed like royalty, a *tika* applied on the forehead and a stately turban tied! A glass of wine is offered as you are introduced to your fellow travellers. Then the train starts on its memorable journey and halts at Jaipur, Ranthambore, Chittorgarh Fort, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Bharatpur and Agra, before returning to Delhi. At each of these destinations, tourists can explore the locale and sights, the highlights of which are as follows:

the first version of Palace on Wheels, which was introduced on 26 January 1982, India's Republic Day. The train won the PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) Gold Award in 1987.

The latest improved broad-gauge version of Palace on Wheels was unveiled in 1995. It has 14 interconnected saloons, with the interior matching the aesthetics of the royal states, a well appointed lounge, library, bar and dining cars. The saloons are named after the princely states of Rajasthan, namely, Alwar, Bharatpur, Bikaner, Bundi, Dholpur, Dungarpur, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Jhalawar, Jodhpur, Kishangarh, Kota, Sirohi and Udaipur. The décor of each saloon highlights the cultural ethos of the state and is represented through the use of furniture, handicrafts, paintings and furnishings. Each coupe (sleeping room) is different, but the overall ambience and décor of the saloons has been taken care of to provide uniformity and continuity.

Each saloon has cream yellow colour on its exterior walls and bears the 'coat of arms' (logo) of the erstwhile princely states, along with its name. Each saloon has four coupes with attached toilet and a mini pantry properly equipped to provide tea / coffee and snacks. In every saloon, there is one

Jaipur: Visit to City Palace Museum, Hawa Mahal, Jantar Mantar, Albert Hall Museum, a ride to Amber Fort, folk dance at a 5-star hotel and shopping in colourful local markets.

Ranthambore: Adventurous jungle safari at the Ranthambore National Park.

Chittorgarh Fort: Rana Kumbha Palace, Padmini Palace, Kirti Stambh, Vijay Stambh, Kalika Mata Temple etc., followed by a beautiful light and sound show in the evening.

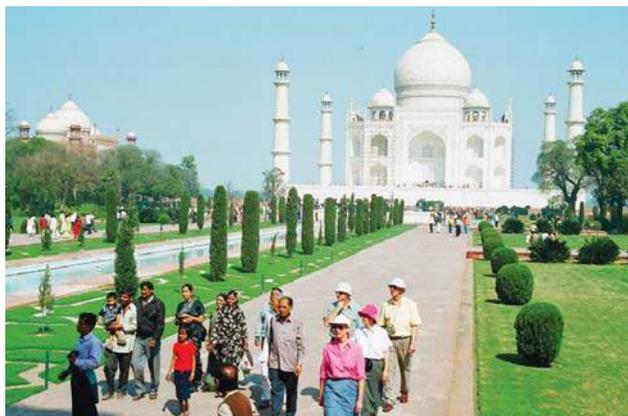
Udaipur: Shikaradi Hotel, City Palace Museum, Crystal Gallery (balcony of Fateh Prakash Banquet Hall), boat ride in Lake Pichola, a visit to Jag Mandir.

Jaisalmer: Old mansions, namely, Patwon ki Haveli, Nathmalji ki Haveli and Salim Singh Ji ki Haveli.

Jodhpur: Umaid Bhawan Palace (one of the largest and finest in the world with 347 rooms) and Mehrangarh Fort.

Bharatpur: A visit to Keoladeo Ghana National Park, a birding paradise and UNESCO World Heritage Site, where you will fall in love with the winged creatures. Over 300 species of birds migrate to this national park from as far as Siberia and China.

Agra: Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Itimad'ud Daula's tomb, light and sound show etc.



The Taj Mahal, Agra (Photo: Masarrath Ali Khan)



Udaipur's City Palace Museum (Photo courtesy: Forts and Palace Publications, Jaipur)



Royal Rajasthan on Wheels

Itinerary (7 nights / 8 days): Delhi, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Sawai Madhopur, Jaipur, Khajuraho, Varanasi, Agra, Delhi

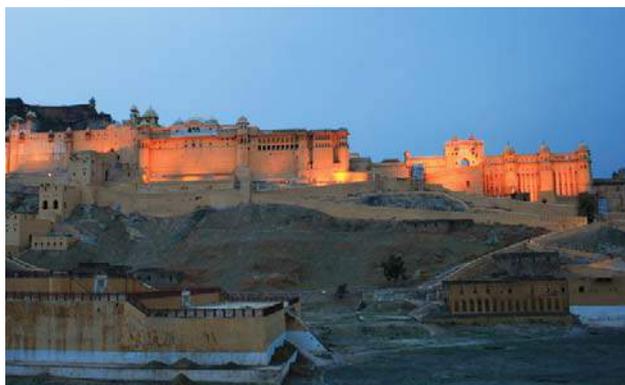
A heritage train oozing with luxury, the 'Royal Rajasthan on Wheels' takes you on a seven-day voyage of vibrant Rajasthan and lets you explore its magic, splendour and vibrant colours,



Royal Rajasthan on Wheels - the deluxe cabin

besides a visit to the Taj Mahal in Agra. This train was launched in January 2009.

An upgraded version of 'Palace on Wheels', the 'Royal Rajasthan on Wheels' is more luxurious and its cabins are more spacious. This luxury train has 14 passenger coaches. Among them, 13 coaches have three deluxe saloons each and the 14th coach (namely Taj Mahal), has two super deluxe saloons. Each deluxe saloon is richly furnished in hues of pearl, ruby and sapphire.



Jaipur-Amber Fort (Photo courtesy: Rajasthan Tourism)



Royal Rajasthan on Wheels - Bar lounge in Swarn Mahal restaurant

The super deluxe suites offer a royal living experience with exquisite silk, velvet bedspreads and finely carved wooden furniture. These spacious suites are named after the jewels 'Emerald' and 'Diamond'. The saloons offer bedding, upholstery, study table and chairs for a comfortable journey.



The illuminated Khajuraho Temple (Photo courtesy: Madhya Pradesh Tourism)

The train has two dining cars namely, 'Swarn Mahal' and 'Sheesh Mahal'. 'Swarn Mahal' is patterned on brass and gold theme, and 'Sheesh Mahal' restaurant features spectacular floor lamps and crystal pelmets. The cabins come equipped with amenities such as Wi-Fi internet, satellite TV, channel music system and individual temperature control. A souvenir coach offers various handcrafted products and apparels.

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The Golden Chariot

The Golden Chariot

The Golden Chariot was unveiled on 23 January 2008 on the tracks, veneered in classic colours of purple and gold, symbolising elegance and the golden jubilee celebrations of Karnataka. It chugged on its maiden journey from Bangalore to Goa on 10 March 2008.

The luxury train derives its name from the stone chariot placed in the Vijaya Vittala Temple of Hampi. The 11 coaches of the luxury train are named after the erstwhile dynasties of southern India, namely Kadamba, Hoysala, Rashtrakuta, Ganga, Chalukya, Bahamani, Adil Shahi, Sangama, Satavahana, Yadukula and Vijayanagara. The coaches are steeped in history and craftsmanship that narrate tales of a bygone era. They derive inspiration from the Mysore and Belur-Halebidu schools of art and architecture and are fully equipped with modern amenities like Wi-Fi internet, Plasma TV and attached baths.

The train can accommodate 88 tourists in its 11 coaches, each with 4 cabins. Its 44 cabins are categorised as 26 twin bed cabins, 17 double bed cabins and a cabin for the physically

challenged. Its two restaurants Nalapaka and Ruchi serve a spread of vegetarian and non vegetarian culinary delights. The lounge bar Madira, named after the mythical drink of the gods, is stocked with an assortment of international wines, while its interiors draw inspiration from the aesthetics of Mysore Palace.

The state of the art gym comes with a changing room, a steam bath, two shower rooms and a toilet. It also has an Ayurveda Centre *Arogya* with facilities for rejuvenating massages. The Golden Chariot runs in two tourist circuits, namely, Pride of the South and Southern Splendour. Both journeys begin from Bangalore's Yashwantpur Railway Station on Monday and end on the 8th day at the same venue.



The Golden Chariot's restaurant

Pride of the South

(Itinerary- 7 nights / 8 days): Bangalore – Kabini/ Bandipur, Mysore, Hassan, Hospet, Badami, Goa, Bangalore

This circuit traverses a land once ridden by formidable armies. The 'Pride of the South' beckons you to discover the worlds that are enriched with history and culture. The main attractions of the journey are halts at the following places:

Bandipur National Park: Home to a plethora of wildlife,



The interiors of the Golden Chariot



The Vidhan Soudha, Bangalore



The Mysore Palace

including elephants, tigers, the striped hyenas, and over 230 avian species.

Kabini Forest: Here the elephants congregate during the dry season and offer an unparalleled experience to wildlife enthusiasts. Enjoy a birding safari and camp fire.

Mysore: Lalitha Mahal Palace, a European classical two-storeyed palace built by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar in 1931, now converted into a heritage hotel.

Srirangapatna: Daria Daulat, Tipu Sultan's Mausoleum.

Shravanabelagola: The colossal 58 feet high monolithic Gomateshwar statue, accessed after climbing 700 steps.

Belur and Halebidu: Magnificent temple complexes of Hoysala art.

Badami: Capital of the Chalukyas – four ancient rock-cut caves all hewn out of red sandstone on the precipice of a hill. The 18-armed Nataraja striking 81 dance poses is a connoisseur's delight.

Hampi: It is set amidst an awesome boulder strewn landscape on the banks of the Tungabhadra River. Here the tourists are

taken on a visit to the Virupaksha Temple, Krishna Temple, Hazara Rama Temple, Vittala Temple etc. Go on a shopping spree in the Hampi Bazar Street.

Pattadakal: A cluster of 10 beautifully chiselled Chalukyan temples.

Goa: Churches of St. Francis Xavier, Our Lady of Rosary and St. Monica.



The Stone Chariot at Vittala Temple, Hampi (Photo: Masarrath Ali Khan)



Bandipur National Park (Photo Courtesy: Karnataka Tourism)

The Southern Splendour

Itinerary- 7 nights / 8 days: Bangalore, Chennai, Mamallapuram, Pondicherry, Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, Madurai, Kanyakumari, Thotepalli / Alleppey, Bangalore

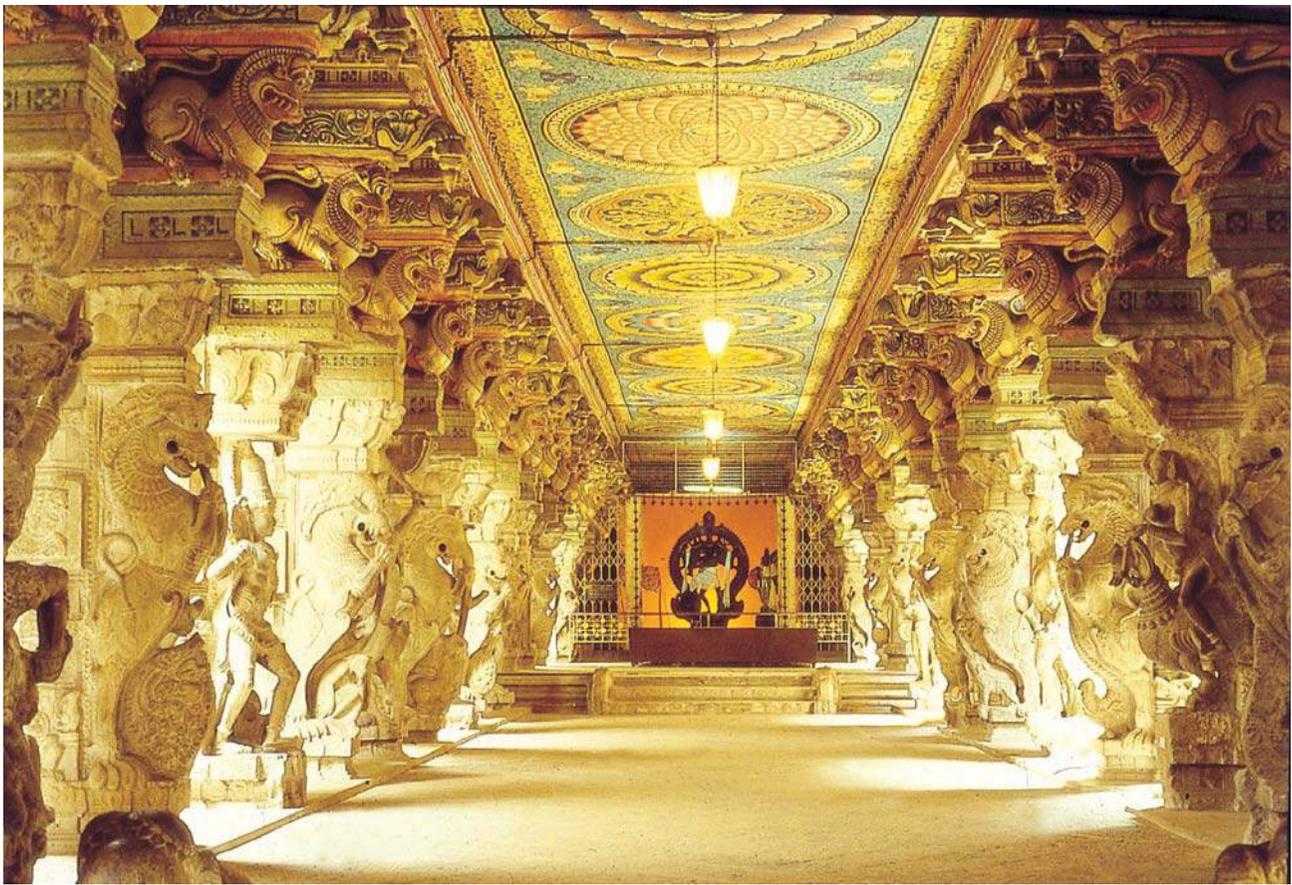
The chief attractions of this itinerary are:

Mahabalipuram: Shore Temple, complex of three temples namely Rajasimhesvara Temple, Kshatriya Simhesvara and Nripatisimha Pallava Vishnugriha.

Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram

Tiruchirapalli: Rock Fort Temple

Thanjavur: Brihadeeswara Temple etc.



Madurai's Meenakshi Temple (Photo courtesy: Tamilnadu Tourism)

Madurai: Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, Thripuragundram Temple followed by a light and sound show at Thirumalai Nayak Palace.

Kanyakumari: The Murugan Kundram hill offers a panoramic view of the town, sunrise and sunset.

Thiruvananthapuram: Ananta Padmanabha Swamy Temple

Kovalam: Take a stroll along the picturesque Kovalam Beach

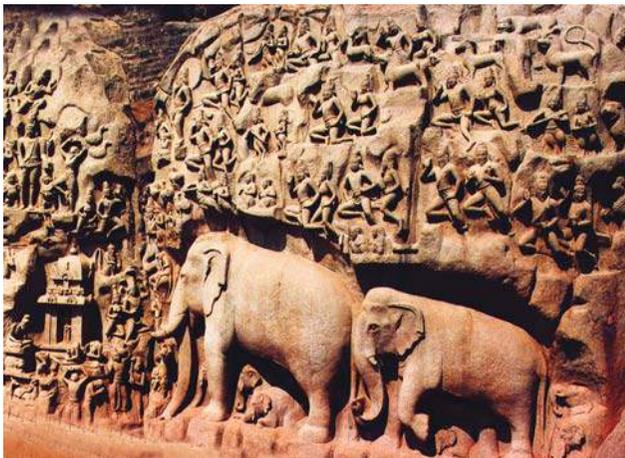
Thotepally / Alleppey: A cruise in the beautiful and serene Vembanad Lake.

Kumarakom: A cruise along the beautiful backwater stretches, enchanting waterways and canals adorned with white lilies and emerald green paddy fields.

Kochi: Mattancherry Palace, the Jewish Synagogue, St. Francis Church, Santa Cruz Basilica.



Kerala - Cruise along the backwaters (Photo courtesy: Kerala Tourism)



Mahabalipuram Arjuna Penance (Photo courtesy: Tamilnadu Tourism)



Thanjavur - Brihadeeshwara Temple
(Photo courtesy: Tamilnadu Tourism)



Maharajas' Express

Maharaja's Express

The journey of the Maharajas' Express has often been compared to that of the legendary 'Orient Express' of the West in refinement and luxury. Its meticulously crafted itinerary offers you a visit to at least five UNESCO World Heritage Sites, palaces, forts, sand dunes and wildlife parks, as you experience the best of India's royal traditions, art and vibrant culture, with optional breaks at select spa destinations, and shops in the myriad-hued bazaars of Rajasthan. And all this luxury comes to you while you live a Maharaja's life inside India's most luxurious train furnished in elegant décor, gourmet dining, and



Maharajas' Express - Presidential Suite



Maharajas' Express: An offboard experience for tourists who are enjoying lunch with the Taj Mahal in the backdrop

state-of-the-art amenities, adding unparalleled finesse to this royal train journey.

Most Maharajas of India had a fascination with rich royal saloons, even before the introduction of train travel in India. They built their own narrow gauge railway lines and enjoyed an odyssey onboard their toy trains. In the era of the Raj, many Maharajas had their own personal carriages draped in luxury and used them for important occasions like state visits and hunting trips. The saloons of the Maharaja's Express derive inspiration from such private carriages of the erstwhile Maharajas.



Maharajas' Express - Rang Mahal

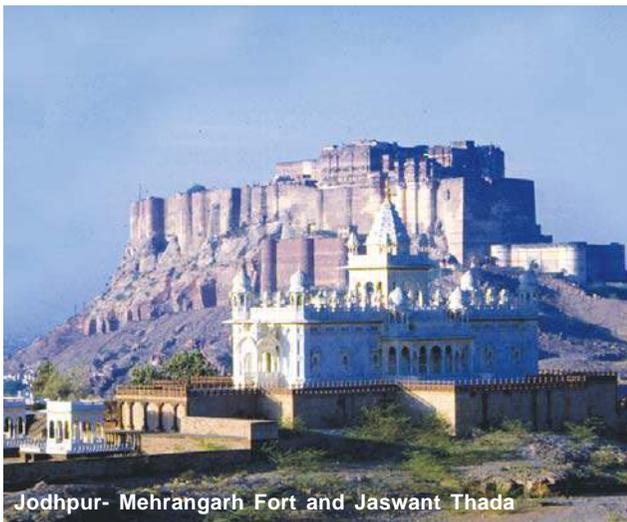
This train's 23 coaches (with a total passenger capacity of 88) include two restaurants, spa saloon, bar, lounge, fitness and business centres. Its 14 guest carriages are named after various precious stones such as Moti (Pearl), Heera (Diamond), Neelam (Blue Sapphire), Firoza (Turquoise), Monga (Coral), Pukhraj (Yellow Sapphire) and so on. The luxury cabins fitted in these carriages come in four categories, namely, deluxe cabin, junior suite, suite and presidential suite (Navratna).

Eminent journalists and chefs such as Sir Mark Tully and Vivek Singh respectively, have graced this train with their

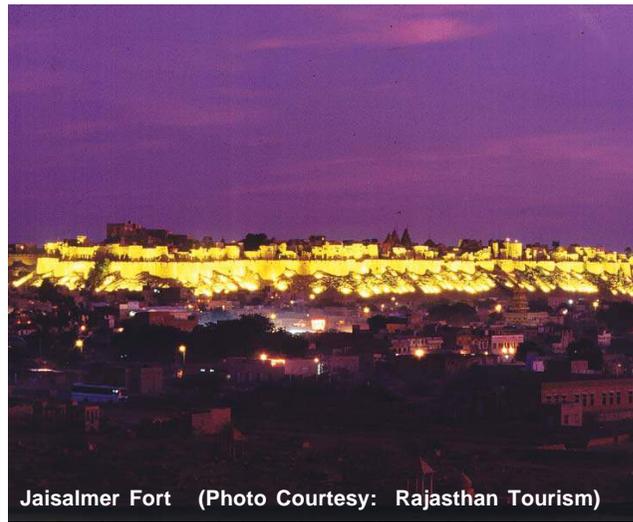
presence. The Maharaja's Express has won many awards and accolades. It was adjudged the *Best Luxury Train* at CNBC Aawaz Travel Award 2010. It bagged the 1st runner up prize in the *Specialist Train Operator* category at Conde Nast Traveller Reader's Travel Award 2011. It won the *World Travel Award* in the category of 'World's Leading Luxury Trains' for three successive years in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

The train offers five itineraries and each journey is a world class experience in itself.

- **The Indian Splendour** (7 nights/8 days): Delhi, Agra,



Jodhpur- Mehrangarh Fort and Jaswant Thada



Jaisalmer Fort (Photo Courtesy: Rajasthan Tourism)



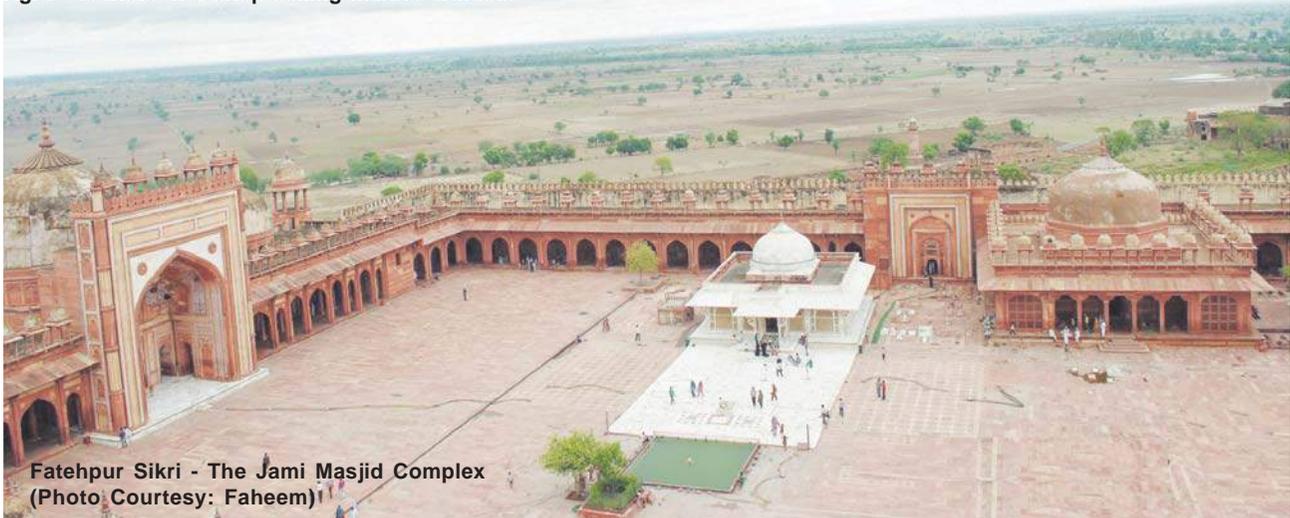
Varanasi Ghat

Ranthambore, Jaipur, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Balasinor, Mumbai.

- **Heritage of India** (8 days/7 nights): Mumbai, Ajanta, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Agra, Delhi
- ***Treasures of India** (4 days/3nights) (departure: Sunday): Delhi, Agra, Ranthambore, Jaipur and Delhi.



Agra - tourists at a shop selling marble artifacts



Fatehpur Sikri - The Jami Masjid Complex
(Photo Courtesy: Faheem)



Fateh Prakash Palace, Udaipur

(Photo Courtesy: HRH Group of Hotels, Udaipur)

- ***Gems of India** (3 nights/4 days)(departure-Wednesday): Delhi, Agra, Ranthambore, Jaipur, Delhi.
- **Indian Panorama** (8 days/7 nights): Delhi, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, Gwalior, Orchha, Khajuraho, Varanasi.
*Treasures of India and Gems of India offer the same package with different journey timings.

The main tourist destinations visited by these trains are:

Aurangabad: Bibi ka Maqbara, Medieval tombs, monuments and palaces reflecting the Mughal art and architecture.

Gwalior: Gwalior Fort and a few other attractions.

Bikaner: Exotic camel safaris and visit to many monuments and temples.

Orchha: Visit to Fort Complex, light and sound show etc.

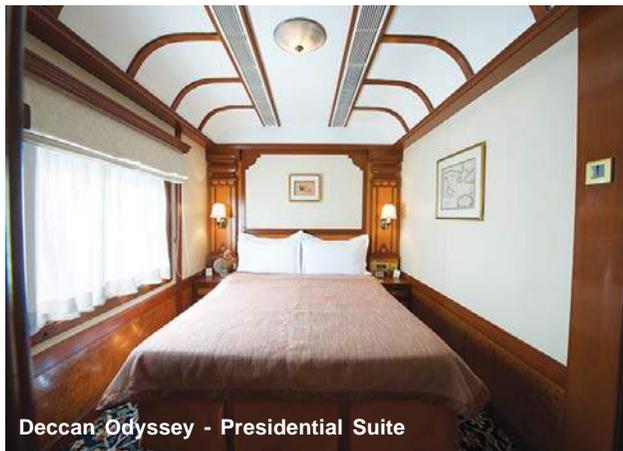
Ajanta: 29 ancient caves famous for architectural elegance and world famous paintings.

Fatehpur Sikri: Mausoleum shrine of Sheikh Salim Chishti, Jami Masjid, Buland Darwaza and Palace Complex.



The Deccan Odyssey

The Deccan Odyssey is the luxury train service of the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC). This train was launched on 16 January 2004. The Taj Group of Hotels also joined hands with Deccan Odyssey to offer 5-star hotel facility onboard to the guests. This luxury train traverses across magnificent landscapes with sprawling forts, and palaces offering memorable experiences. The Cox & Kings travel company has bagged the outsourcing contract of Deccan Odyssey to operate the train from October 2014 onwards for five years.



Deccan Odyssey - Presidential Suite

The train has 40 deluxe cabins in 10 cars, 4 presidential suites in 2 cars, 2 restaurant cars (named Peshwa I and Peshwa II) apart from a bar car, a conference car with a business centre, a spa car and so on. The interiors of each coach reflect a particular era of the Deccan milieu, and come with facilities like personal safe, telephone, attached bathroom, air conditioning and a personal attendant round the clock.

At the end of each coach is a lounge where passengers can relax and reflect on the passing countryside during daytime travel. The 'Deccan Odyssey' operates on the following 10 circuits, encompassing cultural insights and memorable visits to magical destinations, spectacular monuments and world heritage sites, wildlife sanctuaries, and many more.

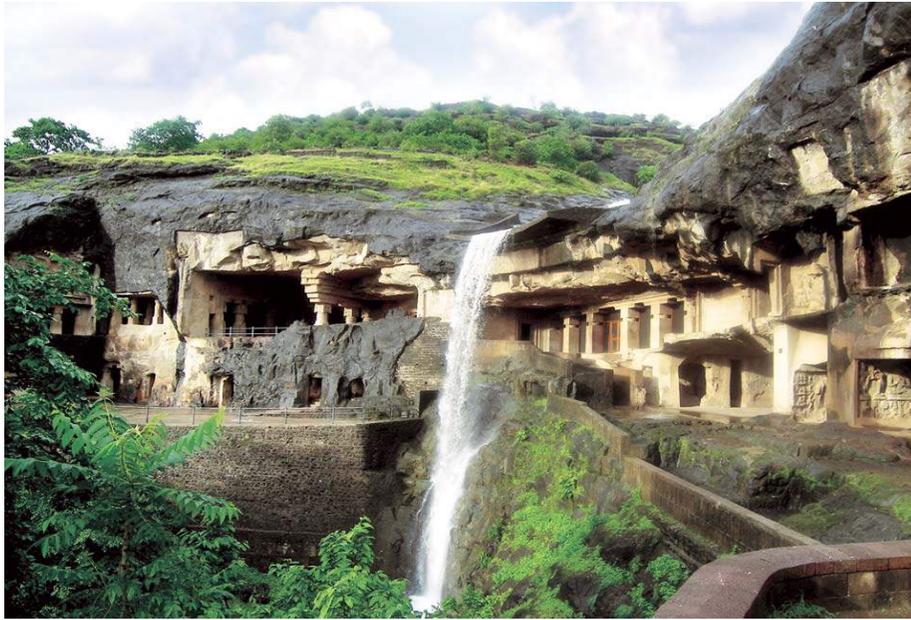
- **Indian Odyssey** - Mumbai to Mumbai (8 days/ 7 nights):
New Delhi, Sawai Madhopur, Agra, Jaipur, Jodhpur,

Udaipur, Vadodara, Mumbai.

- **Indian Sojourn** - Delhi to Mumbai (8 days/ 7 nights):
New Delhi, Sawai Madhopur, Jaipur, Agra, Sanchi, Aurangabad, Mumbai.
- **Golden Treasure** - Delhi to Delhi (4 days / 3 nights):
New Delhi, Agra, Sawai Madhopur, Jaipur, New Delhi
- **Maharashtra Splendour** - Mumbai to Mumbai (8 days / 7 nights):
Mumbai, Aurangabad, Tadoba, Ajanta, Nashik, Kolhapur, Goa, Mumbai.
- **Jewels of the Deccan** - Mumbai to Mumbai (8 days / 7 nights):
Mumbai, Badami, Aihole, Pattadakal, Hampi, Bijapur, Hyderabad, Mumbai.
- **Hidden Treasures of Gujarat** - Mumbai to Delhi (8 days / 7 nights):
Mumbai, Vadodara, Bhavnagar, Sasan Gir, Little Rann of Kutch, Modhera, Ahmedabad, Delhi.
- **Spiritual Sahyadri** - Mumbai to Mumbai (5 days / 4 nights):



Restaurant on the Deccan Odyssey



Deccan Odyssey's destination - Ellora Caves

Mumbai, Nashik, Shirdi, Mumbai.

- **Soul Quest** - Mumbai to Mumbai (3 days / 2 nights): Mumbai, Shirdi, Mumbai.
- **Indian Soiree** - Mumbai to Delhi (8 days / 7 nights): Mumbai, Ajanta Caves, Sanchi, Sawai Madhopur, Jaipur, Agra, New Delhi.

For booking on the luxury trains contact:

The Luxury Trains, UGF,
Chanderlok Building, 36 Janpath, New Delhi-110001
Phone: +91-11-4373-7059 / 2332-2332 / 4373-7000
Fax: 23348003
E-mail: ttquery@theluxurytrains.com
Web: www.theluxurytrains.com
Timings: Monday to Saturday (1000 hrs - 1800 hrs IST)

For booking on Deccan Odyssey contact:

Cox & Kings Ltd Block A & B,
Kamal Cinema Commercial Complex,
Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi - 110029
Phone: +91-11-26767969
E-mail: For Bookings: trains@deccanodyssey.in

- **Maharashtra Wild Trail** - Mumbai to Mumbai (8 days / 7 nights):

Mumbai, Ajanta, Nagzira, Tadoba, Aurangabad, Mumbai

Some important destinations visited by the 'Deccan Odyssey' are:

- **Vadodara:** Jami Masjid, Pavagadh Archaeological Park, Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum, Laxmi Vilas Palace.
- **Tadoba:** Tadoba Tiger Reserve.
- **Nashik:** Triambakeshwar Temple etc.
- **Aihole:** Aihole Group of Temples (the complex has 125 temples

segregated into 22 groups by the archaeological department).

- **Bijapur** (ex-capital of Adil Shahi Sultans): Gol Gumbaz, Ibrahim Rauza, Jami Masjid etc.
- **Hyderabad** (ex-capital of Qutb Shahi Sultans): Charminar, Golconda Fort etc.
- **Palitana:** Cluster of Jain temples built in marble.
- **Sasan Gir:** Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary.
- **Great Rann of Kutch:** the Little Rann of Kutch is famous as the world's largest refuge of the Indian wild ass.
- **Modhera:** Sun Temple etc.
- **Shirdi:** Abode of Sri Sai Baba, Samadhi Temple, Dwarkamai Mosque.
- **Kolhapur:** Town Hall Museum and Mahalaxmi Temple.
- **Sanchi:** Ancient *stupas* built from 3rd century BC TO 12th century AD.



- **Ellora:** Fine specimens of Hindu Buddhist and Jain architectural heritage.

Travel on any of the luxury trains to explore incredible India and take home memories of a lifetime! Happy travelling! ■

The writer is a freelance travel writer.

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Matunga Pioneer English High School Annual Day

Principal Sumathi Shetty, Mrs. Hegde, Mrs. Tejashri Ghag, and Mr. Ratanshibhai Thakkar at the release of the Annual Magazine



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Little Angels English High School, Santacruz



Kanya Vidya Mandir, Santacruz

The rails in India's reels

What is India without her railways? And what is India without her cinema? And the twain do meet often. Railways have sometimes been central to the plot, sometimes a supporting actor and sometimes just an extra in Indian cinema, but some role it does play, and often. Akul Tripathi writes about this pair and the relationship they share, which has so fascinated Indians for more than a century now.

THEY are two quite seemingly unrelated things - movies and trains. Perhaps the only thing that could possibly be seen as common ground between the two is that they revolutionised the world in ways none quite expected them to. One transformed India and steadily made the vast expanse seem less intimidating, while the other became that rare opium shared and enjoyed equally by both the masses and the classes.

The first railways under the grand Great Indian Peninsula Railway opened in 1853 running between Bombay and Thane. In the subsequent years, the hurtling metal boxes changed the geography of the country. Forty two years later, the Lumiere Brothers brought the magic of moving pictures to the country and since then, nothing has been the way it was.



The iconic scene from the Hindi film *Aaradhana*

An early affair

Quite aptly, one of the earliest “movies” to be screened was a 50-second continuous shot of a train pulling into a station: the Lumiere brothers' *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, made in 1895. In the decades and century to follow, cinema and trains have shared a relationship that is steadfast as it is unique. People thronged to big cities on the backs of these locomotives to watch the cinema, which in turn made sure that the romance of a country at move stayed alive and fresh on the silver screen.

If it weren't for the trains in the movies, Raj from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge* would never have met Simran, nor would national integration have played out as sublimely as it did in *The Burning Train*. And of course, if there ever was something to beat the experience of a cinema hall, it has to be the landscape unfolding in the epic old-fashioned 70mm screen of a train window.

It's an unfortunate reality that Indian cinema has lost a vast majority of the films made in the

If it weren't for the trains in the movies, Raj from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge* would never have met Simran, nor would national integration have played out as sublimely as it did in *The Burning Train*. And of course, if there ever was something to beat the experience of a cinema hall, it has to be the landscape unfolding in the epic old-fashioned 70mm screen of a train window.

initial eras of cinema. One of the earliest prominent references of trains used in popular cinema is the 1934 movie *Toofan Mail* which must have been popular and successful enough to warrant a sequel - *Return of Toofan Mail* in 1942. In the years to follow, the train finds reference and often prominence in Indian cinema. Quite unmistakably, it is an iconographic aspect of Indian cinema that has been consistent since, what many argue, has been the urbanisation of Indian society.

The ubiquitous coming of age

The wheels of the train are the hands of time in whose movement the unassuming and in distress young boy, grows up to be the hero that the silver screen demanded of him. One loses count of the number of times that a boy jumps over a bridge onto a running train, and by the time the feet hit the top of the compartment, he is the grown superstar. What can be a better example of this device than the 1973 movie *Yaadon Ki Baaraat*, where in the space of a 360 degree camera movement



And the lovers are reunited - from the Hindi film *Jab We Met*

a young boy transforms into the charming Dharmendra.

In another *avataar*, it is the potent symbol of moving forward in life - which so perfectly captures India where the migration of people from villages to cities is a reality and coming of age, with the train as its medium. In real and reel life, many a superstar arrived to keep their appointment with destiny at the Victoria Terminus of Bombay. The arriving train a harbinger of hope for those waiting; the one running along its merry course the process of a journey being lived, of destinations being reached and of course the train pulling out of the station and receding into the distance, the most potent symbol of loss and separation.

Whether it is the young Shambhu from the 1953 classic *Do Bigha Zamin* on his way to the big city to earn money to pay off a debt; or the poignant moment as the train pulls into the deserted Ramgarh station in the iconic *Sholay*, are pieces of cinema lore that cling to the memory for a life time. What better a movie and scenes from it to depict the length and breadth of the country and its many peoples than the inimitable *Gandhi* where sitting on top of a steam locomotive, the young Gandhi fresh from the South African triumph meets the real India? The train as the setting for the mode of travel and place where you meet the common man hasn't changed since with recent movies like the 2004 Shah Rukh Khan movie *Swades*, where from a train, an NRI opens his eyes to discover India for the first time.

And leaving all meaningful metaphors aside, there has never been a more effervescent setting for a song than these iron clad crawlers with a heart as good as any Cupid. The rambunctious *Chaiya Chaiya* from *Dil Se* in 1998 redefined what a train could do to a song or a song for a train just as the *Mere Sapnon Ki Rani* cleverly shot duet with Rajesh

Khanna in a jeep driving alongside Sharmila Tagore seated in a train, had established this fable so convincingly in 1969. It is quite fitting that it was a song shot on a train that conveys the very soul of the train so melodiously in the 1974 film *Dost* where Dharmendra sees life as one long train journey as he hums *Chalna Hi Zindagi Hai, Chalti Hi Ja Rahi Hai*.

The trains in reel and real have seen the entire gamut of Indian life and the things that make it meaningful for all its billion-plus inhabitants. It has been the garden where the guy first sees the girl, the fantasy land where he romances her (*Solva Saal - Hai Apna Dil Toh Aawara*), the precious gift that is the envy of dacoits, the holy ground worth fighting for and perhaps most magnificently, the universal representation for life's missed opportunities - Rajesh Khanna realising that *Zindagi Ke Safar Mein Guzar Jaate Hain Jo Makaam, Woh Phir Nahin Aate* and the more recent allegory from *Jab We Met*, where Kareena Kapoor's intuition warning her of impending wrong outcomes was compared to the growing realisation that one may miss a train.

It is, when one thinks of it carefully, quite natural that film and rail share such an intimate bond. Both have a significant common ground on which they unite the country. Neither cares nor stoops to distinguish caste, creed, race or religion. All of us equal before the God in Heaven. A feeling so rare, it is rapture. As is travelling by train and being lost in the darkness of the movie hall. To both these centenarians poised to see time beyond all our years: Live long and live well! ■



The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.

“I travel extensively by train”



Suresh Prabhu, the current Union Minister of Railways is a man of many talents. A Chartered Accountant and a lawyer by profession, he has been a Member of Parliament since 1996. He was earlier a member of Shiv Sena party, which he quit in November 2014 to join the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). He was, at various times during the premiership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1996 and 1998-2004), Industry Minister, Minister of Environment and Forests, Minister of Fertilisers and Chemicals, Power, Heavy Industry and Public Enterprises. As Minister of Power, Prabhu introduced major reforms in

India's power sector. He is credited with championing and enacting the Electricity Act of 2003.

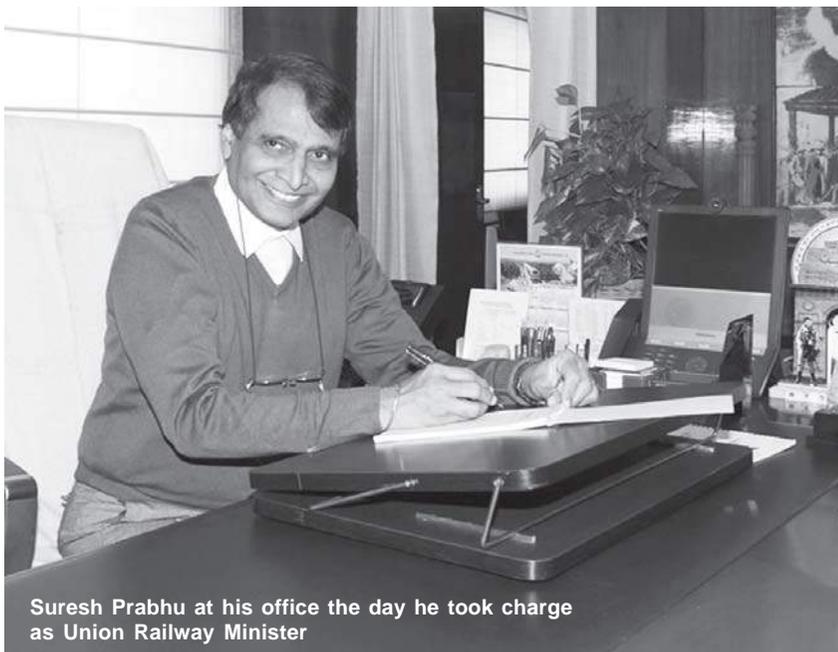
In November 2014, he was sworn-in as Union Railway Minister in the Narendra Modi cabinet. The Railway Budget which was presented in February 2015 was hailed as the first such budget not to take the populist route of announcing new trains. Instead, the focus was more on service delivery, safety, cleanliness and passenger comfort. The Minister took off time from his very busy schedule during the budget session of Parliament, for this email interview with **Anuradha Dhareshwar**. He urges rail passengers to be patient and look forward to a cleaner and safer travel in the future.

What were the major challenges confronting you while preparing the railway budget? How did you narrow down the priorities?

Mobilisation of resources to improve the quality of service delivery was one of the major challenges. Towards this end, it was important to identify projects which needed to be funded on a priority, as these projects are aimed at easing

congestion and generating revenues for railways which could then be used for improvement of services for my customers.

The railway budget has been called historic by a few and lofty and directionless by others. Do you feel some important areas that directly impact the common man got left out? Could you have done better than this?



Suresh Prabhu at his office the day he took charge as Union Railway Minister

announcement in the budget to ease their travel woes, which are phenomenal. Do you feel that the city commuters can ever look forward to safe and reasonably comfortable travel anytime in the near future?

The funds for passenger amenities have been increased by 67% to provide much better facilities to passengers. I have also enhanced funds for lifts and escalators. I am aware about the problems being faced by the commuters of Mumbai. I have directed the General Managers of Western and Central Railway regarding raising of platforms of suburban stations. An announcement has also been made about introduction of AC EMU trains. Announcements regarding integrated

transport solutions for metro cities and MUTP III for Mumbai have also been made.

Ever since I joined the Ministry in November, my entire focus has been on working towards a medium-term action plan which would be announced through the budget. I was, therefore, able to ensure that everything that was important for the development and sustainability of railways was included in the budget. My focus will now be on implementation of my announcements to improve service delivery.

What is the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model that you envisage to get the railways on track? What are the major changes in the PPP policy that you would suggest to make it attractive to investors?

In our action plan we have proposed to take up station redevelopment and logistics parks on PPP mode. The models for these two areas are being firmed up. We will put on the table a framework that is balanced and acceptable to both the partners. I have also set up a one-man committee to suggest measures for strengthening the PPP cell.

There are certain models for private participation such as private freight terminals, investment in wagons, sidings, etc. We are consulting the private sector and we will soon come out with a policy which should enable a large quantum of investment in these areas. Investment in these areas has a direct bearing on the revenues of Indian Railways; hence, these are priority areas.

Mumbaikars are disappointed as there is no big

I am fully aware of the condition of Mumbai suburban commuters. Things cannot improve overnight. We have to be patient. I am working on measures to make rail travel a happy experience.

When was the last time you travelled by the local trains or long distance trains? Do you have any experiences to share?

I travel extensively by train. It is because of this that I was able to emphasise in my budget speech about areas on which I would like to work to improve the satisfaction of passengers.

Mumbai commuters would like to see their railway minister just stand on a platform which has the maximum footfalls in Mumbai, during the peak hours to have a first-hand experience of how they travel each day.

I am fully aware of the condition of Mumbai suburban commuters. Things cannot improve overnight. We have to be patient. I am working on measures to make rail travel a happy experience.

How will you ensure the qualitative improvement in services that you have promised in your budget is implemented in a timely manner? Of the many promises, which are the top five visible changes that the commuters will experience six months from now?

We are drawing up an action plan for every item in the budget speech. I am taking up cleanliness in a mission mode. I hope that six months from now commuters will spend less time in buying tickets and also find cleaner trains and stations. Safety

enhancement is also a priority area.

How soon will we see bio-toilets in all the trains? If this is going to take time, can we not begin with the most basic necessity, a longer chain for the mugs in the long distance trains with immediate effect?

Hopefully, bio-toilets will be there in all trains by 2019. This year alone 17,000 toilets will be replaced by bio- toilets. I am taking note of your suggestion regarding longer chains.

People in general compartments in long distance trains, especially unreserved are travelling in the most inhuman conditions. The only people who are benefitting from these hapless travelers are the Ticket Collectors who are making huge money. What concrete steps will you take to end this kind of corruption that directly affects the commuters?

I am aware of the problems being faced by people traveling in second class coaches. The problem is mainly because of the wide gap between supply and demand. I am making efforts to increase the carrying capacity of trains. In my budget speech I have mentioned about increasing carrying capacity in trains which are not running at maximum permissible number of coaches. I have also announced that more general class coaches will be added in trains where feasible. I agree that corruption is an important issue which needs immediate attention. I have requested Shri Vinod Rai, former CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General) to suggest ways and methods to reduce corruption by improving systems and processes.

On most routes, short distance passengers enter reserved compartments. How do you intend stopping that?

By introducing more surprise checks on trains and penalising railway staff for allowing such commuters to board reserved compartments, and at the same time by increasing the number of unreserved coaches.

What are the concrete measures you will take to plug administrative delays, revenue leakages, corruption and other major problems which have resulted in huge losses for the Railways?

Setting timelines for activities and active monitoring are the

mantras that should bring down administrative delays. Revenue leakages on trains are proposed to be reduced by bringing in hand-held terminal devices. I am also taking steps to bring down corruption.

Safety concerns have grown manifold in the recent years. Is there a plan in place to beef up the Railway Protection Force (RPF), which looks a bit disconnected from commuters' needs of today? Will there be an emphasis on training the force to raise their competence levels, which is so badly required?

Raising competence levels of RPF is of course an area requiring considerable improvement. I have emphasised on better training for RPF staff. Along with this we have introduced a safety help-line number 182 and also intend to provide surveillance cameras on trains.

Raising competence levels of RPF is of course an area requiring considerable improvement. I have emphasised on better training for RPF staff. Along with this we have introduced a safety help-line number 182 and also intend to provide surveillance cameras on trains.

At some stations trains reach at odd hours. These are small stations where there is no security. Don't you think security should be provided at these stations and also waiting rooms for people till day break?

Safety and security of passengers is a shared responsibility with the State Governments. We looking into this area and will try to ensure safety and convenience of passengers.

Passengers coming on long distance trains often get cheated by taxi drivers. Why not have prepaid taxis at major stations?

We do have prepaid taxis at a few stations. We have introduced a concierge service on a pilot basis and if it is successful, we will be extending it to all major stations.

Can you throw some light on how you plan to improve Konkan Railway and also generate employment for 50,000 people in five years?

We have asked Konkan Railway to improve passenger amenities and sufficient funds will be provided. The financial powers of Konkan Railway have been enhanced for quicker decision making. Doubling of Konkan Railway is also under active consideration.

Konkan Railway has started a system of promoting self help groups to sell their products at railway stations. Taxi drivers and auto rickshaw drivers have also been trained as tourist guides. All these measures would lead to job creation. ■

The watersheds in Indian democratic politics

*Both Narendra Modi and Arvind Kejriwal got huge mandates for their vision for India. Their ideologies may differ, but they need not be at cross purposes with each other, says **B. Ramesh Babu**. It would also be best for them to resolve their internal party conflicts and focus on governance and development, where the beneficiary will be the country, he adds.*

THE unprecedented electoral victory of the Narendra Modi led BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, and the spectacular triumph of Arvind Kejriwal led AAP (Aam Aadmi Pary) in the 2015 Delhi Assembly elections represent a clear break from the past. Both are significant in their own separate ways and should not be seen as contradictory to one another or mutually exclusive. The 'Big Broom' and the 'Little Broom' promise to usher in a new era of rapid and sustained economic growth at the national level; and corruption free and responsive self-governance at the grass roots level, respectively. The two leaders are responding creatively to global trends in macro-development strategies, and the growing disaffection of the impoverished millions across the world, respectively.

Putting the country back on the path of rapid and sustained economic growth is overdue. The nation lost several years under the rule of the UPA-II. Economic revival calls for concerted and urgent measures to nurture a business friendly environment so as to attract domestic and foreign investment on a vast scale. The development agenda of Modi had won a clear and massive mandate from the people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari in July 2014. The "alternative politics" spearheaded by the Kejriwal-led AAP won a stunning victory (67 out of 70



Arvind Kejriwal (L): Narendra Modi

seats) in Delhi in February 2015. Both the mandates are equally legitimate and reflect the will of an overwhelming majority of the people. Just because the AAP victory came along subsequently does not mean a negation or diminution of the earlier popular verdict. The two operate at different levels (national and local), and are not at cross purposes as is made out by some analysts.

Modi and Kejriwal face many obstacles

The electoral reality in a continental sized country like India comprising myriad subgroups of all hues and

sizes is very complex, and calls for a more nuanced understanding than the conceptual carpenters seek to box it in! Citizens and voters have a hierarchy of concerns and needs. Both Modi and Kejriwal have come on the scene in response to the felt needs of the times, which are not amenable to the narrow confines of logic. "Life is larger than logic," as Gurudev Tagore observed wisely.

The two leaders should succeed in their distinct missions for the good of the nation. However, it is important to recognise that massive mandates do not automatically translate into realities

on the ground. Honest commitment, determined effort, and favourable institutional dispensation are necessary for success. At present, both leaders face difficult challenges in delivering on their tall promises.

Modi is faced with the insurmountable hurdle of the lack of necessary votes in the Rajya Sabha, and the opposition parties are hell bent on derailing his development agenda. Furthermore, the rightwing radicals of the Hindutva brigade are making it politically difficult for Modi to build the necessary non-partisan legislative consensus in support of his massive mandate.

On the other side, Kejriwal and AAP are confronted with distinctly different, though equally difficult hurdles to overcome. Kejriwal announced a reduction of power bills by half, to consumers of less than 400 units a month from March 1, 2015. He also assured supply of 20,000 litres of water free to all families living in Delhi. The big challenge before him is how to pay for such populist measures over the long haul. Furthermore, it is natural for people to keep asking for more freebies all the time. The temptation to yield is irresistible in an electoral democracy.

The second and equally difficult challenge is lack of unity at the top in AAP. The manner in which Yogendra Yadav and Prashanth Bhushan were thrown out of the Party by a determined coterie of Kejriwal's, symbolises the malaise within the party. Instead of concentrating on governing Delhi and delivering on his promises, if Kejriwal lets himself distracted by power politics within the party, AAP will become another lost cause. That will be a sad and undeserved end to the nascent popular movement for "alternative politics".

At another level, the *mohalla sabhas* as agencies of democratic self-

governance at the grass roots level are yet to be tried out. The experiment has a lot of significance for the future of the "alternative politics" advocated by AAP. We have to watch out and hope that the essentially clumsy process will somehow succeed.

Furthermore, governance of Delhi is faced with built in structural, institutional and legal obstacles with a long legacy. While the Chief Minister of Delhi has the responsibility to govern and deliver on his/her promises, the Government of India and all the central Ministries actually rule Delhi through the Lt. Governor. This constitutional anomaly will not be untangled for a long time.

Failure at the implementation level is a national malaise of long pedigree, which afflicts everything irrespective of who is in power. Let us hope that Modi and Kejriwal will prove to be exceptions to the rule!

Growing global inequality

It is important to see the rise of Modi and Kejriwal in the context of global trends. Since the collapse of communism and the demise of the Soviet Union, capitalist globalisation ruled the roost all over the world for a quarter century or more. In its wake, the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening precipitously in all countries. The rising tide of global inequality (between countries and more significantly within countries), resulted in an enormous increase in the number of poor people, marginalised millions, and the "underclass" of the unemployed and the unskilled in cities, towns, and rural areas all over the world, including India. About 2% of the people have cornered 98% of the wealth across the globe, reliable data reveals.

Naturally, such greed at the top and deprivation at the bottom is an explosive combination. Consequently, popular

movements demanding justice and meeting the basic needs of the people became the foundation of what is now called "new politics" in several countries in South America. Most successful and famous among them was the movement led by Luiz Inacio da Silva in Brazil, which symbolised the 'left-off-centre bottom up kind of participatory democracy' in Brazil. This formula soon spread to many other countries in South America. The success of Castro's Cuba in taking care of the common people, despite the endless American efforts to subvert the revolution, has been a continuing inspiration across the continent and beyond. Aam Admi Party's "alternative politics" belongs to the same genre of democratic self-governance, with active citizen participation at the local level.

"Inclusive Politics" should include women

If the goal is to widen and deepen self-governance, why should the process stop with the so called common man, the 'aam admi'? Kejriwal could have called his party 'Aam Aurat Party' or better still 'Aam Insaan Party', Kalpana Sharma, a senior journalist remarked aptly. As an eternal optimist, I do hope that Indian democracy will cross the gender gap sooner than later. Meanwhile, success of Modi's development agenda at the national level and Kejriwal's movement for justice for the poor at the local level, are crucial for the future of the country. The best that could happen for India today is that the two movements would complement and competitively reinforce each other. ■



The writer is a political scientist. He was formerly the Sir Pheroza Mehta Professor of Civics & Politics, University of Bombay.

Are marriage symbols gender-centric?

Most Hindu married women wear symbols of their marriage. Be it the *sindoor* in the hair parting or the nose ring, there are typical identity marks to being married. **Shoma A. Chatterji** analyses this cultural ethos with all its suggestions of patriarchy, and the premise on which it's based.

IN India, when Hindu women get married, they must wear an identity 'mark' to indicate that they are married, that their husbands are alive and that they are under the safe supervision and control of their husbands and their extended families. Christians across the world also wear the wedding ring, but both husbands and wives wear rings to show that they are married. In Hinduism however, only wives must wear proof of the fact that they are married because in earlier times, a married woman supposedly was considered more respectable than an unmarried young girl, and of course better off than a widow who was considered unlucky, useless and expendable.

Married women are given special adjectives to describe them, such as *sumangali*—one who brings good fortune to the family she steps into, *suhagan*—she is blessed because her husband is alive, or *saubhagyawati*, which means she is lucky in every respect. By the same logic therefore, the minute a woman lost her husband, she was considered a 'curse' in human form, shorn off not only the marriage signs she wore on her skin and her body, but also her hair, her coloured clothes and confined to an extremely austere way of life whether she liked to or not. She was considered unlucky for all festive occasions such as

weddings and *annaprasana* ceremonies.

What are these marriage symbols that are ritually placed in a particular order on the bride at the time of marriage and why are women alone subject to this custom till this day? Some signs are worn on the body—the *bindi* on the forehead, tattoos on the chin and cheeks depending on the caste the bride belongs to, *sindoor* in the hair parting and so on. *Kaajal* or *kohl*—charcoal black used to make up the eyes was not necessarily exclusive to married women alone because unmarried girls are also known to have sported it. On the neck, a married woman is expected to wear a black-beaded

mangalsutra if she belongs to the western states like Maharashtra and Goa, the *thali* if she is from the southern states and different forms of *mangalsutras* if they belonged to a given Malabari Muslim tribe, and so on. Bangles of different makes, toe rings for the toes, *bicchuas* as anklets are other adornments that were once mandatory wear for the married woman.

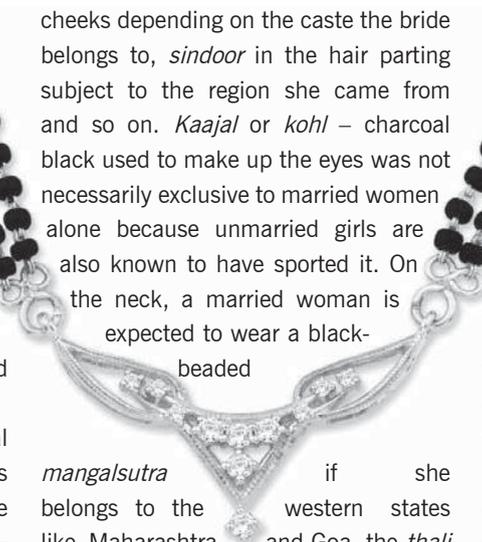
Strangely, grooms/husbands were free of these customs. As the marriage rituals progressed, the groom would adorn his bride one by one, with

these symbols ending in the *saptapadi* around the sacred fire, but he himself did not have to wear any sign to show whether he was married, a bachelor or a widower. Why? Because we lived and still live in a patriarchal society where men dominate, control, rule society and even frame rules to be followed by children, girls and women.

Though today's urban, modernised and educated bride does not believe in wearing these symbols as signs of marriage, they enjoy the privilege of being so adorned during the marriage ceremony.

While things may be changing today, traditionally in patriarchy, a woman's position is largely a position derived from the men in their lives—the father when small, the husband or the brother when young and the son when old. A woman has no position of her own and the position she occupies is determined mainly by the adornments she wears on her person. Even the jewellery she wears is *derived* property—acquired from her parents, husband, his family, relatives and friends.

Her jewellery is not her own though legally, if she is a married woman, it forms part of her *streedhan* and she is the sole owner. But there is a great gap between precept and practice, between legal rules and their application in real life. So in most societies, the jewellery





Sindoor in the hair parting is an important symbol of marriage

a woman wears is not necessarily her own. In this sense, how much jewellery a woman wears or owns, or the wedding symbols she adorns herself with do not empower her in any way. She can only wear jewels but does not have the freedom to give them away without the consent of older women relatives or the men in the family. For example, a married daughter can never inherit her mother's *mangalsutra* because she cannot wear it even if she is married.

Tejaswini Baluni has a different explanation for marriage symbols being the exclusive domain of women ordained by the society dominated by men. She says, "In ancient times, during the reign of kings, when empires were invaded in the war for power, the kingdom that lost the war lost its right over everything within the kingdom including the rights over the subjects – specially the women. The winning party took with them the women of the empire that lost the war. The winning ruler's soldiers and men chained the women by their wrists and ankles now known as bangles and anklets. Since they were practically dragged from the battlefield, trails of blood trickled down their foreheads and this red colour later became the *sindoor* or vermillion. Just as the chains on the hands and legs became symbols of the captive woman and the blood signified that they were prisoners forever, today,

What are these marriage symbols that are ritually placed in a particular order on the bride at the time of marriage and why are women alone subject to this custom till this day? Some signs are worn on the body – the *bindi* on the forehead, tattoos on the chin and cheeks depending on the caste the bride belongs to, *sindoor* in the hair parting subject to the region she came from and so on.

the same marriage symbols the groom adorns his bride with signifies the transfer of property (the bride) from one owner (the father) to another owner (the husband). The ceremonial transfer then signifies that the bride is the property of the husband."

In the *dharmashastras*, the classical legal texts, we get to learn about a 'normative and idealised pattern of the life cycle.' The phrase 'normative and idealised' is in keeping with patriarchal dictates where women are secondary to action, decision and dictation. Harlan and Courtright suggest that items of

jewellery and other ornamentation practices with the Hindu ritual customs are diabolic ways of binding the lives of married women, to confine and restrict them within limits of mobility and social behaviour. A proper wife wears a chignon or a braid because loose hair implies lack of sexual restraint. She also wears jewellery that symbolises her married status, including bangles. Often her jewellery includes precious-metal ankle bracelets; metal or cotton necklaces on which are strung embossed representations of deities or a picture of the husband. In some Indian pockets, nose rings and forehead ornaments tied back into chignoned hair also symbolise a woman's attachment to a husband and his family.

But if one looks closely, over time, some signs have become very confusing. For example, the nose ring is worn also by prostitutes and courtesans. Many of them also sport the vermillion in their hair parting and wear *bindis* of different shapes and sizes on their foreheads. So, in the following series of stories, it would be interesting to discover the history, practice and ideology that lie behind marriage symbols such as the *bindi*, the vermillion, the *kaajal*, the *mangalsutra*, the nose ring, the ring, and so on for Indian women yesterday, today and tomorrow. The knowledge is imperative to familiarise ourselves with a part of our cultural history. ■

The writer is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for 'commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues' among many awards. She is currently Senior Research Fellow, ICSSR, Delhi, researching the politics of presentation of working women in post-colonial Bengali cinema 1950 to 2003.



A theatre of, from and by the people

What is folk theatre? What significance does it have in the Indian theatre lore? What role has it played? **Kanak Rele** dwells on this and starts a new series on the different Indian folk theatre traditions, starting with the *Bhagavatmela of Melattur*.

Folk theatre is the theatre which originated and evolved among the common people. Its relationship with the common people is deep, multiple and multi-layered. It is a kind of entertainment which is not entertainment alone. It carries within it the entire folk culture with all its social and religious institutions. We find reflected in folk theatre the cults, customs, rituals and beliefs of common people. Sometimes it takes the form of a ritual performed to propitiate divine forces for the welfare of the society, and sometimes it is entertainment, pure and simple. It is a part of his tradition with which he has lived for generations.

Folk theatre encompasses the entire gamut of performing arts, including art forms like magic, acrobatics, martial arts or any other device it deems useful. Often this theatre, vast in scope, does not remain confined to a small stage, but converts the entire locality into a theatre. Action flows from people and their environment to the performing arena, and from there back to the source in a single sweep.

The tradition of Indian folk theatre reaches back to distant antiquity. It comes down to us from the aboriginal cave-man who has left a record of his theatrical activities in the form of sketches and paintings on the walls of his abode. Ancient Vedic literature, Buddhist literature, works

like *Arthashastra* tell us about the enchanting panorama of Indian folk theatre.

Historically speaking, it was during the 15-16th century that the folk theatre emerged forcefully in different regions. It used different languages, the languages of the regions in which it emerged. We are basically concerned here with these forms of folk theatre.

The *Vidushaka* and the *Sutradhar* and the roles they play

The *Vidushaka* (jester) as a 'simpleton whose imbecility, real or assumed, is utilised for entertainment', appears in folk theatre in various forms and under different names. He is very dear to village audiences. He is a shrewd person with wide experience and keen observation under the garb of simplicity. All through his evolution, he never lost contact with contemporary life. He has shown tremendous capacity to change with the times and remain eternally fresh. Like his counterpart in classical theatre, he is not bound by a 'written script' or 'set rules of behavior and appearance'; he is free and flexible enough to adapt to changing sensibilities, to acquire new traits.

Yet another figure which dominates the folk theatre is the *Sutradhara*.

In the Indian folk theatre,

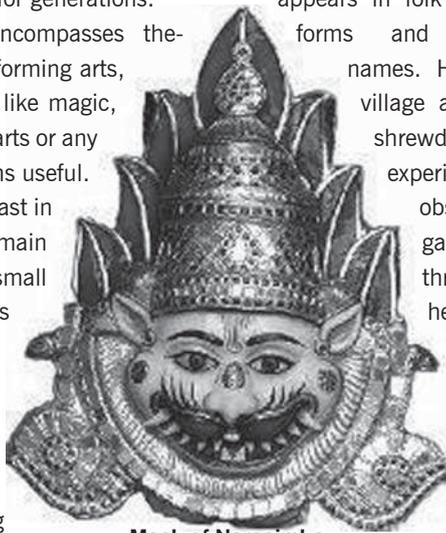
Sutradhara, who is known by different names in the different regional varieties, holds the most important position in the entire scheme of the play. In a way, he may be called the focal point of the evolution of folk theatre itself.

In folk theatre, the narrator, the *Sutradhara*, became an excellent device for translating any story into a coherent dramatic production. He is the person who explains the story or relates the story with the help of the actors. Though the narrator-*Sutradhara* delegated some of his functions to actors and musicians, he retained his important position as a presenter of the show and like the thread in a garland, his presence is felt throughout the performance. He conveniently recedes to the background, leaving the stage to the actors and dancers to translate his words and message into dramatic action.

Folk play is basically narrative in character with a social, religious or moral message to deliver. The *Sutradhara* keeps up the tone of narration of the folk play. He breaks the continuity of the play and also maintains it. His presence became essential because of one peculiar characteristic of the folk play. That is, there is hardly any written, well-defined script. Cue is provided by the narrator to the actors to improvise dialogues on the spur of the movement or sometimes a ready-made piece is given to them to translate it into dramatic action.

The *Bhagavatmela of Melattur*

One travels to Melattur through the lush vegetation of rice fields and coconut palms of Tamil Nadu. A stream of the



Mask of Narasimha

River Kaveri flows nearby. The village was given as a gift by Achyuthappa Naik to the migrant Brahmin families. The Varadarajaswami temple is the centre of activity, religious and social. The Narasimhajayanti is held in May and June: this is the time of presenting the *Bhagavatamela natakam*.

A thatched auditorium is constructed in front of the temple: the *pandal* may have a length of 100-120 feet and the stage has a depth of 18-20 feet. The deity is installed in the front hall of the temple; symbolically, the performance is dedicated to the deity. As in the case of the *Kutiyattam*, *Kathakali* and *Yakshagana*, the performances begin at 9.30 p.m. and continue till the early hours of the morning.

The green room is an adjoining thatched hut, in which are held simple ritualistic preliminaries. The performance itself begins, unlike in the *Kutiyattam* and *Yakshagana*, with the entry of the *Konangi* or the *Vidushaka* on a bare stage, even without musicians. He dances for a few minutes, speaks to the audience in prose, and then leaves. The musicians appear next in a group and sing the *Todayamanglam*. The word *Todayam* as invocation is common to the *Kathakali* and the *Bhagavatamela* traditions. The *Todayamangalam* of the *Bhagavatamela*, however, is strictly a musical composition and there is no dancing: it consists of poetic passages or *svaras* and pure mnemonic rhythm syllables, the *sollukattus*. This is followed by the appearance on the stage of a young boy with the mask of Ganesha. He dances for a few minutes to the singing of an invocatory verse on Ganesha which seeks the blessings of the deity. Though we have also observed this preliminary in the context of the Karnataka *Yakshagana* there is an important difference: in the latter it is often performed in the green room or behind the curtain and not necessarily in full view of the audience.



The Bhagavatmela being staged

The performance begins with the entry of the chief characters. The Ganesha *vandana* and the introduction of the character through abstract movements seem to be common features of many dance-drama forms all over India.

Unlike the Karnataka *Yakshagana*, most of the singing is done by the actors themselves and not by the accompanying musicians or the *Bhagavatars*. The actor naturally has to be a polyvalent artist who must speak, recite, sing and dance.

The orchestra comprises of a *nattuvanar* whose role is important, but not quite as crucial as that of the *Bhagavatar* in *Yakshagana*: he is nevertheless the chief conductor and director of the performance and guides both the musicians and the dancer. There are then the vocalists, a *mridanga* player and either a flute or, of late, a violin player.

The dance content closely resembles the *Bharatanatyam* technique of movement. The *ardhamandali* or the *ukkaramandali* is observed strictly, although it is not quite as clearly defined as by the women dancers. There is a body of *adavu* patterns which include all the varieties. The same taut position of the upper torso and the triangular position of the lower limbs is maintained in all dance sequences. The head movement, particularly the *sundari* (the lateral movement), is used frequently and the arms are held out as in *Bharatanatyam* and are used in straight lines and triangles, and never in curves. The three *kaalas* (speed) are

used in the pure rhythmic passages and the *tiramanam* ends in *araddhis* as in *Bharatanatyam*. Attention has already been drawn to the *abhinaya* technique which also closely resembles the *Bharatanatyam* technique of a line to line and word to word synchronisation of word and gesture. The *Yakshagana* of Karnataka follows a freer and less stylised system in this sphere.

The costuming of *Bhagavatamela* is vastly different from anything witnessed in the Karnataka *Yakshagana*. Although the male characters are dressed grandiosely with much tinsel and brocade, they are realistic and there is no attempt at stylisation as in the *Kathakali* and the Karnataka *Yakshagana*.

The young boys who play the role of women *stri-vesha*, dress much in the style of the *Bharatanatyam* dancer, although some appear in saris as worn in everyday life. The make-up is of the simplest naturalistic type despite the use of large moustaches for demoniac types and none for heroes. Conventions of make-up are minimal except for the mythical characters like *Narasimhavatara*, *Hiranyakashipu*, etc., and others where both masks and make-up are used. ■



The writer is Director, Nalanda Dance Research Center and is a recipient of Padmabhushan award, Akademi Ratna (Fellow of Sangeet Natak Akademi)

Now or never!

Climate change and the disaster it can wreak is no more a distant, amorphous event waiting to happen. The disastrous effects of climate change are upon us today, says Tirtho Banerjee giving examples of recent natural calamities which have taken a huge human and economic toll. The time to act is now.

MORE than 200mm of rainfall within just 24 hours swamped Kashmir on 2 September 2014. It was an extreme weather event that left a trail of destruction. On 4 January 2013, Delhi recorded the coldest day in 44 years. On 13 October 2013, Cyclone Phalin, India's fiercest storm in two decades slammed Odisha, wreaking \$4.15 billion havoc on the agriculture and power sector. In June 2013, devastating floods triggered massive landslides in Uttarakhand, leaving more than 6,000 dead and thousands missing.

The toll on India

India is feeling the impact of climate change with greater frequency and magnitude. Out of the 35 states, 27 are disaster-prone. The country ranks third in the world in natural catastrophes. It is among the extreme risk countries where economic impacts of climate change will be most keenly felt by 2025, says the British risk consultancy Maplecroft's 'Climate Change and Environmental Atlas'. The atlas puts Mumbai and Kolkata at high risk of exposure to climate-related events. Sea level rise due to faster glacial meltdown has already displaced a huge number of people in the Sundarbans, where salinisation and coastal erosion are growing rapidly. A one meter sea surge will displace 7.1 millions in India and about 5,800 square km land area will be lost, along with 4,200 km of road. India is also the most vulnerable among 51 countries in beach tourism. Places like Goa and Puri are staring at a massive tourism downslide in the days to come.

From debt-ridden Vidharbha farmers who are taking their own lives by the day, and increased flooding in Assam to Himachali apple growers facing losses and recurrent storms in the coastal belts - changes in climate are intricately affecting people across the country.

There is a forecast that a 2 degrees Celsius rise in the world's average temperatures will hugely affect India's summer monsoon. The UN's (United Nations) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says the gross per capita water availability in India will go down from 1,820 cubic metre per year in 2001 to as low as 1,140 cubic metre year in 2050. While Himalayan glaciers continue to recede, water resources decline and so does wheat production in the Indo-Gangetic plains. According to the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, if the process of global warming continues to increase, resulting climate disasters will cause a decrease in India's GDP to fall by about 9%, with a slump by 40% of the production of the major crops. IPCC warns that India may lose up to 1.7% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) if the annual mean temperature rises by 1 degree Celsius compared to pre-industrialisation level, which will take a huge toll on the poor.

Rise of 0.5 degrees Celsius in winter temperatures could cause a 0.45 tonne per hectare decline in India's wheat production. Rice output will plummet by 40% and potato production will go down by around 10 per cent in West Bengal in the next 15 years. Mustard and groundnut will have reduced yields

during the same period, says studies conducted by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute. If production continues to decrease, more and more farmers will give up their profession or resort to desperate steps. *Vidharbha Jan Andolan Samiti*, a farmers' body, reveals that 4,200 farmers killed themselves last year in Maharashtra. Loss of livelihood or unemployment will trigger more unrest and food crisis.

Changes in the climatic patterns will force the agricultural land to shrink too. India also faces extreme weather conditions - like drought and flood. Today, of the total agricultural land in India, about 68% is prone to drought, of which 33% is chronically drought-prone, receiving rainfall less than 750mm per year. At the same time, India is the most flood-distressed state in the world after Bangladesh, accounting for 1/5th of the global deaths every year. Around 40 million hectares of the land is vulnerable to floods. A report of IPCC says India will get more intense rainfall even as the number of rainy days decreases due to changing weather patterns.

The fishing community will bear the brunt of climate change, as there will be a huge loss of Asian coral reefs - which are home to around one-fourth of the annual fish catch and food to about 1 billion people. India has over 7,000 km of coastline and so the massive impact on the country can be gauged from the declining fish catch.

Many diseases that had gone into a sleep mode are rearing their ugly heads again, thanks to the extreme climatic conditions. New diseases are also

emerging. Dengue cases in 2011-12 went up alarmingly in Mumbai. New strains of swine flu are gripping many parts of India. Chikungunya is also back with the bang. Outbreaks of water and mosquito-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria are rebounding.

Move away from fossil fuel?

Better adaptation to climate change and long-term prevention measures can only help India to stave off an impending crisis. The country will have to move away from a fossil fuel economy, change farming methods while changing to crops suitable to weather. Sustainable farming is the key to sustainable development. It is imperative that India takes a low carbon and coal approach towards development. The greenhouse gas emission targets have to be strictly followed.

It is praiseworthy that India has managed an eight per cent growth with only a 3.7 per cent growth in energy consumption. But carbon dioxide

emissions have increased more than fourfold-from 0.4 tonnes in 1972 to 1.7 tonnes in 2010. So, energy efficient technologies and fuel-efficient vehicles are the need of the hour. These will go a long way in tackling the challenges of climate change.

Recently, India was ranked 120th in its readiness to meet the threat of climate change. It has to shore up its climate-related disaster preparedness and management strategy. Corporates should raise a fund that contributes towards mitigation of climate-related disasters. The Modi government's renaming of the Ministry of Environment and Forests as the 'Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change' shows it has done so in earnest. But this should not get reduced to a mere gimmick or rhetoric. The government's actions must reflect its seriousness to move towards a greener future. Urban planners need to devise ways where less energy-intensive alternative buildings

are promoted. Renewables in rural development have to take a leap. While bringing electricity to 300 million poor people currently without power, India has to focus on alternative energies like solar and wind. The Modi government has set a target of having 100 gigawatts of solar capacity by 2022. This will require a Herculean effort.

United Nations (UN) dubbed 2014 as the hottest year on record. Against such a backdrop, the next meeting of UN climate negotiation to be held in Paris in December this year assumes much importance. The world has to unite against climate change and global warming. And India has to lead from

the front. Our time is now or never. ■



The writer is a freelance journalist who specialises in environmental issues.

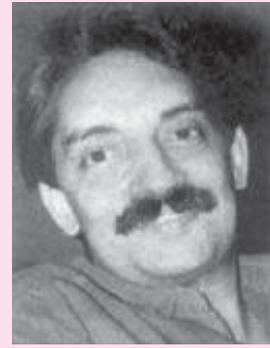
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Flights of Fancy

The Homo sapien species seems to have lost its connect with nature. But it was not always so. Early man venerated nature. Even if he hunted and killed animals for sustenance, he was truly grateful for it. But today sadly, not only has the connect between man and nature broken down, there seems to be veneration for only one kind of god.



Bittu Sahgal
Editor, Sanctuary magazine

TO those who believe that most of Earth's secrets have been unveiled by science, it should come as some surprise that the evolutionary history of birds is still mired in debate and shrouded in doubt.

Did the ancestors of the 9,000 avian species that dominate our skies use the now extinct, feathered *Archaeopteryx* as a conduit for survival? Or was it the ancient, blunt faced, egg-stealing Oviraptor to whom this credit should go?

Neither, if the claims of a group of scientists working in China's Liaoning Province are to be believed. They suggest instead that a feathered, four-winged dinosaur, whose 125 million-year-old fossil was discovered in 2003, might be the missing link between birds and dinosaurs. Called *Microraptor qui* this creature was a metre long and spent its time gliding between trees – a habit that peafowl still practice.

Peafowl take a breath every five wing beats and quickly run out of oxygen. So they prefer to scurry about on the forest floor. Here males risk predation because of the long tail feathers they must lug around. The evolutionary 'decision' to trade style for clumsiness must have been a long time in the making. Whatever the churning of evolution, the trade between muscular legs in place of stronger wings and lungs certainly worked to the advantage of the peafowl, which managed to stay ahead of the survival game, unlike the less fortunate Dodos and Moas.

What a complex gauntlet the genetic codes belonging to creatures of yore had to negotiate. But what picture perfect conclusions nature ultimately fashioned out of them, including *Homo sapiens*.

Tools, and the artistry of early humans whose awe and respect for nature inspired them to paint on ancient walls and caves, represent the most visible sign of the ascent of thinking man. By the same token, I would imagine our penchant for meddling with nature must surely be a sign of

our rapid descent.

Edward B. Taylor, a 19th century thinker coined the word 'animism'. Influenced by theologians of the age who were grappling with ideas and counter ideas centered on evolution and god, Taylor honed in on 'animism' (derived from the Latin 'anima' or soul) to suggest that dreams, hallucinations and premonitions of death were construed by primitive humans to be the language of gods, ancestors and spirits.

It was believed by primitive societies that spirits that lived on long after the body had wasted away put out such visions. Around now Herbert Spencer wrote that religion was founded on the faith that visions revealed messages from the souls of the dead. But no one could really 'prove' anything because humans of the day had not learned to document abstract ideas in a tangible way that would survive the passage of millennia.

Be that as it may, anyone who has visited Paleolithic sites, such as the ones at Bori and Churna in the Satpura National Park surrounds of Madhya Pradesh, must conclude that humans would have gathered in these ancient cathedrals to venerate the most visible symbols of nature.

Sir James G. Frazer was one such visitor and he wrote in his *Worship of Nature* that 'every tree and flower, every brook and river, every breeze that blew and every cloud that flecked with silvery white the blue expanse of heaven', were conceived as departmental gods.'

In days gone by people were connected with nature. They hunted animals and ate them, but were grateful for the source that sustained them.

And today? The source seems to be recognised as the nearest cash register or bank. Taylor grappled with gods of the past and tried to unravel the mysteries of religion. He had no way of knowing that the most omnipresent, powerful and monotheistic god of future would turn out to be... money. ■

Rape is fine, just don't talk about it!

By banning the Leslie Udwin documentary on the 2012 Delhi gangrape, the Government of India has sent out the wrong message. It should focus on sensitisation and women safety campaigns, instead of trying to muzzle such documentaries in the mistaken belief that this will protect the country's image.



C. V. Aravind

is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.

RECENTLY there was a big hue and cry about the release of a documentary titled 'India's Daughter' made by Leslie Udwin for the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), that focused on the 2012 dastardly gang rape of a 23-year-old girl in Delhi, who subsequently died. This incident shocked the nation's collective conscience for the sheer brutality of the crime. In what can only be termed as a knee-jerk action, the central government stepped in to ban the documentary and also issued a *diktat* to BBC not to air the film.

The BBC, being an autonomous body and by no means under the jurisdiction of the Indian government, promptly advanced the screening of the film, which has since been seen by millions despite the ban. What prompted the ban was the exclusive interview with one of the accused (who has been convicted and sentenced to death with his appeal pending in the Supreme Court), in which he had sought to shift the blame on the victim and also made disparaging remarks against women who ventured out at night with their male friends. The misogynist statements made by the defence lawyers too added insult to injury.

The main reason for the ban however, was that India would be portrayed in a bad light to audiences abroad, and this would shame the country in the eyes of the world. The government's view however was that the victim had been shamed as the documentary showed her in bad light. The grim irony is that the shaming and molesting of women in the country, their brutalisation and violation of human rights with impunity, and the low conviction rates of the accused involved in such crimes, is a trivial matter at best when it comes to upholding the country's image abroad. The government's reaction has won it plaudits from some quarters, but by and large it has been criticised roundly by a large cross section that included people from all walks of life.

Be that as it may, the moot question is whether the

gruesome rape and murder of Nirbhaya and the death sentence handed over to the accused by a special court has resulted in any improvement in the safety and security of women in the country. Unfortunately, the answer is a loud 'No!' The media continues to report with monotonous regularity rapes and murders, each one more ghastly and brutal than the other with the victims including children barely out of the cradle. The bestiality and the regressive mindset revealed by the accused who was interviewed for the film is not unique or a rare phenomenon. These views are shared by thousands of potential rapists and male chauvinists including the country's political elite, who continue to hold on to their tattered logic that it is always the woman's fault. One corollary of this warped line of thinking is that at least where our country is concerned, it is the mindset of the men that has to be changed and this can hardly be done overnight; for, the thought that women are an inferior sex with hardly any rights has been ingrained in their psyche for generations.

In the budget for 2015-16, the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has allocated another thousand crores for the Nirbhaya Fund which had been set up by the government to protect the dignity and ensuring the safety of women in India. It would be in the fitness of things if a part of this fund is used to create awareness in the minds of men, especially those who have nothing but contempt for women, and hold a firm view that they are second class citizens.

It would be foolhardy to think that by hiding our warts they will just disappear. On the contrary, there is every chance that they would fester and turn leprous and contaminate the whole society. By preventing the rest of the world from glancing at our dark underbelly we gain nothing, and the sooner we realise this the better, that in this world where news travels faster than the speed of light, bans are nothing more than a futile exercise. ■



IMMORTAL COMIC CHARACTERS

Asterix And Obelix

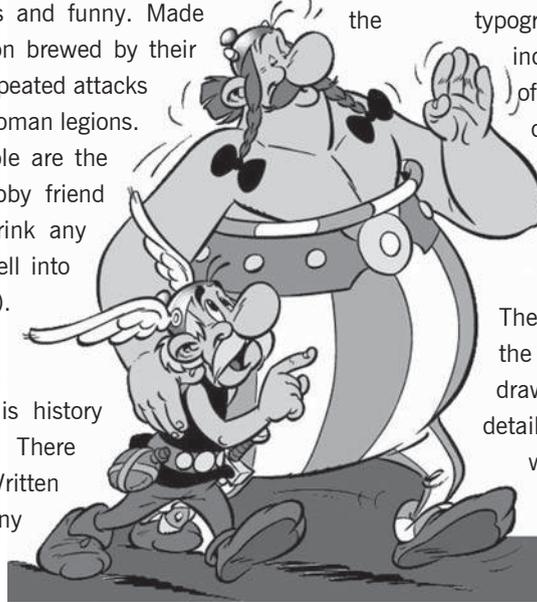
“The year is 50 BC. Gaul is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well, not entirely.... One small village of indomitable Gauls still holds out against the invaders...”

Every Asterix comic begins on this rather sedate note. But the action is fast and furious and funny. Made incredibly strong by a magic potion brewed by their clever druid, the Gauls resist the repeated attacks of Julius Caesar and his powerful Roman legions. The Gauls who make this possible are the wily warrior Asterix and his chubby friend Obelix (who does not need to drink any magic potion for strength, as he fell into a cauldron of potion as a baby). Their efforts to protect their village take them to different parts of the ancient world, and what results is history with an interesting twist.

There are 33 Asterix albums to date. Written originally in French by Rene Goscinny and illustrated by Albert Uderzo, they have been translated into more than 100 languages and dialects. A rare feat, as much of the humour depends on puns and clever word-play. There are plenty of fights, and some running gags (the bard who finds himself gagged when he threatens to sing; Obelix begging to have a drop of

magic potion; a group of pirates who end up losing their ship every time) that add to the fun.

The names of the characters often speak for themselves. Asterix and Obelix get their names from asterisk and obelisk, the typographical symbols that are used to indicate footnotes. Asterix is the ‘star’ of the adventures. Obelix is a menhir delivery-man, and menhir is a stone monolith- an obelisk. The druid is Getafix; the bard, Cacophonix; the fishmonger, Unhygienix, and the chief, Vitalstatistix.



The art-work contributes equally to the enjoyment of the books; Uderzo’s drawings of buildings and costumes are detailed and accurate. Among the people we can find some clever caricatures - Cleopatra looks rather like actress Elizabeth Taylor; a Roman spy (called Doubleosix) looks like James Bond; the bards in ‘Asterix in Britain’ look like the Beatles!

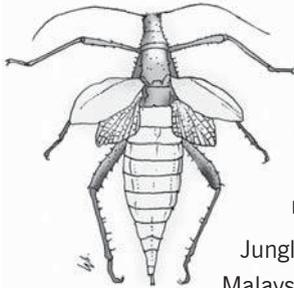
The strength of Asterix and Obelix comes not just from the magic potion. It comes from the magical combination of great art, excellent narration and a wonderful sense of fun.

AMAZING LIVING WORLD

Ninja insect

The female jungle nymph stick insect displays some incredible martial art moves when attacked.

Standing on her two front pairs of legs, she raises her rear legs into the air. Then, in quick scissor-like movements, she kicks her rear legs together to deliver a vicious blow to her opponent. The sharp spines on her legs make the blow more painful and deter the attacker from making any further moves.



Female jungle nymph stick insects are bright green in appearance. They are among the largest and heaviest insects in the world — they measure about 15cm in length and weigh as much as 50gm.

Jungle nymph stick insects are found in Australia and Malaysia, where they are often kept as pets.

Trivia

- Asterix appeared for the first time on the comic page of Pilote magazine in Oct 1959. The first album was published in 1961.
- When writer Goscinny died in 1977, Uderzo continued to write the stories as well. Both are national heroes in France.
- The first French satellite launched in 1965 was called ‘Asterix-1’.
- Parc Asterix is a popular amusement park near Paris.
- Asterix Potato Chips? A French company marketed potato chips shaped like wild boars and shields.



STORY

Lessons in thrift

A man who prided himself on his thriftiness was dismayed to learn that there was another tightwad who lived more frugally than him. "I must take lessons in thrift from this genius," he said to his son, "otherwise I'll continue to overspend. Go to his house and ask him if he will accept me as his student!"

It was customary to gift a goose to the guru at the time he was approached. The would-be *chela* drew a goose on a piece of paper and gave it to his son. "Give this to him with my regards," he beamed.

The boy set off, thrilled by his father's ingenuity. A true son of his father, the thought of giving away one of their geese had filled him with horror.

It took him half a day to arrive at his destination. The man he had come to meet was not at home, but his wife was there and she assured him that her husband would accept his father as his student.

The boy dutifully handed over the drawing of the goose to her. She took it and carefully placed it in a drawer.

It was customary for the teacher to acknowledge the gift with a lesser gift of his own.

"Please take these oranges for your father," she said, and went through the motions of handing over four oranges to him, picking them up, one by one from the table beside her. Only there were no oranges there at all.

Her husband returned shortly after the boy had left. She told



him about the boy's visit, and the exchange of gifts.

"Good, good," said her husband. "We must not forget the social graces. But show me how you held the oranges."

When she showed him how she had held the imaginary oranges, her husband's brow darkened in anger.

"Oh, you wasteful woman!" he shrieked. "Did you have to hold your fingers so far apart?! Do you think we are millionaires that we can give away such BIG oranges!"

—A European folktale retold by L.M. Fernandes

SPARKLER

One Up

THE young scientist was boasting of the achievements of modern science in the presence of an old man. Suddenly a bird flew past.

"We can even fly like the birds!" said the scientist.

"But there's one thing they can do that we can't," said the old man.

"And what is that?" asked the scientist, scornfully.

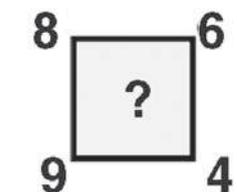
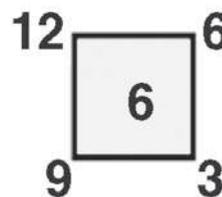
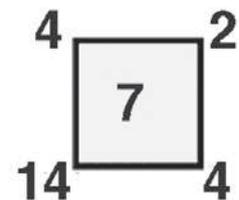
"They can sit on a barbed wire fence."



PUZZLE

Mathemagic

Find the missing number.



square to get the central number.
is divided by the product of the numbers to the right of the
Answer: 3. Product of the numbers to the left of a square

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DAGGUBATI RAMANAIDU

A passionate film maker (1936-2015)

THE passing away of a doyen of the Indian film industry, Daggubati Ramanaidu is indeed an irreparable loss to cinema, as he was one of the most prolific film makers who made over 130 films in several languages including *inter alia* Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam etc. His banner 'Suresh Productions' named after his elder son Suresh Babu, is one of the most respected film companies in the country.

The 'Ramanaidu Studios', a sprawling complex in Hyderabad, was among the first studios to be set up in Hyderabad. The studio which boasts of state-of-the-art facilities has been a boon for film makers ever since its inception. Basically a businessman who hailed from an agrarian background, Ramanaidu had little interest in cinema till he met thespian Akkineni Nageswara Rao, one of the pillars of the Telugu film industry who prevailed on him to enter tinseldom. The rest as they say is history and Ramanaidu who made his foray by co-producing the Telugu film *Anuragam* way back in 1963, rose to become one of the most celebrated figures in the annals of Indian cinema.

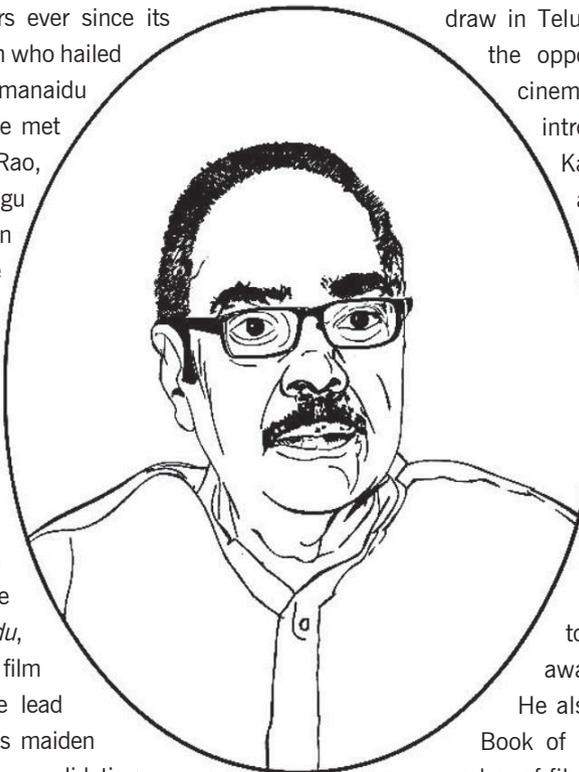
He began his career as an independent film maker with the blockbuster *Ramudu Bheemudu*, which featured another Telugu film stalwart N. T. Rama Rao in the lead role. Buoyed by the success of his maiden venture Ramanaidu soon set about consolidating his position in the industry and a number of hit films followed in quick succession. Among the films which gave a fillip to his production house were hits such as *Prem Nagar*, *Jeevana Tarangalu*, *Soggadu*, *Kaliyuga Pandavalu*, *Coolie No.1* etc. The film *Prem Nagar* was remade by Naidu in Tamil as *Vasantha Maligai* with the legendary Tamil actor Sivaji Ganesan in the lead and after the film's breezy run, Ramanaidu remade it in Hindi as well as *Prem Nagar* with the Bollywood superstar Rajesh Khanna and 'Dream Girl' Hema Malini essaying the lead roles. Ramanaidu was not known to repeat his stars and made films with almost all the leading stars in Telugu right from Nageswara Rao and N. T. Rama Rao to Chiranjeevi, Nagarjuna and the latest crop of stars as well.

After having entrenched himself in Telugu cinema Ramanaidu yearned to spread his wings and this urge propelled him to make films in other languages notably in Hindi. Among the films that helped him to gain a foothold in Hindi cinema were *Tohfa*, *Prem Qaidi*, *Insaaf Ki Awaaz*, *Anari*, *Hum Aapke Dil Mein Rahte Hain* etc. Ramanaidu who had introduced his younger son Venkatesh as the hero in *Kaliyuga Pandavalu* in Telugu also launched him in Hindi with *Anari*, a remake of the Tamil superhit *Chinnathambi*.

Venkatesh who incidentally continues to be a major draw in Telugu films, however could not seize the opportunity and his career in Hindi cinema was shortlived. Ramanaidu introduced a shy sixteen year old, Karishma Kapoor, in *Prem Qaidi* and she went on to become one of the busiest stars in the industry. Ramanaidu also produced films in Kannada, Malayalam, Odiya, Punabi, Assamese, Marathi etc. A number of films made under his banner have won state awards and the film maker himself was a recipient of stellar honours like the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the highest national honour for contribution to cinema and the Padma Bhushan awarded by the Government of India.

He also won a mention in the Guinness Book of World Records for the maximum number of films made by an individual. Cashing on his popularity as a producer he also chanced his luck in politics and joined the Telugu Desam Party floated by matinee idol N.T. Rama Rao and successfully contested the Lok Sabha elections from Bapatla in Andhra Pradesh. However, with his increasing commitments in cinema, he had little time left for electoral politics and quietly disengaged himself from a full time career in politics. Ramanaidu's two sons Suresh Babu, whose son Rana Dagubatti has also acted in Telugu and Hindi films and his actor son Venkatesh who have inherited his mantle, have now been saddled with the onerous task of carrying the legacy of the producer forward. ■

– C. V. Aravind is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.



VINOD MEHTA

An editor for all seasons (1941-2015)

Nowadays it is television that holds sway in Indian households, rich or poor. And television news channels have long overtaken print as the favourite source of news, views and opinions. Print, however has also grown typified by the number of newspapers and magazines in English and regional languages. Vinod Mehta, who died on 8 March this year, personified the ideal print media: provocative yet thoughtful, rejecting sacred cows yet never descending into yellow journalism, delightful and easy to read, yet not dumbing down the content.

Apart from the above, Mehta had personal qualities that made him an editor most reporters and journalists loved, nay, hankered to work with. Unlike many other editors (also known names to readers of English news publications in India), he did not demand indulgence of a manic ego, had no airs about being an opinion leader whose views were sought by kings and kingmakers, and treated his colleagues and juniors as equals. The only question that he was keen on knowing was: what is the news story? Once he was convinced about that he backed the reporter, small or big, all the way, and stood by him/her, even shielding them from the vagaries of the management/owner's demands and manipulation. His exposure of the 'Radii Tapes' in *Outlook* was typical Mehta. He was perhaps the first (and he did it sincerely till the last) to carry letters to the editor that roundly criticised him, often abused him. His trademark chuckle was well known in newsrooms and the more abusive the letter, the heartier the chuckle. His face too had the characteristic expression of someone who truly appreciated the quirkiness of the world and reveled in putting it in print. As is well known, his pet dog was called 'Editor' and was frequently written about in his columns.

Of Mehta's books *Bombay: A Private View* (1971), *The Sanjay Story* (2012), *Meena Kumari* (1972), *Mr Editor, how close are you to the PM?* (1999), *Lucknow Boy: A Memoir* (2010), *Editor Unplugged* (2014), the last two are bestsellers. The one on Meena Kumari was controversial,

but then that was Mehta. He would never write a bland, hagiographic work ever.

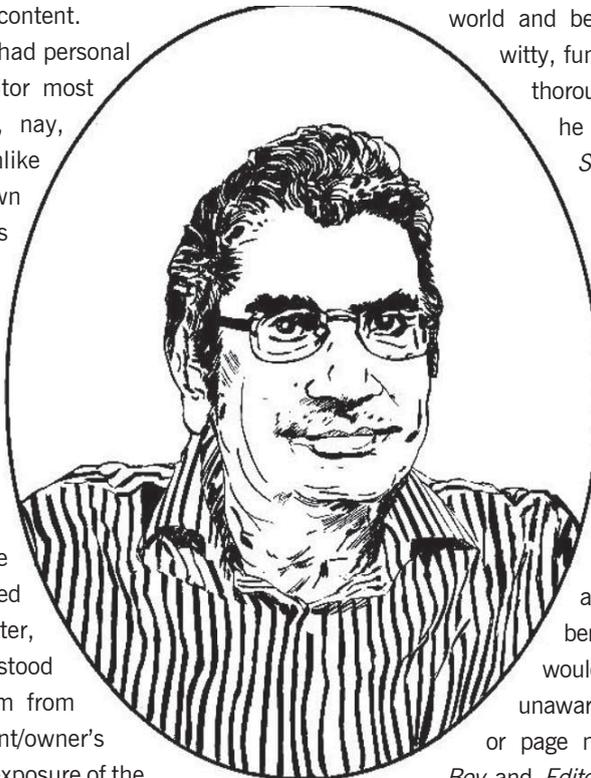
His career path was interesting. He was offered the editorship of a failing *Debonair* magazine when he was 32. For 40 years after that, Mehta kept up his reputation for being fearless and fair. There were demonstrations outside his office(s), he was reviled and ridiculed in print and otherwise, but that was more grist to his mill. Neither was he a crusader in the caricature mode—out to change the world and be martyred. At all times, he was

witty, funny, eccentric and most important, thoroughly readable. The newspapers he edited gained from his acumen: *Sunday Observer*, *The Independent*, *The Indian Post*, *The Pioneer* and lastly, *Outlook* magazine. He was democratic to the core in the newsroom, allowing colleagues to have the last word (but in controversial matters, it was his call always), if they disagreed with him. He was not an editor who sat in his cabin as those who worked with him can well vouch. He was on his feet literally prowling around the newsroom with that benign, good humoured look, but it would be a mistake to think that he was unaware of what the juniormost reporter or page maker was up to. Both *Lucknow*

Boy and *Editor Unplugged* are a treasure house of anecdotes, events, newsroom happenings related in typical Mehta fashion. Unlike most Indian memoirs, his are really frank, not shying away from assessments that are less than flattering even of celebrities and social lions and lionesses. His TV appearances on news panels made him familiar to a greater number, though it was always in print that he shone.

His end when it came in the AIIMS at Delhi, left countless number of people saddened. Not least, the manner of the breakdown in his health around three months before it. In these days of noisy journalism and pompous media celebrities, Mehta stood out. Indian journalism and all those whose lives he touched, will forever be in his debt. ■

— Lina Mathias is senior assistant editor, *Economic and Political Weekly*.



MAJOR UDAI SINGH SM, SC

Serving the country was his motto (1974-2003)

Udai Singh was born on 7 October 1974, in Allahabad. He had his early education in St Patrick School, Deolali, and Army Public School (APS), Delhi. He passed his higher secondary examination from APS, Dagshai. He was not keen on academics, but was good in sports and extracurricular activities. The Principal told his mother that her son had tremendous leadership qualities. He joined Taj Mansingh Hotel as a trainee after graduating with honours in political science from Deshbandhu College, Delhi. He did not like to work in the hotel industry and decided to follow his father's profession of military service. He joined the Indian Military Academy at Dehradun and was commissioned into the unit of his choice - 1 Para Commando on 6 June 1997. His father, Colonel K. K. K. Singh was also a paratrooper. He looked forward to his service in a commando unit. In a neatly folded napkin found in his diary and returned to his father, he had written:

"Being a commando in the Indian army and leading men into the jaws of death will make my soul rest in peace one day! Because when the great scorer comes to mark against my name for all that I did, I will be a proud man who served this country and a cause for which so many brave Indian men laid down their lives".

He served in the Northeast from 1997 to 1999, and in Jammu and Kashmir (J & K) for the remaining period. Ever keen for adventure, he volunteered for the Special Forces after five years of service and wrote in his diary, "I dedicate my life to the Special Forces and I promise to make my country, family, friends and myself proud." In 2001, he was attached to the Vikas Regiment, comprising high altitude specialists of Tibetan origin. He completed his free fall jumps and attended a deep sea diving course. He participated in the Kargil War and was then back to fighting the terrorists in Kupwara and Rajouri areas. Seeking and neutralising terrorists was a religion with him. He loved what he did, never regretting even for a moment his choice of army as a career. It was all that he wished it to be. Army was his heart and soul.

On 1 July 2002, the presence of terrorists was reported in Danti forest in Thanamandi area. Udai was tasked to neutralise them. At 10.30 hours, the scout observed terrorist movement

and killed one terrorist. Captain Udai Singh closed on the terrorist group using the cover of thick forests, which restricted visibility. Udai Singh ruthlessly pursued them single handedly with extreme courage, tenacity, excellent marksmanship and tactical acumen under fire, killing two more terrorists in close quarter combat. Captain Udai Singh was awarded the Sena Medal (Gallantry) for displaying conspicuous bravery, exemplary leadership and raw courage.

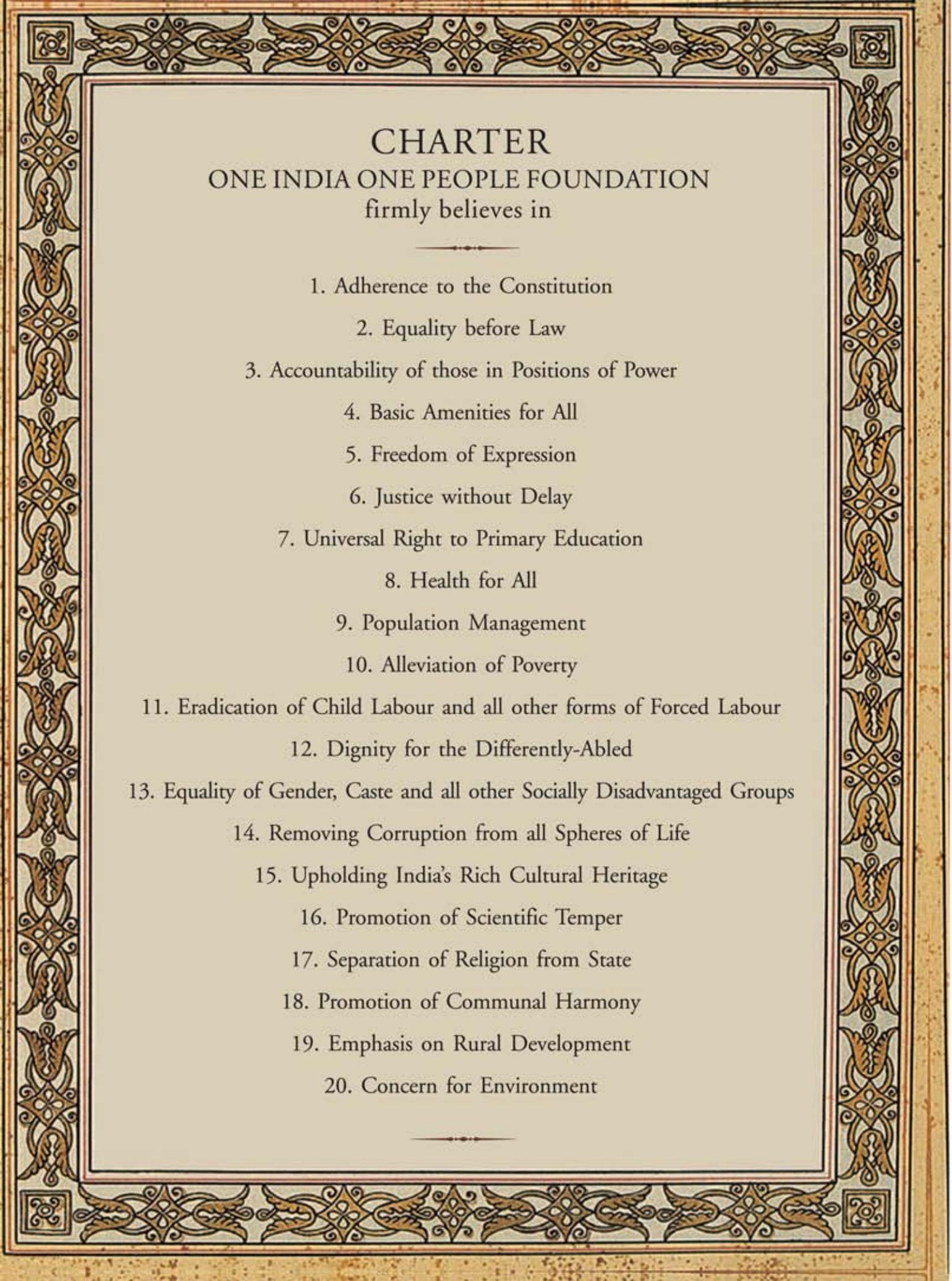
Udai Singh well realised that the terrorists had the support of ground workers for intelligence and logistics support in Rajouri area, and decided to disrupt it. He commenced operations by launching a 'search and destroy' operation in the general area at 0300hrs on 29 November 2003. At 1745 hours, while laying an ambush, they came across a group of terrorists who were firing from a higher piece of ground. They were just about ten metres away. Udai received a gun shot wound in his neck and his buddy received multiple gun shot wounds. With little care for his own safety, Udai continued to engage the enemy, killing one terrorist and wounding another. He then helped extricating his fatally injured buddy before succumbing to his injuries. Major Udai Singh displayed indomitable courage and exemplary leadership in fighting the terrorists. He was awarded Shaurya Chakra (posthumous).

He was cremated with full military honours in Delhi Cantonment. Amongst those present were the Chief of Army Staff, senior military officers, family, friends and members of general public. The army band played a soulful tune with bugles followed by rifle shots. The national flag was taken off and presented to the officer's grandfather. Many of the friends and relations broke down. His parents have established the 'Udai Public Charitable Trust'. The Trust endeavours to provide education and support to the children of soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice.

He lived by the motto of the Special Forces: "*You are occupying too much space on mother earth, if you are not living on the edge.*" ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)
(Sketches of Great Indians by C.D. Rane)





CHARTER
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION
firmly believes in

1. Adherence to the Constitution
 2. Equality before Law
 3. Accountability of those in Positions of Power
 4. Basic Amenities for All
 5. Freedom of Expression
 6. Justice without Delay
 7. Universal Right to Primary Education
 8. Health for All
 9. Population Management
 10. Alleviation of Poverty
 11. Eradication of Child Labour and all other forms of Forced Labour
 12. Dignity for the Differently-Abled
 13. Equality of Gender, Caste and all other Socially Disadvantaged Groups
 14. Removing Corruption from all Spheres of Life
 15. Upholding India's Rich Cultural Heritage
 16. Promotion of Scientific Temper
 17. Separation of Religion from State
 18. Promotion of Communal Harmony
 19. Emphasis on Rural Development
 20. Concern for Environment
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WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I the President of India first or an Indian first?

Am I the Prime Minister of India first or an Indian first?

Am I the Commander-in-Chief first or an Indian first?

Am I a supporter of any 'ism' first or an Indian first?

Am I a white-collar/blue collar worker first or an Indian first?

Am I a youth/senior citizen first or an Indian first?

*In all cases you are Indian First, Last and Always.
Be a Proud Indian. Make this country Great, Strong and United.*



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

(October 9th, 1930 – February 23rd, 2007)

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE