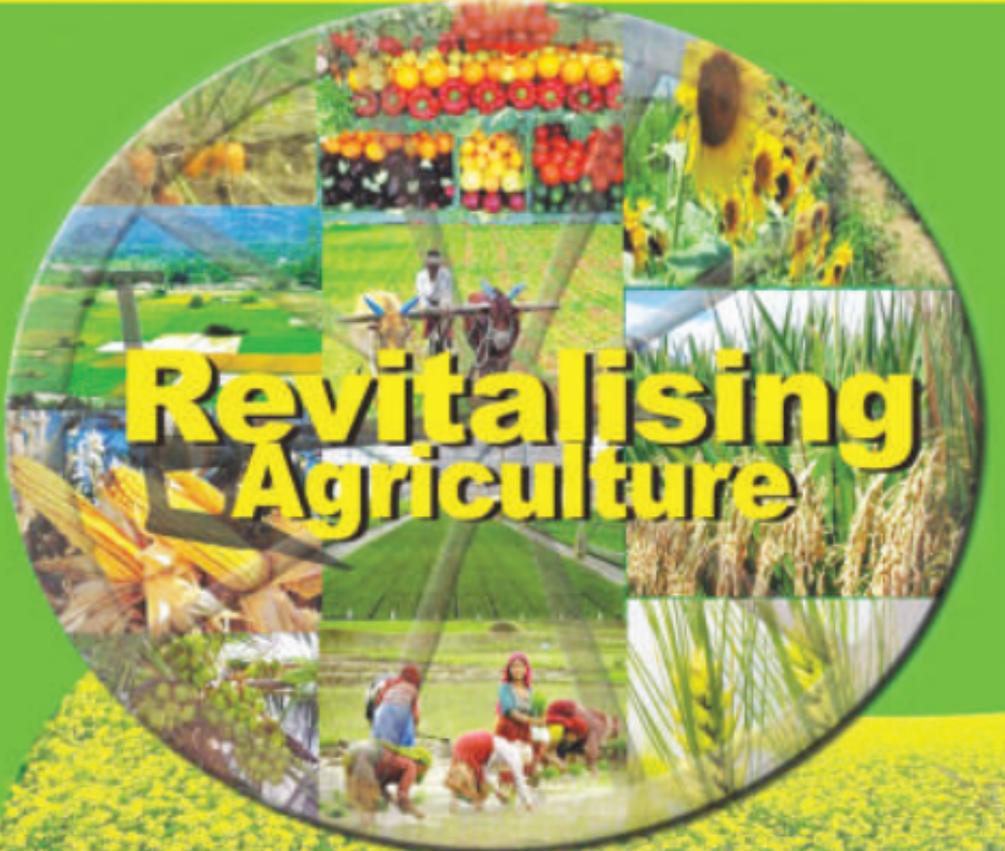


ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined



Revitalising Agriculture

KNOW INDIA BETTER

Spiti - The middle land

FACE TO FACE

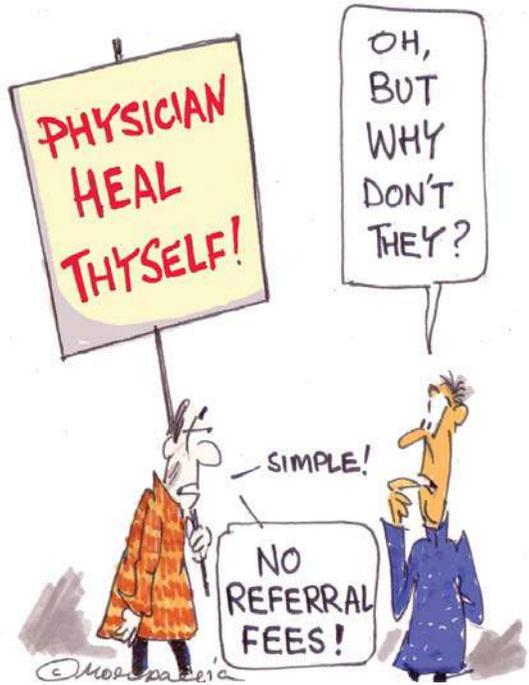
Justice B.H. Marlapalle

Great Indians: Lt.Col Hari Chand MVC / Prokash Karmarkar / Nandu Bhende

MORPARIA'S PAGE



TIFFS OVER TICKETS & SEAT-SHARING:



Contents

AUGUST 2014

VOL.18/1

THEME:
Agriculture



7

Morparia's page	2
A day in the life of a Union Agriculture Minister <i>V Gangadhar</i>	5
Revitalising agriculture <i>Devinder Sharma</i>	6
A policy-caused crisis <i>Dr. D Narasimha Reddy</i>	8
GM crops: Sowing seeds of disaster <i>Rajesh Krishnan</i>	11
Feeding India's hungry <i>Prem Nath</i>	14
Cooperative farming to boost economies of scale <i>Dr. L Jalapathi Rao</i>	16
In Bengal, women agriculturists take charge <i>Ajitha Menon</i>	19
A dangerous trend <i>Sriprakash Menon</i>	21
Know India Better	
Spiti - The middle land <i>Akul Tripathi</i>	23
Face to Face:	39
Justice B H Marlapalle: <i>Sonam Saigal</i>	
Features	
Youth Voice: <i>Shaurya Mehta</i>	42
Quotas – an electoral gimmick <i>Dr. P M Kamath</i>	43
Cultural Kaleidoscope	45
Odissi dance : <i>Dr. Kanak Rele</i>	
New paradigms of higher education <i>Dr. Samta Jain and Prof. Rajini Anand</i>	47
The spiritual kitchen of Maharshi Ramana <i>Late B.M.N. Murthy</i>	49
Columns	51
Nature watch : <i>Bittu Sahgal</i>	
In focus : <i>C.V. Aravind</i>	
Young India	54
Great Indians	56



23



39

Justice B H Marlapalle



*Lt Col Hari Chand
MVC*



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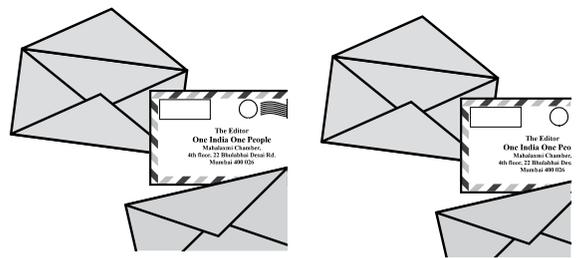
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thought provoking and timely themes

Thank you for an excellent article on 'Restoring the credibility of CBI and CAG' (*The decline of institutions* June 2014) by our former CVC, Shri N. Vittal. It is an eye opener for public and the legal basis of these institutions, manipulations of the then ruling party UPA as the country saw tumultuous times in the wake of various scams. There is no denial of the fact that CAG has been an apolitical institution, and especially during the term of Shri Vinod Rai, the institution came under much debate, thanks to the Audit reports on CWG scam and Sale of 2 G Spectrum. It was the grit and determination of the incumbent CAG to steer clear of even a hostile JPC, and establish the credibility of the Constitutional office. Shri Vittal's suggestion as to the selection of CAG in a transparent manner is welcome and timely!

His impressions about CBI and its independence are noteworthy. Even the institution of CVC itself needs more independence, considering that CVC has to depend upon CBI alone for its own actions. Thus these inter related institutions need further strengthening.



One India One People is the only magazine in recent times that gives an unbiased and critical treatment of various issues which determine the country and its dynamics. The themes are timely and thought provoking. We look forward to each issue! Congratulations to the editorial team!

– Nandini Y. Kapdi IA & AS (Rtd.) Former Principal Accountant General

Excellent job!

I want to compliment the editorial team of One India One People on an excellent job of carrying forward the vision and dreams of Mr. Sadanand Shetty. You select very good and relevant topics--outstanding writers! The standard is as high as it was when Mr. Shetty launched it. My best wishes!

– U V Rao, Bangalore

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A day in the life of a Union Agriculture Minister

Describing the life of an agriculture minister, V. Gangadhar says, one of the fundamentals of politics is, if you have some expertise on some subject, you will never get the ministry dealing with that subject.

8 a.m. : Wake up, laze around in bed for some more time. But duty calls. Begin the daily routine with a walk along the bungalow fields which grow grains. My pockets are filled with juicy grains to feed the pigeons. (I am a great admirer of late actor Amrish Puri and feel inspired by his act in Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge.) After sometime, hungry I walk back home. At the breakfast table, I read the papers, switch on the TV news bulletins. The dailies mention the need for a healthy and filling breakfast and who am I to oppose them? So ghee-filled 'aloo paratha', fat double omelette, fruits, brown bread, cheese and jalebi dripping with ghee and sugar syrup so as to not displease the sugar lobby. I am meeting their delegation later in the day. The TV anchors mention drought in most parts of the state. Oh, not when I am having breakfast. I need some rest before plunging into work.

9 a.m. : Nice cushioned chairs, help the thinking process. How did I become the Agriculture Minister when I do not know anything of the subject? My expertise was Labour Law and calling for strikes and bandhs and I would have preferred the labour or industry ministry. Then I learnt one of the fundamentals of politics. If you have some expertise on some subject you will never get the ministry dealing with that subject. Look at our cabinet. The Foreign Minister had specialised in 'Unani' medicine, the Finance Minister was a social reformer who had worked on Jail reforms and the Defence Minister was the new expert on IPL cricket. Such a portfolio distribution prevents the emergence of smart alegs and the Prime Minister can feel safe. I feel quite happy as the Minister of Agriculture.

11 a.m. : Read up important files on foot and mouth disease and artificial insemination of buffaloes from Botswana. I need not know anything about buffaloes from Botswana and their animal husbandry needs. But my secretary informed me that as the Minister for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, I was to be the chief guest at an international conference.

He showed me some nice photographs featuring Botswana women in their native costume (or lack of it!).

12.15 p.m. : Meeting with members of Agriculture Price Commission. Dozed through most of it. Everyone is ready to throw money for the farmers, but what about the consumers? Onion growers from Nashik talked tough. Exhibited their produce which smelt like rotten onions, we all shed tears and conceded their demands not to sell onions till their prices touched ₹150 per kg. The onion farmers and hoarders assured me my supply line would not suffer and passed on a fat package which certainly did not contain onions.

1.30 p.m. : Seven course lunch with a fertilizer delegation, all suited and booted, and talking English. But why so much importance to urea, not an ideal topic at lunch. Or did they believe that the late Morarji Desai would be present at the lunch? But the mutton was soft, the chicken succulent and the desserts delectable. Should have more such lunches; minus the urea talks.

5 p.m. : Press conference. I was a bit nervous, but my secretary said he had taken charge and everything would be fine. I quickly learnt why, the press knew as little on the subject as I did. They asked the silliest questions, mixing up 'kharif' with Caliph. I impressed them with my expertise on the topic, saw they were well fed, and the secretary had organised expensive gifts. Like the character in "Three Idiots", I could only exclaim 'All is well.'

8 p.m. onwards: Busy day ends well, delightful desi khana topped with a great mujra show hosted by Brinjal Growers Association from Bellary. The girls and their dancing were super. End to a hard day's work! So what if mujra has nothing to do with agriculture? ■



The writer is a well-known satirist.

Revitalising agriculture

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly emphasised on the dire need to make farming economically viable. A beginning can be made by revitalising agriculture in a manner that it brings back the smile on the face of the farmers, writes **Devinder Sharma**.*

I have never understood why Indian farmers continue to be ignored. With a meager outlay every year, Indian farmers have been producing a bountiful harvest. If only agriculture was to be injected with the much needed economic stimulus package, I am sure Indian farmers can flood the country with food, fruits and vegetables. India can certainly emerge as one of the biggest exporters of agricultural commodities.

Government apathy towards farmers continues

In 2013-14, farmers produced a record harvest of 264.4 million tonnes of food grains. Production of oilseeds reached a record high of 34.5 million tonnes, a jump of 4.8 percent. Maize production increased by 8.52 percent to reach a level of 24.2 million tones. Pulses production reached an all-time high of 19.6 million tones, an increase of 7.10 percent over the previous year. Cotton production too touched a record high.

With such record production, the nation remains indebted to the virile and hardworking farmers. But last year, in 2013-14, when farm production recorded a quantum jump, agriculture received 19,307-crore from the annual budget kitty, which is less than one percent of the total budget outlay. This year, finance minister Arun Jaitley provided only ₹ 22,652-crore to agriculture and cooperation departments. In all fairness, the apathy towards agriculture continues.

The neglect of agriculture has become more pronounced since economic liberalisation was introduced in 1991. I recall

the then finance minister Manmohan Singh's famous budget speech when he showered all the bounties on industry and in the next paragraph said that agriculture remains the mainstay of the economy. But since agriculture is a state subject, he left it to the state governments to provide the much needed impetus to farming. But what he forgot to say was that industry too is a state subject and should have been left to the state governments. The bias therefore was clearly visible.

Although agriculture grew at an impressive rate of 4.1 percent in the 11th plan period (2007-8 and 2011-12) it received a dismal financial support of ₹ 1 lakh crore. For a sector which directly and indirectly employs 60-crore people, ₹ 1 lakh crore outlay for five years is simply peanuts.

In the 12th plan period (2012-13 to 2017-18) agriculture is projected to receive ₹ 1.5 lakh crore. Compare this with the ₹ 5.73 lakh crore tax exemptions showered on the industry in 2014-15 alone. It's therefore a matter of priorities. In fact, as I have been saying for long, farmers have disappeared from the economic radar screen.

Resources diverted to the elite

Despite such low budgetary allocations for agriculture and knowing that the public sector investments have been drastically falling in the rural areas, there is no visible intention of resurrecting the farm sector reeling under a terrible



economic distress. As if this is not enough, all the noise in TV studios is to cut down on subsidies meant for the poor – food, fertilizer, diesel, gas and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. But there is not even a whimper on the desperate need to remove the tax exemptions for the Indian industry.

Since 2004-05, corporate India has been showered with ₹ 31-lakh crore tax exemption. This was expected to boost industrial output and create jobs. But while only 1.5 crore jobs were added in the past 10 years, industrial production has not shown any significant jump. On top of it, corporate India is sitting over a cash surplus exceeding ₹ 10-lakh crores, and has also defaulted the banks (termed as non-performing assets) by another ₹ 10-lakh crores or so. It clearly shows how the poor are being denied their legitimate economic support and the resources are being very conveniently diverted to the rich elite.

As I said earlier, agriculture employs 60-crore people. Nearly 82.2 percent of those employed in agriculture are small and marginal farmers. With a meager land holding, and with virtually no financial support, this majority population has somehow managed to survive. Studies show that nearly 60 percent farmers themselves go to bed hungry. With agriculture deliberately being turned economically unviable, more than 42 percent farmers want to quit farming if given a choice. Mainline economists are keen to finish agriculture and move the farming population into the urban centres. But considering that temples are the biggest employers in the country, followed by security guards and the lift boys, I wonder if that is what constitutes economic growth. Nevertheless since the World Bank has prescribed rural-urban migration as the ultimate indicator of economic growth, Indian economists have been parroting the same prescription.

Creating smart villages

Economic Survey 2013-14 points to the same direction. Raghuram Rajan, the Reserve Bank governor echoes the same argument. Rising food inflation comes in handy to up the ante against Minimum Support Price (MSP) being paid to farmers.

Agricultural produce market committee (APMC) also known as *mandis* are to be dismantled. Farmers are being pushed to accept the market doctrine, which means that distress sale will now become a norm. In Bihar, which has no APMC since 2007, markets have failed to infuse any confidence by way of

economic prosperity. But that's what the markets like. They should be able to source cheaper farm commodities thereby adding on to their profits. What happens to farmers has never been their concern. Nor will it ever be.

I expect Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reverse the trend and thereby make an historic correction. He has repeatedly been emphasising during his election campaign on the dire need to make farming economically viable. He has also been talking of providing modern amenities right in the villages. Taking development to the villages has been the hallmark of his political thinking. A beginning can be made by revitalising agriculture in a manner that it brings back the smile on the face of the farmers. In addition to creating 100 smart cities, Mr Modi should also focus on creating smart villages.

A smart village will automatically link local production with local procurement and local distribution. A smart village will not only bring internet connection into the rural hinterland but also provide support to sustainable agriculture practices. A network of small scale industries

linked to agriculture, and a strong network of rail and road corridor, with civic amenities like education and health will transform the face of real India. That's the kind of change India expects. That's the big ticket reform the country has been waiting endlessly for 67 years. Smart villages will not only reduce the growing inequality but also bring *acche din*

for the last person in each and every corner of the country. It will at the same time reduce the burden of influx on the cities, and help reduce global warming. ■

The writer is an agricultural scientist by training and is also an author, researcher and policy analyst specialising in global food and agriculture.

Despite such low budgetary allocations for agriculture and knowing that the public sector investments have been drastically falling in the rural areas, there is no visible intention of resurrecting the farm sector reeling under a terrible economic distress.



Maxim

Indian sports stars, especially women, are made by strong parents, not by associations

– Kiran Bedi

A policy-caused crisis

It is difficult to conceive a pan-Indian policy for agriculture that will cut across all regional specificities and peculiarities, says Dr. D Narasimha Reddy. In his view, a nature-friendly agricultural production is the only answer to the challenges brought in by climate change.

FARMING has evolved over thousands of years with the farm as the basic unit of local community and culture. Its practice was shaped everywhere by geography and the creative skills of the farmer, to be optimally productive.

In India, agricultural sector has been facing increasing problems of resource constraints – geographical, human, natural and economical resources. At different periods, various factors mentioned above have surfaced in larger than expected form, and has hit the small and marginal farmers severely. The difference now could be the culmination of the failure of government departments, dealing with agricultural research and development, and extension services, in delivering their responsibility. All the efforts undertaken by the government have been post-event measures.

Government schemes failed to address issues of small and marginal farmers

It is worth quoting a very old document here. As per the new strategy in the 4th Five-Year Plan, “Agricultural development has suffered on account of incomplete planning, particularly at the local levels. The central fact to be kept in view is that agricultural production lies, almost entirely, in the private, unorganised sector. Agricultural production is, in consequence, primarily the result of individual planning or decision taken and effort put in by farmers who control the actual production process. An agricultural plan becomes a plan in the true sense of the term and targets acquire real meaning, validity and sanction, only if the national goals or broad targets are concretised into a set of specific programmes through village, block, and district plans, and are accepted by the farmers as their own and there is a joint commitment on the part of the farmers, their institutions (cooperatives and Panchayat Raj), the State governments and the Centre to play their respective roles.” (Planning Commission, 1966: 181)

The procession of Green, White, Blue and other revolutions has benefited only a few, rich, educated, and not the average farmer community. Fossil fuel-based agricultural production is the source of trouble for farmers and agricultural production.

Number of landholdings is on the rise, and the size of most of the land-holdings is less than three acres. All the schemes of the government have failed in addressing the problems of inputs of these small and marginal farmers. Given the climate of ‘modernisation’ and the kind of institutional support (electrification, borewell irrigation, chemical fertiliser subsidies, hybridisation of seeds, etc.) provided by governmental agencies, farmers were also forced to shift their agricultural practices from low external inputs to high external inputs.

It is widely and reliably known that nature is unreliable as far as agriculture is concerned. Since ages farmers of these regions are managing the uncertainty of nature by following sound agricultural practices, which try to overcome such a dependency, that have evolved over a period of time. But with the changes introduced in the agricultural practices, through direct or indirect support of the government, the vulnerability of small and marginal farmers to natural phenomena increased manifold.

Impact of climate change

A recent Planning Commission document says, “climate change poses a vital challenge to natural resources. Through its direct and indirect impacts on crop yields, pests and diseases, land and water resources; climate change is expected to affect sustainable agriculture through multiple pathways, thereby having an effect on livelihoods and the overall food security situation in the country.”

The whole structure of agricultural institutions, departments, agencies and corporations has been established precisely to protect the farmers from the vagaries of nature. However, this institutional structure has grossly failed in delivering the goods, as their performance has been abysmal, bordering on negligence, apathy and indifference, steeped as they are in their own petty bureaucratic procedures, and inane programmes and policies.

The procession of Green, White, Blue and other revolutions has benefited only a few, rich, educated, and not the average farmer community. Fossil fuel-based agricultural production is the source of trouble for farmers and agricultural production. The environmental consequences of such production in terms of soil erosion, loss of green cover, loss of top soil, pesticide pollution, decrease in soil quality, increase in saline conditions, depletion and contamination of ground water, etc., have adversely affected the farmers.

The irrigation potential created after Independence, has been only one-third of what was done before, even going by the government statistics. Political considerations rather than the needs and requirements of the situation have governed irrigation investments. In fact, a former engineer has gone on record, saying that irrigation investments are governed by the jungle law: the stronger getting the larger share, if not entirely.

It is clear that Indian agriculture is in a policy-caused crisis.

Need for policy changes

In the last 15 years, since liberalisation, government has taken several policy measures with regard to regulation and control, fiscal policy, export and import, taxation, exchange and interest rate control, export promotion and incentives to high priority industries.

Food processing and agro industries have been accorded high priority with a number of important relief and incentives. Wideranging fiscal policy changes have been introduced progressively. Excise and import duty rates have been reduced substantially. Many processed food items are totally exempt from excise duty. Custom duty rates have been substantially reduced on plant and equipments, as well as on raw materials and intermediates, especially for export production.

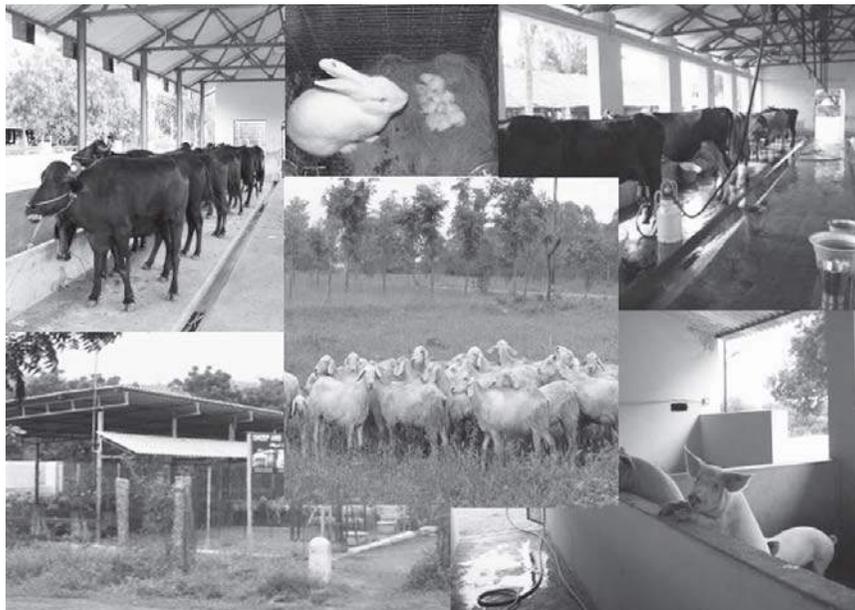
Many schemes have been launched. However, a regionally differentiated strategy, based on agro climatic regional planning which takes into account agronomic, climatic and environmental conditions, remains to be adopted to realise

the potential of growth in every region of the country. The thrust of such a strategy should be on ecological, sustainable use of basic resources such as land, water and vegetation, in such a way that it serves the objectives of accelerated growth, employment and alleviation of hunger.

Allied sectors such as horticulture including fruit and vegetables, fisheries, livestock, and dairy are losing out with the decline in natural resource base. Effective control of animal diseases, declaration of disease-free zones, scientific management of genetic stock resources, breeding, quality feed and fodder, extension services, enhancement of production, productivity and profitability of livestock enterprise have to be taken up.

Other farming systems

Rural poverty largely exists among the landless and marginal farmers. Access to land, therefore, remains a key element of the anti-poverty strategy in rural areas. It was envisaged that the programme of action for land reform would



include the following: detection as well as redistribution of ceiling surplus land; upgrading of land records on a regular basis; tenancy reforms to record the rights of tenants and share croppers; consolidation of holdings; prevention of the alienation of tribal lands; providing access to wastelands and

common property resources to the poor on a group basis; leasing-in and leasing-out of land will be permitted within the ceiling limits; and preference to women in the distribution of ceiling surplus land and legal provisions for protecting their rights on land.

Animal husbandry, which includes dairy, piggery, poultry, goatery and sheep farming, is the major occupation of this group of population. The five farming systems mentioned above should be developed on the principle of resource-based planning, which includes land, water, agro-climate, labour inputs and financial capability of the disadvantaged community. Livestock farming has to look into all the above facts and

more importantly into economic, environmental and social factors. Thus, the development of remunerative farming systems for improving their economic conditions and quality of life is most important in future.

A drastic restructuring of priorities for the farm sector is needed, including progressive integration of subsidies and regulation of the farm sector, greater crop diversification especially in the rainfed areas, and a relatively marketsensitive decentralised system of procurement and distribution of food grains. We must also offer incentives to invest in rural infrastructure, and make provision for research, extension, input supply and informational services to farmers that can be considered 'public goods', and which have remained grossly undersupplied so far. In making this transition an important focus of attention should be to increase the efficiency of institutions providing these services.

The farm sector can become globally competitive through appropriate policies and strategies to increase the farmer's income, strengthen and improve the performance of the sector, by increasing productivity and reducing the cost of production.

Policies cut off from reality

India has failed to take advantage of even the existing provisions of the trade agreements to strengthen its position in world competition. While the opportunities for India offered by the various trade agreements lie in the future, their threats are immediate. A national consensus is needed on how these threats should be converted into opportunities, as well as a government with a political will to implement that consensus. This is the challenge of the hour.

In this context, a discussion on the National Foreign Trade Policy (NFTP) is definitely required. Unlike in the past, it was promised that this would be continuously updated, revised and improved, so as to reflect the needs of the Indian trade interests. While welcoming this initiative, which should be taken as a step in the right direction, one needs to be careful in endorsing it completely. There are number of issues which impinge on Indian foreign trade, which may not get a complete answer through the instrument of foreign trade policy, nor the institutions which have the primary responsibility to implement the foreign trade policy. Indian farming sector seasons have to be integrated into the NFTP,

and the decisions on imports and exports. Agricultural production related foreign trade policy would definitely boost the confidence of Indian farmers.

Most policies are cut off from reality of climate change and declining role of farmers in decision-making. Seed policy needs to be revisited, with the aim of increasing control of farmers over seeds, and access to good quality seeds. A Soil Fertility Improvement Policy is required. Across the country, soil degradation is a major cause of concern and has been the prime factor in the decline of agricultural production and shift to commercial crops. Even though governments have recognised this long back, a proper and cogent policy and programme has not been evolved. The thrust should be on the scale and importance given to the infrastructure sector.

National Water Policy has not given enough concentration to the water shortages in many places. Irrigation is not a complete answer. Water availability needs to be combined with soil fertility and crop choices. Growth in cereal production is also a top priority. A nature-friendly agricultural production is the only answer to the challenges brought in by climate change.

Conclusion

Finally, it is still difficult to conceive a pan-Indian policy which will cut across all regional specificities and peculiarities. The agro-ecological diversity can never be ignored. Food security of millions is a top priority and no policy can afford to ignore this consideration. The long term perspective therefore should not be to import food from where it is cheapest, but rather the approach should be to shrug off dependence on import of food grains altogether. Or else, India's long term development will be compromised and an all pervasive dependence will become a problem in itself. ■



The writer has developed information and policy expertise on seed sector, cotton, sugarcane, sericulture and other related areas. He supports various initiatives on land and water issues. He is currently a Member of the Consultative Committee of Cotton Advisory Board, Ministry of Textiles.

Did you know?

The branches of the Banyan tree, which is the National tree of India, spread over a large area to take roots keeps on living and regenerating for thousands of years. According to the Indian mythology, this tree is immortal. The Great Banyan tree located in Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden, Howrah, near Kolkata, is the largest known in India. It looks more like a forest than an individual tree. It was struck by lightning in 1925, and the middle of the tree was excised to keep the remainder healthy. Many of the Indian villages are centered around large shady banyan trees that provide a good place for public meetings and meetings of the village council.

GM crops: Sowing seeds of disaster

*While achieving food security, decision makers in India should not get distracted by techno-fixes like GM crops which are promoted by global biotech seed companies as a silver bullet. They are nothing but a threat to nation's seed sovereignty and food security, warns **Rajesh Krishnan**.*

THE debate and controversy around GM crops and, more precisely about environmental release of GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) started 41 years ago around the time the first GMO was developed in an American lab. The debate initiated in the scientific circles spread out to all sections of the society, as here was a technology that had the potential to impact each one of us. The unpredictability of the consequences as well as the uncontrollability of the GMOs, which some call as a living technology, once left out in the environment was the main concern. The scientific evidence on the adverse impacts of GM crops to human health, environment and society has been growing ever since. A recently published compilation of such studies gives abstracts of more than 400 peer reviewed scientific papers¹. What also emerged out was the potential of this technology to facilitate the patenting of life forms which was permitted for the first time in the history by the US Supreme Court in 1980.

The possibility of patenting and owning life forms, thereby ensuring continuous exclusive rights and profits from seeds, the most important input in agriculture, was precisely the reason why the agri business got interested in this technology. It is thanks to GM crops that Monsanto, the agrochemical giant has become the largest seed company in the world.

Bt cotton- It's high time we learn lessons

Nothing explains better the absolute monopoly that this technology can provide to its developer like the cotton seed situation in India. Almost 95 percent of our land under cotton is now covered by Bt (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*) cotton and of

this almost 100 percent use Monsanto's licensed Bt cotton. One should also remember that all this happened in a span of less than 12 years. Not only is the company earning thousands of crores in royalty but also is in a position to decide on what varieties can be grown in our country. It is also a dangerous situation that if the company decides to stop licensing of this technology then there is hardly any non Bt cotton seed left in



the private or public sector seed providers in our country to be given to our farmers. Infact even the planning commission of India in its 12th five year plan highlights this concern of monopoly.

On one side we have lost our cotton seed sovereignty to an American company and on the other, this magic wand of a technology as it was claimed to be has miserably failed to help our cotton farmer come out of the distress that he/she is in. Last years' National Crime Records Bureau figures show that two out of every three farmer suicide of the total 13,754 reported were from the major cotton growing states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. It is also important to note that the stagnancy in growth of yield despite wide spread adoption of Bt cotton has been acknowledged by the previous government. In fact, in a 10 year review of 2002, the year in which Bt cotton was approved for commercial cultivation, done by Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR), Nagpur, notes that, "Cotton Advisory Board data show cotton yield increased by about 60 percent in three years between 2002 to 2004 when the area under Bt cotton was a meager 5.6 percent and non Bt area was 94.4 percent. The yields did not increase significantly more than the pre Bt era even

until 2011 when the Bt cotton area touched 96 percent.²

The experience so far also shows that the reduction in pesticide usage in cotton cultivation, the *raison d'être* for bringing Bt cotton itself hasn't happened. The 10-year independent analysis shows that the only cotton growing state where pesticide usage has gone down during the 2002-2012 period is Andhra Pradesh and that is due to the successful Non pesticide Management (NPM) programme that has spread out to lakhs of hectares there during this period. Interestingly a long term analysis by the CICR says that the bollworm attacks which Bt toxin in Bt cotton was supposed to counter had comedown drastically starting from the year 2000 itself where as, commercial cultivation of Bt cotton started only in 2002 and spread to a significant area only by 2005-6, which leaves one with a question of what exactly was Bt cotton then for? Infact Jairam Ramesh famously called Bt cotton a solution looking for a problem.

Public sector agri research or Trojan Horse?

At this juncture it is also important to talk about the public sector efforts to bring out GM cotton. To annul the fears of people about foreign corporations taking absolute control of our cotton seed market Indian Council of Agriculture (ICAR) brought out the much touted Bt *Bikaneri narma*/the first public sector GM crop reaching commercialisation in India. It was released in 2008 only to be recalled back in a year's time following complaints that it contained the Monsanto's Bt gene. An investigation done by a high level committee constituted by the ICAR later on came up with startling facts that the Bt *Bikaneri narma* was possibly contaminated by Monsanto gene during the field trial stage itself, a secret known and discussed by those in charge of ICAR as early as 2005.³ But they decided to keep quiet. Infact many feel that public sector research besides being influenced by the private sector has also become Trojan horses for them.

This could also be seen in the case of Bt Brinjal, the first GM food crop that came up for commercial approval. While the Bt Brinjal was developed using Monsanto's proprietary Bt gene by Mahyco as part of an International programme coordinated by the United States Agency for International Development and United States Department of Agriculture, it also included three Indian institutions, the Indian Vegetable Research Institution, Varanasi, The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore and the University of Agriculture Sciences, Dharwad. Besides giving away the Indian varieties of Brinjal which they had in their University germplasm these 'eminent' public research institutions also had signed on an MoU (memorandum of understanding) with Mahyco permitting the company to decide on the commercial aspects of the Bt Brinjal varieties developed using our germplasm. While

Monsanto and Mahyco have been dragged to the court by the National Biodiversity Authority for biopiracy, the role of our public sector institutions which are supposed to be custodians of our germplasms also need to be looked at. It is unfortunate that instead of promoting such agriculture technologies that help the farm communities and the nation itself maintain the control of our seed heritage and diversity, these institutions funded by our public, are giving away our seed sovereignty to multinational seed corporations for god knows what.

Thankfully in the case of Bt Brinjal an alert civil society, a strong scientific advise against it along with 13 state governments opposing its commercialisation could persuade the then Minister for Environment and Forests, Jairam Ramesh to take what he called a decision responsive to society and responsible to science and put commercialisation of Bt Brinjal under an indefinite moratorium.⁴

But the fiascos with Bt cotton and Bt Brinjal has unfortunately not stopped our public sector agriculture science research from moving away from a technology that puts our country, its farming, citizens health as well as environmental sustainability at risk. Unless the agenda of agriculture policies change from a paradigm that are resource destructive and which facilitates corporate control over agriculture to those that helps ecological sustainability, economic viability and social justice, such risky technologies will continue to be pursued by our research institutions.

The good news is that such technologies exist. A classic example for the real alternative to synthetic pesticides for pest management is the Non Pesticide Management (NPM) programme in the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh which has spread over to 40 lakh acres and across crops.⁵ While there is hardly any counter to the effectiveness of the NPM practice in managing pests and bringing monetary benefits to farmers and safe food for consumers, the programme is yet to be promoted by the agriculture ministry in our country, ICAR or even the state agriculture department. Instead all these institutions are going whole hog promoting unsustainable technologies like GM crops and especially Bt crops which are just an extension of the chemical pesticide-based approach to pest management, leaving one wondering where do our priorities lie.

Will GM crops provide food security?

Nothing could be far from the truth that techno-fixes like GM crops could provide food security for our country or any country in the world. A letter by 156 Indian scientists to the previous government gives the reason why.⁶ The experiences from the few countries that grow GM crops (like USA, Brazil and Argentine) shows that the food security situation in these countries haven't improved as opposed to other countries like Peru, Venezuela and closer home Bangladesh, where there is

commercial cultivation of GM crops. Besides this one also needs to realise that so far there is no GM crop that has been modified to increase yield as a character. Moreover food security is also about food safety which GM crops are threatening.

Our country seems to live with the paradox of mountains of grains and millions of hungry, once again proving the point that increasing production and productivity is not going to solve the issue of poverty or malnutrition. Our food grain production has been breaking records for four consecutive years with this year's figures climbing up to 268 million tonnes. It is established that a multipronged approach which includes :

- the promotion of sustainable food production systems,
 - efficient food distribution and
 - ensuring livelihood security of citizens
- is the way forward for our country to be food secure, now and in future.

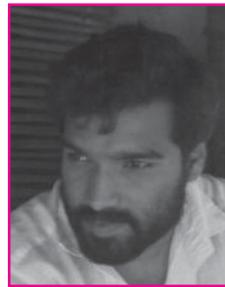
India as a nation is struggling with the big question to achieve food security with a growing population and the already starving millions. It is important that our decision makers do not get distracted by techno-fixes like GM crops which are promoted by global biotech seed companies as a silver bullet.

The voices cautioning against the hurry to embrace GM

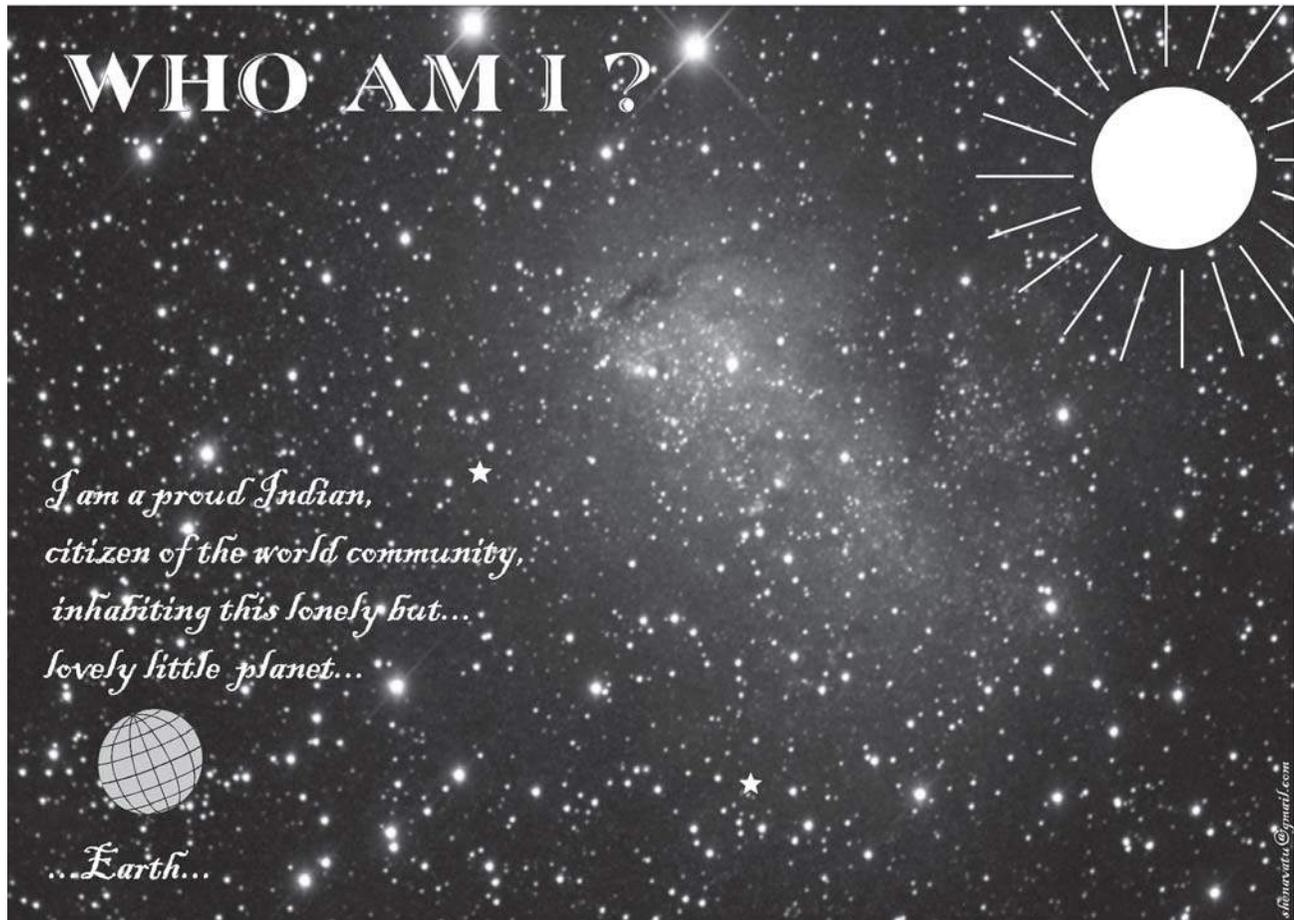
technology in the recent past included the parliamentary standing committee on agriculture and the Technical Expert Committee set up by the Supreme Court. One hopes that the new government in place will heed to these voices of reason and concern and steer clear of risky technologies in agriculture like GM crops, to ensure that the seed sovereignty and food security of the nation is not compromised, now or in future. ■

Footnotes

- 1 <http://indiagminfo.org/?p=657>
- 2 www.cicr.org.in/pdf/Bt_book_Kranthi.pdf
- 3 <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/content/368156/report-of-dr-s-k-sopory-committee-on-bnla106-event-genetic-transformation-of-an-elite-indian-genotype-of-cotton-gossypium-hirsutum-l-for-insect-resistance/>
- 4 http://moef.nic.in/downloads/public-information/minister_REPORT.pdf
- 5 <http://www.csa-india.org/what-we-do/non-pesticidal-management>
- 6 <http://indiagminfo.org/?p=537>



The writer is a practicing farmer with an educational background in Biotechnology and Ecology. He is also currently the Convenor of the Coalition for a GM Free India, a large network of concerned organisations and individuals across India fighting to keep our food, farms and environment free from GMOs.



Feeding India's hungry

India needs serious attention of policy makers, development officials, researchers and farmers in boosting land productivity and food production by using advanced technologies, and most importantly making nutritious food available and accessible to all, writes Prem Nath.

AGRICULTURE was developed by human beings for their own benefit, in order to tame and utilise the natural resources for producing food. Although it started as a hit and miss process in its early stages, its success became a practice followed by tradition. With the passage of time the successful practices became more traditional and came to be defined as traditional farming. With the knowledge gained in biological and related sciences, agricultural sciences enhanced the quality and quantum of food production much needed by the growing human population.

Role of technology

While agriculture is the vehicle for food production, agriculture technology is the engine to propel and gear up the process and net result of production. The development and application of appropriate technology are essential for achieving higher production and quality. A view of the present scenario indicates that there has been unequal development and application of technology in the developing countries, and more so in developed countries, where these countries have developed superior and efficient agricultural technologies leading to higher production, many times more than what they can consume, leaving behind developing countries who are short of what they need for consumption. In developing countries, the lack of resources for investment in agriculture, and the gap in knowledge of efficient agricultural technologies are glaring. Application of improved technology will propel increased production thereby combating hunger and malnutrition among people. It is incumbent on each government to develop its national agriculture through efficient technology and feed its people.

At present we are discussing efficient and smart technology developed through advanced agricultural sciences for the benefit of farmers who can produce quality food in abundance. In order to harness the potential and refinement of agricultural sciences and to develop useful technology, certain essential ingredients are a must which embrace the area of education, research, technology development, application of technology,

developmental steps in production and consumption.

In this context and process, two new dimensions have emerged because of socio-economic condition and migration. In the developing world, both the small and the large farmers have to be encouraged and their interests protected for better production and productivity. The unabated migration of people from rural to urban areas and their demand of livelihood is changing the face of rural and urban divide and forcing the traditional rural agriculture to accommodate new approaches of urban and peri-urban agriculture with its rising importance.

Emphasis on improving agricultural education

In the developing countries including India, there is tremendous scope for improving agricultural education which lays down the sound footing for efficient agriculture. There is great disparity between regions — some don't have a single agricultural university whereas some others have many, but the quality in terms of both scientific and human resource development can do with improvement to be competitive in the present context of transactions of food worldwide.

Again in the developing world, the shortfall in both qualitative and quantitative agricultural products demands for emergency action on technology development and its application. For example, the production efficiency of vegetable crops in India, needs to be vastly improved to raise the productivity levels.

While the developed countries have advanced knowledge in farming technology, efforts continue to refine and advance it further, whereas the developing world is in the process of catching up. In this electronic age, why shouldn't knowledge be shared and both the worlds catch up with each other to bridge the gap?

Whether it is breeding new varieties of crop or developing new crop management practices, plant protection measures or post-harvest handling technology or marketing; the latest technologies or practices should be utilised to harness maximum output in production. Sometimes biotechnological tools over traditional breeding could do better, whereas in

other crops both the tools could be used profitably. The practice of GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) at the farmer's level has ensured success in good harvests.

As diverse as they are, these challenges need to be addressed in time and appropriately by both, the public and private sectors at different levels, whether it is framing policy, development of technology and application, post-harvest handling or consumption. Various aspects of agriculture call for attention of those concerned to fulfill their commitment whether they are policy makers, researchers, professors, development officials or farmers.

Women's contribution unrecognised

Do women really feed the world? On a global scale, women produce more than half of all the food that is grown. In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, they produce up to 80 percent of basic foodstuffs. In Asia, they provide from 50 to 90 percent of the labour for rice cultivation (Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 1998). Despite their contribution to agriculture and food security, their work is not recorded in statistics or mentioned in reports. As a result, their contribution is poorly understood and often underestimated. Outside the household, a great deal of rural women's labour whether regular or seasonal- goes unpaid and is, therefore, rarely taken into account in official statistics (FAO, 1998). Rural women often lack education and opportunities to learn about new technologies.

Using natural resources wisely

In this context of agriculture, we cannot forget the contribution of natural resources which are essential ingredients as well as partners in the manufacture of food. These natural resources are plants, animals, and human beings on one side and earth, water, sun and air on other side which provide both base and medium for the production, reproduction and survival of the former group of resources. Further, human beings need plants and animals as sources of food and agriculture facilitates the production of food products.

We should underscore that none of the natural resources are in plenty and that we should 'economise' on each natural resource to build together the world's livelihood. For example, water is utilised for different purposes. It seems, a strong

competition exists among humans, plants and animals with regard to fresh water utilisation. We need to cut down our consumption and use water wisely. Statistics show that we use 2,029 gallons of water to produce one pound of hamburger, 468 gallons for one pound of chicken, 600 gallons for each pound of cheese, 72 gallons for one pound of apples, and only 16 gallons of water to produce one pound of tomatoes. Now it is for us to judge and decide what we like to produce and eat.

Poverty and food security

Today, more than a billion people are suffering from hunger and malnutrition in the world, out of which about 300 million live in India. For them food and nutrition security are priority areas which need to be addressed both by public and private sectors. In India alone about 42 percent of the children are malnourished. What would be the future of the country? Who is to be blamed, the government or the public? I think both are responsible. It is difficult to achieve food security when poverty prevails in the households. Among other factors, access to food remains a dominating force in the frame of food security, where economic accessibility plays an important role. People are hungry because they have no earnings which can be mitigated by providing employment to them. Therefore creating employment opportunities should be a priority.

At Rio+20 (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development) held in June 2012 at Brazil, the emphasis was to build a green economy to achieve sustainable development and lift people out of poverty including support for developing countries that will allow them to find a green path for development and to improve international cooperation for sustainable development.

Today India needs serious attention of policy makers, development officials, researchers and farmers in boosting land productivity, food production, availability of nutritious food and most of all accessibility to food. ■



The writer is the Chairman, Dr. P.N. Agricultural Science Foundation (PNASF), Bangalore. He is also the former assistant director general, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN).

Festive Times

The Nehru Trophy snake boat race is undoubtedly the most exciting boat race of the year in Kerala. This race is held in memory of India's late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. An impromptu snake boat race was held in 1952 when the Prime Minister visited Alleppey. He was so impressed with the welcome and the race, he donated a trophy. The race has continued ever since. It takes place annually on the second Saturday of August. This year will be its 60th anniversary, with extensive three day celebrations to mark the occasion.

Cooperative farming to boost economies of scale

Dr. L Jalapathi Rao says, *small and marginal farmers can benefit immensely through cooperative farming, provided the government motivates them by offering tax breaks and concessions and the bureaucracy too provides support.*

AGRICULTURE in India has a long and sound traditional base. It is a major source of employment and food for millions and source of raw materials for several industries. It is the single largest private sector with nearly 60 percent of people depending on it for their source of livelihood.

India is endowed with rich natural resources, variety of soils, water, natural vegetation and climate suitable for growing large variety of food, fodder, horticultural crops and rearing variety of livestock. Self sufficiency in food grains production was achieved by synergy of technology, services, public policy and farmers' entrepreneurship. However the growth shows a declining trend; production and productivity have remained almost stagnant.

Economic status of farmers still bad

The agriculture sector contributes only about 18 percent of the total GDP, with more than 60 percent population depending on it, resulting in low per capita income in the farm sector. Consequently, there is a large disparity between the per capita income in the farm sector and the non-farm sector. Farmers in general and small and marginal farmers in particular, are struggling to have a viable livelihood and dignified living through farming and to hold on to their resources.

The support services, policies and schemes of governments have not succeeded in improving the economic status of farmers. It is argued that the high-intensive and high-risk models of agriculture have pushed the majority of small farmers into crisis. There is greater need now than ever before to focus more on the economic wellbeing of farmers rather than just on production, by evolving a long term and sustainable solution to the problems that pervade small and marginal farmers.

Progress in agriculture needs to be measured not only on the total food production but also on the growth rate in net income of farm families. A vibrant and politically stable India rests on the financial conditions of rural communities and not on the profitability of a few large corporations.

Institutional reforms are required to channelise small farmers' energies for greater productivity and higher income.

A robust innovative system is essential with participation of producers, research institution, financiers, supporting policies and extension mechanisms. Two approaches that are to be taken up to seek solutions to these problems are: accelerating transfer of technology mechanism through use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and creation of farmers' enterprises—agricultural co-operatives commodity groups.

Cooperative farming can enhance incomes

Indian agriculture is characterised predominantly by small and marginal farmers. One of the reasons for yield plateau and low income to farm families is land fragmentation. About 80 percent of farmers are small and marginal. They are deprived of access to latest precision farming techniques, farm mechanisation, credit, technical advice, quality inputs, market intelligence and post harvesting facilities. They also lack the bargaining capacity. The gap between scientific know-how and field level do-how is widening. Fragmentation of land is inevitable due to ever increasing human population and decreasing cultivable land. But there is a need to address this issue comprehensively to increase production and farmer income in order to overcome knowledge deficit speedily.

This can be done by cooperative approach to farming. The economies of scale in procurement, technology adoption and marketing are better attained if small farmers join hands for collective farming. The farmer group operation would facilitate requirement for quality and traceability for exports. These farmers' collectives would further facilitate crop specialisation in clusters and the limited and finite resources in the area could be channeled and processed, and industry can be established in the production zone itself. Farmers in a cooperative become an integral part of the supply chain. There is a need therefore, to encourage the formation of producer enterprises, agricultural cooperatives or commodity-based collectives, so that a section of the farmers can themselves reap the benefits. The need is to give the power of scale to the small farmers both in production and post harvest operation to enhance their incomes.

There are problems for processing and marketing enterprises for procuring higher quality products for specific

markets from large number of small farmers. There is a need, therefore, for forming large groups of farmers engaged in production of higher quality products for specific markets within specific agro-climatic zones.

Agricultural cooperation in India

This is not an easy task considering the fact that the past efforts in cooperative farming have not succeeded. Agricultural cooperation in India so far suffered from various institutional drawbacks but it cannot be given up. An honest attempt has to be made to convince the farmers about the benefits of cooperative farming and the economies of scale. The motivation for the collectives need to come from the government offering tax breaks and concessions, a supporting bureaucracy and service support.

There are few successful cases of cooperatives in India that are unique models, but localised. They are known for acceptance of leadership and commitment. These societies are, however, confined mainly to marketing of inputs and outputs. Similarly the concept of cooperative marketing of inputs and seed production is spreading in different villages. But concerted efforts are to be made by one and all to demonstrate the benefits of cooperative farming and while extending other various forms of support.

Appropriate mechanism should be put in place so that farmers have greater control of the market channels and improve their profit opportunities.

The policy and legal frame work under which the cooperatives are functioning, need to be reviewed so as to create an enabling environment for them to attain autonomy and run their operations in a business-like manner and accounting made transparent.

Farmers' cooperatives should be financially supported for creating initial infrastructure. The present free economic policies must also have a reserve place and sector for cooperatives.

Legislative and regulatory frame work should be amended and strengthened to achieve the objectives. A new bill, Co-operative Sector Reforms, formulated and introduced in Parliament in place of Multi State Co-operative Societies Act 1984, needs to get approval.

Transfer of technology

The diversified nature of India, with its wide variety of agro climatic regions and broad range of socio-economic conditions in the rural population, calls for agricultural extension approaches that are context and situation specific. With more than 80 percent of farmers cultivating an area of two hectares or less, there is an increasing need for stronger intermediaries that can facilitate information access for adverse small holder farmers. Progress in poverty and hunger reduction crucially depends on the increased productivity and profitability of these

farmers, which in turn depends on the successful delivery of agricultural extension.

There is an increasing need to work in partnership and to share knowledge and skills in order to provide locally relevant services that meet the information needs of marginal and small holder farmers.

The extension system during 70s and 80s was effective and played its role in realising the benefits of Green Revolution. But in subsequent years, the system was not able to meet the requirements of changing agricultural situation. There has been, therefore, a demand for re-examining the architecture of Agricultural Extension Services to help farmers to bridge the gap between yields that are possible and those which are actually achieved.

Enhancing small farm productivity

Enhancing small farm productivity, and increasing small farm income through crop-livestock integrated and multiple livelihood opportunities through agro-processing and biomass utilisation, are essential, both to meet food production targets and for reducing hunger, poverty and rural employment.

Despite a wide range of reform initiatives in agricultural extension in India in the past decade, the coverage of, access to, and quality of information provided to marginalised and poor farmers is uneven. While the call for demand-driven agricultural extension has existed for several decades now, new modes of reaching out to farmers could have significant impact, as they better reflect the local information needs of farmers. In spite of the renewed interest and investments in agricultural extension, the coverage of such services is inadequate and limited. Survey showed that 60 percent of farmers had not accessed any source of information on modern technologies to assist in their farming practices.

To realise the benefits of latest technologies, farmers need to access a wide range of information related not only to production technologies but also to post harvest processes, accesses to remunerative markets, price information and business development.

The Extension Working Group, constituted by the Planning Commission, recommended for launching of National Mission on Agricultural Extension, during the 12th Plan to deepen, widen and carry forward the extension reforms. The mission is to focus on sustainable small farms agriculture, especially in rainfed areas. It is also expected to achieve inclusive growth through comprehensive framework of development of difficult areas and disadvantaged group of farmers on the highest priority by every sector. The government, under Bharat Nirman Programme, is committed to expand rural connectivity through different measures so that rural users can access information of value and transact business. This includes connecting block headquarters with fibre optic network, using wireless technology to achieve last mile connectivity and operating

information kiosks through partnership with citizens.

Few farmers have access to technology

Traditional extension system is in a state of disarray, insufficient and in-accurate. Advances in technologies are not reaching to most farm families. Information is power and tool for progress. There is need to fully leverage power of ICT for linking every component, provide accountability and empower farmers to demand and access service. Continuous contact with farmers has to be established to provide knowledge, information, empower to facilitate them to demand and access services. Efforts are required to strengthen informatics in agriculture. Cyber space need to be explored and ICT should be used to reach the last person in a village.

Attempts are made to use first generation ICT 4D models, radio, TV, web, but links to end user are not established. Second generation ICT 4D approaches mobile services, hands-on-mobile net working and knowledge database are emerging. They are still not two-way interactive. There is now need to use next generation ICT 4D approaches like Voice-Over Internet Protocol and web with mobile (webinars).

Restructuring and strengthening of agriculture extension system has to be a mix of extending physical outreach, enhancement in quality through domain experts and regular capacity building, interactive methods of information

dissemination and innovative use of ICT. In addition to harnessing ICT, the existing extension system need to be retained and rationed. There is need to expand Krishi Vigyan Kendra approach for demonstration of technologies and skill development of rural youth and women as para-technicians. For complete and effective transfer of technology there is need to develop Village Knowledge Centers for making extension farmer-responsible and farmer-accountable and to have last person connectivity.

There is also a need to rollout a national e-governance plan for continuous interaction with farmers. A national centre for e-governance in agriculture should be setup to leverage ICT for promoting improved delivery, transparency, accountability and good governance through digital system for performance monitoring at all levels. In an era of globalisation, connectivity by radio and separate TV channel

for agriculture can act as important mediums in strengthening grassroots and mainstream linkages and contribute towards creating a vibrant, aware and informed connectivity, the hall mark of a true democracy. ■



The writer is the former Registrar of Acharya N.G.Ranga Agricultural University, Hyderabad.



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In Bengal, women agriculturists take charge

*Women farmers in India's hinterland are not merely content with doing the lion's share of farming work; they are ready to demand the right to take charge of decision-making, writes **Ajitha Menon**.*

AGRICULTURE is hard work. And contrary to the general perception, women, rather than the men, do most of the farm work. In fact, their contribution to India's total agricultural production is about 60 percent. From helping to prepare the land, to sowing and harvesting the crop, to looking into its processing and storage, Gouri Mondal, 45, of Pathar Pratima village in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal does all the work on her husband's two bigha farm. What is more, she even takes care of the seed collection and preservation. But Mondal's role is not just limited to tilling and caring for the land; she is also making her presence felt as the recently-elected state committee member of the Kisan Swaraj Samity (KSS) in Bengal.

More and more women farmers like Mondal are now coming forward and taking their place within farming organisations, participating in the discussions and voicing their concerns. Of the over 200 farmers from nine districts in West Bengal that participated in a meeting of the KSS held in Kolkata in May 2014, 30 percent were women cultivators. "Such meetings give us the opportunity to interact with other farmers and discuss our problems. We can identify common concerns and lobby for better policies to address them. For instance, at the KSS meeting it was found that improper or delayed seed distribution by the government was a major problem for all the farmers. It is our entitlement but most of us are deprived of good seeds at the right time due to poor management of the seed distribution process," states Sarbani Bera, 38, of Paharchan village in East Midnapore district.

Back to organic farming

Mondal and Bera are among those farmers who have gone back to using organic fertilisers with the guidance and support of non-government organisations that are working together under the Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture (ASHA) network. "We were using inorganic fertilisers for our paddy crop but when soil fertility was destroyed due to floods some years ago, the land was rendered useless. I learnt to make and use



Contrary to the general perception, women, rather than the men, do most of the farm work and their contribution to the India's total agricultural production is about 60 per cent. (Credit: Subhrajit Dutta Mallick/WFS)

organic fertiliser to restore soil fertility," shares Mondal.

The ASHA network supports the Kisan Swaraj policy based on economic sustainability of agriculture-based livelihoods, ecological sustainability to preserve the productive natural resources, people's control over agricultural resources including land, water, forest, seed and knowledge, and ensuring non-toxic, diverse, nutritious and adequate food for all Indians, according to Chandrani Das of Development Research Communication and Services Centre (DRCSC), a participating non-government organisation.

Aparna Mondal, 36, of Paargumti village in North 24 Parganas district points out that with the DRCSC's support she switched to organic seeds to ensure maximum production from her one bigha land. "I learnt how to collect the seeds and preserve them using organic preservatives like charcoal and neem leaves. Apart from that I am making my own organic fertiliser from cow dung," she says.

This industrious farmer has a sustainable agriculture-



More and more women farmers are coming forward and taking their place within farming organisations, participating in the discussions and voicing their concerns. (Credit: Anirban Banerjee/WFS)

based livelihood system in place, “I started off with integrated farming on a small scale, growing vegetables in the kitchen garden and cultivating fish in my pond. Today, I make an annual profit of ₹ 10,000 from fish cultivation alone. The home-grown vegetables provide nutritious food for the family and I sell the extras for cash.”

Lack of water and irrigation facilities

Most women cultivators see the shortage of water as a major issue. “The rains have become undependable so we tap water from the local ponds when the monsoons fail us. We need the government to seriously look into the irrigation issues, rainwater harvesting and laying of canals to ensure steady water supply to the fields,” says Poornima Sarkar, 34, from Basirhat in North 24 Parganas district.

Sarkar and her husband, Mangal, grow paddy on two bighas of leased land using the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and only organic fertiliser. “My father-in-law used to grow paddy on a lot of leased land in early 2000s. But we realised that increased use of inorganic fertilisers was destroying soil fertility. So my husband and I took on another two bighas where we use only organic fertiliser and SRI as we were trained by the DRCS. We are getting good yield now,” she elaborates.

The lack of proper irrigation facilities comes up for discussion at all farmer meetings. “All of us are facing the same problem. Monsoons are increasingly becoming erratic making rain-fed agriculture unviable. Water from local ponds is often used for irrigating the paddy fields but that is always inadequate. We want the government to seriously look into finding long-term solutions for the irrigation of farm lands,” says Meera Kar, 52, another member of the KSS from Moorakberia village in Howrah district.

According to Alpana Bhakta, 37, a KSS member from Paschimptol village in East Midnapore district, all district committees of the KSS are encouraged to prepare a list of local demands within the context of state and national demands simply because it recognises the fact that every region has its own requirements dependent on specific climatic conditions and availability of natural resources. With these inputs and in keeping with the Kisan Swaraj policies, the KSS has prepared a farmers’ charter of demands.

One of the main demands is the need for government focus on bringing about economic sustainability in farming. Explains Gouri Mondal, “The government has to ensure income security for farmers and see to it that financial support systems like subsidies, credit and insurance, benefit a larger number of farmers. Small farmers like us often get marginalised in such systems.”

Pricing policies and decision-making power

The other significant demand is related to the pricing policies for crops like paddy. “Pricing should take into account the real costs of production like land and water use, management expenses, farm inputs such as composting and seeds as well as family labour. For farmers, too, the cost of living has been steadily rising. Health and education account for a major chunk of the expenses. With declining government support in these areas, it has severely hit our domestic budget making it tough to make ends meet,” she adds.

Moina Khatun, 25, of North 24 Parganas, has enrolled for a Master’s degree in Political Science at the Rabindra Bharati University. Yet, she considers herself a farmer first, working alongside her mother Hasina Bibi on 12 cottahs (1 cottah = 720 sq ft) of leased land. “I want a kisan credit card and access and control over productive resources like water, land, seed and forest. We use them the most, so we should have the decision-making powers as well,” she asserts, adding, “Issues related to pesticide poisoning and bio-safety measures in the context of genetically modified crops like Bt brinjal need to be resolved quickly as well.”

The women farmers who are part of the KSS – and participated in the meeting in Kolkata –actively back two proposals: one that takes into account the detrimental effects of Bangladesh’s approval to limited trials of Bt brinjal on Indian agriculture, and another that opposes the ushering in of a green revolution in Eastern India. Clearly, women agriculturists today have an opinion that they are not afraid to voice out loud. They are not merely content with doing the lion’s share of farming work; they are ready to demand the right to take charge of decision-making. ■

(Source - Women’s Feature Service)

A dangerous trend

*Lack of incentives and institutional support are discouraging small time farmers to move out of the farming sector and find jobs in nearby cities to make a living. Such a trend can spell doom for the agriculture sector and will only jeopardise food security and lead to economic imbalances, cautions **Sriprakash Menon**.*

WHEN we live in urban areas, everything from grains to pulses and vegetables to fruits are made available through the local *kirana* shops or plush looking supermarkets. We readily pay the price and buy up these essential commodities without giving much thought to the people who produce them or the conditions in which the food grains may have been produced.

Today, India's progress is not just because of its industries, but also stems from two selfless sections of people - farmers in the villages and soldiers guarding our borders. Acknowledging this fact, former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri had coined the slogan "*Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan*" for everyone citizen of India to ponder over their immense contribution to the nation.

It was only when I turned a part time farmer, a few years ago, I realised how difficult farming is. Though my forefathers were farmers, little did I realise living in towns and cities that there are several challenges which farmers confront everyday: shortage of water, lack of irrigation facilities, availability of good seeds, organic manure/fertilizers, labour, environmental factors likes rains, pests and nature borne diseases affecting crops and farm lands. Even after getting a good yield, farmers have to depend upon the government or market governed prices, besides being at the mercy of distribution and supply chain (the middlemen and traders who make most of the gains) to sell their produce.

Industries are as much significant as agriculture for any emerging economy, yet today India's progress and self sufficiency in food production comes from its bumper crops and bulk of its agricultural output. For a vast majority of the population not going hungry to bed is because of the selfless toiling farmers in the countryside, who feed the nation.

Farmers are an extremely hardworking and sacrificing lot, who do not aspire for huge profits or try to find a place in the Forbes list of the most influential people in the world; they work tirelessly to feed the society endlessly. In the cities when we get most of our stuff in designer packets, we hardly think of the farmers who cultivate and grow the crops and arrange for the supplies to reach us against all odds of operations,

storage, costing, distribution and so on.

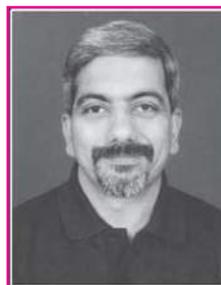
Though the government has become more sensitive towards the farming community in the last few years, nothing substantial has been done for them, except launching a few schemes to generate employment. The new government led by Mr Narendra Modi has promised to revive the agricultural sector, which has been facing a crisis since long; we will have to wait and see for the results. While farmers are keen on increasing their yield and production with the help of modern technology and traditional knowledge, not much has been done to encourage the agriculture sector on those lines so that surplus commodities may bring down prices to make food available cheaper to the people within the country rather than multi national companies making big profits in the domestic market.

While industries especially IT-based have got a big boost from successive governments, enough importance has not been given to agro-based industry in the country. Agro industries have an immense scope for giving fillip to farming activities besides creating employment in villages and small towns.

Lack of incentives and institutional support are discouraging, especially small time farmers, who are now opting to move out of the farming sector and find jobs in nearby cities to make a living. Such a trend can spell doom for the sector and will only jeopardize food security and lead to economic imbalances. As the government is seized with issues like FDI(Foreign Direct Investment), SEZ (Special Economic Zone) and tax holidays for some emerging enterprises in the urban areas, it needs to critically evaluate the deficiency and challenges like improving

qualitative skills and quality control in the agricultural sector. The big Indian success story lies in the fact that it is the farmers who are keeping the citizens of the country well fed and we cannot afford to neglect them. ■

The writer is a documentary film maker, journalist and a small time farmer.



Aarogyam

For indigestion and colic pain one can try this simple home remedy. Cook half cup rice with four cups of water with crushed ginger and salt. Powder long pepper and fry it in a spoon of cow's ghee and add it to the gruel. Consume it hot. This is very light to digest and relieves colic pain.

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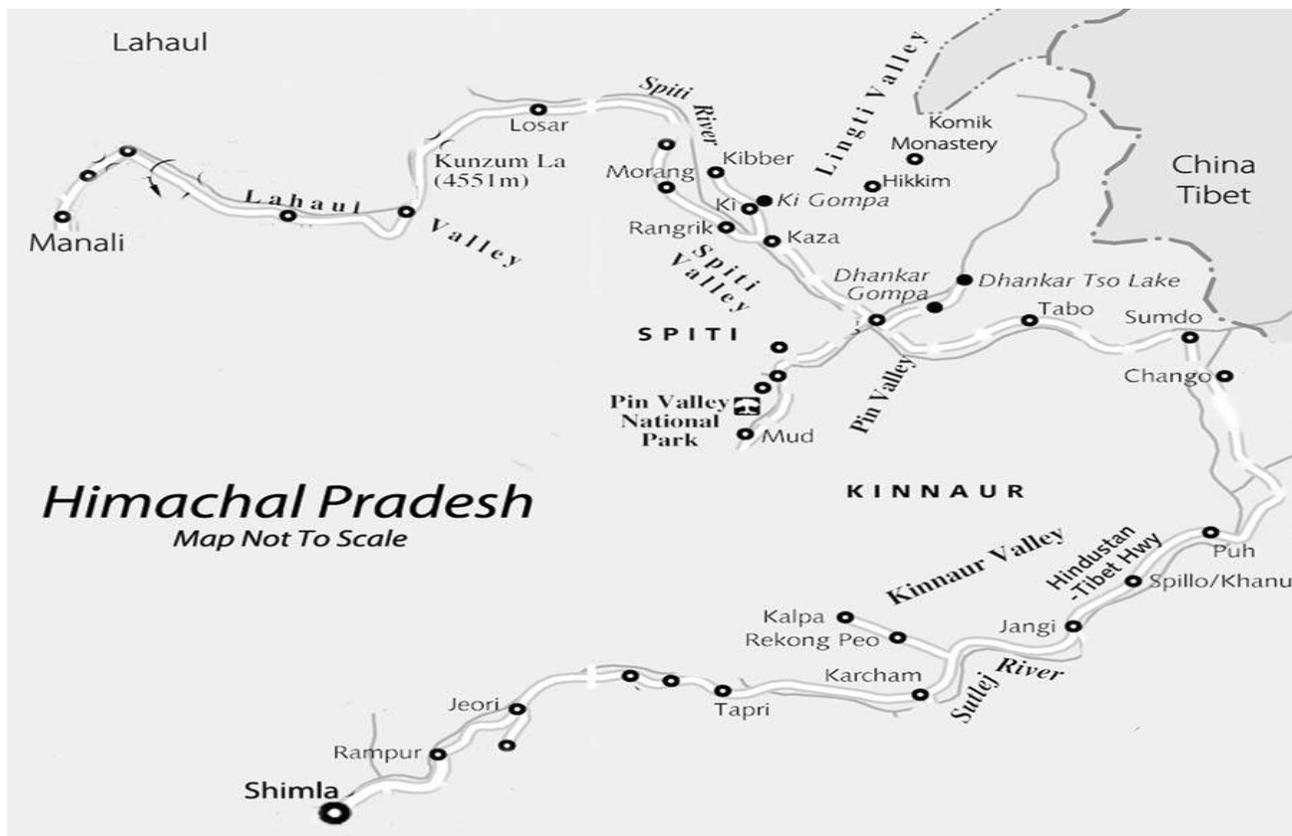
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SPITI

The middle land

In a far flung corner of Himachal Pradesh, Akul Tripathi discovers a land undisturbed for over a millennia. Mystery and magic lie unperturbed and legends still hold true. Where the wild and civilised live alongside and human hearts still bleed gold.

Text and Photos: Akul Tripathi



Spiti Valley is nestled in the north-eastern corner of the state of Himachal Pradesh

WHAT country is that?", "Is it near Haiti?"; are amongst the more bizarre of the responses I have had thrown at me when I have recounted my trip to Spiti Valley. Raised eyebrows, bewildered expressions and a lost look on the faces are what I have deduced to be normal reactions. Quite ironically, those were the same expressions I had on my face when I visited the extravagantly beautiful valley of Spiti. The only difference – mine stemmed from a place of astonished, unbelieving awe.

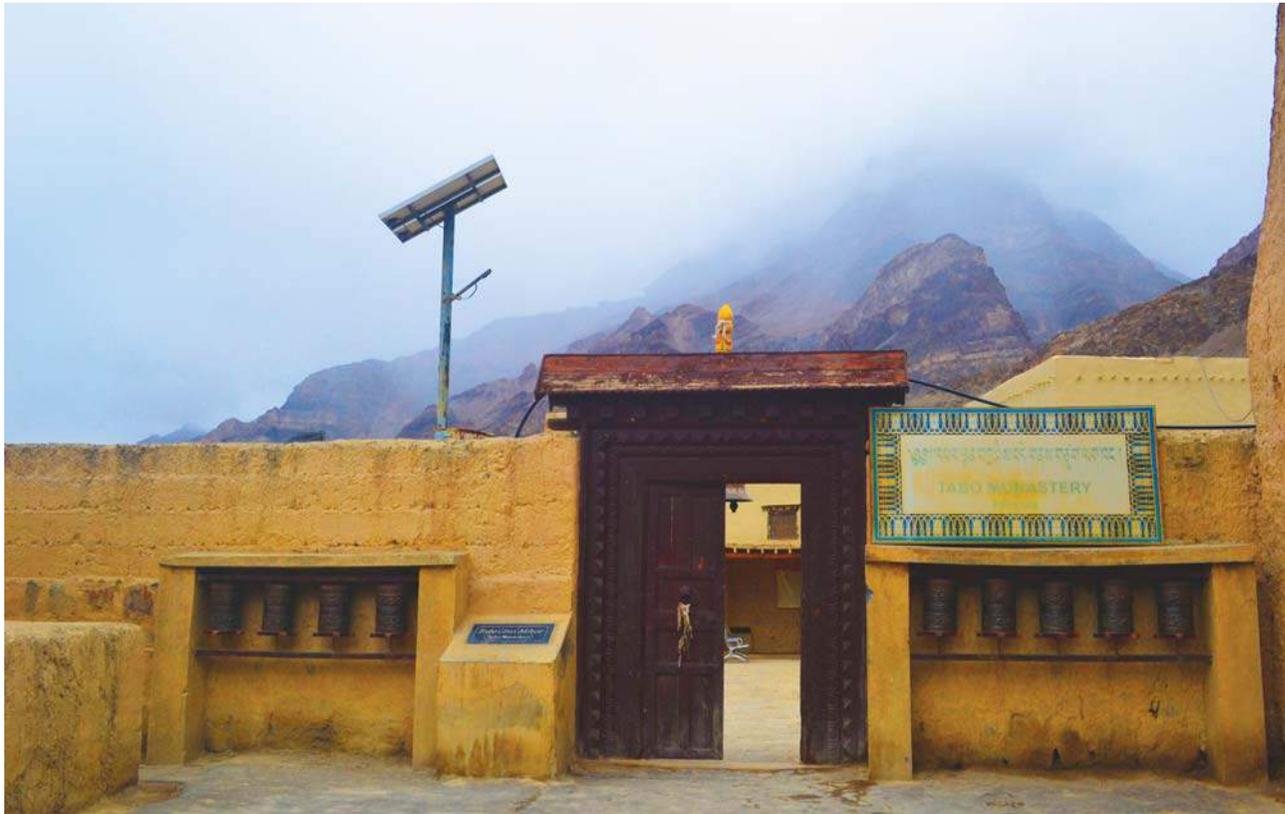
Nestled in the north-eastern corner of the state of Himachal Pradesh, in the district of Lahaul and Spiti; Spiti Valley is very much in India and nowhere close to Haiti. It borders Tibet in the East and Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir) in the North. To the West and South are districts of Himachal Pradesh - Chamba and Kullu in the West and Kinnaur to the South. In essence, the valley of Spiti is a continuation of the Tibetan Plateau and similar in topography, landscape and culture to the Ladakh region of India and the Tibet Autonomous Region. Historically the area has been a border area and the name in Tibetan means exactly that - 'the middle land' between India and Tibet. Another theory is that the original word is *Piti* which means 'the middle land' and is also the name of the river that flows through the region; making Spiti (*sa + piti*) the country of the Piti River.

The region in early times was ruled by the Sen kings. Its

fortunes declined during the reign of Chet Sen in the 7th century and it was annexed by the kingdom of Ladakh. In the 10th century, the kingdom was given to one of the three sons of the king of Ladakh and since then, the fate of the region has been inextricably linked with Ladakh. During the reign of the Ladakhis, local rulers called Nono's - a hereditary post - were in charge of day to day administration. In 1846, the region of Spiti was brought under the control of the East India Company and that joined its lot with the rest of India. After independence Lahaul and Spiti remained separate districts till 1960 at which point they were combined with Keylong in Lahaul being made the present administrative centre.



Spectacular landscapes



Entrance to the over 1000-year-old Tabo monastery which holds an extraordinary wealth of documentation detailing the history and culture of the region

It is quite hard to fathom the moods of the planet when mere kilometres from the dense forests of Himachal, the earth turns arid without warning or prelude. Much in the same manner like the transformation from the bountiful land of Srinagar to the desert of Ladakh after crossing the Zoji-La Pass in Kashmir. Perhaps it is the relatively easy accessibility of Ladakh through Srinagar and the airport at Leh that has contributed to the fog of unawareness that clouds the rain shadow region of Spiti. There can be no other logical reason as to why the place is not popular amongst tourists. That and the fact that getting to the valley of Spiti offers just as much excitement and adventure as the valley itself!

The road trip - unexpected acquaintances

There are two routes that one can take to get to Spiti. One is through Manali and traverses through Lahaul before one approaches Spiti through the Kunzum Pass (15,059 ft.). This route is cut off during winter as snowfall and icing conditions make it impossible to traverse the high altitude pass. The southern approach via Kinnaur from Shimla is an all season route of 412 kms. from Shimla to the Spiti sub-divisional headquarters of Kaza - twice as long as the 201 km. route from Manali.

Travelling with the ever youthful brigade of the Wilson College Nature Club (WCNC) with its eccentric professor at

their helm, it was effortlessly predictable that while the expected, planned events may or may not happen, the unexpected surely will. With Kunzum scheduled to be negotiable only towards the middle of June, my travel plans in the month of May left only one option for us - the route through Kinnaur. One would expect that an all season road would mean a long and uneventful drive to Spiti and an unhindered following of an exotic itinerary. But wait! Did I not just say that the unexpected is sure to happen?

Our journey began from Kalka station with the first pitstop scheduled at Rampur - a small city roughly 130 kms from Shimla. Several small delays, primarily the traffic nightmare within Shimla made an estimated dinner time arrival in Rampur more like a middle of the night arrival. However, the long rest on the train from Mumbai to Kalka made sure that the spirits were high and after a quick meal and couple of hours of sleep, we were ready to leave at the crack of dawn towards our destination of Tabo in Spiti. Little did we know that the imp whose job it is to create itinerary disasters was busy at work and barely three hours away, we were made to halt at a small wayside town of Tapri. The cause for what seemed like a small delay was shooting stones on the road just outside the town. Now landslides and delays because of them are common in the Himalayas and one just expects the debris to be cleared and life and traffic moves on.



A view from Dhankar

Assuming this, we decided to make the best of the delay and gobble up some food and tea. In conversation we realised that people had been stuck at Tapri for as much as three days as the landslide wouldn't stop and the recent rains had made the situation worse. This was confirmed by some army *jawans* who were themselves camping in their jeep for a couple of nights. When an army vehicle is not granted permission to proceed on a road, it spells serious trouble and this sobered us a little. Still there was hope that by evening the road would clear and we would be allowed to proceed.

I am always fascinated by such delays. While they are definitely inconvenient, they provide the perfect opportunity to explore a place you would otherwise never have met. And for simultaneous entertainment are the eclectic bunch of people stuck together and their views and experienced analysis of how long it would take for the road to open and the various processes that would need to be executed till that opportune moment. Just like the expert views everyone has about how the Indian team should be playing and the correct team composition and batting order, every driver, shopkeeper and traveller has their conviction in these matters. The time range for the now infamous Tapri shooting stones to subside ranged from 20 minutes to two days depending on who you asked. Some even insinuated that the local authorities would let people pass with some money changing hands.

The best solution in these matters, in my opinion, is to make the most of the time at the place and if there is an option of retracing your steps - set a deadline of time you are prepared to wait and then move, irrespective of what anyone says. Luckily there was an alternate route, which though not advised for large vehicles was prepped up by the authorities to allow a little risky, but possible detour. And this little road above Tapri, informed to us by some local residents - in the same manner as the little path around 'The Hot Gates' of

Thermopylae - allowed us passage towards Spiti. Sumdo, at a distance of 74 kms from Kaza is the point of entry into Spiti. Travelling alongside the Spiti River, our first halt was the grand old monastery of Tabo.

Where monks dwell

Like people, the influence of change too finds it difficult to make an early entry in places as remote as Spiti and old tradition, cultures and ways of life continue or co-exist with change more peacefully than in other parts where change conquers all with little respect to time. Spiti, though now connected by road and modern amenities remains one of the sanctum sanctorum of the Lamaist Buddhist monasteries. The oldest of these monasteries is the monastery of Tabo which holds the distinction of being the oldest continuously functioning Buddhist monument in India. The Tabo monastery holds an extraordinary wealth of documentation detailing the history and culture of the region through paintings, sculpture, inscription and extensive wall texts.

Founded in 966 CE at an altitude of 10,004 feet above sea level, the monastery and the village of the same name are over a thousand years old. Tradition attributes the famous Buddhist teacher and translator Rinchen Zangpo as the founder of this monastic complex. The complex itself holds nine temples 23 *chortens* or *stupas*, a monk's chamber and an extension that houses a non chamber. In the cliff faces that surround the monastic complex are several caves, which were once used for meditation. The locals tell that faint traces of paintings are still visible in some of them.

While the monastery has plain mud walls on the outside and the complex is thoroughly unimpressive to look at, the art inside the monastery, however, is in fantastic condition and its close resemblance to the paintings found at the world heritage site of Ajanta caves in Maharashtra has had the monastery



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Enroute the fort monastery of Dhankar

dubbed as the Ajanta of the Himalayas. Dedicated to the entire Buddhist pantheon, the high quality of the stucco images that adorn its walls and the richness of its paintings have earned lavish praise from the Dalai Lama himself, who has expressed his desire to retire to Tabo.

The Tabo village provides for various alternatives for accommodation from home stay to what would be luxury in these parts. We were fortunate enough to get bookings in the monastery guest house, living in which is an altogether sacred experience in itself. Not high on creature comforts but good balm for the soul. It was also at Tabo that we experienced the problem that plagues Spiti - the shortage of electric power supply. Despite the many hydro-electric projects on the road to Tabo, it was surprising to discover that erratic supply had been such a problem that the day after we reached, a strike had been declared to protest the problem. Luckily for us, a nearby hotel owner risked the penalty on ₹ 2000 and prepared breakfast for us, served discreetly in the dining chambers of the monastery guest house.

From Tabo, our next stop was the fort monastery of Dhankar. Situated between Tabo and Kaza, Dhankar was once the capital of the Spiti valley kingdom. Situated at an altitude of 12,774 feet, the monastery itself is built on an out spurt of a 100 foot tall mount making for a remarkable setting. The

name itself originates from *dhang* or *dang* meaning cliff and *khar* which means fort, literally meaning the fort on a cliff. As the monastery held political power with the rulers dispensing justice, it was also a fort built for defensive purposes. It is modelled after many central Tibetan buildings which served this dual purpose. Experts have concluded that the features in the buildings show evidence of occupation since at least the 12th century.

At that high altitude, the small climb to the monastery and the fort seems like an effort for us plains dwellers. After all the wheezing and panting to get to the pinnacle the astounding panorama which includes the confluence of the Spiti and Pin rivers absolutely makes the effort worthwhile and the sight a mental image that will not be forgotten in a hurry.

A few kilometres from the monastery lies the high altitude lake of the same name - Dhankar lake. A fresh water lake in the middle of arid desert is a wonder in itself and those who have made that trek swear by the beauty of the lake affirming that no picture could ever do justice to the vista that the naked eye absorbs. Though the trek was on the itinerary, the day spent at Tapri made it the first and thankfully the only casualty to the planning. On an honest note to myself, I was pretty relieved that we couldn't make it as I don't know whether I would have physically been up to trekking the five-odd



The climb to Dhankar monastery

kilometres to the lake at that high altitude when that little jaunt to the monastery had quite literally taken the wind out of my sails. It remains on my list as a definite 'to-do' for the next time I visit there.

The wild valley of Pin

Spreading south from the Dhankar monastery following the Pin River which originates in the Pin Parvati glaciers, is the natural interface that separates the once separate districts of Lahaul and Spiti. Known as the Pin valley after the river, it is a region of hills, cliffs and mountainous crevices with grassy lower slopes. Despite its semi-frozen rivers and sub-zero temperatures, the valley which was once submerged under the Tethys Sea, is home to several rare species and other interesting wildlife.

Best known for the Siberian Ibex and the Snow Leopard, the Pin Valley National Park was formed in 1987 to protect the unique Himalayan flora and fauna. The blue sheep, Tibetan wolf, Himalayan fox, pika - the mouse hare can also be encountered here. Though the flora is limited with patches of alpine trees and Himalayan cedar the rare Himalayan Snowcock, chukar, red-billed and yellow-billed Choughs, Kestrel, the snow partridge and snow finch flourish in the national park.

Despite the tiredness of the early hour or rising and the strain of the Dhankar walk, the very entry into Pin valley had a strange engaging kind of excitement which was highlighted by the spotting of a fox trotting alongside the bus as we made our way to Mudh village - the last village of Pin Valley, situated at an altitude of over 12,500 feet.

Our arrival at the village was its own little excitement for the villagers who are not accustomed to Indian visitors as most tourists to the village are foreigner's intent on trekking to the Pin Parvati and Bhabha Pass trails which begin at Mudh. Our 35 seater bus was also a star as it was the only private bus to have entered the village since a wedding over a decade ago. As we enjoyed these interesting trivia we were being offered, it struck home exactly how remote this area was and how far removed from modern civilisation the people of the village were. A friendly, humble lot, they went out of their way to ensure that we were comfortable and our fire-wood cooked meals remained hot. With no building having 10 rooms to let out, the group had to be split in three hotels with the locals promising a bigger hotel for the next time we visit!

Surrounded by frosty fields and a river still half frozen, the setting of the village is ethereal. Recent snowfall and an avalanche that blocked the small patch of road that led outside the village to the hills added to this setting. The wildlife in the



The Pin valley is home to several rare species and other interesting wildlife

area must be rich, given we sighted three more foxes in the space of an hour and the villages reckoning them the way we would to dogs in the city. The blue sheep and Ibex, we were told, were frequent visitors and nearly every person in the village had at some point in their lives spotted a snow leopard! Given that on the way back, we did spot the Ibex, makes me completely believe their claims. My appointment with the snow leopard, however, seems to be indefinitely delayed. Yet, in hope I live and travel.

In the heart of Spiti

Lest we forget that we are at high altitudes in the Himalayas, there are enough boards and claims once you enter Kaza to make you realise that you are amongst the highest inhabited places in the world and in that zone where civilisation and nature are at constant loggerheads, challenging the other's presence. Sitting comfortably in a vehicle - something we take for granted - it scarcely crosses our mind that it requires fuel to move them. And if getting myself to 14,000 plus feet was so,



Red Fox



Lammergeier Vulture



On way to Mudh, the last village of Pin valley situated at an altitude of 12,500 ft

difficult, just how difficult must it be to maintain a constant supply of petrol and diesel! But it is done quite spectacularly at the world's highest retail outlet in Kaza at 12,270 feet!

Kaza is itself divided in two distinct sections - old and new, known as Kaza *Khas* and Kaza *Soma* respectively. Overlooked by high mountains on all sides within which are situated many other 'world's highest' claims, Kaza is conveniently placed in the centre of Spiti valley and with the good connectivity and other facilities available to the headquarters of a region, it is

the ideal starting and refilling point for any expedition in the valley. Just around Kaza, there are enough day trips to keep one busy for at least a couple of days. And each one has something to brag about on social media.

Just seven kilometers from Kaza is the largest monastery in Spiti valley - the Key monastery (also called Ki, Kee or Kye). Built in the 11th century, it has numerous ancient Buddhist scrolls and paintings. Primarily a training school for lamas, its history is as spectacular as its precarious setting overlooking



The Siberian ibex is a frequent visitor to the village



The blue sheep is locally known as Bharal



Key monastery, the largest in Spiti valley has a spectacular setting overlooking the Spiti River

the valley and the Spiti River. It is believed that at first the monastery was located in the nearby village on Rangrik where it was destroyed by the Mongols in the 14th century. Rebuilt at the current location, it was again attacked in the 17th century by the Mongols. In 1820, it was sacked during the wars between Kullu and Ladakh. In the 1840s it was ravaged by fire and in 1841 it was attacked first by Ghulam Khan and Rahim Khan of the Dogra army and then later in the same year by the Sikh army. More recently in 1975, it was severely damaged by an earthquake and then restored with the help of the

Archaeological Survey of India and State Public Works department.

This repeated destruction has caused a quite haphazard growth with temples being subsequently built on top of one another like boxes, giving it a unique appearance of a fort built in the Pasada style of architecture with more than one storey and often serving the role of a fort. The monastery has several low rooms, narrow corridors and not so well lit passages. The structure is itself a labyrinth with scattered prayer rooms accessible through small doors. Along with the wealth of



Kibber village, the second highest motorable village in the world at 14,200 ft built on a summit of limestone rock

Buddhist literature and art work, the monastery also houses many weapons and some unique wind instruments which are still brought out in the summers. It is best to explore the monastery with a monk who can open the many locked rooms in the monastery and talk one through the use and significance of the monastery and its many stories and the various Tibetan inscriptions on its walls. In 2000, Key celebrated its millennium year in the presence of the Dalai Lama.

The road from Key monastery further leads to the village of Kibber, pegged as the second highest motorable village in the world at 14,200 feet. There are several such high altitude inhabited villages in the Spiti region, only a few of which have access by road. Kibber, built on the summit of a limestone rock is unique for being a village with houses built of stone, unlike the mud and adobe bricks houses more commonly found in Spiti. The village is home to a monastery and the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary established in 1992. The sanctuary is well known for having some endangered medicinal plants used in traditional Tibetan medicine.

With Kibber being the second highest motorable village, it's natural to inquire about the highest motorable village, which not surprisingly is only a couple of hours drive from Kaza. The village of Hikkim across the river holds the distinction for being the highest polling booth in the world at 14,567 feet above sea level. It is also home to the world's highest post office; feats for which it finds mention in the Limca book of records.



World's highest Post Office at Hikkim

A little way from Hikkim - a little higher up, needless to say - is the world's highest motorable village of Komik. It is also one of the highest altitude village in the Himalayas at over 15,000 feet. Somehow, it's quite fitting that the world's highest monastery is right above this village. Known as Komik monastery, it dates to the 14th century and is built like a fortified castle with massive slanted mud walls and battlements with vertical red ochre and white vertical stripes.

There is no paucity of legends and mythological stories in Spiti with almost every mountain, building and stream having a local legend associated with it steeped in a heady mix of history and fantasy. The most intriguing of these is the one





A breathtaking view from Key monastery

associated with the Komik monastery. As per local lore, there was once a severe drought in the area and so the priests of Komik decided to move the monastery to the comparatively lower altitude of Hikkim. While the entire monastery was shifted to a newly built structure, the main statue of *Mahakal* - the protector of *dharma* refused to budge from its foundation in the ground of Komik. After many chipping and lifting efforts by the monks, they finally gave up and a monk remained behind to pray and carry out the rituals for *Mahakal*. It continued this way till the 1975 earthquake, in which the new monastery at Hikkim was completely destroyed but there was no damage to this statue, which firmly held its ground. Taking this as a sign, the monastery was moved back to the higher ground of Komik, where it still stands. Interestingly, the temple dedicated to *Mahakal* does not allow women inside with the feeble excuse that the deity is so powerful and deadly that women may not be able to withstand the force of that personality.

On the return journey to Kaza, the guide made a pit stop at

the village of Langza near which is an area where fossils of marine life from the time when the entire area was under the Tethys Sea can be found amongst the rocks. A good 30 minute search revealed quite a fair amount of rocks, some with distinct imprints of marine life in them. Hundreds of others still lie there for the discerning tourist with a curious eye. While in search of fossils, we also came across a large herd of blue sheep which caused great excitement in us, much to the amusement of the locals for whom they were as common as cattle.

Atithi Devo Bhava - A guest is God incarnate

Having traversed the length of the Spiti valley, it was time to retrace our steps back to Kalka, from where it all began. It had been a while since the unexpected caught up with us and as lower altitudes returned, Murphy's law about whatever can go wrong, will go wrong; reared its mischievous head once again. The 'expected' delay at Tapri never happened with the shooting stones taking a break but a little way ahead, a diesel tanker quarter full with fuel had overturned right in the middle of a narrow single lane track, making passing impossible. Again the hundred theories and predictions of when it would be cleared were doing the rounds as the tanker was slowly being emptied by everyone taking turns to get their share of free diesel, despite the local police pleading with people to stay away from the leaking tanker as it was dangerous.

But I digress. The real point of writing this is completely different. The real story here - the chance encounters that such situations effect is my heart warming take away from this situation. With the prospect of another cold night on the road, we went looking for shelter. On a whim, a couple of us walked up to a nice house on the hill and knocked on their door. A lady opened the door and we explained our predicament requesting if at least the girls in the group could stay with them for the night. Without any hesitation she agreed and went about making preparations for us to be comfortable. This,



Entrance to Komik monastery (a close view of the entrance)



The Komik monastery

for a bunch of ragamuffin strangers who just walked up and announced themselves. This, without consulting with anyone in the house and then going about arranging beds and blankets around the three spare rooms and accommodating their entire family into one room so that we could be comfortable.

The next morning, we had an opportunity to meet the entire family and each one was humble, welcoming and helpful. We attempted to give a little money for their troubles which was swiftly and firmly turned away drawing on traditional principles of hospitality which are an endangered commodity in our modern, suspicious world. Our heartfelt thanks to them when orally expressed brought tears to their eyes and a bond was formed - an inexplicable lifelong relationship where we may never meet again but we will remember each other for many moons over countless retellings of the story of that fateful night. We will recount our blessings and they will laugh at our peculiarities and in our memories keep each other alive.

This is my biggest gift from Spiti - that stoic, hard hearted, primordial looking world, in one swift stroke, brought me back into the circle of humanity. For as long as we live, the memory of this generous act, I hope, will inspire all of us who experienced this pure gesture to look beyond ourselves and

extend a helping hand. Travel makes you hardy, they say. Well, it softened me in the process and I am glad for it.

Au revoir, not goodbye

It's a surreal world in Spiti. Every frame is an element of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions and non sequitur. The unending emptiness, a vast canvas on which dreams and reality lay bare the innermost recesses of your soul in a manner which makes it impossible to separate the two. In that wild, wonderful world, I would not recommend you expend effort to disjoin them. Let them fester and follow you around like an imaginary bird perched on your shoulder, gently whispering in your ears fables of the beauty in desolateness that the logical mind is not equipped to appreciate. Allow this bubble of ludicrous



interpretations all the impetuosity it is capable of. And I promise you, in those myriad shades of grey, will emerge in vivid colours and astonishing detail a view of everything that life can be - that life should be... ■

The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.

Our Last Six Issues

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100th One India One People Club

One India One People (OIOP) Foundation reached a milestone in July 2014, when it opened its 100th club at Maniben Nanavati Women's College (Degree) at Vile Parle (west), Mumbai. Former Bombay High Court judge Justice B.H. Marlapalle, the chief guest on this special occasion, recalled the humble beginnings of the foundation and the philanthropic zeal of the late founder Mr. Sadanand A. Shetty in establishing the foundation and initiating the OIOP club activities in order to sensitise the youth of India. He expressed hope that OIOP foundation and its member clubs will jointly take the founder's mission forward. The function was graced by the founder trustee Mrs. Soumyalatha S. Shetty and Trustee & Managing Editor of OIOP, Mrs. Sucharita R.Hegde.



- 1 Lighting of the inaugural lamp
- 2 Principal Dr. Harshada S Rathod presenting a memento to Mrs. Soumyalatha S. Shetty
- 3 Justice B H Marlapalle opening the OIOP club

- 4 Presenting the OIOP Club Membership Certificate
- 5 Students listening with rapt attention
- 6 Justice Marlapalle addressing the students



(l-r) Sonam Saigal (sub editor-OIOP), Vaibhav Palkar (Club co-ordinator OIOP), Justice Marlapalle, Mrs. Shetty, Mrs. Hegde, Anuradha Dhareshwar (Editor-OIOP), Principal Dr. Rathod watch a dance performance by a student (centre), at the club opening

101st Club opening at Maniben Nanavati Women's College (Jr. College)





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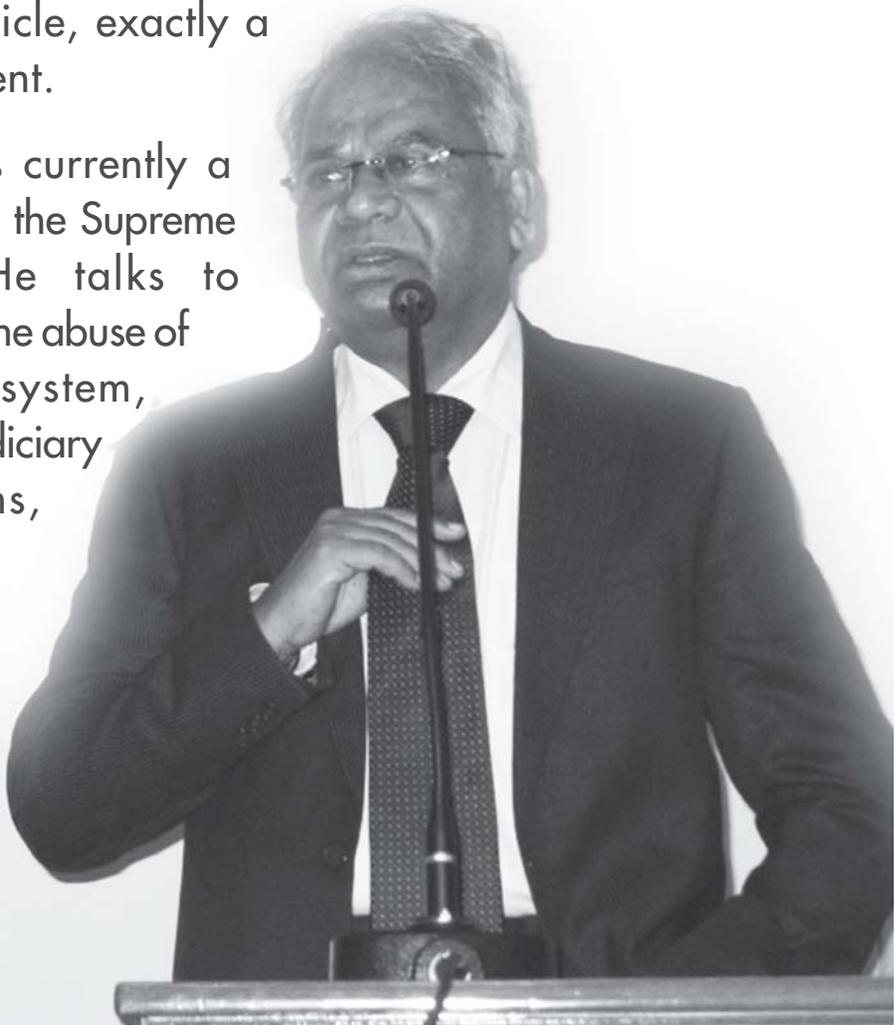
“The collegium system has been abused by some individuals”

Justice B H Marlapalle started his practice before the Bombay High Court in 1986. He specialised in labour, service and constitutional laws. He was appointed as an additional judge of the Bombay High Court for two years in 1997, and then got confirmed as a judge. Justice Marlapalle has been one of the most outspoken and distinguished judges of the Bombay High Court who set a new benchmark not only for other members of the judiciary, but even for high-ranking bureaucrats by vacating his official quarters and surrendering his vehicle, exactly a day after his retirement.

Justice Marlapalle is currently a practising advocate in the Supreme Court of India. He talks to **Sonam Saigal** about the abuse of the collegium system, independence of the judiciary and judicial reforms, among other things.

What are your views on the collegium system?

The collegium system is not something which is in the Constitution. This system has evolved following three judgments of the Supreme Court (SC), in 1981, 1992 and 1998. The latest one in 1998 had the reference made by the very same NDA (National Democratic Alliance) government then under the Article 143 of the Indian



Constitution and, when the matter came up before the Constitution bench for hearing, Mr Soli Sorabjee who was then the Attorney General had filed an affidavit on behalf of the Government of India saying that there are issues which require the determination of the judgment and whatever is decided by the court will be binding.

The reference was made on a very short issue whether the view of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) means a singular view or a plural view and whether the CJI is required to communicate his views along with his senior most colleagues and that his decision is that of a body. That reference was then answered by a judgment written by Justice Bharucha and there it was finally said that there will be a collegium of five judges, the CJI plus four of his senior most colleagues for appointments of the Supreme Court judges but so far as the appointment of High Court (HC) judges is concerned, the HC will have a collegium of three judges, the Chief Justice of the court and two of his senior most colleagues.

It was also added that when it comes to the appointment of HC judges, not only will the views of the collegium matter, but if there are judges in the SC who are coming from the respective high courts their views will also be taken into consideration. They are required to give their opinion in writing, hence it is a full proof mechanism, so that there is consultation at each level and in the whole process. But many people say that the government has no role. That is wrong; the recommendation made by the HC goes to the state government for approval. For example, in the case of Maharashtra, it goes to two states, Maharashtra and Goa because they have a common high court and if the chief minister for some reason feels that a particular candidate is not suitable, he

is entitled to write back to the HC by giving reasons. It can't be arbitrary. If he gives reasons he has to return the whole panel to HC for reconsideration. All the recommendations have reports from top intelligence agencies like the Intelligence Bureau to look into.

Where was the need to introduce the collegium system?

Collegium system was necessary because it was felt by the institution, public and the fraternity of lawyers that there was a lot of highhandedness with respect to the appointment of the HC and SC judges. It was true that there were some appointments made out of turn, and therefore, there was no alternative but to bring in some institution which will have a plurality in decision-making and the judiciary will have its supremacy. Today the judiciary has it and, this is where it pinches the executive. But as it happens with every institution, one

For any crime what matters is investigation, professional honest investigation. If that is done and the case is taken to its logical conclusion, there are enough provisions to bring the guilty to book. I don't agree that new law has to be brought in and new act has to come in. New laws bring in too much pressure on the judiciary.

believes that the collegium has also failed, so there are doubts raised. Especially in the appointments made after 2001, the medicine has been proved to be worse than the disease.

It is said that in India judges appoint judges. But the government does have a say, it is not that the judiciary does anything exclusively. But by and large people are not happy with the collegium system because it has been abused by some individuals.

What do you have to say about the recent Gopal Subramaniam controversy?

First the Government of India has to be blamed and then Gopal Subramaniam. He should not have rushed to the media, the CJI had asked him to wait. This should not have happened, it is very unfortunate. He did not let the CJI assert the implementation of the judgment of 1998. If he had kept quiet, the CJI would have stood by him.

There were three other names which were required to be sent back in toto. The government has no powers to segregate names on its own; that is required to be done by the SC. This government has done something illegal and they should not have done that. They should have given reasons, written the whole proposal to the CJI and asked him to reconsider and then the CJI with his colleagues would have taken a call. The Modi government has violated a judgment of the SC, acted in breach of it and did something which the law does not permit. This is going to have serious implications in the future.

What can be done to ensure the independence of the judiciary is not jeopardised by the government?

The CJI has to put his foot down to ensure that the judgment is followed. I hope the Gopal Subramaniam controversy

was the last such incident. If it is repeated, then the judiciary is in peril. We cannot allow the executive to have a final call in the appointment of judges. Judiciary has always been assertive and it must continue to do so. It depends on the leadership of the judiciary and the individual judges. They are bound by their oath to be assertive, fair and fearless. It is an institution's will not just that of the CJI though it comes across like that. The success of every institution depends on the people who man it.

How does it feel to practice as a lawyer in the apex court after serving as a judge?

After being a judge for almost 15 years in a chartered high court like Bombay, it becomes difficult to come in the advocate's mode. As a judge you are always used to asking questions but as lawyer you have to answer the queries and be prepared for the most unexpected questions. For me it took almost six months to settle into my new role. A retired judge practicing as a senior advocate has a lot of advantages, because of the varied experiences he has had. He has an overall view which a lawyer probably does not have a chance to have. I have always been very selective and therefore, I don't take each and every case that comes to me, unless I am satisfied that there is good point to argue. I have been doing a lot of pro bono cases as well, for the government and poor litigants.

I am thoroughly enjoying being at the Bar now. A lot of reading and research work keeps you active and healthy, and you are always a part of the system, where you are able to contribute. A lawyer like a doctor should never retire whether you are a judge or not. All the knowledge and information gathered over years should be put to use; in the process if you make money, nothing wrong with it.

Judicial reforms will really happen if the government takes care to provide sufficient budget to the judiciary. Time has come when senior advocates should tell the judges that "my lordship the case has been filed but there is nothing in it, you may please give the order."

What do you think about the current CJI, Justice Lodha?

Justice Lodha has brought in a lot of discipline and speedy disposal of justice. He has changed the face of the court... its layout, library and corridors. One never saw beautiful paintings in the SC before, he has utilised the funds very well. He has set in motion that adjournments will be discouraged. Judges don't grant adjournments now. This discipline must continue. The view of the CJI of working for 365 days need not be taken in the literal sense, all he is saying is that we must work on all working days and do away with vacations and the royalty of festival holidays. If you ask me, our subordinate judges must have six working days in a week, while the HC must have five working days. We must have just three national holidays, Independence Day, Republic Day and some other holiday.

I am convinced that high courts can work for 275 days a year. Festival holidays must be kicked off at the earliest.

What judicial reforms are needed?

After the Nirbhaya incident, new legislation was being debated and it was thought that it should be brought in. In my view, existing laws are enough. We only need to implement them better. For any crime what matters is investigation, professional honest investigation. If that is done and the case is taken to its logical conclusion, there are enough provisions to bring the guilty to book. I don't agree that new law has to be brought in and new act has to come in. New laws bring in too much pressure on the judiciary. I will give you an example. The Negotiable Instruments Act was amended and Section 138 for cheque bouncing has been incorporated. Earlier there used to be recoveries; now there are private complaints under this Act and, in Mumbai alone we have around four lakh cases on bouncing cheques pending before the magistrates. There are 25 magistrates assigned only for this, the Parliament just did not think how this is going to affect the judiciary. So every time the government brings in a new legislation it has to first consider how is it going to affect the judiciary and what infrastructure will have to be provided. Just bringing in new laws is not going to help.

For rape cases there already is a provision in the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc) amended in 2003. In six months you have to go to trial, but then you must have the infrastructure, you have the courts, prosecutors, and they also need to be competent and honest.

Judicial reforms will really happen if the government takes care to provide sufficient budget to the judiciary. Time has come when senior advocates should tell the judges that "my lordship the case has been filed but there is nothing in it, you may please give the order." ■

‘The business of business is business’

Shaurya Mehta is a trained singer, cricketer and a photographer by passion, who aspires to take the Metcon brand to different parts of the world and make it the most respectable and value-focused conglomerate of India.



Shaurya Mehta

THE business of business is business’. This statement immediately goes to your gut, your heart, your innermost self and as a businessman, you end up asking yourself fundamental questions such as: “What do I truly believe in?”, “Which side am I on: Crony Capitalism or Soft Socialism?”, “Am I doing enough for society?”. The answers to all these lie in understanding what the statement by Milton Friedman or Alfred Sloan (remains disputed) truly means and accepting some harsh or soft facts about yourself and your company.

Businesses are not just businesses but also creators, distributors and facilitators of products and services, which are solutions for global needs.

Products from Apple, Samsung, and other leading brands help people stay in touch, carry out analyses, pitch for sales, experience entertainment, among many utilities. Services from British Airways and Virgin Trains make transportation possible. Banking corporations like Barclays and Citigroup make banking, saving and investing possible. They are all serving people, but at a cost. Moreover, businesses provide employment opportunities to billions of people globally.

Leading business names such as Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, Becht Family, BHP Billiton, among others have massive charities which improve lives, empower people and contribute towards eco-preservation across the world. Whether it is for simply giving back to society, shaking off guilt or to create shareholder value is immaterial because these actions are making a difference to the world. They are not just making charities themselves but also leveraging their resources and raising large donation amounts. I believe such organisations will not diminish in the long run because it is human nature to give and take and vice-versa.

John Maxwell once made a thought-provoking statement: “There is nothing called Business Ethics. There are just ethics. You either have them or you don’t.” I believe similar is the case with social responsibility.

What we truly believe in is reflected in our businesses. For example, I plan to start a charitable trust that raises funds to fight HIV, Cancer and Alzheimer’s. This has led me to support ‘Ashray’, a shelter-home for HIV-affected children, in a small way through my company Metcon Finance, as a responsible company. Does this mean that I am doing this to pay my debt to society; maybe or maybe not.

I am a firm believer in capitalism and pure competition. We live in a dog-eat-dog world, a complete rat-race, with limited jobs, natural resources and capital. This naturally results in the survival of the fittest. Should businesses take pity on the rest? In most cases, they should not because I believe businesses must prudently channelise their benevolence as social support needs to be sustainable.

In conclusion, most businesses are attempts at building capitalist empires in the long run. Governments anyway levy taxes and cesses on corporations and firms which are directed towards education, environment protection, employment, etc. Hence, whether businesses should participate in social responsibility measures is a decision better left to them. However, I strongly believe that those who can should make their contribution to help make the world a better, greener and affordable place to live in. ■

Quotas – an electoral gimmick

Dr. P M Kamath *talks about the serious long-term consequences of caste-based reservation.*

MAHARASHTRA will shortly be going for state elections to elect a new Legislative Assembly to form a new government. Maharashtra's ruling Congress Party sent only two MPs to National Parliament while its coalition partner, Nationalist Congress Party could elect four of their MPs. The Congress Party having suffered a humiliating defeat at the national level, wants to avoid such a scenario in the ensuing state elections. Therefore it could think of only one of trodden step of capturing its vote bank by extending reservation to Muslims and Marathas! The cabinet recently, decided to reserve 16 percent of seats to Marathas and five percent to Muslims in educational institutions and in employment.

Marathas are a dominant caste in Maharashtra wielding economic power as it owns 75 percent land in Maharashtra. It has also controlled political power in the state so far, having had 10 out of 17 chief ministers. The Muslim community has traditionally supported the Congress, all these years. This has once again initiated a debate in favour or against the policy of reservation.

Historical background

For an unbiased understanding of the reservation policy it is necessary briefly to know how it all came into the Indian political thinking. Since Indian caste system initially considered as an ancient device to achieve social division of labour, has degenerated into a hereditary fact, the people performing menial work are treated as belonging

to lowest caste; were not only treated as untouchables, but were condemned to follow caste-related functions and denied access to education. Hence, during national freedom movement, Mahatma Gandhi and several others advocated reservation to these extremely backward castes, generally called Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SC/ST) were assured in the constitution of reservation of a percentage of seats in educational institutions and in employment. It also meant a certain dilution of conditions generally applied for admissions or employment, to other castes in the society.

Thus, Indian Constitution that came into force on 26 January 1950 provided for reservations to persons belonging to scheduled castes and tribes for a period of 10 years. Participating in the debate in the constituent Assembly over the issue Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had envisaged the reservation as a short term measure to achieve a degree of equality between upper castes and the scheduled castes, and providing a level playing field to the down-trodden to come up in life.

However, after 64 years of working of Indian Republic, the current policy of caste-based reservation has reduced it to a political joke wherein every political party has been promising reservation in competition with one another. The smaller the party the greater and louder is its commitment to ameliorate the current pathetic situation of the backward castes. No one remembers its underlying original limited purpose. Thus, reservation as a policy has been reduced to a mockery!

Though the Supreme Court has

ruled that the reservation policy cannot go beyond 50 percent in any field, the reservation policy covers in different states much higher percentage than that. After the economic liberalisation in the country, politicians aiming to preserve their shrinking and fragmenting vote banks succeeded getting reservation extended to public enterprises. Since their craving is not satiated, now they are lobbying to get included in private and minority educational institutions and private sector jobs as well within the ambit of reservation policy.

Consequences

This kind of vote bank politics has certain serious long term consequences that will damage the very survivability of Indian society and polity, raising questions of cohesion and unity of political system and the very concept of India as a nation. Let us examine a few important unforeseen or seen but ignored consequences for immediate political gains, of the present reservation policy.

First, during the independence movement, prominent freedom fighters, political thinkers and social reformers had all stressed on one aspect of the Indian social life: Abolition of caste system and creating a casteless society. Contrary to that goal, everyone is made conscious of his or her caste. The caste factor has become a predominant fact of life for creation of: social groups for pursuing a hobby, provision of education, or self-help activities. During the independence movement, educational institutions came up on the lines of nation building. Lokmanya

Tilak, Gopalkrishna Gokhale, Mahadeo Ranade, Dr. Ambedkar among others established educational trusts and started educational institutions to provide modern education. After independence, particularly after state reorganisation, trusts came up to provide education to linguistic communities in different states. But today it is only educational trusts established on religion or caste lines that have come up and survived.

Second, caste combination has emerged as the main sustaining force of politics in Indian democracy. Therefore, by appealing to primordial loyalties of individual citizens, depending upon the caste of the election-contesting politician, he would appeal to his voters belonging to his caste group by promising special treatment to his people.

Third, this has strengthened caste consciousness amongst the citizens. When caste alone could not help in achieving political aspirations of a leader he would try to create a large group by promising reservations in education and employment to several communal and caste groups. In Gujarat thus, we have a classic case of Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi and Muslims or KHAM. This kind of policies initiated by the Congress party has been pursued since then as a sure path to success by every political party.

Fourth, when the BJP countered these caste coalitions by raising the Ram Temple issue to unite Hindu votes, the then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh who was heading a minority government dusted out an old report of 1978 and announced 27 percent reservations to OBCs (Other Backward Castes), thus expanding caste-based reservations. OBCs are not an oppressed caste or class but may be a poor lot.

Fifth, this has only led to continuous efforts to divide and

fragment Indian society—from broad religious basis to sub-sects lines or from the caste lines to sub-caste basis. The politicians are on a continuous mission to find sects within the sects and castes within the castes. It was reported that Mulayam Singh Yadav a few years ago had faced in his constituency a Yadav candidate. He went on to mention that his gotra was superior to the other Yadavs. The Congress led by Sonia Gandhi gave reservation benefit to Jats and Jains using caste and religion to drive home that “you are backward caste or community and need state favours of reservation policy”.

We moan that we do not have even one traditional university that comes in top 200 universities of the world. If we continue to divide Indians into backward castes just to create and enlarge nationally or within a state a political vote bank for a party, it is unlikely that we could ever think of having a single world class institution.

Sixth, there is a premium today on backwardness; very few will be ashamed to claim that he is a member of backward category. If one gets a position without much effort put in or undeservedly, why not take advantage of it? I had a classmate in the early sixties who told me that he gets a scholarship as he belonged to scheduled/backward caste though he was staying at Malabar Hill with his Income tax officer-brother.

More seriously, I have seen after the transformation of the Bombay University into Mumbai University, reservation policy came in more rigorously and the quality of teaching, objectively speaking, declined drastically in every department.

Seventh, the creation of sectarian consciousness is only a first step to lead towards politically fissiparous tendencies. If ‘we’ are different from ‘they’ and ‘we’ are continuously looked down by ‘them’, why should we continue to live with them and accept their leadership here and there? If I want to be the Chief Minister or the Prime Minister and they deny me an opportunity to lead, why not I as the leader of this caste or that community try to divide the territory to create an independent homeland?

What is the way out?

During the period of campaign for the 16th Lok Sabha elections, Congress Party General Secretary Janardhan Dwivedi mustered enough courage to publicly call for an end to all reservations and quotas but provide only for economically weaker sections by bringing all communities under its ambit. He was, however, silenced by Sonia Gandhi, who said that the Congress is of the “firm opinion” that reservations for SC, ST and OBC must continue. She justified by stating that it is essential to end the “discrimination imposed by centuries of subjugation and oppression.”

Mr. Dwivedi’s suggestion should be examined by the new government by taking gradual steps. While reservations for SC and ST could continue, OBC is not a subjugated or an oppressed class and can be taken care by the general quota for economically weaker sections as suggested by Mr. Dwivedi.

(Continued on page 50)

Odissi dance is a mobile sculpture

Odissi is characterised by simplicity of grace and redolent with sculptural poses which are reminiscent of the glorious stone sculptures of Konark and other temples, writes Dr. Kanak Rele.

A 7th century A.D. text Vishnudharmottara Purana says, "Vinatu nrityashastrena chitrasootram sudurvidam". The sage propounding this text says that without the knowledge of dancing, the other plastic arts cannot be comprehended. This very clearly shows the co-relationship of sculpture and dance. It is said that dance is a mobile sculpture and sculpture is a frozen dance. In this context, the classical dance style Odissi from Orissa is a shining example.

Exposition of beauty and grace

Odissi is redolent with sculptural poses which are reminiscent of the glorious stone sculptures of Konark and other temples. Odissi is characterised by simplicity of grace. Odissi is believed to have originated in almost 10th century A.D., but received a tremendous fillip in the 12th century when Poet Jayadeva who was a great devotee of Lord Jagannatha at the Puri temple, wrote his immortal love song Geetagovinda. It is said that he wrote it specifically for being interpreted in dance and music and his wife Padmavati who was herself a devadasi danced it in the temples of Orissa. These *devadasis* in Orissa are called Maharis. There is another wing of this dance which is danced by nubile young boys called gotipua and these are the boys who indulge in more acrobatic dancing. Odissi, if one has to describe its characteristic, believes in the exposition of beauty and grace. As such the dance style is rather uncomplicated but its beauty, its sculptural poses and the

lovely tribhangi - that is the triple bend in the body-always reminds us of the beauty of Indian art in general.

From the archaeological evidence available it may be surmised that Odissi may be the earliest classical Indian style. There are beautiful dance sculptures in the Rani Gumpha Cave of 2nd century



An Odissi performance

B.C. in Orissa. These reliefs include the first finished example of a dance scene with a full orchestra. In another inscription belonging to the same period from the Hathi Gumpha it is stated that in the 3rd year of his reign the Jaina King Kharavela, who was himself an

accomplished dancer and musician, had arranged a performance of tandava and abhinaya for the enjoyment of his people. After this in the 8th century A.D. there is a reference at Bhubaneswar of the king's mother building a temple of Shiva and dedicating several dancing girls to it. This indicates that these temple dancing girls - devadasis known as maharis in Orissa were the earliest performers of Odissi dance and for more than a millennium were the repositories of this art.

Geetagovinda- integral part of Odissi repertoire

Later in 1194, King Anangabhimadeva built a number of temples and also constructed the Nata Mandir as an annex to the temple of Lord Jagannatha at Puri. The Nata mandir was specially made for performances of the maharis and the musicians who were in the service of the temple.

It is during this period that poet Jayadeva wrote his immortal love-poem Geetagovinda extolling the divine love of Radha and Krishna and the recital of the Geetagovinda has become an indispensable part of the rituals of the Jagannatha temple. It also forms a major chunk of the repertoire of Odissi today. It is during this period also that the Abhinaya Chandrika, the foremost shastra for Odissi was written by Maheshvara Mahapatra.

As we come down the centuries we find an unbroken chain of the twin traditions of the singing of the Geetagovinda as a daily ritual of the



Gotipura, another wing of Odissi is more of acrobatic dancing

Jagannatha temple and the Maharis dancing at fixed times as part of the temple rituals. By the 15th century A.D., Vaishnavism as a religious sect became the main religion of the people of Orissa and the Bhakti cult received great impetus.

From the 17th century onwards the Maharis came to be employed to dance in the royal court as well. Till today the Mahari system continues in Orissa but the ritualistic aspect of their dance or of the singing of the Geetagovinda is for name sake only.

The acrobatic element in the dance

From the early 17th century a class of boys called gotipua came into being. These were nubile young boys who dressed as dancing girls and danced for the temple as well as general entertainment. This brought in a very vigorous and acrobatic element in the dance.

Technically Odissi is a highly stylised dance combining the precepts of Natyashastra, Abhinayadarpana and Abhinayachandrika.

Both nritta as well as nritya wise,

Odissi has a thoroughly systematised and exhaustive technique. The most prominent feature of the technique being the various bends - bhangis - of the body, the tribhanga aspect - or the triple bend in the body of the Indian sculpture and iconography is fully exploited in Odissi.

In nritya and mukhaja abhinaya, it is very orthodox and subdued. We have already seen that Odissi dance is an inseparable part of the religious practices and rituals and, as such, there is hardly any item which is devoid of the bhakti concept. As a result there is hardly anything known as a fixed repertoire. Earlier there was only one long sequence of about 45 minutes, which began with invocation and ended with a fast paced climax of nritta. Since about 30 years this has been broken into smaller segments which constitute today's repertoire.

The Odissi steps are based on the square, basic position of the feet called chauka and the different movements and bends of the sides. The most predominant feature is the bend in the waist or hip, the kati. These bends are usually tribhanga – the triple bend or

atibhanga – maximum bend.

The steps progress from the basic simple stamping of the foot accompanied by the neck, waist and bend. Sometimes the chest hip moves diagonally enhancing the sculpturesque effect. Odissi being closest to sculpture, utilises the principles of image making like the sutra, mana etc. Odissi movements combine in them crispness as well as lilt. The positioning of the arms and hands is also in the square. The movements usually follow the direction and cadence of the sides and the kati, and balance the entire structuring of the dancing body.

The items are:

- **Bhumi Pranam** - Ceremonious offering of salutation to the earth. This is also referred as Mangalacharana.
- **Battu Nritya** - In honour of Batuka Bhairava or Lord Shiva. It has both nritta as well as nritya.
- **Pallavi** - It is a nritta item which lays equal stress on nritta patterns, raga and tala. Pallavi literally means elaboration and here it applies to dance as well as its music.
- **Ashtapadi** - From the Geetagovinda, these are an integral part of the Odissi repertoire.
- **Pada** - Devotional songs, many a times in the Oriya language.
- **Mokshya (Moksha)** - Concluding nritta item corresponding to Tillana of Bharata Natyam and Jeeva of the new repertoire of Mohini Attam. ■



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

Facilitation and Reflective Learning:

New paradigms of higher education

Dr. Samta Jain and Prof. Rajini Anand say that facilitation techniques when professionally used with excellent reflective learning methods in institutes of higher education will enable creation of better leaders and technocrats for the corporate world.

TEACHING in higher education until recently has been characterised with emphasis on lecture method and monologue. This has led to rote learning in a passive environment inhibiting the learners' thrust for curiosity and knowledge awakening. The teacher-centric approach has several pitfalls. The learners' ability to imbibe, synthesise and apply knowledge in the practical environment is hindered. The monologue hampers effective development of communication skills of the learner which is otherwise possible in the learner-centric method, where there is high level of involvement of the learners.

These learners when they join the corporate world as new recruits are unable to cope with the rigors of highly competitive and complex business environment. Quite often, the corporate world has reported that the new recruits present more problems to the top management than providing alternative solutions for them. They have also pointed out the inability of the new recruits to cope with failures due to lack of understanding of the realities of the business world and appropriate coping skills. These have been some of the outcomes of our traditional teacher-centric approach to teaching.

Leaders with innovative minds

In today's highly competitive environment the need of the hour is to

have leaders and executives with an innovative bent of mind who can exhibit resilience, decision making and strategy formulation even in turbulent times. This necessitates the training and development of adult learners who would occupy positions of responsibility and risk. Thus, the faculty members today are not only required to teach and mentor but also to effectively facilitate the learning process. Rapid changes in technology have made the new-age learner more accessible to a wide array of technological aids thereby increasing the learner's curiosity and craving for information. This has placed a tremendous demand on the principles of effective learning. The traditional "chalk and talk" method is now passé. The need of the hour is to bring about a deliberate paradigm shift towards experiential learning. The facilitator is presented with a challenge of blending suitable pedagogical tools which are in sync with the learning styles of the learner.

Facilitation and reflective learning have become important constituents in teaching and training of adult learners, as these cultivate team building skills, group learning, problem solving abilities, and effective application of knowledge.

Towards better learning outcomes and managerial capabilities

Facilitation techniques when professionally used with excellent

reflective learning methods in institutes of higher education will enable creation of better leaders and technocrats for the corporate world. These techniques aim at improving performance and allow the learners to take more ownership and accountability of learning outcomes. Education must be provided in the light of these learning outcomes and the faculty members need to adopt suitable learner-centric approaches. Experiential learning methods must be rigorously applied and efforts must be made to enhance the learning and reflective skills of the learners so as to develop high levels of communication, interpersonal, assessment and decision making skills.

To make a transition from the role of "sage on stage" to that of "guide on the side" may not be easy but it is also not so difficult at the same time. The complexity and vagaries in today's business world have left us with no choice but to adapt to the new principles of quality education. Facilitation encourages reflective learning, entrepreneurial attitude, risk taking and decision making skills. Thus, the need of the hour for today's teacher is to be endowed with excellent facilitation, coaching, mentoring skills along with domain expertise. The main aim of facilitation should be to unearth latent talent and tacit knowledge which the learners could themselves

be oblivious of and provide them scope for further reflection. This would help to cover the three facets of learning: knowledge, action and emotions.

Reflective dialogues by facilitators

The reflective dialogues used by the facilitators have to be very powerful and must be briefed and debriefed systematically to the students to make learning more of a holistic process; a process that relies on the learner's autonomy, sharing and collaboration.

Some types of reflective dialogue that can be used by a trainer are:

a. Concept check questions

Facilitators could make use of questions called Concept Check Questions whereby facilitators build questions in a manner which reflect the true understanding of the learners. These questions are intended to demonstrate confirmation of understanding of the concepts. This technique is more appropriate during inductive based training where the concepts are derived through suitable questioning.

Facilitators of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) training sessions apply them to present grammar or vocabulary or any other target language to confirm understanding of the learners.

Concept check questions can ease out areas of confusion prevalent (if any) in the learning tasks which the learners are engaged in.

Traditionally, concepts are asked through questions. However, there are other visual, verbal and non verbal methods of eliciting responses from learners.

These are :

- Pictures
- Miming or demonstrating
- Using definitions, antonyms and synonyms

b. Instruction check questions

By and large a trainer engages the learner in any learning task by either pairing or grouping the learners. These tasks can present a lot of challenges for the trainer in terms of ensuring that the learners have understood the instructions. The learners could also be equally confused if the instructions are told in a general or vague manner. This is particularly true if suppose a trainer has not taken cognisance of the fact that the learners are of mixed ability. To prevent this confusion, facilitators could create instruction check questions (closed ended) which demonstrate understanding of instructions provided. It is important to note here that the trainer has to spend a considerable amount of time planning the concept check questions and embedding them in his or her lesson plan or training module.

The faculty needs to create an effective and quality learning environment in which he is able to build trust and faith in the participants to share both emotions and experience. There is a high necessity of continuous, consistent and comprehensive feedback as well. This would stimulate innovation and active learning and bring about cognitive and behavioral changes in the learner when coupled with Peer-Assistance Learning (PAL).

To have facilitation skills in classrooms, one has to have quality orientation, empower the learners and help them create what may be called as "Personal Learning Networks". To ensure these, faculty members have to generate learner-centric ecology of resources like picasa, blogs, google docs, moodle and web 2.0. By making use of the psychological principles, team building games, scenario building activities, case studies and brainstorming, the faculty members can provide an environment conducive for active learning in the

classroom which would improve the learner's communication, problem solving and decision making capabilities.

The key facilitation skills include reflecting, clarifying, summarising using non-verbal language and verbal signs. At the same time, using conviction and being fair and unbiased while sharing feedback is equally crucial for a facilitator.

Conclusion

In the era of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA), prompt decision making, problem solving, team building and strategic thinking is imperative for continuous innovation and sustenance. The pedagogy used by the faculty members and facilitators today should be aligned in a manner which fosters the overall development of the learner. The emotional and intelligence quotient of the learner can be maximised through an optimal use of various pedagogical approaches like audio-visual aids, simulations, vestibule training, in-basket exercises, dotmocracy, thematics, games and role-plays. A conducive learning environment is a must for harnessing the hidden potential of the learner and this is possible only through effective facilitation which will promote reflective learning. ■



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The spiritual kitchen of Maharshi Ramana

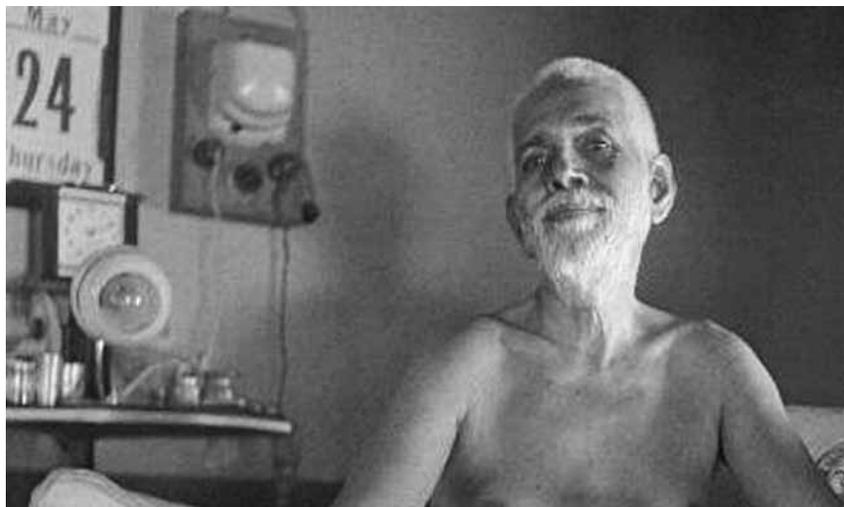
A few lessons in Vedanta could be learnt from observing the way Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi worked in the kitchen and his interaction with the inmates of the ashram.

BHAGAVAN Ramana Maharshi was a culinary expert and a perfect cook in the kitchen of Sri Ramanashram at Tiruvannamalai. He wasn't an ordinary cook and used the kitchen as a background for spiritual training to all the disciples who worked there. Some lesson or the other from Vedanta could be learnt from observing the way he worked in the kitchen and during his interaction with the others. He was a disciplinarian and his orders were to be obeyed to the last detail.

The way Ramana took interest in the kitchen even in the minutest detail, one would think that he was a foodie and enjoyed a hearty meal. However, that was not so. At dinner time, he would mix up the little servings on his plantain leaf -- the sweet, the sour and the savoury -- everything together and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in his mouth. When one of the cooks in the kitchen Sampurnamma, a young widow, told him that it was not right to mix such nicely prepared tasty dishes, he said, "Enough of multiplicity let us have some unity". When someone commented that the interest he took in preparing the fine delicacies belied his poor taste, the Maharshi would say that the preparation is done with a spirit of service to others and not to please his own appetite.

Bhagavan's methodology, cleanliness and economy

Bhagavan used to exercise extraordinary care for every aspect of cooking, stressing in particular methodology, cleanliness and economy.



Ramana Maharshi

He used to tell the other workers in the kitchen, "You must cover your vegetables when you cook them. Only then will they retain their flavour and will be fit for consumption. It is the same with your mind. You must put a lid over it and let it simmer quietly. Then only does a man become food to eat for God". Ramana would use such ingredients to prepare food which normal cooks would not even dream of as edible. Wild plants, bitter roots and pungent leaves would turn under his guidance into delicious dishes. "A thing well done and with sincerity, devotion and love has its own reward. It is the cooking that matters, not the cook or the eater", he would say.

Breaking conventions

During their periods, women were not allowed to enter the ashram nor were they given ashram food, as they were considered impure at the time.

But Bhagavan broke conventional rules, by feeding them in the ashram. "There is no one who is pure or impure. All are one, and all are same", he would say. Thanks to him, women were allowed to not only stay in the ashram but also have ashram food in the kitchen during their periods. By his gesture Bhagavan taught the inmates a lesson that in spirituality, the human being comes first and that Compassion is the Supreme Law.

Untouchability was not practiced in the ashram since all were treated as equals, irrespective of their caste, creed and nationality. Everbody would have meals together. Many times the inmates of the ashram found themselves caught in the trap of outmoded customs and convention that discriminated against the less fortunate in the society, especially women and lower castes. Bhagavan was strict in treating everyone equally. He would often say, "The

ashram does not see any differences. There are no untouchables here. Those who do not like to eat in our kitchen may eat elsewhere. What is the difference between man and man? Am I a Brahmin and he a paraiah (downtrodden)? God resides in every heart whatever may be his caste.”

The Maharshi was particular about the leftovers and he would allow no food to go to waste. The leftovers of the previous day were warmed up and served at breakfast the next morning along with hot idlis. If there was any soup or vegetable left, they were mixed with sambar and used. Ramana knew very well that this would hurt the caste rules of some orthodox Brahmins, but he would not bother. He was of the firm opinion that no food should be wasted. He also opposed giving leftovers to beggars since, in his opinion, beggars should be fed along with others, given the same food as others and never to be fed with poor quality of food.

Bhagvan comes to his devotee's rescue

In 1932, one Mr. M.S. Nagarajan, a staunch devotee of Ramana, was in charge of the daily pooja of the

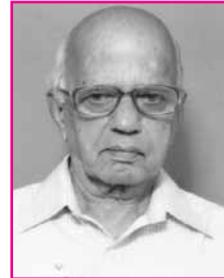
Mother's shrine at the ashram. He was also in charge of the ashram kitchen. During Dhanurmasam (the cold season of December – January), a devotee volunteered to offer some special prasadam of sakkara pongal and vada – to the Mother at the early morning pooja before dawn (called Usha Pooja in Sanskrit). Nagarajan got up early in the morning at 3.30 a.m., had his bath in the pond, went to the shrine, kept the premises tidy and clean for the pooja. Thereafter he went to the kitchen for the preparation of the special prasadam. As he was not conversant with the preparation of vadas, he was a bit worried but started the work. After grinding some dough he tried to spread it on a leaf in the shape of a neat round vada as he had seen others do, but it would not come out properly. He tried again and again, but to no avail. Annoyed, he threw the dough back into the vessel. At that moment, he felt some movement behind him and turned around to see Bhagavan watching his efforts. Nagarajan was agitated but Bhagavan affectionately told him, “It does not matter. You have added too much water while grinding the black

gram. Anyway now make round balls of dough and fry them. They will become bondas”.

When the bondas were served at breakfast, the devotee who had made the offerings got annoyed and shouted, “Look here! Did I not ask you to prepare vadas? Why have you made bondas?” Bhagavan intervened and calmly replied, “What does it matter? If the cakes are flat and circular they become vadas and if they are spherical they become bondas. Both taste the same. Only the name and form change but the substance remains the same.”

Bhagavan brought home the Vedantic truth that the world consists of only names and forms which are not real and what lies behind all of them is one and the same, i.e. the “*Sat* or the Ultimate Truth or Divinity”. ■

The late BMN Murthy was a prolific writer who contributed articles and columns on



Indian heritage, tradition, vedic wisdom etc. The above article has been taken from his collection of write ups from his book, 'Mahati'.

Quotas – an electoral gimmick

(Continued from page 44)

It should stand a scrutiny by the Supreme Court as it has already directed government to exclude persons from the creamy layers from the quota. Reservations could be further modified to all categories only at the entry level in education as well as employment, further promotions etc., should only be done on merit.

Muslims can also be included to benefit from economically weaker sections. Recently Minister for Minority Affairs, Najma Heptulla rightly observed

that “reservation on the basis of religion is not permitted under the Constitution”. She also said that reservation “kills the spirit of competition. To raise the importance of merit in public administration, it is also necessary to restrict continued reservations to SC and ST only to entry level”. For instance, if the reservation is provided at the entry level and then teachers are made to compete later for higher positions without any reservation applied, there could be a balance between level playing field and promoting quality. We moan that we do not have even one traditional university that comes in top 200 universities

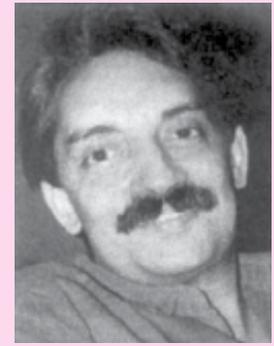
of the world. If we continue to divide Indians into backward castes just to create and enlarge nationally or within a state a political vote bank for a party, it is unlikely that we could ever think of having a single world class institution. If that is fine with the majority of mediocre political class, we can go ahead further dividing our society on caste lines. ■



The writer is former Professor of Politics, University of Bombay and currently is Hon. Director, VPM's Centre for International Studies affiliated to Mumbai University.

A sound economy needs a sound environment

Greenpeace India and other similar NGOs are simply asking that we protect our natural resources, and that we avoid repeating the development mistakes others have made.



Bittu Sahgal

Editor, Sanctuary magazine

GOING by our Intelligence Bureau (IB) and some of the voices in the government, anyone asking for the protection of the country's forests, its rivers or its coasts is anti-national and destroying the country's economy.

I have spent the better part of my life working to save India's natural wealth from the assault of development (largely in vain it often seems). I have told successive governments that the hundreds of big dams planned in the Himalayas are not only ecologically destructive, but also make little economic sense, given that climate change is going to drastically affect the water flow.

I have fought against highways and tourism projects inside protected areas, asking that these few remnants of wildlife be left alone. And I have campaigned for the protection of the few tigers we have left today from the onslaught of development in their remaining habitats. I guess, according to the IB, that makes me part of the anti-national brigade. So be it. We are in good company. Baba Amte, Padma Shri and Magsaysay award winner, would be anti-national too — he vociferously fought for the rights of Madia Gond tribals threatened by the Bhopalpatnam and Inchampalli dams planned for the Indravati River. Sunderlal Bahuguna, Padma Vibhushan awardee, who has been opposing the clear felling of the forests and the construction of dams in the Himalayas for decades, is another one of those anti-nationals.

What the IB and its masters in government fail to realise is that there can be no economy without an intact ecology. If you want to set up a factory, you need a viable water source. If that water source is polluted, you need to invest money on filtration systems. If the air is too polluted, productivity is lost

as workers take more sick days. If our catchment areas are degraded or destroyed, floods and mudslides, followed by drought, are inevitable, dragging down the economy.

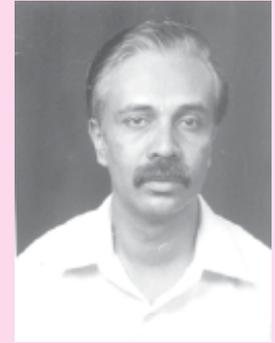
A sound environment is a must for a sound economy. You don't have to take it from one of us 'environmentalists' — the World Bank, which ironically has probably done more than any other agency to destroy India's environment, recently said that environmental degradation costs India 5.7 percent of GDP. The same report also said that strategies to reduce environmental degradation would cost less than 0.04 percent of the average annual GDP growth rate.

The IB report's comments on Greenpeace are enlightening. The forest protection campaign in Mahan, Madhya Pradesh is cited. Yet what is Greenpeace and other groups asking for here? That the laws of the land governing our forests be followed. Those laws just happen to stop companies from mining coal in the area. I have had my share of disagreements with Greenpeace over the years, but anyone who denies the contribution it has made on environmental issues over the last decade has not done his homework. From its contributions to the Justice for Bhopal campaign to its stellar work on e-waste and cutting the carbon footprint of the telecom industry, Greenpeace has notched up important wins — wins that benefit the country at large.

Greenpeace India and other similar NGOs are simply asking that we protect our natural resources, that we avoid repeating the development mistakes others have made, that we compete in the global clean energy race that is underway, while stepping away from the dirty energy sources of the past. If that is anti-national, then I am proud to say that I too am anti-national. ■

The politics of violence

Most political parties are keen to recruit rabble rousers and those with dubious pasts as they come in handy during election time for intimidating voters and securing votes.



C. V. Aravind

is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.

INDIAN politics can be slotted in different categories and this has nothing to do with their political affiliations. Some of them, alas a microscopic minority are sincere and honest and are in politics to serve the people. The politician who spells disaster for the nation is the one who preaches the doctrine of violence and who irrespective of the office that he or she holds uses every single opportunity to incite gullible people to violence and when their nefarious acts are exposed manage to save themselves by tendering apologies which of course count for nothing. In recent times videos of hate speeches by an actor turned politician Tapas Pal, a Lok Sabha MP of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) wherein he has threatened to send his boys (TMC cadres) to rape the womenfolk of those who belong to the opposition party, the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPM) creating a furore across the country.

He has also advised women to use their kitchen knives to slit throats and the men to chop CPM men to pieces. There has been no debate on the authenticity of the videos that have surfaced but it is the muted reaction of the party's supreme leader Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of West Bengal and a one time staunch fighter for human rights that has taken everyone by surprise and horror. The TMC has allowed the matter to rest after an unconditional apology by the offender and for all intents and purposes he has been let off the hook. Although his call to arms could attract several sections of the Indian Penal Code, he will not have to face the music as those who should prosecute and punish him are on his side. This however is an extreme case, but violence mongering is not something that is unknown in this country and no party can claim to be above board in this respect.

The brutal murder of Chandrasekharan who left the Marxist party in Kerala to start his own political outfit, and the boast by a Marxist party man that his party cadres have committed several political murders is indicative of the fact that there is a whole culture of violence that is slowly eating into the vitals of Indian politics.

The role of political parties in elevating leaders with chequered pasts and a history of violence is something that is extremely disturbing. Most parties are keen to recruit rabble rousers and those with dubious pasts as they come in handy during election time for intimidating voters and securing their votes. With time these criminal elements infiltrate into the party and using muscle power even manage to climb the rungs of the ladder and get themselves elected to office. And then they begin to show their true colours by propagating their doctrine of violence and this in turn creates a situation where violence is unleashed and human lives are lost.

As far as the party bigwigs are concerned if an orgy of violence can earn them dividends in the form of electoral support or lead to a widening of the party base they are only too willing to turn a blind eye to hate speeches or violence perpetrated by their partymen. It is indeed a pathetic situation where criminals in the garb of politicians are able to ply their trade without fear of the consequences. As it would be futile to expect political parties to take stern action against their leaders who go off the track, the only option would be Public Interest Litigations (PIL) which could move courts into action. The courts too could initiate suo moto action to bring the guilty to book. The land which produced the greatest apostle of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi can do without politicians who are little more than creators of mayhem. ■

COOL CHAMP



Try to answer the questions below and send your answers along with your name, address, date of birth, school and photograph to: **“YOUNG INDIA QUIZ”** One India One People Foundation, Mahalaxmi Chambers, 4th floor, 22, Bhulabhai Desai Road, Mumbai - 26. You can also log on to our website and answer our quiz online at www.oneindiaonepeople.com. We will choose two winners (the Cool Champs) from all the correct entries and publish his/her photograph and name along with the answers in our next issue. **(Last date for entries: August 20, 2014)**

Quiz No: 127

1. Kuchipudi is a dance form of which state?

- a. Kerala
- b. Andhra Pradesh
- c. Himachal Pradesh
- d. Uttar Pradesh

2. Which director made the famous film Charulata?

- a. Shyam Benegal
- b. Mani Ratnam
- c. Satyajit Ray
- d. Balu Mahendra

3. Which is the smallest union territory of India?

- a. Lakshadweep
- b. Puducherry
- c. Chandigarh
- d. Andaman and Nicobar islands

4. Which city is hosting the commonwealth games this year?

- a. Cairo
- b. Glasgow
- c. Sydney
- d. Beijing

5. In which year was the Consumer Protection Act introduced?

- a. 1987
- b. 1986
- c. 1999
- d. 1981

Answers to Quiz # 126

QUESTION 1

Answer: (c) Gulzar

Gulzar is an Indian poet, lyricist and film director. He also writes poetry, dialogues and scripts. He started his career as a lyricist in the 1963 film *Bandini* and directed films such as *Aandhi* and *Mausam* and TV series during 1970s and 1980s.

QUESTION 2

Answer: (a) Manipur

Manipur is a state in the north east of India with the city of Imphal as its capital. It is bounded by Nagaland to the north, Mizoram to the south, and Assam to the west; Burma lies to its east. Manipur has been at the crossroads of Asian economic and cultural exchange for more than 2500 years.

QUESTION 3

Answer: (b) Parliament of India

The Parliament of India, also popularly known as *Sansad*, is the supreme legislative body in India. The Parliament comprises the President of India and the two Houses, Lok Sabha (House of the People) and Rajya Sabha (Council of States). The Parliament is composed of 790 MPs, who serve the largest democratic electorate in the world.

QUESTION 4

Answer: (d) Greenpeace

Greenpeace is a non-governmental environmental organisation with offices in over 40 countries. The goal is to “ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity”. The

Intelligence Bureau has accused the ngo of hurting the economic progress of India by campaigning against power projects and mining.

QUESTION 5

Answer: (b) 29

Telangana is the 29th state of the country. Andhra Pradesh got split into two states on 2 June 2014, Telangana and a residual Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad will be the joint capital for both states for ten years. Telangana is bordered by Maharashtra to its north and north-west, Karnataka to the west and Chhattisgarh to the north-east.



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Quiz No. 126

No winner



Row, Row, Row A Boat



FESTIVAL

IN August, when the monsoons begin to abate, there's feverish activity in the coastal villages of Kerala, that are home to the famous *chundan vallam* or snake boats. The boats are repaired, oiled and decorated to participate in *vallamkali* or boat races, one of the main attractions of the harvest festival of Onam.

Boat racing is symbolic of the seafaring and martial traditions of the early inhabitants of Kerala. The *chundan vallam* is so called because it resembles a long snake. Its stern looks like the raised hood of a snake. More than 60 metres long, it can accommodate a hundred oarsmen, besides helmsmen and singers, who stand on a small platform in the centre of the boat. While the singers sing, drums beat and cymbals clang, the rowers on either side dip and flash their oars to the fast beat of the *vanchipaatu* (song of the boatmen) which goes *Theyare theya theya theya they they they they tho.....*

The biggest and most popular of the boat races is the Nehru Trophy Boat Race. It is conducted on the second Saturday of August at Punnamada Lake in Alappuzha

(or Allepey, a district, known as the 'Venice of the East' because of its lakes and lagoons).

The race was first held to commemorate Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Kerala in 1952. Panditji was immensely pleased with the race arranged in his honour, and when he returned to Delhi, he got a silver trophy made in the shape of a *chundan*, and sent to the winners of the race.

The race lasts more than three hours. Thousands of people, tourists included, throng the specially erected floating platforms at the finishing point. Tickets are sold well in advance.



STORY

Rakhi Gives Azad-i

IT was Raksha Bandhan Day. Chandra Shekhar Azad, the intrepid revolutionary who was dodging the British minions at that time, happened to be in Allahabad at a friend's house. Somehow the police got wind of his presence there and surrounded the place.

Thinking fast, the lady of the house, Shridevi Mutsaddi, donned her finest sari and shoving a basket of sweets into Azad's hands, asked him to follow her as if he were her servant.

"Hurry up, hurry up, man!" she snapped, as they stepped out of the house. "My brother will be

waiting for me to come and tie rakhi and I'm late!" A police inspector stepped into their path and was about to say

something when the lady picked up a laddoo from the basket Azad was carrying and stuffed it into the policeman's mouth, saying, "Bhai Saheb, please have some sweets." Then she hurried away, followed by Azad who did his best to do justice to the role he was playing.

The inspector was completely fooled. He let them go and rushed into the house with his men, hoping to find Azad there, unaware that the bird had flown.





Enchanting Valley of Flowers

THE Valley of Flowers stretches over an expanse of 87.50sq.km in Uttarakhand, in the upper reaches of Garhwal in the Zaskar range of the Himalayas. It was declared a national park in 1982. Because of the rich diversity of plant species that grow there, the UNESCO has listed it as a World Heritage Site. Legend has it that when the Pandavas were on their way to Swargarohan in the Himalayas, Draupadi saw an exquisite flower floating in a river. She asked Bhima to find out where the flower had come from. Bhima set out alongside the river through valleys of rhododendrons, oaks, firs, pines, deodars and silver birches in search of the flower. He came upon it in a saucer-shaped valley, where millions of flowers of different shapes, sizes and hues grew in wild abandon.

Except for the people who lived in the vicinity, hardly anyone had heard of the enchanting valley of flowers that Bhima had seen. To the locals, it was a *bhyundar* or the playground of fairies and nymphs.

In 1931, English mountaineer Frank Smythe, who led the first successful expedition to Mt. Kamet, accidentally stumbled upon the place on his return journey. Amazed at the incredible sight of hundreds of thousands of blossoms in a riot of colours



against the backdrop of the massive Rataban peak and the meandering river, Pushpawati, he and his team camped in the valley for two days, collecting seeds, bulbs, tubers and plants to take back with them.

Back in England, Smythe wrote a book called *The Valley of Flowers* describing the place as 'a valley of peace and perfect beauty where the human spirit may find repose'. His book made the valley so popular that tourists from all over the world began to visit it and soon the place came to be called the Valley of Flowers.

ART-BEAT



The Edinburgh Fringe

THE Edinburgh Fringe Festival is the world's biggest performing arts festival. It is one of the several art and cultural festivals which take place simultaneously, in August, when Edinburgh plays host to various theatre, music and dance troupes from around the world.

The Fringe began in 1947 along with the more prestigious Edinburgh International Festival to encourage less famous and more off-beat artists.

It is a big culture carnival with stand-up comedians, street artists, musicians, acrobats and others entertaining the public at a host of venues from private flats and circus tents to even public toilets! There are also puppet shows, musicals and other events for children.

The Fringe is open to all — anybody with the desire to perform can put up a show.

LT COL HARI CHAND MVC

The dauntless colonel (1919-1979)

LT Col Hari Chand was born on 16 February 1919 in village Atwala in Punjab. He was commissioned into 8 Gorkha Rifles (GR) on 8 November 1942. His father, Shri Babu Ram had served in the army in the Middle East in World War 2. In 1947, Gilgit which was on lease to the Government of India was handed back to Jammu and Kashmir state. It passed into the hands of the raiders due to the treachery of British officers and Muslim soldiers of the state. Lt Col (later brigadier) Sher Jang Thapa proceeded to Skardu from Leh to ensure security of Skardu. Only 33 troops of state forces were left in Leh. One company of 2 Dogra under Major (later Lt Col) Prithi Singh was sent to Leh across Zoji La pass, reaching Leh on 8 March 1948. With the loss of Kargil on 10 May, the garrison had to depend on air supply. On 1 June 1948, one company of 2/4 GR was air lifted to Leh. It was realised that it was not feasible to rely on air for supplies due to commitments of the Air Force in other sectors and one company of 2/8 GR then located at Ferozepur was ordered to proceed to Leh via the Manali track. Hari Chand drove his column hard. The passes were closed with snow and the troops hacked their way through. They arrived at Leh on 5 July. A maintenance base was established on this route.

Five days later, the raiders crept forward and occupied the hills surrounding the Gorkha position. The local porters ran away. Confusion prevailed and the position became untenable. The Gorkhas fell back to Leh in two's and three's. By mid-July, the raiders had reached Tharu, about 13 kms from Leh. Skardu fell on 14 August 1948 and it was expected that enemy troops released from Skardu would rush to Leh. There was an urgent need for supplies and additional troops. Colonel Parab and one more company of 2/8 GR with ample supplies were flown to Leh by 31 August. Col Parab took charge of the garrison and

was appointed military governor of Ladakh. The remaining troops of 2/8 GR went to Leh via Manali route and reached there on 18 September. It was known that the passes on the Manali route would be closed from November to May. Six hundred mules were employed to build up supplies by October. A guerrilla platoon of 35 selected Gorkha and State troops was organised in September under Hari Chand.

They could climb mountains where there were no tracks, had to withstand extreme temperatures and live on dry rations. He took one local guide with him. They started on the morning of 6 September and on the first night camped at a site three kilometres short of the Lasirmou pass. They huddled behind rocks to shield themselves against the piercing wind. They reached Nimu village three days later and learnt of the presence of enemy party with a 3.7 inches howitzer (gun) in village Basgo. Hari Chand located the site with the help of the son of the village headman and killed the six Pakistani soldiers. The howitzer, ammunition and ordnance dumps were destroyed before returning back to Leh on 15 September. The commander of the Pakistan forces in this sector just managed to escape. On 28 October, Hari Chand crossed

Zaskar River and ambushed a supply convoy of 20 ponies, killing the escort of 20 raiders. Threat to Ladakh was over with the clearance of Kargil and Zoji La by end November. Major Hari Chand was awarded Maha Vir Chakra for taking a handful of men in inhospitable terrain and destroying the enemy gun and dumps. This forced the enemy to call off the attack on Leh. In 1962, he was commanding officer of the battalion tasked to defend the Chushul airfield. Under his resolute leadership, the unit inflicted such heavy casualties on the enemy that the Chinese called off the attack and the airfield was safe. He passed away on 21 August 1979. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd)



PROKASH KARMARKAR

A revolutionary artist (1933-2014)

BOLD colours and thick lines are hallmark of artist Prokash Karmarkar, who fought with penury and sufferings but never gave up his art or compromised it by taking up commercial assignments. He is one of the outstanding painters of contemporary India known for his originality. His work is culmination of rich inheritance of Indian art and dynamic spirit of the modern age. Born in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1933, he has lived through wars, famine, communal riots, and partition, and his powerful brush has caught the anguished search of his age for meaning and direction in bold lines and rich colour. His magnificent distortions offer a profound insight into the hidden matrix of experience.

Prokash was born in 1934, to an artistic family, his father was a renowned artist of his time, but lost everything including his paintings in communal riots in 1940s. His father Prohlad Karmarkar, a pioneer of modern painting in India, died early leaving Prokash to fend for himself. Prokash faced poverty since childhood, but got himself enrolled in the Government College of Art, Kolkata, to pursue his passion. He saw many ups and downs in his life and career once his parents died in early 1949. For a brief period he joined army, but a wandering soul soon returned back to canvas and continued his difficult journey into art.

Out of necessity he was pushed to sell his works on street, and he took to street so much that he exhibited and sold his works on streets like no other Indian artist had done. Due to this unique way of displaying his works on streets and his left leanings, he was considered as a revolutionary artist. He used to say, "I do not want my paintings to be imprisoned within four walls." Seeing many struggling artists in and around Kolkata, he formed a society of artists but in the absence of any support, the venture fizzled out while the Society of Contemporary Artists which almost ran parallel thrived.

Being treated as an outsider, his early works depicted degeneration of moral values in the society; his works always

glorified sacrifices of poor and did not hide his applause for the Naxalite movement gaining strength in those days. He was proficient in oil and acrylic painting and had his own brand of thick lines to outline human figures and patches of bold colours to show variations in backgrounds. His landscapes are unique in many ways capturing the true essence of India, but at the same time very modern in approach and treatment. His figures, his lines, his distortions are scintillating. His later day paintings moved away from traumatic and harsh subjects to simple peaceful life in rural Bengal.

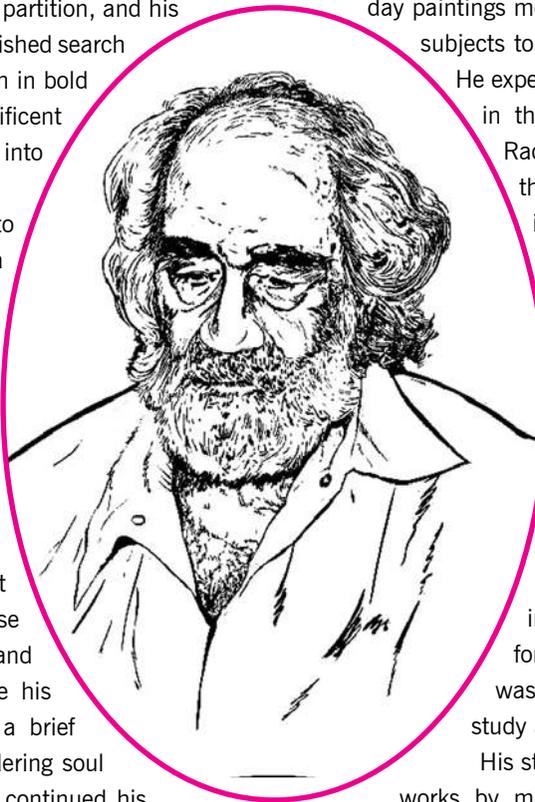
He experimented and depicted village people in the form of mythological figures like Radha-Krishna. He was influenced by the works of Picasso and other classic impressionists from Europe. As a result, his works reflect degeneration of moral values and confusion that prevailed in the society.

He was recognised as an artist in 1957 when he received an award for his water colour work at the national art exhibition held in New Delhi. However he was never patronised by the art world and continued to display his works in street shows. As his experiment of forming artists' group fizzled out, he was lucky to get French fellowship to study art in Paris.

His stay in Paris and study of the classical works by master painters and interaction with contemporary European artists helped him to hone his skills and develop his own style by fusion of Oriental and Western art, leaving behind authentic stamp of his individuality. Over the years his paintings have been acquired for their collection by the Modern Art Gallery, New Delhi, Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Calcutta, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, Allahabad Museum, Lalit Kala Akademi, Lucknow, Art Heritage of India, New Delhi, to name a few.

He left his indelible mark on Indian art scene and became an icon for many more generations of artists who followed his way of visual language. ■

– Prakash Bal Joshi is a Mumbai-based journalist and artist.



NANDU BHENDE

India's original Rock Star (1955-2014)

NANDU Bhende, son of Marathi actor-director Atmaram Bhende and late Dr. Asha Bhende (Lily Ezekiel), had showbiz coursing through his veins. He was one of the pioneers of Rock Music in India. In the 1970s, as the rock music wave engulfed India's cities and big towns, Nandu Bhende sang with bands such as Velvete Fogg, Brief Encounter and then Savage Encounter in Mumbai.

In 1974, theatre director-producer Alyque Padamsee staged the seminal Jesus Christ Superstar, a Rock Opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. According to theatre lore, Madhu Das who played Jesus Christ, was keen to play Judas. But Alyque Padamsee cast Nandu Bhende in the coveted role; he left such an indelible mark with his performance, that no one remembers who played Judas in other productions of Jesus Christ Superstar! Nandu's performance as Judas, spurred Marathi theatre and film director Dr Jabbar Patel to cast him as Ankush Nagaonkar, the anti-hero in Teen Paischacha Tamasha, a Marathi musical version of Bertolt Brecht's Three Penny Opera, adapted by P.L. Deshpande, which played over 200 shows. Audiences still remember it for its path-breaking music which was partly composed by Nandu, who regaled typical Maharashtrian audiences with rock songs in chaste Marathi! The track *Aata Aika Mazhi Kahani*, remains a classic.

In 1988, Nandu represented India at the Festival of India in the former USSR, where he along with his group performed seven shows in various parts of the country including two in Moscow. He sang in Hindi, Marathi, English and, in Russian to the delight of the Soviets. In 1998, film actor and theatre director-producer Lillete Dubey staged Jaya, the first indigenous Rock Opera in English that presented the key events of the Mahabharata through the eyes of Yudhishtira. Nandu Bhende once again did duty in the lead role as Yudhishtira, piping his co-performers with his excellent voice modulation.

Although rock music remained Nandu Bhende's forte and passion, he moved to playback for Hindi films with music directors such as R.D. Burman, Laxmikant Pyarelal and Bappi Lahiri. The latter's film Disco Dancer fetched Nandu a Gold

Disc. Cashing in on the disco craze, in 1980, Nandu teamed up with Music India to produce two very successful dance albums Disco Duniya and Disco Nasha; with HMV Nandu recorded two more disco albums -- *Disco Zamana* and *Disco Mazaa*.

His first English album 'Get Organized' featured original compositions, as well as a few songs from a collection of poems specially written for him by the Sahitya Academy Award winning, internationally acclaimed poet Nissim Ezekiel (also his maternal uncle). In 2001, Nandu released 'Spicy

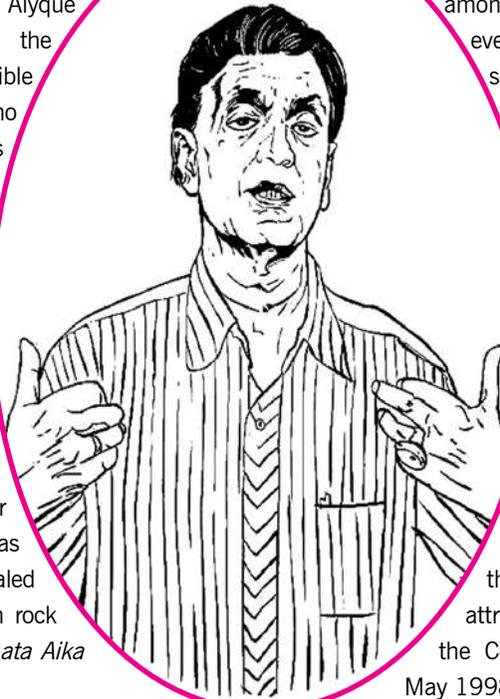
Mango-Raapchick Remix' a remix album in Marathi, for Universal Music. It became an instant hit among the Marathi speaking youth. Nandu even scored music for many prime time shows across channels like Cats (Sony), Chandrakanta (DD1), Jeena Isi Ka Naam Hai (Zee TV) and Kohra (Star Plus), etc. Since music was his passion, Nandu launched Music Software and Spectrum Multimedia which produced popular long running Marathi FM shows Hasat Khelat and Majhi Awadti Gaani along with the Konkani FM show Geetacha Paus for HMV-FM, and prominent Marathi and Konkani artists served as RJs (radio jockeys).

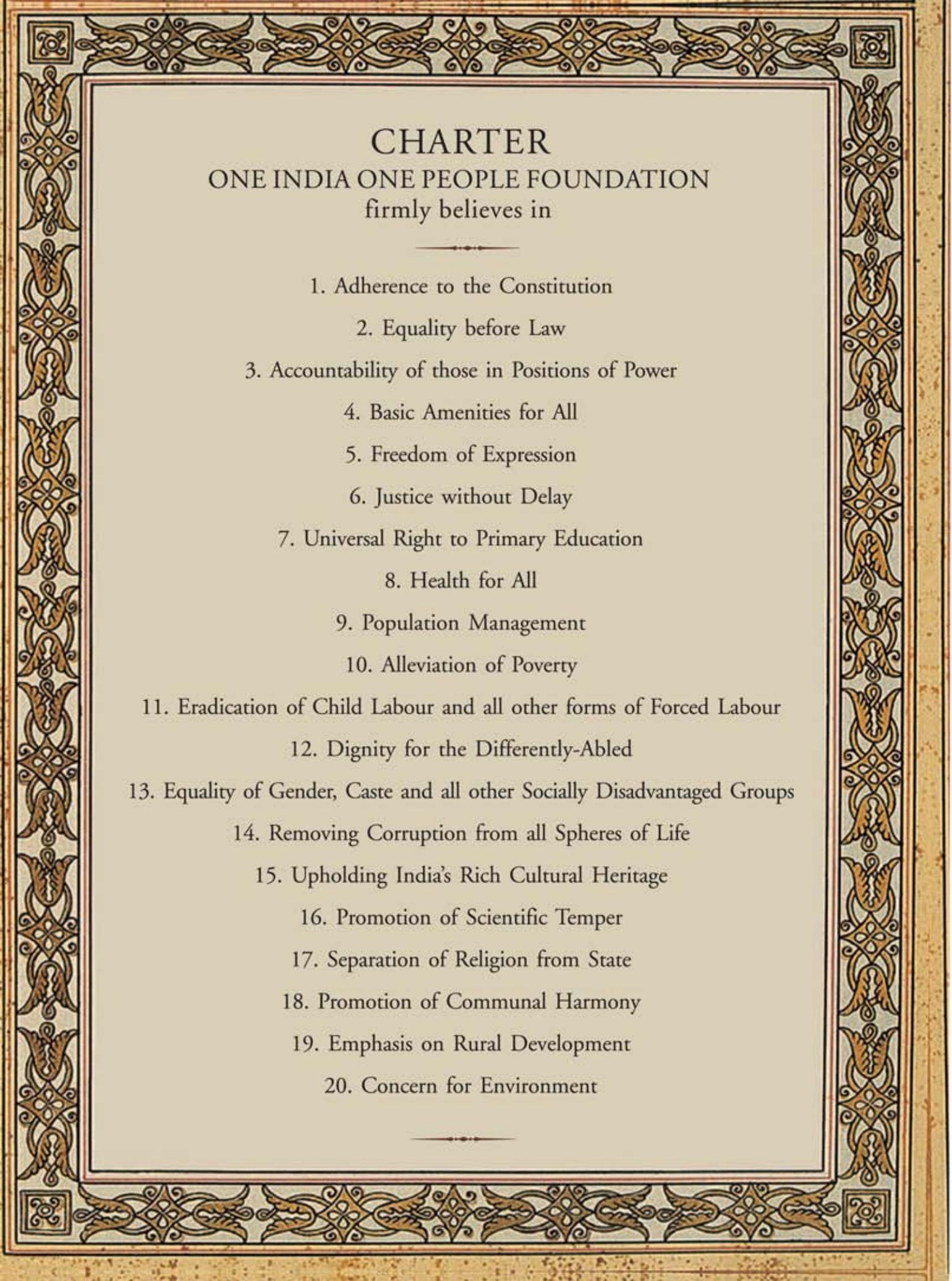
Nobody understood music better than Nandu Bhende. Leslie Lewis attributes his teaming with Hariharan as the Colonial Cousins to Nandu Bhende. In May 1998, he opened InSync Studios, a state-of-the-art 32 track digital audio recording studio, in Juhu, Mumbai. Much in demand for its facilities and quaint location in a quiet Juhu lane, in March 1999, the studio was upgraded to 64 tracks. In the Indian tradition of guru-shishya, he started the very popular Nandu Bhende Voice Workshops, one of the pioneers in the field of voice culture for effective speaking, the dynamics of music and singing.

His priority till the end remained live shows which he enjoyed immensely. A month before his sudden departure, he rocked the stage at Blue Frog, Mumbai's seminal venue for live gigs. ■

– Piroj Wadia is a veteran film journalist.

(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