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Campaigning for Change



New age activism

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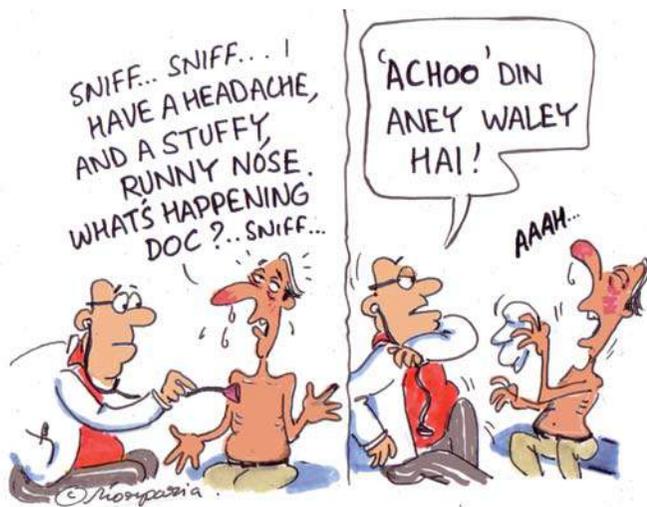
Lakshadweep - Blue Lagoon

FACE TO FACE

Naseeruddin Shah

Great Indians: Admiral R L Pereira PVSM AVSM / Sudhatai Varde / Balu Mahendra

MORPARIA'S PAGE



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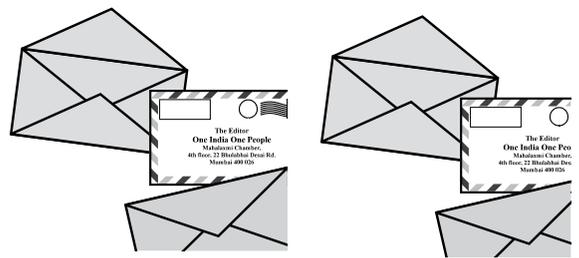
Weed out the rot in our system

The decline of our great institutions was well covered in your June issue of One India One People. It is sad and shocking to read the rot that has set into our defence and other reputed institutions. Weeding out corruption and restoring the credibility will certainly be an uphill task, but then we cannot just turn a blind eye and say that it happens everywhere. There is no justification to corruption. If we have to question the credibility of institutions like the CBI, then whom will the aam aadmi turn to for justice?

The citizens of this country have great expectations from the new government that has promised the moon. We can only hope that it does not let us down.

The interview with Gulzar was interesting. He is one of my favourite directors and I have grown watching his films like Mere Apne, Mausam and Angoor over and over again. It was also a pleasure to explore Warangal through your Know India Better.

– Pamela Goveas, Mumbai



Proud to be associated with OIOP

I have gone through your website and I was touched by the ideology of your organisation and the noble cause of national interest, your organisation is working for as the core activity.

I received my first issue as a subscriber. Very curiously, perused it and after that, I realised that I have made tremendous delay in joining hands with your organisation. I consider it as a personal loss to me, what I have been missing in terms of valuable inputs from intellects in different walks of life. The 20 points Charter of the Foundation, and continued endeavour of the magazine in these valuable ideologies, really are noble, in the arena of mass awareness and social reforms. I am pleased that, I am connected with you as a subscriber.

– Hem Bhandari, Mumbai

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Hyper activism in rights

V Gangadhar tells us how activism in India is alive and kicking.

ENOUGH has been said and written about India being the largest democracy in the world. The world has also recognised that being the foremost in activism means we are the most 'active' on all sorts of 'rights'. India overflows with all kinds of rights and foreign nations are so alarmed that they have warned their tourists from coming to India.

Women's Rights: This peaked after the Delhi Nirbhaya case of 2012 and gave an entirely new fillip to women's rights. The great state of Uttar Pradesh which has provided the nation with several great prime ministers, as expected, led from the front on the issue of women's rights. Even while being a clear leader on rape among Indian states, UP achieved a new distinction. Its brave and chivalrous men were not content with molesting and raping teenage girls. Going a step further, they hung the bodies of the victims from tree branches. It was universally acknowledged by UP politicians and those from the rest of the cow belt that this was a major leap forward on the issue of women's rights.

Children's Rights: Our widespread 'activists' spread all over the cow belt also reported remarkable progress in the field of children's rights. For a brief time it was feared that parts of UP would escape the usual onslaught of Japanese encephalitis but the progress was maintained resulting in the usual death toll. This time the region was afflicted not only with Japanese encephalitis but also the Thai, Singapore, and Vietnam varieties of the epidemic. Children died not only from Japanese encephalitis but from several other types. UP and the rest of the cow belt thus maintained their enviable records in children's rights. The achievement will be highlighted when prime minister Narendra Modi visits South East Asian nations including Japan during his forthcoming foreign trips.

Animal/Environment Rights: It was not just UP and the cow belt which lived up to their reputation in the field of multiple activism; Mumbai, the city with an alleged soft

heart did not lag behind. It exceeded its annual target in killing stray dogs and did not stop there. A couple of posh buildings in posh South Mumbai where flocks of birds like herons, egrets and seagulls had nested and laid eggs, hundreds of such nests which were broken up fell down, smashing eggs and newly hatched little birds. It was the first time that Mumbai had seen such a new strategy in protecting its own environment and upholding animal rights. Mind you,

it was only bird rights which were violated! Protesting bird lovers filed complaints with the police and Municipal Corporation, the sole authority permitted to cut and trim tree branches. They rescued hundreds of birds and took them home but most of them did not survive the ordeal they underwent. The flat owners who saved the 'society' now call themselves, King Richard, King Henry and King John, British kings who were famous for their bird shoots which netted thousands of birds. It is likely that the three buildings in the compound will now be named after them.

Consumer Rights: Which other nation in the world has a shopping principle, 'The shopkeeper is always right'. India has it.

Some months back I gave a pair of shoes to be repaired. Only one of them was damaged and needed repairs but the vendor wanted both of them. A week later I went to claim my shoes. Putting one of them before me, the man explained, "Sorry Sir, this is your shoe which needed repairs. I lost the other one." When I protested I could not walk home and manage with one shoe, he brought a packet which contained a single shoe of a different design and colour. "Try this sir," he advised. "This one is the same size as your other missing shoe. In fact, superior quality. Who knows, you could be setting new trends in shoe fashions." ■



The writer is a well-known satirist.

Even while being a clear leader on rape among Indian states, UP achieved a new distinction. Its brave and chivalrous men were not content with molesting and raping teenage girls. Going a step further, they hung the bodies of the victims from tree branches.

New age activism

*Activism isn't only about nudging the government to act, but actually taking on the State. The current situation presents the most difficult challenge, says **Jyoti Punwani**, asking if activists will rise to the occasion.*

GOING by the national indignation over the murder of 24-year-old Mohsin Shaikh, lynched in Pune only because he looked like a Muslim and therefore belonged to the community suspected to be responsible for an offensive Facebook post (this has yet to be established), it seems “civil society” is alive and kicking. Demonstrations have been held, articles written, and the union home ministry has been forced to ask for a report. This is no mean achievement, considering that the home minister and Mohsin's alleged killers belong to the Rashtriya Hindu Sena, draw inspiration from the same ideology.

But can activism end there? Activists worth their salt would ensure that the killers get convicted. In a State notorious for letting Hindutva goons go free whether they commit mayhem or murder, this would be tough. It would mean keeping up the heat so that the investigation is wrapped up quickly and the case brought to trial, then monitoring the trial so that the public prosecutor does not side with the accused, and the eye-witnesses don't buckle under, both of which normally happen in cases of communal violence. And doing all this in the face of an uncooperative State.

A government run by the rule of law would ensure justice to Mohsin Shaikh. Ours isn't, hence the need for activism. In India, activism isn't only about nudging the government to act. It means actually taking on the State.

Activism at a cost

Naturally, activism isn't likely to attract hordes. Those fighting for human rights or the environment have always been a handful. Some have had to pay for their lives – in Andhra Pradesh at least half-a-dozen civil rights activists were killed in the 80s and later in 2001, because they were upholding the constitutional rights of those labeled Naxalites. There, the police colluded in the killings, because civil rights activists came in the way of their method of dealing with Naxalites by simply killing them in fake ‘encounters’. RTI activists have been killed by those wanting

to hide information. Even volunteers such as Bhanwari Devi, who was working for a government programme in Rajasthan against child marriage, an innocuous a cause as can be, have been targeted with rape. Dr Binayak Sen, who ran a free clinic for tribals in Chhattisgarh, and spoke up against the Chhattisgarh government's Salwa Judum, a vigilante movement aimed at forcible eviction of tribals from their land, was sent to jail and sentenced to life for being a Maoist.

Himanshu Kumar, a Gandhian who set up an ashram to better the living conditions of tribals in Bastar, had his ashram destroyed and had to flee, only because he helped tribals file cases against the police.

Yet, activist groups continue to work across the country. Some individual activists even get recognition in the form of international awards, or in the media. Their contribution to the lives of those at the bottom of the heap has been tangible. It's thanks to activists such as Aruna Roy and others that we have the RTI act; Medha Patkar and the Narmada Bachao Andolan got the World Bank to withdraw from the Sardar Sarovar Dam, and she along with others like her have forced the government to enact laws for the unorganised and self-employed urban poor. The National Advisory Committee appointed by Sonia Gandhi was in effect, a group of activists. Thanks to them, we got the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and the Food Security Bill.

Those fighting for human rights or the environment have always been a handful. Some have had to pay for their lives – in Andhra Pradesh at least half-a-dozen civil rights activists were killed in the 80s and later in 2001, because they were upholding the constitutional rights of those labeled Naxalites.

Role of the NGO's

But these achievements have come after long struggles. And the struggle just got tougher. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) has just given the home ministry a list of foreign-funded NGOs who have been active in various causes, from the anti-nuclear movement to resistance to land grabs by the state or corporates. The IB has acknowledged that these NGOS take up “people-centric” issues, but it alleges that this is just a front to thwart growth.

Given that this is a government committed to growth at

all costs, the outcome of the IB report is obvious. The Congress government also tried to stop the activities of NGOs accused of getting foreign funds. The home ministry was forced to admit that some of those labeled were in fact, not receiving any.

However, it's also a fact that in PM Narendra Modi's own state, if some of the powerful accused of the 2002 pogrom are now in jail, it's because of activists. But perhaps their efforts might not have succeeded without the close involvement of the Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission in monitoring the worst cases of 2002.

So what do activists do? Eschew foreign funding? That has been the principle followed by many groups, especially those directly exposing the State such as human rights groups. That means working with very tight budgets, which limits your reach.

The activist party

This has been the scenario so far: a handful of fund-starved groups working against a powerful state and a largely indifferent media. But this changed in 2011 when Anna Hazare's fast against corruption in Delhi received unimagined support. It was what every activist had dreamt of — masses of people getting involved in a cause, not afraid to come out on the streets. For the first time, you had ordinary people responding to a direct challenge to the State without being mobilised to do so. Anna's movement challenged the age-old relationship between an all-powerful government and a helpless citizenry. When this movement led to the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP); when the party, led by activists and academics, won 28 seats in the Delhi assembly and formed a government that in the 49 days that it ruled, not only fulfilled its promises of lowering

electricity and water rates, but also significantly brought down the everyday corruption faced by citizens at the hands of the police and bureaucracy, it seemed activism had finally arrived. For the AAP remained an activist party, it never became a party of rulers. No wonder then that the 2014 Lok Sabha elections saw activists such as Medha Patkar, Soni Sori, Dayamani Barla, Lalit Babar, Sanjeev Sane, P Uday kumar and others, fighting elections on the AAP ticket. Their election campaigns were run by volunteers and other activists, not by paid workers, and these campaigns were

drastically different from the expensive, manipulative election campaigns of established parties.

No one expected AAP to win. But said one taxi driver in Delhi, "This election will show how many people want a corruption-free country." So those who voted for it did so in the hope that the party would eventually bring in long-term change and till then, voice the people's opposition to the Establishment. The incoming National Democratic Alliance government was expected to come down hard on activists; but AAP would be there with its hundreds of volunteers to oppose the ruling party - that was the hope.



AAP's activists did not let down their supporters – at least Medha Patkar, days after her defeat, went back to doing what she has always done. Approached by a slum facing sudden, illegal demolition, she intervened on their behalf with the CM, and mobilised them to resist. Obviously, the promise of entering the Parliament did not change a lifelong activist such as Medha.

Will activists get media support?

What of AAP? Will it live up to the hopes of its supporters and be the quintessential uncompromising activist party? As



Dream of every activist - masses of people getting involved in a cause, not afraid to come out on the streets

things stand, AAP is in disarray, with its internal disagreements being leaked to a salivating media. It has to set itself straight before it joins or even triggers off mass protests. Meanwhile, there have been enough incidents to protest about, and activists have done so. But so far, these incidents, such as the Badaun rapes, have been so outrageous that even the media has had to protest. But will the media highlight protests in Jaitapur if the new government goes all out to push the world's biggest nuclear project there? If labour laws are changed across the country as Rajasthan has just done, will the media highlight the protests of workers? What about mining projects which will displace tribals and destroy the environment? The media has always looked at environmental objections as impediments to 'development'.

Be it mining or labour laws or nuclear projects, activists will definitely protest and court arrest if necessary, whether they get media attention or not. But after that, what? Will they be able to get a large section of citizens on their side?

New methods to participate

Though activists have always been few, there was a time when they magnified their impact by actually going on the streets, spreading the word through wall posters, street plays,

small magazines and public meetings. Gradually, spaces to do this started shrinking. Today, street protest by activists is mostly tokenism; the same old faces getting together to shout slogans that only they can understand. There's very little attempt to involve the passer-by.

Today, the real passion and protest is online. The internet is fast, cheap and can reach millions. Those who don't have computers have mobiles with Whats App. Fanatics use this to circulate inflammatory videos, triggering off angry, violent reactions. Why don't activists use the same technology to spread their message on a similar scale? Why can't the angry protests on Facebook (FB) trigger off actual street action? It happens all the time in China, where

protests are banned. In our democracy, it happened when Dr Binayak Sen was arrested. Many of those who organised actual protests for his release were first-timers who had heard of him through FB. But not all their protests, nor international outrage, mattered to the government. It was only the arguments of a senior lawyer like Ram Jethmalani in the Supreme Court that got him bail. Yet, the Raipur Sessions Court convicted him on no evidence at all.

So can activism only succeed with the help of the courts? Perhaps. For even Anna Hazare's mass movement couldn't force the Congress to enact a proper Lokpal Bill.

Activists have always had to live with frustration; under the new government, this will get worse. The real hope is the courts. That too is a form of activism – you need good lawyers fighting for free. Thankfully, their availability might not be affected by the new government. ■



The writer is a Mumbai-based freelance journalist who focuses on issues of communal harmony/conflict and human rights. She has been active in human rights organisations.

Maxim

Loyal and efficient work in a great cause, even though it may not be immediately recognised, ultimately bears fruit.

– Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

The rise of women

Sujata Gothoskar takes us through the journey of women's activism and says that without these spirited women, the situation prevailing today would have been even worse.

WOMEN have been active in several political and social movements over a very long period of time. Women's activism is what has sustained them over centuries. Without the activism of women such as Savitribai Phule, many of us would still be at a great disadvantage even in terms of basic rights like education. There have been so many women activists in different periods of time in different countries that fought for their rights. To cite a few examples: In 1955, a 42-year-old African American Rosa Parks, refused to get up and give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery in the USA. Or the women migrant textile workers who went on strike in 1912 at Lawrence Textile demanding an increase in their wages and also to be treated with equality and dignity by flashing the slogan: 'We want bread, but we want roses too!' There were also the Suffragettes in the UK who fought women's right to vote.

Different periods in history have raised different issues and women have played a key role in shaping them and responding to them. The issues women face, depend upon their historical and geographical location.

Impediments and constraints

From the very beginning, women's movement has characterised an important aspect of the current social structure and system that men control mobility, labour, sexuality and the reproductive capacity of women.

Sexual division of labour at home or at workplace has consistently put women in a disadvantaged position. Women have been made to be responsible for all the work in the

household. At the same time women are discriminated against in the labour market for precisely the same reason – that their primary responsibility is supposed to be the home!

The other problem that circumscribes women's activism is societal attitude towards women and their spaces. Women are supposed to be confined to the family and other spaces that the

family 'allows' her to be in like her work space. Anything outside those spaces is frowned upon and aspersions are cast on her 'character' and she is stamped as a 'loose woman' or some stigma is attached to her. That itself may make it unsafe for women to be active as it may invite violence of the kind that is reserved for 'women who deserve it'.

Most of the issues that were addressed by women's organisations were precisely those

that put serious constraints on her lives.

The phase of the women's movement that began in the middle of the 20th century looked at women's rights to their own lives and bodies. Women came out of their homes in large parts of the world demanding right to autonomy, right to their bodies, right to health, right to education, right to work. Women in every country demanded that violence against them should end.

Rise of women's activism

In the context of India, the 1980s saw the emergence of the new wave of women's activism. Rape and sexual assault were the earliest issues that women from different personal and political backgrounds took up. That decade saw women's organisations coming up in large cities, small towns and also villages in some states of India. Gradually, domestic violence



Women have played a key role in raising different issues at different times

began to emerge as a crucial issue in the consciousness of the women's organisations that had already been formed in the media as well. By the end of 80s, there had emerged a loose network of women activists and women's organisations. This facilitated a greater sharing of issues and strategies by drawing out the commonalities in the situation of different sections of women.

Hence issues like women's rights to their bodies could be taken up in a more holistic manner. Apart from direct issues of violence, women's right to contraceptives of their choice, women's right to be born were raised and, these issues took on the form of campaigns that went beyond one or two cities and took on a much larger form, raising issues organise campaigns, and much more. From street-level and community-level campaigns to legal struggles, different organisations raised issues on women's health and women's right to their bodies.

One strand of the women's movement – the autonomous women's organisations – attempted to consistently raise issues of organisational structure and decision-making processes. They emphasised on collective functioning and non-hierarchical organisational structures.

Campaigns for legal reforms underlay several of the issues that the women's movement took up – from the right to be born to women's right to be free from all sorts of violence, especially sexual violence. This also included communal violence and women's experiences in communal violence situations.

Deepening activism

In the meantime, voices of women who were from communities that were marginalised and hence faced the same issues with even greater gravity were raised. These were esbian women, adivasi women, dalit women, Muslim women, women belonging to the Denotified Tribes and so on. While there was an insistence that the by now 'mainstream' women's movement take up the issues of women from the marginalised communities, there were attempts to form independent organisations and movements as well.

Women workers in the informal sector contributing to the economy were organising different groups. For instance, some as workers against the police and the authorities, some in terms of their right to safe and secure housing. Some women in rural areas are part of movements that voice a more holistic view of their lives – as women, as agricultural or domestic

workers, as adivasi women or dalit women, and as beneficiaries of government programmes etc.

Women who worked in occupations that were stigmatised were gradually organising themselves. Organisations of sex workers had emerged all over the world. Some were trade unions and some were non-governmental organisations. Bar dancers got together in the city of Mumbai to fight for their right to earn their livelihood. These sections directly questioned the staid and often patriarchal notions of society.

The women's movement insisted that the interests of women could not be subsumed under those either of the 'family' or of the 'community'.

The road ahead

These attempts at activism and issues revolving them dot the country as they do the globe. Women's activism is there to stay as without that women's survival is precarious.

However, looking at the present spate of sexual assaults on women and girls, one begins to question – what has women's activism meant all these years; what has it achieved?

I would like to believe that without women's activism the situation that prevails now would have been even worse. That it is the voices of dissent, voices of protest that question the power of men over women, that interrogate the easy equation of women as disposable and dispensable beings that have been anchors for women and girls to personally and collectively resist and assert themselves in whatever situation they are in.

The task before the women's movement especially in the present context of rescinding of and denying the earlier won rights, minority bashing and increasing crimes against women and girls is to devise methods and strategies that support women, especially from disadvantaged groups and communities to come together, to recognise the allies – potential and contemporary – and create conditions and grounds for such alliances and networks to fight the forces that want to take us back to a period of darkness that we had fought our way out of. ■



The writer has been a part of the women's movement and the labour movement in Bombay for over four decades. She has also worked as a researcher and writes on different issues relating to women's work, women's rights and the women's movement.

Aarogyam

Mouth ulcers are common and can cause great discomfort. Gargling is the best and feasible solution for ulcers. Boil water with some coriander seeds or crushed cardamom. Eating raw tomato, chewing holy basil or tulsi leaves or applying turmeric powder on the affected area are also easy home remedies.

Taking sides

Lina Mathias talks about the evolution of activism in media, its changing trends and how social media is beginning to redefine new age activism.

THOSE who assume that “media activism” is a recent phenomenon forget the spirited role the Indian print media played in the freedom struggle. Remember that famous couplet by Akbar Allahabadi who lived through the 1857 War of Independence?

*Kheencho na kamano ko,
Na talwar nikalo;
Jab top mukabil ho,
To akhbar nikalo!*

(Do not pull out the bowstring or the sword; when faced with the cannon ball, bring out a newspaper).

Media in colonial times

And that is what our freedom fighters did to spread the message against colonial rule beginning from the 1840s onwards itself. An impressive number of regular publications in almost every Indian language came out. Every region in India has its history of such heroic efforts. Usually, the owner-editor was also the most prolific writer and often the vendor-distributor too, right until the late-19th century. Almost all of them suffered economic losses and imprisonment when their “offices” were raided, material and printing presses seized and they were fined heavily under the various laws like the Official Secrets Act, Incitement of Offences Act, and Vernacular Press Act etc. Given the low literacy rates, the number and range of these publications were truly remarkable and the target audience was the literate

and the opinion makers who were expected to read out to the others.

Three catalytic trends

This is not the place to go into the old debate about the virtues (or not) of “objectivity” in mainstream journalism. Suffice to say that two trends (in India these number three) got together to give rise to the media activism that has become familiar worldwide since 2011. One, mainstream media (more so in India) began becoming more and more selective in its coverage, often leaving out events and happenings that were detrimental to the financial interests of its owners. Two, with the popularity of television news channels and later digital technology, the print media had to become more attractive with more visually content, eye catching headlines and “simple” language. It was argued that readers were impatient with long, thought provoking articles, wanted easily digestible

news items (as short as possible) and racy infotainment. Three, the mind boggling spread of instantly accessible social media knocked the mainstream media, including television, off its pedestal.

These three trends led to a number of effects. More and more, people’s protests and actions which



Media has mobilised people physically as well as ideologically. Crowds take to streets to protest against Nirbhaya rape

affected vested interests found little space in the mainstream media and the “alternative” media—but still traditional like the print media—became the only other outlet for such news. So you had non-governmental organisations (NGOs) bringing out publications which took up various causes: the rights of tribals, the disabled, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

(lgbt) sexual minorities, issues of privatisation of medical services and so on. Soon, these NGOs went a step further and began training the poor including tribals, women and lower castes, to effectively use community radio, the video camera and also bring out publications. Readers interested in this phenomenon must look up the example of *Khabar Lehriya* published in Bundeli and Avhadi by 40 rural women journalists. In the south of the country too, there are a large number of examples given the higher literacy rates among all sections of society.

Soon, citizen journalism became popular and the NGO CGnet Swara with its extremely innovative and creative campaigns comes to mind immediately. There is also *merinews.com*, one of the largest citizen journalism media platform. While these two have been mentioned, there are many others which are doing a commendable job though within the journalistic community the debate still rages about the “authenticity” of citizen journalism.

International reach

Media activism, as we speak of it now, almost always brings to mind the two most famous international examples: Occupy Wall Street movement and the Arab Spring movement. The former was initiated by anti-corporate globalisation activists to protest against the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle, US. They used digital technology generously and widely to mobilise protestors, build networks of members and sympathisers and even reach out to the mainstream media. Almost anyone could interactively use the online fora, post reports and videos and reach out to the farthest corners of the world. It was a huge breakthrough, not least because opinions which the mainstream media shied away from even mentioning could be liberally propagated. Similarly, the Arab Spring took the rest of the world by storm, catching the imagination of young people from every part of the world. In China, not even the tight governmental control over access to the Internet and its censorship, have succeeded fully in restraining Chinese netizens from reaching out. Similarly, in a host of other countries where authoritarian regimes of whatever political hues managed to repress dissent, digital technology is now playing a stellar role in letting the rest of the world in.

As of now, it is a totally familiar phenomenon to have websites and blogs advocating the rights of every conceivable group under the sun. What is more, there are courses offering to teach people how to use digital technology to advocate a cause or rights group that they are keen on. Social media like Facebook and Twitter have completely revolutionised perceptions and even long held practices. As readers would be well aware, the longest and most keenly fought polls that India just passed through in May were dominated by the use

of social media. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been extensively quoted emphasising the significance and importance of the social media. Of course, the flip side of a “new” phenomenon is also the raging controversies and embarrassments and retractions that we are witness too when impulsive public personalities obsessively tweet their response to any and everything.

Many political and media observers are convinced that the responses to Anna Hazare’s anti-corruption movement, the anti-rape or Nirbhaya protests and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) would not have been what we witnessed, had it not been for the power of the social media (backed of course by content-hungry television channels).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that digital technology has had tremendous impact on the world as we knew it even 10 years ago. Completely new words have entered languages (memes comes to mind immediately though there are so many more), perceptions have altered and more significantly, so have expectations.

Dealing with the fallout

But there are apprehensions too. One is the very nature of the ‘net and social media that allows tremendous leeway to communicate and which can be and is being used dangerously. Take the latest violence in Pune (Maharashtra) over Facebook postings which were clearly mischievous in nature and the murder of an innocent young Muslim man that it all led to. The use of Section 66A of the Information Technology (IT) Act to arrest or cow down people who post on Facebook and other social media has not been without controversy however as a number of events from the time the law came into force have shown.

Again, the very idea of “activism” has almost turned on its head. Traditionally, grassroots leadership and activism meant hard and long campaigning to mobilise people physically as well as ideologically. It meant actually moving among the sections of people you wanted to convince to your way of thinking. Critics now point out sarcastically that pressing the ‘like’ button is not enough, you have to get out there and do the hard work of meeting people, convincing them, knowing how to face criticism and debate your stances. All of which seem to be short circuited by social media.



Be that as it may the Internet and the social media are here to stay for better or for worse. As with every other modern phenomena to make it a good servant and not give it the power of an unbridled master, is entirely up to us. ■

The writer is senior assistant editor, Economic and Political Weekly.

Lending voice to the mute

Anuradha Sawhney narrates instances of animal and bird abuse in India, and how despite the fact that there are laws to protect them, these are hardly enforced by authorities due to low awareness and lack of empathy.

In India animal and bird abuse is quite common. There are many laws for the protection of animals. Unfortunately, citizens or for that matter even law enforcers, are not aware of these laws; as a result these poor neglected creatures continue to suffer and die due to inhuman treatment.

Some major laws for protecting the animals are:

- The Constitution of India (Its not a law but entitles basic rights)
- The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960
- The Indian Penal Code, 1860
- The Criminal Procedure Code, 1973
- The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
- The Police Acts
- The Municipal Corporation Acts

The law of our land provides for protection and humane treatment of animals and as citizens of India, it is our fundamental duty to enforce these laws to protect the helpless animals who suffer in the name of religion, science, entertainment, business, etc.

But with greater awareness than before, more individuals in the country are rising up to speak for animals. It is their activism, along with international animal welfare organisations like the Humane Society International, World Society for Protection of Animals (WSPA) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) which is helping to bring about a change in how animals are viewed in our country. A few examples are given below of how activism has brought about a change in how animals are treated.

On screen abuse

The use of animals in advertisements, television and films has increased, and, even now, laws concerning their use are not being strictly followed. Animals used in films are often treated as little more than props, and many suffer terribly behind the scenes. The film environment is quite different from the animals' natural habitats: The hot arc-lighted sets, the relentless retakes and the whips of the trainers on the sets is something that these mute animals are not able to comprehend. It is a torture for them to be subjected to this kind of treatment.

There have been numerous cases of animals being severely beaten during filmmaking, and others have suffered serious



There are few who care and feed stray animals

injuries or even death. Some animals are drugged to make them 'convenient' to work with, and some have their teeth and claws surgically removed or impaired or their jaws stitched shut. Deprived of their natural instincts and habitats, which shape their character and existence as unique species and individuals, these animals become bizarre imitations of their former selves – spiritually dead, tamed and broken.

Not many filmmakers realise that even if animals are not treated cruelly during the shoot, they always have a history of torture and abuse. These animals are either caught from the wild or bred in captivity and are trained by a combination of cruelty, punishment and reward. Forcing animals to perform acts that are unnatural to them requires rigorous training methods that can include electric prods and food deprivation. Physical punishment has long been the standard training method for animals in filmmaking. Some species are less able to acclimatise to the training than others, and as a result, these animals suffer greater strain during these torturous sessions.

With an intention to control and supervise the use of animals in entertainment, the Government of India, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-sections (1) and (2) of Section 38 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (59 of 1960), notified the Performing Animals (Registration) Rules, 2001. Rule 3 provides that any person desirous of training or exhibiting a performing animal shall apply for registration to the prescribed authority and shall not exhibit or train any animal as a performing

animal without being registered under these rules.

As a result of sustained pressure by animal activists and organisations, the Central Board of Film Certification now asks the applicants to furnish a non objection certificate from the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) before certifying a film wherein animals have been used. It is because of the AWBI, with the help of activists around the country that some semblance of control is being brought into the usage of animals in films.

Safeguarding the birds

Parakeets are protected birds under the Wild Life Protection Act of 1972, and cannot be used for any ads or films, as 'fortune tellers' or sold or kept as 'pets'. Possession of protected animals (who are listed in the different schedules of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972) without an appropriate ownership certificate from the requisite chief wildlife warden of that state is an offence, as is the trade and trafficking of all wildlife including wild birds.

It is estimated that for every single bird sold in the market, two die en route. Baby fledglings are stolen from their nests and smuggled in cartons, tiny boxes and even rolled up inside socks and brought to cities. Captive birds' wings are crudely cut with a pair of scissors so that they cannot do the one thing they most long to do i.e. fly. The life of these birds are limited to tiny cages in which they can hardly stretch their wings.

Despite the Wildlife Protection Act, which bans the trade and trapping of all indigenous birds, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which restricts the trade of foreign birds, black marketeering of birds thrives openly in many places, involving many of the country's estimated 1,200 species. Laws designed to protect India's birds are well intentioned but rarely enforced.

In 1997, the Bombay High Court constituted a committee to look into the cruel trade of birds in the city of Mumbai which temporarily curbed the illegal trade. The current committee is hampered from taking any action like raiding premises where this cruel, illegal trading of birds is being conducted, due to lack of proper facilities to keep these rescued animals, and the lack of adequately skilled personnel to take care of these rescued animals at the available facilities.

All kinds of animals can be found being sold in animal markets across the country where these animals are kept in terribly inhumane conditions, with puppies being drugged so



Black marketeering of birds thrives openly. It is a common sight to see parrots being used as fortune tellers

that they don't cry and large birds being stuffed into small enclosures. Star tortoises are sold openly and so are other protected animals.

Wild birds are often seen in these bird markets. All those named in Schedules I, II, III, and IV of the Wildlife (Protection)

Act 1972 are protected species, whose capture is totally forbidden. Among often illegally sold wild birds are: Munias, Parakeets, Peacocks, Weaverbirds, Koel, Mynahs, and Owls.

Birds arrive into cities via the railways and the airlines. They are stuffed into cartons or into cages, covered with gunny sacks and sent as unaccompanied baggage. Often small cages stuffed with birds can be seen at the cargo section of the airport. A few days old parakeet babies are stuffed into cartons and flown by air from Nepal and towns of UP (from where they have been cruelly snatched from their nests) and are then taken to the animal market in the heart of the city. Birds are also sent to Mumbai in trains. These birds are not given any food or water during their entire journey, and by the time they reach their destination, many succumb.

Baby fledglings are stolen from their nests and smuggled in cartons, tiny boxes and even rolled up inside socks and brought to cities. Captive birds' wings are crudely cut with a pair of scissors so that they cannot do the one thing they most long to do i.e. fly.

Pain inflicted upon snakes

All snakes are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and hence it is illegal to capture, train or possess these animals. Yet, snake charmers could be found in abundance in cities, towns and villages across the country at one time. As the month of *Shravan* begins, so does the preparation for *Naag Panchami* or the festival of snakes.

(Continued on page 22)

Fighting lone battles for public good

Rishi Aggarwal feels perturbed about the fact that only a few people in India go to extraordinary lengths to impact issues which affect all, while millions are completely missing in action.

ACTIVISM and the environment share a very close relationship. Most environmental issues we face depend very closely on activism for results. But for activism a number of environmental issues would see steady deterioration.

For the past decade, in the matter of saving the mangrove forests along the coast of Mumbai, it was my constant retort that left to environmental laws, environment department, IAS officers and other bureaucrats or even the constitution of the land we would not have a single acre of mangrove forests surviving in Mumbai. This in spite of the fact that there is a law of the land - a notification called Coastal Regulation Zone (1991) - which after a good amount of thought, thought it fit to protect the mangroves. All laws and government departments mean nothing unless somebody in the society chooses to exercise the apparatus. A favourite saying goes like this: 'the government is like an axe, if you let it hang on the wall it rusts, if you use it regularly it stays sharp'. Activism most of the time is what happens when millions of citizens do not use the government leading it to become rusty. A few people then have to struggle hard to make the axe work.

Fight for mangroves

A few of us including me in the late 90's and the early 00's worked steadily to counter the designs of the real estate

interests and those within the government willing to support them. We came out in the streets in the neighbourhoods of Versova and Lokhandwala, distributed pamphlets to morning walkers who were enjoying the solace and clean air next to the mangroves, met government officials, moved the courts and did everything to save around a 1000 acres of mangrove



Strong protests and PILs by activists have saved some of our mangroves

forests in the immediate vicinity. In the process we received very good support from the media as well which had a very good leveraging effect. Saving these forests ensured that these areas were spared of the effects of the disastrous floods of 2005 since the mangroves accommodated all the excess water in the system.

Society has a lot to thank activism for. The freedom struggle and

the resultant freedom from colonial rule was a result of the activism of hundreds of thousands of people. Activism has led to cleaner air in Delhi at one point of time though the long term results are certainly not something to be happy about. We have activists fighting for years to save the Ganga and many other rivers in the country, who keep hope alive. Activists help expose corruption and other wrong doing in a number of government departments meant to work for public welfare. All activism spurs from a certain hunger for moving beyond carnal humdrum existence and alleviate oneself to live life on a higher plane - to endeavour "to fill the unforgiving minute with 60 seconds of distance run."

Elements of activism

What can be the essential elements of activism? Activism begins with having a strong opinion or position on an issue and progressively moving on to impact it. People can then write letters, speak to the press to highlight the issue or convey their position along with it, stand with banners or posters, go viral online, heckle politicians or relevant stakeholders, become part of working groups that are meant to look into solutions. Consensus building can be a big part of the activity.

Almost all of environmental activism has its origins in the industrial era and it is synonymous with this 'new' way of living we have taken to. It first originated in the now completely industrialised nations where people realised that this new form of resource hungry lifestyle came at a high cost to the natural environment. Being blessed with abundant choices in consumer goods did not mean that people did not value a city with clean air, or rivers which they could swim in or a hike in the countryside without encountering heaps of garbage. Almost all of these effects - highly polluted air, rivers and mountains of waste were a creation of industrial processes which supplied goods to the millions. Importantly it has to be remembered that activism in this regard is not about enjoying a pollution free view or a swim or a hike; the high pollution was leading to serious health implications and even mortality in the industrialised countries towards the middle of the last century.

The polluted Thames in London, the London smog of 1954, the sorry state of the Rhine and the Danube in mainland Europe sparked agitation and action. In 1970 a group of environment and peace activists kicked off the Earth Day celebration in America, which was celebrated by millions across the country. The subsequent build up of public opinion led to the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts in the United States.

Fighting a lonely battle

In India we have some very good examples of activism through the past few decades, but unfortunately advocacy groups here do not receive the strong resource support here as they do in the western world. Most activists fight a lonely battle receiving little volunteering support and far lesser monetary support which can help in hiring further resources. The result is that in India we are almost forever in a fire

fighting mode on most issues. Individual activists will keep making noises and that may or may not get covered in media, thousands will read it and sympathise and do nothing to support the efforts and the world goes on while the issue remains the same or deteriorates. I have always believed that the strength of the western world is in its activism and the kind of dynamism they show in allowing dissent and accepting change. The superlative cleanliness and services that Indians enjoy in Europe and US is the result of a number of individual activists and advocacy groups having worked hard at some point to clean up the state of affairs.

Activism need not be about engaging in some great act of bravado. It can be as simple as choosing to be aware of issues which affect you directly. Activism could be having a broken sewer in your street fixed or saving the big mammals or the rain forests or fixing the transport systems of your city.

I am forever surprised of the little amount of interest that people have in the governance systems that deliver all the small and big services in our daily lives. Sometime back I was on season two of Satyamev Jayate in the third episode covering solid waste management in India, and it was this same amazement I was left with when a number of people who saw the episode remarked how little they knew of the malpractices that govern solid waste management in our cities. No rocket science in understanding what is going on, just that nobody takes any interest. I think everybody who considers himself to be a citizen of any country needs to take some time out in their life to engage in understanding the systems that contribute to day to day conveniences and services.

Activism is not something you need to do in perpetuity - once an activist, always an activist. Everybody should commit to at least one instance of activism in their life. I really think that it is unfair that a few people should go to such extraordinary lengths to impact issues which affect all and that millions should be completely missing in action. An easier way of being an activist can be to support another activist or advocacy group. ■



The writer is an environmental activist based in Mumbai and has been closely engaged with a number of issues of Mumbai for the past 15 years. He is also a Research Fellow at Observer Research Foundation, Mumbai.

Did you know?

Numbers from one to nine, zero and the decimal system were first invented by ancient Vedic-Hindus. The binary digits of 0 and 1 are so vital for present day world, IT and even Internet. Algebraic equations, permutations and combinations, Pythagorean Theorem were known to them several thousand years before it was known to the modern world.

Growth of judicial activism

Stating that judicial activism must not be confused with judicial overreach and adventurism Kamayani Bali Mahabal says, the apex court cannot usurp the powers of legislature, but only balance the deficiencies in law by giving it a new interpretation.

JUDICIAL activism is that legal process by which relief is provided to the disadvantaged and aggrieved party. Thus where there is a gap in the legislation or the law is silent on a specific point and prompt redress is needed, the judiciary exercises its inherent powers by virtue of being a custodian and watchdog of the Constitution.

Categories of judicial activism

Broadly speaking, judicial activism falls into two categories. The first consists of evolving new principles, new concepts, new maxims, new formulate, new relief going beyond and sometimes even alien to the hitherto known and evolved jurisprudence and substantive and procedural law.

The second extends to laying down priorities, policies and programmes and giving directions to execute them when they are not obligatory, and are entirely in the direction of the executive and the legislature or other authorities, and thereby usurping their function, power and wisdom; to taking over detailed administration of a policy, scheme or programme even if they are obligatory instead of monitoring their performance; giving directions to execute a plan or a policy in a particular manner when equally good or better alternatives are available; preventing implementation of schemes and projects on grounds unsupported by and unverified with the expert knowledge; interfering with the working of the independent autonomous bodies by meddling with their decisions for no reasons other than their alleged impropriety; foisting the court's choices, directing enactment of laws when they are at best directory; interpreting the Constitution and statutes contrary to their language and original intention, or by going beyond their

accepted and well established and understood meaning, so on and so forth.

Role of the Supreme Court

Judicial activism in India can be witnessed with reference to the review power of the Supreme Court of India under Article 32 (can appeal in the Supreme Court) and under Article 226 (can appeal in the respective High Court) of the Constitution particularly in Public Interest Litigation. The unique model of public interest litigation that has evolved in India not

only looks at issues like consumer protection, gender justice, prevention of environmental pollution and ecological destruction, it is also directed towards finding social and political space for the disadvantaged and other vulnerable groups in society. The courts have given decisions in cases pertaining to different kinds of entitlements and protections such as the availability of food, access to clean air, safe working conditions, political representation, affirmative action, anti-

discrimination measures and the regulation of prison conditions among others.

The Supreme Court has expanded the frontiers of fundamental rights and of natural justice. In the process it has rewritten some parts of the Constitution. The right to life and personal liberty and the procedure established by law has been converted de facto and de jure into a procedural due process clause contrary to the intent of the makers of the Constitution.

This expanding right has encompassed, within itself, the right to bail, the right to a speedy trial, immunity against cruel and unusual punishment, the right to dignified treatment in custodial institutions, the right to legal aid in criminal



proceedings and above all the right to live with basic human dignity. The Supreme Court has developed a new normative regime of rights and insisted that a state cannot act arbitrarily but must act reasonably and in public interest on pain of its action being invalidated by judicial intervention. The Supreme Court has evolved a strategy of public interest litigation and made it possible for the problems of the disadvantaged to be brought before the courts.

Landmark judgments by SC

The guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court with respect to procedure of arrests in the celebrated case of D K Basu Vs State of West Bengal saw passing of The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, in 2008 which amended Sec 41 Cr.Pc. The amended section has, now, put fetters on the power of police to arrest the accused persons involved in offences punishable with imprisonment up to seven years. Similarly, the guidelines laid down by the apex court in Vishakha case with respect to sexual harassment of women at workplace was incorporated into The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. The Vineet Narain Case which exposed the Jain Hawala Scandal and failure of CBI to get high profile people accused in the case prosecuted, the Supreme Court made directions that included supervision of the CBI by the Central Vigilance Commission.

Thus, the directions issued by the Supreme Court, fill the vacuum until the legislature enacts substantive law. The law creating power of judges should not be narrowly interpreted. The apex court has become a symbol of hope for the people who do not understand the technicalities of law and yearn only for justice. It is essential for the court to exercise the power of judicial creativity in order to save our democracy from being subverted. However, judicial activism must not be confused with judicial overreach and adventurism, the apex court cannot usurp the powers of legislature and it can only balance the deficiencies in law by giving it a new interpretation.

Face of activism in India

The progressive judicial activism is the result of complex interaction effects: textual precedent, creative judicial agency, constitutional design, radical social upsurges, strategic concessions by the executive, and the fragmentation of power

in the wider political arena. The move by India's Supreme Court over the last three decades to make various socio-economic entitlements in the Constitution justiciable through its substantive reinterpretations and the innovation of public interest litigation has been enormously valuable. This move has highlighted the severe human deprivations that still afflict millions of citizens in the world's largest democracy, and seeks to protect many of them in individual judicial cases.

Significantly, the apex judiciary has also challenged the declining norms of the political class and the failure of the state to discharge many of its basic governance functions, especially since the early 1990s. By highlighting the nexus between socio-economic rights violations and poor governance, the higher judiciary in India has emerged as the defender of a normative and homogenous civil society of equal citizens, allaying the fear that non-elected public institutions would increasingly become the abode of privileged social classes in the wake of increasing electoral participation by historically subordinate groups.

Delivering justice is not a mechanical procedure; it is rather a dynamic process. Each case differs from the other. The creation of justice implies and involves every time a fresh application of mind, interaction with the parties and their lawyers, appreciation of the oral and documentary evidence against the particular background of each dispute, of the arguments advanced and the relief sought. The judges are required to be live partners in the process of justice and to respond creatively in each case. Creativity and innovation amongst the judiciary are as necessary as impartiality and independence. The judges are not expected to be mere mechanics and masons. They are required to be designers and architects. So long as their innovations are within the bounds of their jurisdiction and are designed to advance the cause of justice, and do not violate the legal norms, however

unorthodox and unprecedented they may be, the innovations have to be welcome as accreditations to the legal armoury to preserve and promote justice which should be the object of the any legal and judicial system. ■



The writer is an expert in gender, health and human rights issues.

Festive Times

The two-day Hemis Festival commemorates the birth of Guru Padmasambhava, who founded Tantric Buddhism in Tibet. It's held in July every year at the 300-year-old Buddhist monastery of Hemis Jangchub Choling, near Leh. The highlight of the festival is the Masked Dance, performed by the Lamas, that illustrates good prevailing over evil. The performers wear elaborate and bizarre costumes and brightly painted masks and the music is characteristically punctuated with sounds of cymbals, drums, and unwieldy trumpets.

Consumers today are more vocal, thanks to activists

*Networking and lobbying by consumer activists and consumer organisations requires to be strengthened to ensure proper and effective implementation of the Consumer Protection Act, writes **Jehangir B. Gai**.*

EACH and every one of us is definitely a consumer from the time we are born, but perhaps even before that while we are conceived in the womb. So, every person, including a manufacturer, trader or service provider is also a consumer. Then why is it that all over the world consumers are taken for granted till they fight for their rights?

Rise of consumer activism

There are multiple reasons for this: Firstly, the perceptions of an individual differs depending on which side of the fence he is. Secondly, most manufacturers do not want to admit the fact that something could be wrong with their product or service, so the consumer's grievance is not taken seriously. Thirdly, no manufacturer or service provider wants to bear a monetary loss due to a rejected product, so he prefers to lose a customer rather than replace the defective item. In Gandhiji country, we have forgotten his words of wisdom: "A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent upon us. We are dependent upon him. He is not an interruption in our work he is the purpose of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us the opportunity to serve him". Since consumers are scattered, it is difficult for them to unite and put pressure on a company that violates consumer's rights. The end result is that the individual consumer who has a grievance has to fight a lone battle for his rights.

It is in this backdrop that some public spirited consumers felt the need to form consumer organisations and build pressure groups to counter organisations which show scant respect for consumer rights.

Evolution of the consumer movement

John F. Kennedy, former President of the USA, felt that

even though consumers formed the largest economic group, which was affected by almost every public and private economic decision, their views were seldom heard. In a historic address to the US Congress on 15 March, 1962, Kennedy took up the cause of consumers, saying: "If consumers are offered inferior products, if prices are exorbitant, if drugs are unsafe or worthless, if the consumer is unable to choose on an informed basis, then his dollar is wasted, his health and safety may be threatened and the national interest suffers."

A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent upon us. We are dependent upon him. He is not an interruption in our work he is the purpose of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us the opportunity to serve him.

Kennedy's words were an inspiration and a motivation factor that led to the birth of the consumer movement. The first consumer activist in USA was Ralph Nader, a lawyer. He became a legend for questioning the safety of certain car models and was hounded and threatened by the motor industry for his trouble. Almost at the same time, David Tench, also a lawyer, became the public face of consumer rights in Britain. He explained how consumers could stand up to big companies, retailers and marketing agencies over shoddy products. Not just that, he also showed how consumers could fight back against lawyers over the drawing up of wills or house sale deals, which were then lucrative propositions for the legal profession. Soon consumer rights movements were established around the world. In 1960, a world federation of consumer groups was founded. Today it is known as Consumers International. It is based in the United

Kingdom, and has over 250 member organisations in 120 countries. It is the only independent and authoritative global voice of the consumers. Consumers International defined eight consumer rights: the right to satisfaction of basic needs, the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose, the right to be heard, the right to redress, the right to



Consumer awareness has grown over the years

consumer education, and the right to a healthy environment. After 10 years of struggle and campaigning, these rights were adopted by the United Nations in 1985.

Consumer movement in India

The Passengers and Traffic Relief Association (PATRA) was established in Mumbai in 1915, much prior to the western world becoming alive to consumer rights and protection. It was not a general consumer association, and its activities were restricted only to commuters, but it is the first documented and registered consumer organisation in the world. It was very vocal till about a decade ago, when it became defunct.

In 1966, India got its first general consumer organisation, the Consumer Guidance Society of India, which was formed by a group of nine housewives. Later, other consumer organisations were established in various parts of the country. Unfortunately, their networking in India is not as effective as it should be.

Enactment of the act and grievance redressal agencies

India is a signatory to the UN guideline on consumer protection. Rajiv Gandhi, who was then Prime Minister of India, took special interest in the consumer movement. After the United Nations Resolution of 1985, India became the first country to establish the Consumer Protection Act in 1986.

The objective of the Consumer Protection Act was to provide speedy and simple redressal to consumer disputes by setting up a quasijudicial machinery for redressal of consumer grievances and grant suitable directions and award compensation. To make justice more accessible, the Act does not provide any format for the filing of a complaint; the consumer fora are not bound by technicalities and are merely required to follow the principles of natural justice. To make redressal of grievances more effective, the Act mandates the establishment of a District Consumer Forum in each district. The redressal tribunals have a lawyer or judge as the President and nonjudicial members. The objective is to develop a model of adjudication that combines the merits of lay decision making with legal competence. This would ensure fairness in decision making without complicated procedures, so that consumers would be able to fight for their own rights.

Today, the functioning of the consumer fora leaves much to be desired. Many of the presiding officers who are retired judges want the same aura, grandeur and procedures they were familiar with in regular courts.

Effectiveness of the consumer fora

Today, the functioning of the consumer fora leaves much to be desired. Many of the presiding officers who are retired judges want the same aura, grandeur and procedures they were familiar with in regular courts. Since the Act does not provide any specific format, each presiding officer comes up with his own format for filing of complaints. This is counterproductive as the consumer finds it difficult to appear in person, which is necessary for consumer empowerment. The positive side, however, is that the consumer fora makes it possible for consumers to take on the might of builders and giant multinationals. But networking and lobbying by consumer activists and consumer organisations requires to be strengthened to ensure proper and effective implementation of the Consumer Protection Act. Then the

consumer will truly become the king, not in name but in letter and spirit of the word, if he is empowered and can get proper and speedy justice in a time bound period. ■



The writer is a consumer activist and has won the Government of India's National Youth Award for Consumer Protection.

Respecting the rights of one and all

*Human rights, more than anything else in a society is a reflection of the value its people give to its preservation, says **Teesta Setalvad**.*

BASIC human rights have been guaranteed to Indians through the Fundamental Rights enshrined in our Constitution. The Right to Life, the Right Against Discrimination, the Right to Free Expression with reasonable restrictions (especially hate speech that can generate violence), the Right to Free Association and the Right to Freedom of Faith including the Right to freely propagate and even change one's faith.

Justiciable rights

These are individual political rights and are justiciable (that is can be enforced if there is a violation) only against the State. Since many of these rights are violated by non-state actors, since the 1980s, special protection laws have had to be enforced to ensure the preservation of these rights. Particularly the anti-dowry legislation, the law against Sati (the barbaric practice of burning widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands), the Prevention of Atrocities against Dalits and Adivasis (1989) were passed after large sections of our society, weaker and discriminated against needed this protection. The failure to bring in and include special provisions in the Indian Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure to recognise that these systemic inequities exist, led to the non-application of sections of these laws by the police (investigating agency) and the prosecution since gender driven, caste and communal biases exist within these sections also.

Amendments in the law

The national outrage last year against the gruesome rape in Delhi led to key amendments in the criminal law to protect girls and women against gendered violence. Key amendments to the 1989 Atrocities Act have already been passed by the Parliament but have gone largely unnoticed. The move to enact a special law for the protection of religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities (the Prevention of Communal Violence-Justice and Reparations Bill 2014) has been bogged down by a vitriolic opposition that has thrived on religious division.

Apart from basic individual political rights, civil and economic rights are guaranteed under the Directive Principles of State Policy contained in Articles 36-51 of the Indian Constitution. Article 38[(1)] reads, "The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life." Article 39[(2)] specifies that, "The State shall, in particular, strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.]"

The failure to bring in and include special provisions in the Indian Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure to recognise that these systemic inequities exist, led to the non-application of sections of these laws by the police (investigating agency) and the prosecution.

New laws and new rights

However laudable the objectives, the fact that these rights are not justiciable, that is not enforceable through the courts has led to a spate of legislation in the recent past. The Right to Information law of 2005 has revolutionised transparency in government functioning by entrusting the ordinary Indian with the right to know how critical decisions are taken. Through our organisation, KHOJ we have managed to start three schools in Marathi and Urdu medium started in a poorly developed town Mumbra in Thane district. Though the Thane Municipal Corporation had sanctioned the opening of the schools, the decision was not enforced until parents and activists got together making it happen.

The Right to Education Act 2009 is one more such effort to ensure that every Indian child receives free, good quality education from ages 6 to 14. Unfortunately this right should have been available to children from their birth because it is well known that like in the inter-dependancy of the food chain, unless children have good pre-school education, fair and free access at age six is meaningless. A common school system with a good neighbourhood school, where the middle classes and poor sit together in the classroom is the only way all will have a



stake in quality. But today many of our schools are reluctant to even allow admission to 25 percent poor students.

Empowering the Commissions

Since the 1990s other institutions like the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the National Commission for Women (NCW), the National Minorities Commission (NCM) and the National Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission have been set up as statutory bodies to monitor the quality of human rights in the country. We still need to work together to make these institutions vibrant and accountable, ensure

Lending voice to the mute

(Continued from page 14)

Snake charmers throng the streets of the state, with cobras and other snakes in cane baskets, asking for money. Devotees offer milk to the snakes, and gather around to see the snake dance — a ritual where snakes spread their hood and sway to the tune of a *pungi*, a wind instrument. Most people are under the impression that the snakes are being charmed by the music, which is not true. Snakes sit up as a defensive reaction to the torture they are put through. People believe that feeding milk to snakes brings good fortune to the devotee; however snakes suffer terribly and usually meet with an early and a terrible death because of this practice.

Once the snakes are captured from their homes in the forests, they are kept in tiny boxes or suffocating bags. The snake's teeth are yanked out violently; their venom ducts pierced with a hot needle and some snake's mouths are painfully sewn shut. Snakes normally never drink milk, but the handlers starve them, denying them of any food or water. Thus when milk is offered to the snake, they consume it thirstily, which later causes the snake severe dehydration,

that dynamic persons man them, ensure that they are receptive to complaints and do not get paralysed by over burden. State Commissions need to mirror the national authorities to ensure the quality enforcement of human rights.

Eventually the state of human rights in any society is a reflection of the value its people give to their preservation. How are Indian families on the question of rights of their children? Do we treat girls and boys the same way? How do families deal with life choices and the freedom to deviate from beaten paths? What about our schools and the curriculum?

Fashionable as it is to blame the government and politicians for all the ills that abound, the case of the Delhi and Bombay rapes, as also the unfortunate Supreme Court recent decision on Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code reflect that the malaise is everywhere, a prejudicial and closed mindset prone to violence abounds. To correct this and make a vibrant culture that respects and celebrates the rights of one and all is today the real challenge for young India. A challenge that in the days and years ahead, all Indians will face. ■



The writer is a human rights activist, journalist and educationist.

allergic reactions, and often dysentery. Sometimes, snakes used in these rituals go blind. The reason: the toxic *tikkas* that are applied to the snake's hood during the worship ritual which trickle into their eyes, making them lose their eye sight. Other snakes fare no better. Pythons have their mouths stitched together so they cannot bite those provoking them.

Snakes are captured from their natural homes for other purposes as well. Their skins are made into leather purses or belts, while some snakes are sold live to hospitals and colleges for dissection. Others spend miserable lives cramped in a dark box and taken out only for venom milking.

But thanks to the presence of animal activists and awareness amongst urban dwellers, the incidence of snake charmers in cities has dwindled to almost nil. They can still be found in the rural areas though.

Elephants in cities have been banned as a result of activism and so have monkey and bear *madaris*.



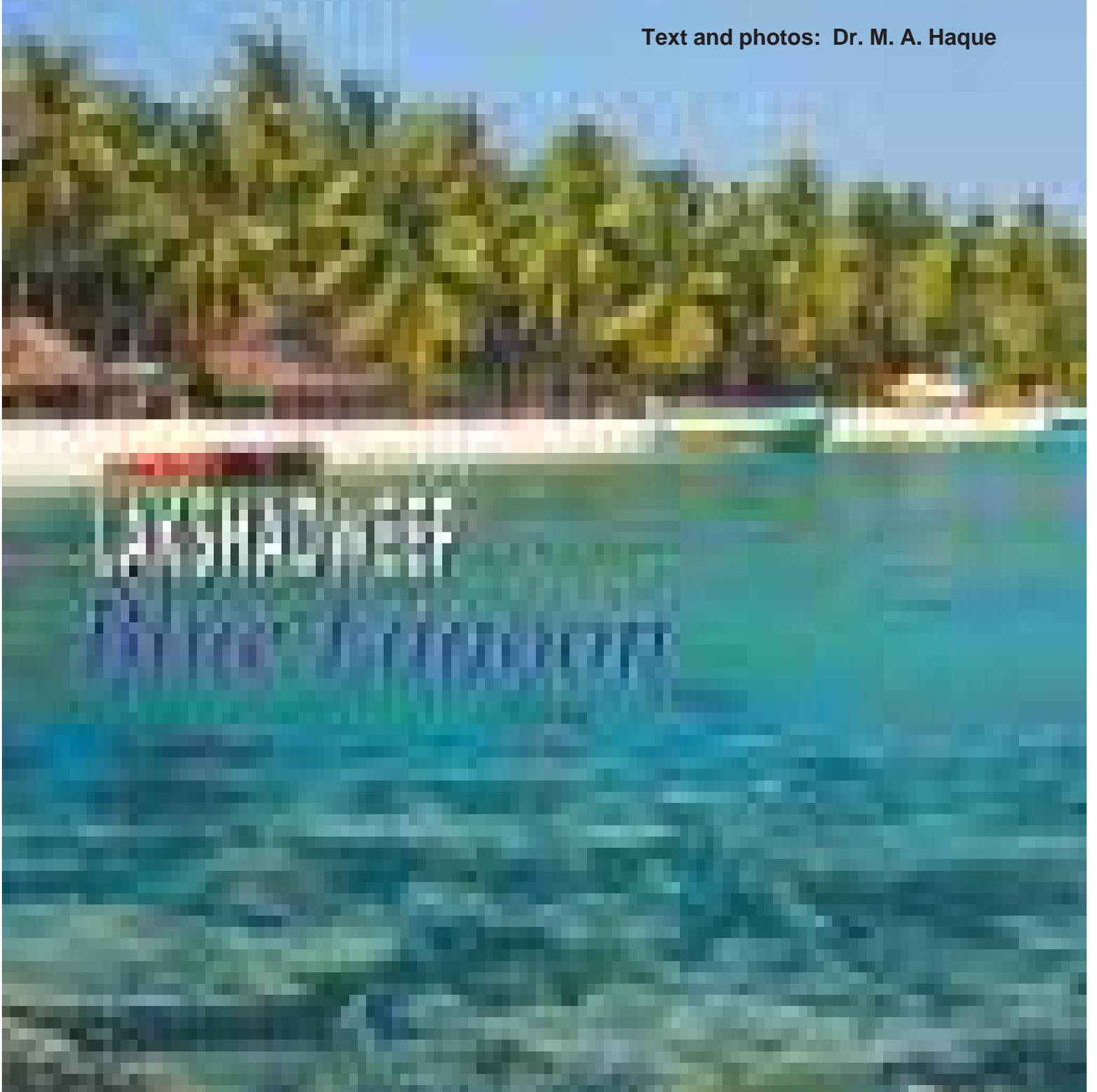
What still needs to be checked is the incidence of unregulated and cruel animal slaughter in abattoirs and on the streets. ■

The writer was heading the PETA India office for nine years and has been an active campaigner for animal rights and environmental issues. She now has a vegan food catering service in Pune called *Back to the Basics*.

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Untouched by human activities, the beauty and serenity of this coral paradise comprising 36 tropical islands cannot be captured by any camera. Hidden under the blue-green waters is unimaginable marine wealth, and the islands abound in rare species of birds and animals, making it a must visit destination.

Text and photos: Dr. M. A. Haque





An aerial view of Lakshadweep islands

LAKSHADWEEP is a Union Territory and the smallest, comprising of only one district. The distinct feature of this union territory is that it comprises 36 islands situated in the Arabian Sea in an area of 32sq.km. The islands are located at distances ranging from 220 to 440 km from Kochi, off the Kerala Coast. In all only ten islands are inhabited while the rest are barren.

A hundred thousand islands

Lakshadweep in Sanskrit and Malayalam means, "A hundred thousand islands". The name was probably given to indicate the large number of islands in the group as people in the early days could not count all of them. Although the total area of the union territory is very small, its lagoon area extends to about 4,200 sq.kms. The territorial waters spread to about 20,000 sq.kms, while the economic zone is spread to about 4,00,000 sq.kms. As such Lakshadweep forms a large territory in strategic terms. It also has 17 uninhabited islands, of which four are newly formed islets and five are submerged reefs. The inhabited islands are Kavaratti, Agatti, Amini, Kadmat, Kiltan, Chetlat, Bitra, Andrott, Kalpeni and Minicoy. Bitra is the smallest of all having a population of only 271 persons as per the national census of 2011. The island of Bangaram has so far been considered uninhabited. However, during 2011 census it has been considered to be populated with 61 people.

The Climate

Lakshadweep has tropical climate with the average temperature ranging from 27° C to 32° C. The hottest months are April and May when the average temperature rises to about 32° C. The climate though generally warm and humid is pleasant. During the months of June to October the south west monsoon is active in the area, which receives an average rainfall of about 10-40 mm during the entire monsoon. During monsoon, the sea is rough and the climate is generally not conducive for ship tourism, which is suspended during the months. Otherwise, people move from one island to another by ships and ferries. Diesel-based large power boats are used for travelling between islands and for carrying goods.

Wind remains light to moderate during the months of October to March. That is the period which is ideal for a visit to the islands as temperature remains moderate and light wind makes the environment pleasant. For last many years, Lakshadweep is connected with the mainland through air-service which operates from Kochi to Agatti. From Agatti to Kavaratti, which is the capital of Lakshadweep there is a regular helicopter service which facilitates quicker travel between the islands. Facilities for landing of helicopters are there on other islands too and depending on requirement the service is utilised.



A spectacular view of the island surrounded by the Arabian Sea

Sir Charles Darwin Theory

Geologically, the islands in Lakshadweep are coral atolls. There have been controversies about the formation of these coral atolls. From time to time different theories have been forwarded about the islands. However, the theory proposed by Sir Charles Darwin is considered the most accepted one. He postulated in 1842 that the process started with volcanic islands. Subsidence of volcanic islands resulted in the formation of fringing reefs and, continued subsidence resulted in upwards growth of the fringing reefs. Once the volcanic islands were completely submerged the atolls were formed encircling the lagoons. The coral atolls are ring-shaped coral reefs surrounding submerged tropical islands. Subsequently, due to the impact of waves, currents, wind, temperature fluctuation etc., on the reefs, the coral islands were formed. We need to understand that coral reefs are huge colonies of tiny animals that need sunlight to grow. These animals are associated with algae, which are plants with chlorophyll. They need sunlight to perform photosynthesis and the plants in turn provide food to the animals while they provide protection to the plants. Darwin's theory is

Once the volcanic islands were completely submerged, the coral atolls were formed encircling the lagoons. The coral atolls are ring-shaped coral reefs surrounding submerged tropical islands.

based on the fact that coral atolls grow as reefs in upward direction in search of sunlight. At the same time the ocean islands slowly sink below the sea surface. The main factors behind sinking are the cooling ocean crusts and the huge mass of the islands.

Since 1842 when Darwin proposed the theory, conclusive evidences were lacking to prove or disprove his theory. In fact some scientists gave the hypothesis that the atolls were only a thin layer of corals. Their idea was that there was nothing very deep as proposed by Darwin. However deep drilling was performed in 1953 in certain reefs, but not in Lakshadweep. The drilling confirmed the theory proposed by Darwin as it revealed the presence of volcanic rock about 1,400 metres below the presently existing reef top. Taking these findings into account, it is now accepted that atolls are reefs in the shape of ribbons with broad configuration of a closed shape which may not

always be circular. The atolls may spread to several kilometers. Atolls enclose lagoons which may be about 50 metres or more deep. Thus, scientifically, the atolls represent the final stage of continuous growth of reef around a sinking extinct



Lakshadweep is a coral paradise

volcanic island in upward direction. The volcanic island had long disappeared from view. Occasionally, these islands are inhabited by people like in the case of Lakshadweep, Maldives, Polynesia, Micronesia etc.



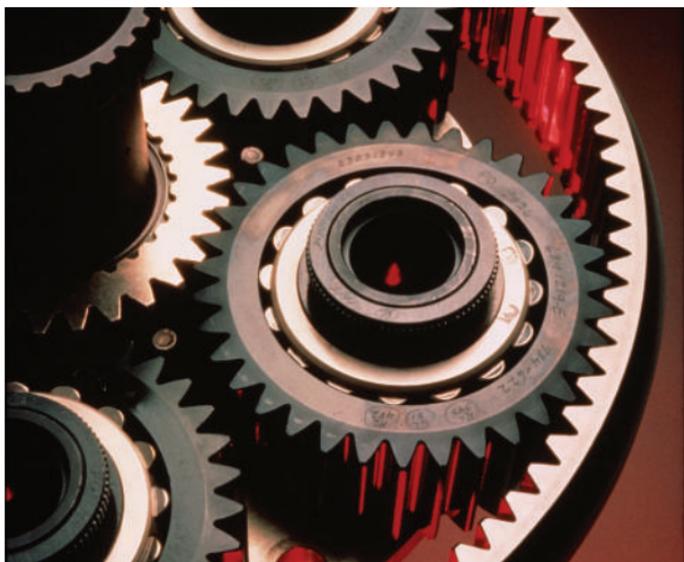
A variety of coral



Corals can be clearly seen in the sparkling waters

Influence of Islam

The early history of Lakshadweep is not properly documented; what is now considered as history of the islands are only legends. People believe that the first human settlement on the islands came up during the time of Cheraman Perumal, who was the last King of Kerala. It is believed that the King embraced Islam after coming in contact with some Arab merchants. Subsequently, he decided to travel to the holy city of Mecca for pilgrimage. He went out of the then capital, Cranganore (presently called Kodungallor) during the night and took to sea with the aim of reaching Saudi Arabia. On receiving the news of his disappearance, search parties were sent into the sea. One of the boats of the King of Cannanore was struck by a fierce storm and the boat was destroyed. Somehow the survivors could reach the island which is now called Bangaram. From Bangaram, the King's men travelled to the nearby island of Agatti. When the weather became favourable, they travelled to the mainland. On their way back they could see other islands of the group. It is believed that after the return of the first party, another group of sailors and soldiers went in the same



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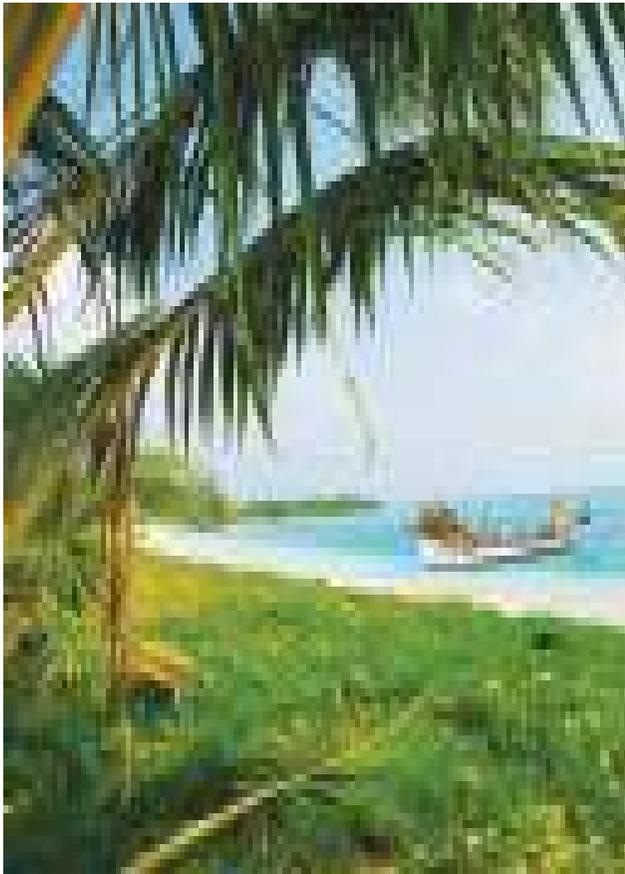
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A boat anchored close to the island

direction and discovered the island of Amini. They started living there. Legends say that small settlements established in the islands of Andrott, Amini, Kalpeni and Kavaratti. In due course of time, people from these islands moved and settled in other islands e.g. Agatti, Chetlat, Kadmat and Kiltan. Thus habitation started on the islands and became a permanent feature.

Islam reached Lakshadweep islands in the 7th century AD. It is believed that a person with the name Ubaidullah was in Mecca in the holy mosque. He fell asleep there and dreamt that Prophet Muhammad desired that he should travel to Jeddah, the port city and from there he had to travel to other places to spread the message of Islam. He followed the instruction and left Jeddah by sea route. His ship got wrecked in the journey but he miraculously survived and with the help of a plank he reached Amini island. There he started preaching the message of Islam. The headman of the island did not like that and ordered his exit from the island. But Ubaidullah did not oblige. In the meantime a young woman fell in love with Ubaidullah, who married her and gave her the

Sparkling coral reefs under the pellucid waters are home to a variety of life forms. The warm, shallow waters of the lagoons provide good opportunities to view the fishes and other types of flora and fauna.

name of Hameedat Beebi. The new development further infuriated the headman and he wanted to kill the couple. The headman with his supporters surrounded Ubaidullah and his wife to kill them. Ubaidullah called the almighty for help. Miraculously, the members of the group intending to kill him and his wife turned blind. That gave an opportunity to Ubaidullah and his wife to leave the island safely. When they left the island the headman and his companions regained their sight. Ubaidullah reached Andrott island, where he was met with similar opposition, but he finally succeeded in attracting people to Islam. Subsequently, he travelled to other islands and successfully propagated Islam. In the end, he returned to Andrott where he died and was buried there. The grave of Saint Ubaidullah exists on the island and is considered a sacred place. That is why preachers from Andrott travel to other places and they are highly respected in Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, etc.

It is interesting to note that even after almost the entire population of the islands embraced Islam, the Hindu ruler of Chirakkal was having his sovereignty over. Later the islands went in control of the Muslim ruler of Arakkal. That development took place in the middle of the 16th century. But the Arakkal rulers were oppressive making it difficult for the people to accept them. In 1783, few people belonging to the Amini island went to meet Tipu Sultan at Mangalore. They requested him to take over the administration of the Amini group of islands. Tipu Sultan had good relations with Beebi (lady ruler) of Arakkal. However, after deliberations and insistence of the people of those islands, the administration of Amini group of five islands was given to him. The remaining ones remained under Arakkal's rule. In 1799, the Battle of

Seringapatam took place and Tipu Sultan was defeated. The islands which were under his rule were annexed by the East India Company, and Mangalore was made the administrative headquarters. In the year 1847, Andrott island was hit by a severe cyclone. The ruler of Chirakkal planned to visit the island to personally assess the damages there and to distribute relief. Sir William Robinson, an officer of the East India Company joined with the ruler for the visit. In Andrott, the ruler found it very difficult to fulfill the demands of the people living on the island. Sir Robinson offered the ruler a loan to finance the relief work. That was accepted and the arrangement continued for about four years. But with time the interest became huge. Then the English asked the ruler of Chirakkal to repay the loan with interest. The ruler could not oblige.



Thatched houses on the island, which is peaceful and serene as it is cut off from human activities

The British rule

As a consequence in 1854, the remaining islands were given to the East India Company for administration. That was how the entire Lakshadweep group of islands came under the British rule. The annexation of the Lakshadweep islands was an example of the political manipulations and methods adopted by the English to extend their control over the Indian territory. The English always considered their political and economic interests above the concept of good governance. Their main interest was in exploiting the islands, their people and the natural resources available there without bothering about the welfare of the people. With the same objective, the British notified the Lakshadweep Regulation in 1912, which conferred limited judicial and magisterial powers to the local Amins/Karanis. Restrictions for outsiders were also promulgated through the same regulation. During the entire British rule only few primary schools and few dispensaries were started for the local population. British rule continued till India became independent. The Government of India declared the islands a Union

People believe that the first human settlement on the islands came up during the time of Cheraman Perumal, who was the last King of Kerala. It is believed that the King embraced Islam after coming in contact with some Arab merchants.

Territory in 1956. The name Lakshadweep was given to the Union Territory in 1973.

The islands also experienced the atrocities of the Portuguese. As we know, certain territories of the mainland India were occupied by the Portuguese. Hence, they regularly travelled between the territories they controlled and Portugal. On the way they used to halt at the Lakshadweep islands. During their halts they used to exploit the locals by way of forcibly taking their finely spun coir which was a much sought after item in shipping industry. Also, they used to loot vessels travelling in the vicinity of the islands. The local people were fed up due to that behavior of the Portuguese. In the early 16th century once a group of Portuguese mariners landed at Amini island. They wanted to forcibly take coir from there, but the locals had already planned something. They invited the Portuguese to have food before leaving. The invaders obliged willingly. The locals had mixed poison in the food served to the invaders and all of them died. After that incident, the Portuguese never invaded the islands.



Agatti Museum from outside

Traditions and rituals

The 2011 census indicated that the population of the entire group of islands was 64,429. But the Union Territory sends one Member of Parliament to Delhi and elections are held in a similar way as in other constituencies. More than 90 percent of the population follows Islam. In all the islands except Minicoy, Malayalam is used as the common language. In Minicoy the language used is Mahl. Incidentally, that is the language spoken in Maldives as well. Total indigenous



Different types of utensils displayed in the museum

population of the Lakshadweep islands is classified as Scheduled Tribes. If a person is born in Lakshadweep and both parents of the person were born there, the person is categorised under Scheduled Tribes. Interestingly, Lakshadweep islands do not have any scheduled castes as in Islam there is no caste system.

Another interesting feature is that in these islands women inherit the properties of the parents. In Minicoy, the husband even adopts the name of his wife's family. In Agatti and Kavaratti, the inherited property is distributed among all the members of the joint family. After marriage women look after the entire household affairs. The husband has to pay a fixed amount to the wife for maintenance every year. If he does not do so, the wife can ask for divorce and she can even get it. After divorce the woman can easily remarry. On certain islands for all social work women have to come forward. They organise the people for performing specific jobs. Thus women have a different status on the islands.

Sources of income

Main sources of income for the island people are coconut cultivation, coir twisting and fishing. However, people of the islands are generally poor, although good quality coconuts are



Tourists enjoying on the white sandy beach

produced there. But on account of inadequate transport infrastructure they are unable to take them to the mainland markets. They have to depend on middlemen who make huge profits at their cost. Same is the case with fishing. Fish caught there have markets mainly in the mainland or are exported. The same transport facility becomes an impediment and the island people do not get remunerative price. Recently, the Government of India and the Union Territory administration have started processing, preservation and packaging facilities

for the fishes in the islands. That is expected to boost the income of the local people who are engaged in fishing.

In recent years, tourism is expanding on the islands. Tourists from inside the country and outside are interested in visiting the islands. However, considering the fragile nature of the environment there are strict restrictions on the number of visitors to the islands. Every visitor has to obtain special permit to enter the islands. Air service between the mainland and Agatti is helping in making tourism industry more attractive. Otherwise



Fishermen transporting the catch to the shore



Fish being dried on clothes line by locals



Coconut sap being collected for making chemical free jaggery

people had to travel by sea route only, which meant spending several hours at sea to reach the islands from the mainland. However, even now many tourists prefer to take the sea journey to enjoy the spectacular beauty of the islands. For them, tour packages by ships are available. In 1962, a ship with the name MV Sea Fox was introduced. Later three more ships were pressed into service. They carry tourists as well as regular passengers. The Lakshadweep Samudram is a five-day tour package. The package takes the tourists by the ship named MV Kavaratti to the islands of Kavaratti, Kalpeni and Minicoy. The package includes lunch, refreshments and entertainment on the islands. Folk dance is organised for the tourists, who can also indulge in recreational activities like swimming, snorkeling and other water sports during the day. The visitors are taken on sightseeing of the islands. The Marine Museum, Tuna Factory, village walks are popular with the tourists. Nights are spent on the ship. There are cruise packages from Mumbai too which take tourists to Lakshadweep and back in fixed numbers of days.

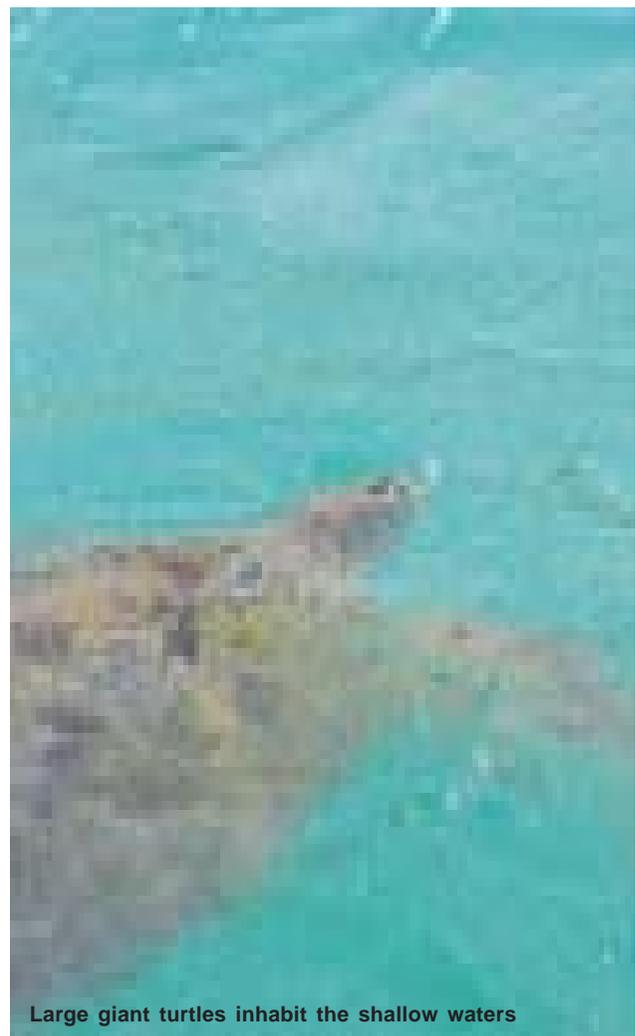
A dedicated organisation has been formed to encourage and facilitate development of tourism. The organisation works in close association with the local administration. Also, a well

equipped water sport institute has been established at Kadmat island. The facility provides opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, parasailing, scuba diving, water skiing, wind surfing, yachting etc. The tourist facilities at Bangaram are quite popular among foreign tourists. The resort provides high quality stay, food, recreation and also water sport facilities. There are tourist huts at different islands which provide affordable services to the tourists, including food.

Occupation

As the islands have tropical climate, coconut trees are found in abundance. Some are quite tall while others are of dwarf variety. A variety of fruits grow on the islands. Laccadive micro, Laccadive ordinary, green dwarf are well known varieties. Marine life is equally rich. Different types of fishes are found there. They are consumed locally and also taken to the mainland for export. Sun drying of fishes is also practiced on the islands by hanging them on cloth lines or on the ground.

The islands here have turquoise hued warm, clear water,



Large giant turtles inhabit the shallow waters



A bird strolling on an isolated beach

white sand beaches and palm trees growing in abundance. Sparkling coral reefs under the pellucid waters are home to a variety of life forms. The warm, shallow waters of the lagoons provide good opportunities to view the fishes and other types of flora and fauna. One can see the rich underwater marine life in glass-bottomed boats, specially organised for tourists. Going in the sea in those boats is a unique experience as the underwater marine life is clearly visible. Corals, fishes, other animals, plants etc., can be easily seen.



Sun setting over the lagoon

The islands and its vicinity are inhabited by large number of birds. One particular uninhabited island, Pitti has been declared a Bird Sanctuary. Crow is commonly found in Amini and Minicoy islands, but strangely, they are not present in Kavaratti. It is a common sight to spot several species of rare oceanic birds and migratory birds on these islands.

Animal habitat

A very important feature of Lakshadweep is that it has an



A fisherman soaking in the vast blue-green expanse from his boat



A typical house in Lakshadweep

amazingly large number of giant turtles in the shallow waters. Those turtles have a very long life span and scientists say that many of them are centuries old. Although these turtles are huge they do not attack humans. In fact one can swim with them, catch them and even ride on them. They are vegetarian and depend on sea vegetation for their survival.

The money cowrie (scientific name: *Cypraea moneta*) is abundantly found in the shallow waters of the lagoons. During low tide, women and children enjoy collecting the cowries and other species of *Cypraea* genus. Beautiful wall hangings and other decorative items are made with cowries and people from the mainland buy them as souvenirs.

Jaggery making is an important income generation activity for the locals. Coconut tree sap is collected just like the date-



A local dish made of rice, which is the staple diet of the islanders

palm sap which is heated in large containers. After removing water, the contents become thick and brownish. The same is allowed to cool to become jaggery, which is then packed in bottles or plastic pouches and sold. The jaggery is devoid of chemicals and is very tasty. Another important faunal member found in the vicinity of some of the islands is the sea urchin, which is also called as sea hedgehogs. They are small, spiny, globular animals which feed mainly on algae but they themselves are eaten by sea otters. If their population is large, these animals can devastate the habitat by way of consuming the algae which form the basis of the food chain in the aquatic habitats. As a result, fishes and other useful animals cannot survive. That is why the fishermen do not like them. They catch them and bury them in the sand so that they die. The shallow lagoon water around the islands in Lakshadweep are full of a variety of beautiful, colourful fishes such as the coral fish, parrot fish, butterfly fish, surgeon fish etc. These fishes can be viewed from the glass bottom boats or while diving and snorkeling.

Life in Lakshadweep

Life in Lakshadweep is simple and easy. People are honest, god-fearing and very friendly. They are very good swimmers and seafarers. That is why many of them are easily employed by the shipping companies. The cuisine is also rich. Rice and fish are staple diet of the islanders. Chicken is also enjoyed. A variety of dishes are made from rice. Banana is another item which is relished by the local



Coconuts grow in abundance but transporting them to the mainland is difficult

population. However, availability of potable water has been a major problem for the inhabitants of these islands. Wells cannot be dug there as the islands are made of coral materials which are porous. Hence, sea water easily enters to fill any available space, including the wells. People try to collect rainwater as much as possible. Earlier they used to collect them in small ponds. Now many of the houses and other establishments have scientific rainwater harvesting and storage systems. Large tanks are used to store water during the rains and are used almost the year round. On some of the islands, the administration has installed plants for vacuum distillation of sea water into fresh drinking water. Few years back it was discovered that close to the shores there was substantial difference in the temperature of water at different depths. Warm water from sea is evaporated in large containers under low pressure to make water vapour. Cold water obtained from certain particular depths is used in the distillation equipments to cool the vapour. The vapour condenses into water. Obviously, the condensed water is not saline. Thus fresh water is made from saline sea water at low cost. That particular technique is now being expanded to meet the requirements of fresh water on different islands.



Fishing is a major occupation of the islanders

Sea erosion is yet another problem faced by the inhabitants of the island. In 1986 an expert committee was constituted to look at the risks of sea erosion. The committee was of the view that about 9.6 km of sea shore was in need of protection. In the later years, the length has increased on account of new observations and increasing sea erosion. About 36 km has been identified so far requiring protective measures. A large stretch has already been covered and further work is in progress. Large tripods made of cement are commonly used to break the force of the waves which cause erosion. Such tripods can be seen on various islands. At some vulnerable points walls have also been erected.

The unparalleled beauty of Lakshadweep makes it a place worth visiting again and again. Its serene atmosphere, simple lifestyle, indigenous food draws visitors from all over the world to this paradise offering them an out of the world experience. ■



The writer is a Director (retired), Government of India. He regularly writes on subjects related to Environment, Science and Tourism etc. in English, Urdu and Hindi.

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Juriscine – use of cinema to teach law

Suman Kalani, is an assistant professor at Pravin Gandhi College of Law. She is very passionate about teaching and loves to watch plays, write, travel and innovate new methods of teaching.



Suman Kalani

THE canvas of cinema has spread its vibrant colours to various aspects of life. Apart from playing a major role in the entertainment industry, cinema has played an important role in bringing various other socio, political, economic and legal aspects in the forefront by its medium. One such important area has been the law and the courts.

Indian cinema has produced some brilliant films projecting the legal issues and court room drama. *O My God*, a brilliant and bold movie which questioned the commercialisation of religion in India by suing the agents of god while literally interpreting the “force majeure” clause in the insurance contract is one such recent film. The film highlighted important concepts of clauses in contract, and concept of agency if looked into minutely. A very important aspect of a valid contract is whether it is enforceable by law. This aspect was well projected in a very humorous film *Bunty and Babli*,

where the characters in the film have entered into numerous illegal contracts. The film has helped law students in understanding the application of laws pertaining to invalid contractual relations, its consequences and understanding the concept of voidable and void contracts through important sections in the Indian Contract Act.

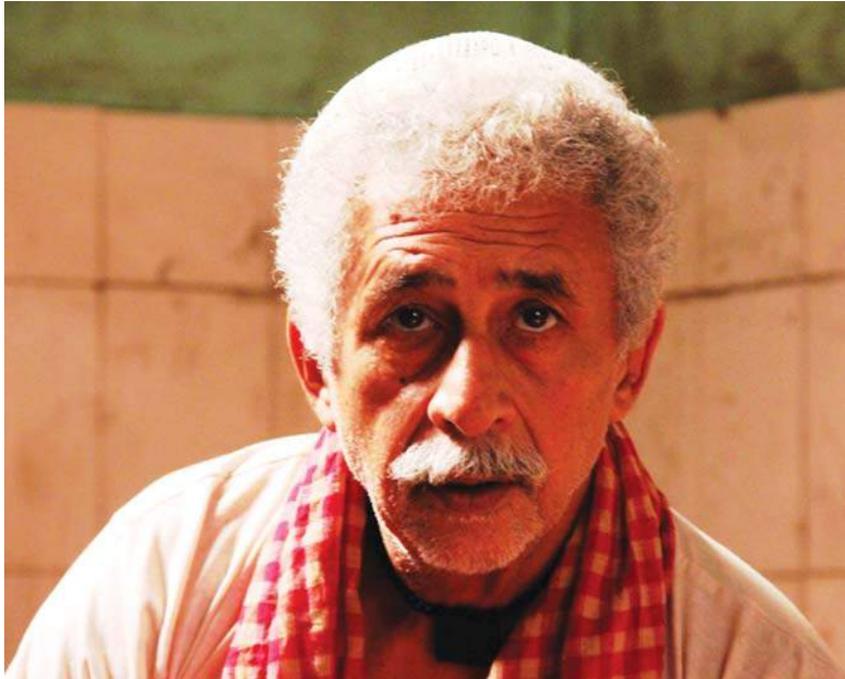
Corporate, again a much appreciated film was a brilliant exposition of a director’s liability concept, rules relating to product manufacturing, brand setting and consequences of unfair practices adopted by the employees of the company. The film also helped to discuss the issue of licensing and permission in any business, thus highlighting that ignorance of law cannot be an excuse. The film also touched on cybercrime. The film *Khosla ka Ghosla* helped to teach the concept of fraudulent transfer in property law. Transfer of Property Act, 1882 one of the technical laws can be made interesting by using this film as a case study. Today a lot is spoken, discussed and debated about the surrogacy contracts, a very important off shoot of the medical tourism industry. The concept of surrogacy, much before its debate and discussion started in India, was excellently put forth in the film *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke*, underlining terms of surrogacy contract, rights of the commissioning parents and rights of the surrogate mother. *Damini*, projected the fight of an ordinary woman to bring justice to a rape victim. It raised important thought provoking questions about the current legal system. Some of the scenes

in the movie *Beta* could be used to highlight the consequence of coercion or undue influence on contract. Apart from this concept, the film was also important to understand certain aspects of criminal law. Muslim Personal Law and rights of a Muslim woman have always been a subject of discussion in the society. An important film projecting Muslim law of marriage and divorce in its story was *Nikah*. Exploitation of women and illegal trafficking of women was featured in one of the boldest films of its time, *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*. Films like *Wednesday* have proved to be nice film in the class of cyber crime where the main character in the film uses computer and mobile to commit heinous crimes.

Films like *Waqt, Mera Saaya* and *Insaaf ka Tarazu* were excellent court room dramas. Such movies have been a great tool to teach crucial subjects like criminal law and criminology. The movies apart from having thrilling story lines, have lawyers arguing cases which are helpful for students to understand the art of examining and cross examining the witnesses. *Kanoon*, a 1963 film on capital punishment, was again a brilliant courtroom drama based on a murder case.

There are many more films that can be cited as examples in legal education. The contribution of cinema in educating our youth, students as well as lay persons about law and its many aspects has been immense. This is an aspect worth mentioning when we are celebrating 100 years of cinema. ■

“Acting is a craft and the actor must be an honest craftsman”



I first met Naseeruddin Shah more than 20 years ago on the sets of Basu Chatterjee's *Tiriyacharitra*, based on a Hindi short story by Shivmurti. It was a National Film Development Corporation of India produced film, which was an extremely hard-hitting statement on the brutally inhuman punishment by branding a young woman for being raped by her own father-in-law in the absence of the husband. Naseeruddin was specially chosen at that

time because *Tiriyacharitra* marked the actor's 100th film over his career. He was a picture of grace and extended the courtesy of asking his chauffeur to drop me at the nearest railway station when informed that I did not have transport. It was a rare courtesy for an actor towards a journalist he had never met. The year was 1994.

Twenty years hence and he must have packed in many more outstanding performances to reach far beyond that first 100. It is no great surprise that the versatile actor with God-Alone-Knows how many awards should have been picked to deliver Satyajit Ray Memorial address recently in Kolkata, the subject of his speech being "The Honest Actor." This writer found Naseeruddin a changed man, more mature not only in years, but also in experience. He has become more cerebral on the one hand and cynical on the other. Let us try to understand 'why'. **Shoma A. Chatterjee** in conversation with **Naseeruddin Shah**.

You have been hand-picked for the Satyajit Memorial Address. But you have never acted in his film. What is your response to this anomaly?

I consider it a great honour to have been chosen to deliver this address. Not

having worked under the directorial baton of the great Ray is one of the biggest regrets of my life. I saw him just twice in person. When I was around 12, I saw his picture in a magazine. Later, when I was in my second year at the National

School of Drama (NSD), he had come to watch Ingmar Bergman's *Silences*. When I saw this enormous figure seated in front of me, I was so mesmerised by his very presence that my attention was more on this great man than on the

screen. The second and last time I saw him was at the International Film Festival of India in Delhi. After Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* was screened in which I portrayed an important character, he came up to me and shook my hand. It is my bad luck that he did not choose me to act in any of his films. That is all the more reason I cherish this day in my life.

You failed to find work when you first came to Bombay in 1968 and you went back more determined to definitely come back and become an actor. It was Shyam Benegal who took you in his fold. What was the experience like?

After my NSD Diploma, I followed this up with the acting course at Film and Television Institute of India. Girish Karnad who taught us recommended me to Shyam Benegal. I was screen-tested for my role in *Nishaant*. The film came and went, and no producer lined up outside my door. I went on acting in one Benegal film after another: *Bhoomika*, *Manthan*, *Godhuli* and *Junoon*. Working with Shyam was a wonderful experience. Since NSD had armed me with considerable stage experience, I was not at all camera-conscious. I loved the easy pace with which Shyam functions. I learnt a lot and after *Manthan*, outside producers began to pour in, even for roles in mainstream films.

You've had your share of mainstream films and middle-of-the-road films. What is your take on these films?

Every young man or woman who wants to become an actor wants to be a part of mainstream cinema, and I would be lying if I said I was any different. You become an actor because you want to be famous. It was not my doing that I got associated with serious cinema. I would've taken whatever came to me. If I had been offered the lousiest role in a lousy commercial film, I would have done that



Naseeruddin Shah in *Tridev*, an out and out commercial film

also because I needed work. But I was very lucky that these films were being made, so I did not need to do lousy commercial films.

How do you look back on some of these commercial films?

I never believed *Tridev* would run for a day. Yet, it prolonged my career by 10 years. I am grateful to Rajiv Rai for having taken me in the film. But it gave me a box office hit I had never experienced over 10 years in the industry. Ten years later it gave me another one, *Mohra*, again by Rajiv Rai. And 10 years later it gave me *The Dirty Picture*. In fact, my dossier has more commercial films than all the art films I did put together. I worked in Mahesh Bhatt's *Sir*, Dharmesh Darshan's *Lootere*, *Karma* with Dilip Kumar and Boney Kapoor's *Rajkumar* in which I did a double role.

But some of them were disastrous. How do you explain your choices?

Earlier, it was entirely based on instinct. I had just to feel like doing a role and that was all. Sometimes I have proved myself wrong. But it was all in the game.

Today, I value the qualitative worth of a total project rather than just my own role in it. Occasionally, I take on roles in films I genuinely feel ought to be made, such as Govind's *Droh Kaal*. I have discovered that every script reveals itself within the first 10 pages. I do not need to read further. If I like it, I read further. When I've read the script, I try to work out whether this is going to be fun or not. I have acted in some films no one has even heard of, much less seen, such as *Zinda Jala Doonga*. But the experience makes it worth the while. Have you heard of a film called *Dil Aakhir Dil Hai*? I bet you haven't. By the time I realised my mistake, it was too late.

How would you expound on the term 'the honest actor'?

An 'honest' actor is a contradiction in terms. When you are playing someone you are not and are never going to be, how can you be honest? An 'honest actor' according to me, is a work in progress, an ongoing struggle for an actor. Honesty in acting by its very nature is false. There just cannot be anything such as a 'dishonest' actor because honesty in an

actor is a 'given' and not a gift or a blessing for the audience or for the director. The world is made up of every kind of actor – the confident actor, the selfish actor, the generous actor, the plodding actor, the clever actor and the diffident actor. Acting is a craft and the actor must be an honest craftsman and it his responsibility to remain honest to his craft which will transfer this honesty to his audience. As an actor having spent around four decades in the trade, I feel it is my responsibility to give back to the next generation a bit of what I have learnt and imbibed from the craft. And if acting is a craft then there is nothing remotely metaphysical about it. I do this through workshops and lec-dems (lecture-demonstrations) I am invited to from time to time.

Has the cut-throat competition today brought down the quality of acting and the honesty in an actor?

There are conditions over which an actor has little or no control. How can one expect a person to be objective when he has to convey someone else's ideas, concepts, ideologies? The audience for example cannot distinguish between real tears and glycerine-induced tears. But sometimes, for some actors, glycerine-induced tears can be more effective than natural tears in another actor. The blame should be squarely placed on people who are making films. The minute the price of an actor began to be determined by his ability to hold the audience captive, the star was born and

acting became secondary to the star. I look at the current quality of actors' output to be abysmal. The audience should begin to demand fresh and new films and then we might begin to talk about an 'honest' approach. The refinement and the restraint we saw in films like *Kagaz Ke Phool* and *Do Bigha Zameen* is lost to time forever. Sometimes, I sincerely feel that some of the acting we see today could be said to be on the verge of being labelled 'grotesque.' But again, the poor quality of acting is a reflection of poor writing and the poor quality of vision around it. Marlon Brando excelled in films based on Tennessee Williams' work. He did not excel in all films so there you are... ■



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With and without Ray

Shoma Chatterji, profiles celebrated photographer **Nemai Ghosh**, as he reminisces his life, his accidental encounter with the camera and his vivid themes of photography.

NEMAI Ghosh is a low-profile person. He was content shadowing his idol, hero, friend, philosopher and guide, Satyajit Ray. He never seeks vantage position in the front row of life. Way back in 1991, a photobiography on Satyajit Ray was published under the title – Satyajit Ray at 70. It documented a collection of black and white photographs of the great master of celluloid taken by his personal photographer for more than 25 years.

Ghosh has in his personal collection, more than one lakh photographs of Satyajit Ray including working stills from his films since *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*, during the shooting of which his association with Ray first began. This by itself is an astounding amount of work put in by a single man by any standards and speaks volumes for his hard work and dedication. Another work of Ghosh that will enter into posterity is his work for Bengali theatre which has recently

come out in the form of a book recording the history of Bengali Group Theatre for the past 25 years through photographs. After Ray passed away, Ghosh ventured to discover new worlds to capture them for posterity through the magic lens of his camera and this resulted in coffee table books of archival value that are still coming out one after another.

Encounter with the camera

Basically from group theatre, Ghosh chanced upon photography purely through a strange twist of fate. “One evening, as I waited to go to the rehearsals for a play and munched peanuts, a friend of mine said someone had forgotten his camera in a cab. He picked it up and was already offered ₹ 600 for it from another friend. I don’t know what prompted me to buy the camera off him. ‘You already owe me ₹ 240. If you give the camera to me I shall write off the loan. He left the camera with me. I turned it around and looked into it, examining it closely. But I could hardly understand how it worked. At this point, a friend of mine who was an assistant cameraman in films, offered to teach me the ropes. Actor Robi Ghosh from theatre took me to a shooting of a Ray film. The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

Many moods of Ray

The photographs of Ghosh present Ray in his many moods – at work, in thought, pensive, joyful, probing the frame through outstretched palms joined at the thumbs, talking to a sadhu near the ghats at Varanasi, bending over a chessboard on location, in profile holding his fingers to his chin, ‘looking through’ his rounded-finger-



Nemai Ghosh (Pic by his son Satyaki Ghosh)

and-thumb lenses at an actor, caught inside a room in a vest and trousers with a book in his hand, looking through the lens of his still camera, and many more. You name a particular expression you wish to see Ray in, and it is there, captured for posterity through the gifted lens of Ghosh’s historic camera. Ghosh has deliberately kept away from a chronological ordering of the photographs. This invests the book with an element of continuous surprise.

Talking about how he was so singularly focussed on Ray for so long, Ghosh says, “I was in a trance, such was the power of his persona. I was mesmerised by this towering persona, his ability to get sucked into his work so much that he forgot that I was always there, photographing him every minute in time. I did a lot of work to span theatre also during that time as I am originally from theatre. But that was like an off-shoot which became a subject later on. The eye of my camera and my own eyes behind the lens was focussed on Manik-da.” In January 2013, in a



The Forgotten Goddess by Nemai Ghosh



A rare picture of Satyajit Ray in the midst of a crowd

tribute to 100 years of Indian Cinema, The Delhi Art Gallery had organised an exhibition entitled ‘Nemai Ghosh – Satyajit Ray and Beyond’ launched by another famous Ray cinematographer Soumendu Roy who says, “what I could not achieve with my big camera, Nemai has done with his little camera!”

Documenting master artists

Delhi Art Gallery has digitised Ghosh’s work of more than one lakh negatives, and presented around 170 archival prints at the Harrington Street Art Centre in Kolkata. Delhi Art Gallery brought out a superbly printed coffee table book of Ghosh’s photographs of Ray caught candidly in a myriad of moods – reading, writing, concentrating, pensive, working, looking through the lens on location, pointing a finger to direct action and so on. Pramod Kumar K.G. curator of the exhibition said, “Ghosh’s photographs of Ray at home and on the sets suggest a rare intimacy; with the poignancy of these images of the master at work, during and in many cases, enacting roles.”

His photographs on Ray are exhibited at the permanent gallery of St Xavier’s College, Kolkata, and at Nord Pas-de-Calais, France. He has

documented the making of films such as *Jukti Takko Gappo* by Ritwik Ghatak, *Interview, Calcutta 71* and *Ek Adhuri Kahani* by Mrinal Sen, *Paar* by Gautam Ghosh and *Ijoddu* by M S Sathyu. Ghosh photographed great masters Jamini Roy, Ram Kinker Baij and Benode Behari Mukherjee over the years 1969 and 1970. He went back to his interest in documenting master artists from 2002, photographing more than 30 major Indian painters and sculptors at work, resulting in a massive suite of photographs of the best minds in contemporary Indian art at work.

Beyond Ray

Moving beyond Ray, he has photographed the land and the people of Kutch in Gujarat (1995–97), Bastar in Chhattisgarh (1998–99), Bonda Hills in Orissa (2007), the Apatani tribals in Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh (2010). “You cannot even begin to imagine what a long struggle it was to capture the lives and habitats of these adivasis of India living in remote places inaccessible by any form of public and private transport, involving miles and hours of trekking on foot in terrible climatic conditions and all this when I was not exactly young,” reminisces Ghosh who celebrated his 80th birthday this May.

“The three things that have seen me through my struggles to establish myself are – tenacity of purpose, discipline and hard work. I learnt discipline from Utpal Dutt when I trained under him as part of his Little Theatre Group. The same applied to Ray.” One of his sons, Satyaki Ghosh, is currently one of the best-known names as a brilliant photographer in B & W of performing artistes, cinema, and fashion.

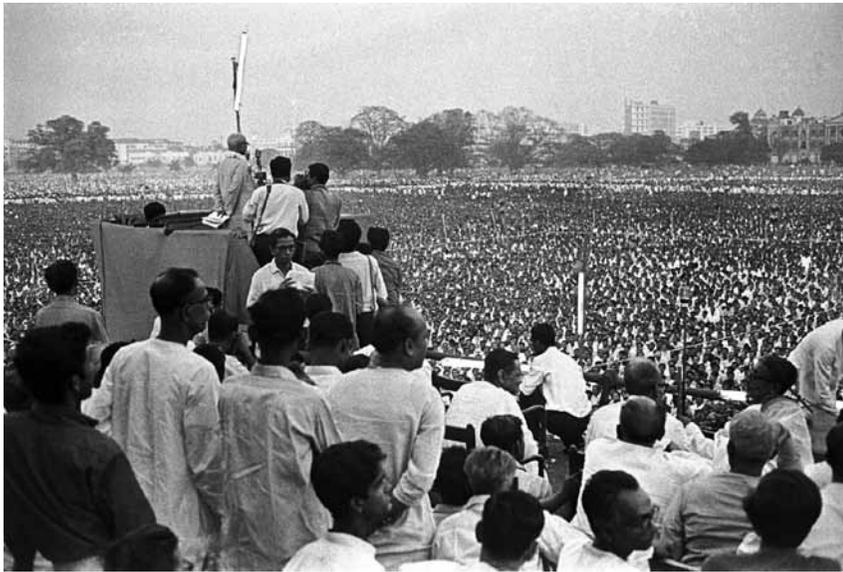
“Today, the word ‘camera’ is an integral part of my name. Wherever a group of people discuss me, the word ‘photograph’ comes up almost naturally. The most interesting part of my story is that to be a photographer was never a part of my life-plan.” These are the opening lines of the book *Manik-da*. Simply written, the author-photographer traces how his passion for the theatre, developed since boyhood, and his interest in lighting, which is an integral part of theatre, slowly but surely took him on a long and exciting journey along with one of the greatest filmmakers the world has ever produced.

Nemai’s Kolkata

Right now, Nemai-da is anxiously waiting for his latest coffee table book



Ray at a wayside bookstall



The first United Front meeting at the maidan captured by Nemaï Ghosh

published under the Harper-Collins India imprint called 'Nemaï Ghosh's Kolkata'. It is a brilliant aesthetic and creative tribute to the city. The images reproduced in B & W are complemented with text and captions by culture historian

and journalist Shankarlal Bhattacharya and Ghosh's own quotes. "I hear a lot about this city. Some call it a city of poverty and despair. Some find it to be one of politics and rallies. And there are many who believe in its deep root in art

and culture. Whatever be the case, I find life here, and love. What draws me to Kolkata is the human element and its spontaneous expression. Every moment of the city distills a narrative of epic possibilities and I, as a flaneur, have framed all of that. From the alleys to the highways, my lens has been doing its job. It is not a comprehensive, definitive compendium of Kolkata. Neither is it meant to be one. It is my Kolkata, the way I have seen it evolve through time," says Ghosh, who was bestowed with the Padma Shri in 2010 among numerous national and international awards. ■



The writer is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author, who has won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema.



Kuchipudi - the dance drama from Andhra

This art has the sentiment of loving devotion to God permeating every facet of its technique. It helps to arouse a great consciousness of God's greatness in the minds of people, writes Dr. Kanak Rele.

KUCHIPUDI is a dance style from the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. It can be rightly called a dance drama. Kuchipudi, in effect, is the concept of total theatre where you have the combination of all the four abhinayas like *vachika* - spoken words, *angika* - physical movements, *sattvika* - that which has to do with the sentiments, human, emotions and *aharya* - that is the costuming.

The origins

Kuchipudi is a small little village in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. The dance style or dance – drama is a traditional practice by very high caste Brahmins. It is believed that it was created in the 15th century A.D., and later on it is Siddhendra Yogi who is credited with bringing in a lot of vim and vigour into the dance style. The most characteristic feature of this dance style is its scintillating and very vivacious footwork and body movements. It has a lot of coquetry in it because it has to do a lot with the feminine aspect and shringara rasa.

Between the 6th and the 10th centuries A.D., India saw the phenomenal upsurge in personalised devotion to God in the form of Bhakti. With Jnana and Karma, Bhakti formed the third *marga*, or path to achieve moksha, the absolute release from the cycle of rebirth. Bhakti *marga* extols the achievement of this spiritual union with God through pure love resulting in a great yearning in the soul of the bhakta (devotee).

In South India too this *marga* caught the imagination of the masses. There arose an order of yogis who were of the conviction that the best way to express bhakti was through the combined arts of music, dance and drama. Thus they initiated a tradition whereby the bhakta began to approach his God by singing, dancing and acting.

Another dance-drama

Being predominantly Vaishnavite in its approach, Kuchipudi focuses on extollation of the virtues and great deeds of Lord Vishnu and follows the Maha Bhagavatam. In Kuchipudi, traditionally no woman is allowed to take part and the female roles are enacted by nubile Brahmin boys. It is also a composite art in the sense that different actors enact different roles but no art can be static. In the past three or four decades solo items have been created and are being performed.

The same tradition gave rise to a similar form of dance-drama called Bhagvat Mela Natakam in the adjoining state of Tamil Nadu. Both these arts have the sentiment of loving devotion to God permeating every facet of their technique. These dance-dramas helped to arouse in the minds of the people a great consciousness of God's greatness.

Contributed of yogis

In the development of Kuchipudi two yogis appear to have played a key role. These are Tirtha Narayana Yati and his disciple Siddhendra Yogi. Both



Kuchipudi performance has to do a lot with the feminine aspect and shringara rasa

of them were devout bhaktas of Lord Krishna. Their great love manifested into outpouring of exquisite bhakti literature. Tirtha Naryana wrote the Krishna Lila Tarangini in the form of a musical opera. His disciple Siddhendra yogi wrote the famous Shringara Kavya Parijatapaharana. While presenting this in the form of dance-drama, he shunned the devadasis and, instead, selected nubile Brahmin boys to enact the roles. This dance drama is performed even

today and stands as a master piece in this genre.

The technique of Kuchipudi exhibits a fine balance between nritta, nritya and natya elements, the last preponderating in the vachik abhinaya. Thus the Kuchipudi actor/dancer not only sings his pieces and dances them, but also speaks the dialogues. It must be mentioned here that though Kuchipudi is a dance-drama, there are some items which can be and are performed as solo items.

The nritta is made up, as in Bharata Natyam, of *adavus*. Since Kuchipudi is a dance-drama the nritta sequences or even items are used to decorate the dramatic sequences of the play. The nritta still retains some elements of its original rustic flavour and so has quicksilver jumps and glides in its performance. Very naturally the rhythmic syllables shollus - also must have these same qualities and there is created a bubbling confluence of recited shollus and vivacious dancing resulting in an audio-visual cascade. The adavus for men and women are performed in distinctly different manner highlighting the clear demarcation between *tandava* and *lasya*.

Kuchipudi today

Today the world over, the mention of Kuchipudi instantly conjures up a delightful image of a vivacious dancer dancing by balancing herself on the rim of a brass plate. On her head she balances a jar which is full to the brim with water. It is breath taking to watch the dancer translate different tala patterns recited by the guru who is accompanied by the chief percussion instrument mridangam. As the dance progresses the intricacy of the shollus multiplies. There is also a question-answer session where the guru recites a particular sequence of the nritta portion

and immediately the dancer translates it by her foot-work performed on the rim of her plate – the sound of the ghungroos and thumping of the plate on the ground creating a cascade of rippling mnemonic reminiscent of a bubbling stream. And all during the dance the water in the jar never spills over. This requires tremendous mental concentration to ensure that the water does not spill and the dancer's technical ability and



The most characteristic feature of this dance style is its scintillating and very vivacious footwork and body movements.

command over tala. Scholars attribute a philosophical meaning to this feat – the dancer's concentration indicates her complete mental detachment from the mundane world, her gaze turned towards the supramundane like in a Yogic Samadhi, while her constantly dancing feet denote the acknowledgment of her mundane (worldly) existence beating out the eternal cycle of rhythm of life. This dance is called *Tarangam* (wave).

The nritya is made up chiefly of items like *shabdham*, *shlokam* and

padam. Out of these, traditionally, the shlokam is performed sitting down. Like Bharata Natyam the padams are devotional love songs, those written by the great composer Kshetrajna being very popular. Other compositions which are popular for solo expressional presentation are the kritis of the saint-poet Tyagaraja.

Siddhendra Yogi has composed the most famous dance-drama known as Parjitapaharanam for Kuchipudi. This is more commonly known as Bhamakalapam which has an elaborate treatment of the character of Satyabhama one of Krishna's consorts. This play is a masterpiece and is most popular for presentation.

Distinctive facets

Two very characteristic facets of Kuchipudi performance are the character of the *sutradhara* conductor of the performance and the *praveshadaru* which is a small composition of dance and song whereby each character announces himself/herself and reveals his or her identity in the most skillful manner.

Another special feature of the presentation is pagati veshamu, which is a comic sequence in a play but which is not from the original text. This is added to relieve the seriousness of some of the original sequences and are acted out impromptu. The music is classical Carnatic system, the chief singer being the sutradhara himself. ■



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

Building women's political presence

Pamela Philipose throws light on the changing role and contribution of women parliamentarians and how AAP stands on this yardstick.

INDIA's 16th general election has been the most expensive exercise of its kind in the country's history. One estimate puts the figure at ₹ 30,000 crore, a tad shy of the bill notched up in the 2012 US presidential polls. What does this tsunami of money power that brought Narendra Damodardas Modi to power mean for the faceless, voiceless Indian? The answer will unfold over the next five years, but what is clear is that for India's women, the more things change the more they remain the same.

Glamour quotient and political connections

It is true, of course, that this election has seen the highest ever number of women becoming parliamentarians. But it is equally true this increase is statistically insignificant – while 2009 general elections saw 59 women enter the Lok Sabha, this time the number stands at 62. It is a fact, also, that the number of women who got tickets this time increased, but here again it was a marginal rise. In 2009, there were 556 female contestants out of a total of 8,070; this time there were 668 women out of a total of 8,251 candidates. Most of these women were chosen for two reasons. Their ability to draw crowds was one. BJP's Hema Malini in Mathura, a constituency she had never been associated with earlier, and the Trinamool Congress's Moon Moon Sen, who won from Bankura, are examples of those who romped home on glamour power. The second consideration was family connections. Would Dimple Yadav of the Samajwadi Party and Poonam Mahajan of the BJP have been MPs if they were not the wife and daughter, respectively,



Manisha Singh, an AAP leader believes in alternative politics that seriously takes up the issues of ordinary citizens be it children's admission or the safety of women.

of prominent politicians? Undeniably, many male candidates made it through film or family connections as well but a disproportionately larger number of women did so.

When it came to the voters here, too, there were some striking trends. In keeping with the generally higher voter turnout, some 65 percent of the total female voters exercised their franchise this time as compared to 55.82 percent in 2009. The gap between male and female voters was estimated by the Election Commission to be just 2.14 percentage points - half the difference of 4.42 percentage points that prevailed in 2009.

This ever growing constituency of women could well constitute a distinct political constituency in time, despite emerging from dissimilar backgrounds, religions, castes and regions. But how prepared are parties for this? How

willing are they to reflect this trend? Of all the major players in this searing summer of 2014, it is perhaps only the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) that seemed to engage with these questions.

Women and AAP

At least three aspects of AAP's campaigning indicated its relatively greater gender sensitivity. First, it fielded 59 women in a list of 434 Lok Sabha candidates, just one short of the Congress – the party with the largest number of women among the 414 candidates it fielded. The BJP, incidentally, had just 38 women among 394. In other words, the party that could have afforded to take the most risk by fielding women – the BJP – did not seize that chance, even as a debutant party that had everything to lose by taking this gamble, did.

What is more – and this is the

second point – AAP's list had many strong articulate women who entered formal politics for the first time in their lives. If they had been voted to power they could have defined a new political paradigm. Women like Medha Patkar in Mumbai North East, Nina P. Nayak from Bangalore South and Dayamani Barla, from Jharkhand's Kunti Lok Sabha constituency, were three examples of such candidates.

Third was the interactive nature of AAP's style of campaigning. In sharp contrast to Modi's helicopter drops and million-bodied rallies, I watched Arvind Kejriwal interact with around 2,000 people who had gathered to hear him in the Buddhist town of Sarnath, located at the edge of Varanasi in late April. His words had an immediate resonance with the few women who had gathered to hear him, "People don't want leaders who fly in helicopters. They want politicians who connect and understand their problems. 'Road nahin, toh vote nahin' (no road, no vote), that is the principle we stand for."

Interacting with a small group of AAP women attending that rally provided insights into why they preferred the party. Savitri Singh, an assistant professor from Varanasi said, "This party is different." I asked her to elaborate. "Other parties have made their pact with criminals, but the culture within AAP is evident by the way it approaches women as a group. You can sense it even in the behaviour of party *karyakartas* (workers). It's only when a party's culture is respectful to women can someone like me join it," she said.

Women in alternative politics

Manisha Singh, who was also present at that rally, argued for alternative politics, "By leaving positions of power, Arvind Kejriwal showed he cared for ordinary citizens." She termed herself "middle class" and was angry at the way private schools and hospitals fleeced people. "Then there is the issue

of safety of women. Every time we step out we feel scared. Why should this be the case? Today, as a member of this party, I can actually talk about such issues with its leaders," she ended. Usha Devi and Durgawati, two village women who had come to the rally from a neighbouring village, believed that AAP was different because it was "honest and wouldn't steal food from our mouths". Said Durgawati, "There are many in our community struggling just to stay alive. Our young men are not working, and we hardly earn."

It's true that in this election it was money power, media power and the 'helicopter politician' who ultimately won. But the politics of transformation is ultimately about long distance running. Whether AAP will live to fight for an alternative political vision in general elections 2019 remains uncertain. But Lalita Ramdas, the Alibag-based social activist who is a firm AAP supporter, argued that the path to the future lies in women like Savitri Singh and Durgawati. "AAP must take the women's constituency most seriously, not just see them as voters but actively support them in entering mainstream politics. This is a section of the electorate waiting to be discovered," she said. Ramdas is determined to persist, "Unfortunately most political leaders, including those in AAP, tend to be gender blind and view women's issues through the traditional prism. But within AAP we as women will push for greater representation."

If that happens, perhaps Kiran Pal, 22, a volunteer at the Sarnath rally, could realise her dream to "be somebody who helps other people". This daughter of a farmer who is doing her second year B.Ed, revealed how



Usha Devi and Durgawati, two village women, had come to the AAP rally in Varanasi from a neighbouring village because they were convinced that the party was "honest and wouldn't steal food from our mouths".

difficult it was to step out of her home because the "neighbours say all kinds of things". Fortunately, her family is unusual in allowing her a limited freedom. Convinced that the AAP platform will help her to "develop", she commented that "there was less politics in AAP and more social activism, which is why I volunteered".

Pal had gone from door to door campaigning for AAP in this conservative pocket of Varanasi and argued that the future was on the side of the party, "I have talked to several youth, many ordinary women. They are all supportive of AAP. They will decide the fate of politicians in the future."

But if Pal's optimism is to prove prophetic, it means the AAP leadership would have to ensure democratic functioning. Observed Anuradha Chenoy, JNU professor and an AAP sympathiser, "The party has a membership base of one crore. It has made an impact. But unless there is an organisational structure in place that is democratic and responds to the voices on the ground, people's expectations may not be met." ■

(Women's Feature Service)

This article was written before the Lok Sabha election results were announced.

Panini, the world's greatest Grammarian

Panini's treatise on grammar 'Asthadhayi' is acclaimed by linguists all over the world as the most perfect model of grammar.

IN the 20th century when computer technology was well advanced to device its own computer language, scientists and technocrats made a thorough study of all the major languages in the world to find out their suitability to be used as an ideal computer language.

Sanskrit-the most suited computer language

They came to the conclusion that Sanskrit, in particular, the Sanskrit grammarian Panini's treatise on grammar, 'Asthadhayi', would be the most suited computer language. In fact, the popular American magazine, 'Forbes', reported in one of its issues in 1987 that Sanskrit was the most suitable computer language.

Panini's grammar, popularly known as the 'Ashtadhayi', is acclaimed by linguists all over the world as the most perfect model of grammar. Well known Western scholar, L. Bloomfield described Panini's grammar as 'one of the greatest monuments of human intelligence'. Panini commands the same respect even today in the history of any language and its grammar.

Regarding the nativity of Panini, the opinion is not definite. But the most prevailing view is that he belonged to a place called, 'Salathura', which is identified by researchers as Lahul, a village now in Pakistan.

This has been lately confirmed by senior archaeologists of Pakistan who



have also stated that the name of Panini is revered and respected in that village even today.

Sometime in 1995, a group of Oriental scholars from India visited Lahul and recommended to the local authorities to erect a memorial with the name of Panini.

Panini's Ashthadyayi

As regards to the date of birth of Panini, no concluding evidence is available. However, from the nature of the language he described, which is closer to the Vedic language and from his references to the Vedic literature, it is safer to conclude that he belonged to a period between the 5th century and 4th century B.C.

The Kathasaritsagara of the Kashmiri poet Somadeva (1070 A.D.) has recorded that Panini (400 B.C.) was the disciple of a sage called Varsha who had another disciple named Katyayana.

While Katyayana was very intelligent, Panini was a blockhead. Distressed by his ill luck, Panini left his Gurukula and went far away into the Himalayas.

There, he practiced penance for a number of years in order to propitiate Lord Shiva. Pleased with his austere penance, Shiva granted him the boon of intelligence. The God in his ecstasy performed the Cosmic dance (Tandava Nritya). In the course of the dance, Shiva beat his *damaru* (drum) 14 times out of which Panini got the first inspiration of grammatical aphorisms

(*sutras* as they are called in Sanskrit). Out of these 14 *sutras*, called Shiva *sutras*, Panini composed the unique treatise on Sanskrit grammar known as the 'Ashtadhyayi'.

Classical Sanskrit in the history of Sanskrit literature, we find three distinct stages, namely, Vedic, Epic and the Classic. Classical Sanskrit begins with Panini.

His Ashtadhyayi which means 'eight chapters' with its 4,000 *sutras* or aphorisms is considered the best grammar in the world.

According to the well-known lexicographer, Sir Monier Williams who produced the first Sanskrit – English Dictionary, "The Panini grammar reflects the wonderful capacity of the human brain which till today no other country has been able to produce except India".

Panini was highly interested in the economy of words. The continuous development of Sanskrit language was possible due to the high logic, precision and creative capacity of Panini to formulate new words.

This explains why Sanskrit avoided becoming obsolete, the fate of classical Greek, Latin and even Pali. It is the fluidity of Sanskrit grammar that permits the derivation of new Sanskrit words and thus helps in enriching the language.

In the monumental work of genius, Panini established the new classical Sanskrit by standardising the sacred language that had been the exclusive domain of the learned before and during his time.

Vedic vocabulary

Seeking to preserve the Sanskrit language, Panini preserved the Vedic vocabulary for all times through his enlightened intellect. He was a reformist who did not compose any

new grammar but revised the earlier grammar traditionally handed down to him mainly from the point of view of bringing precision and perfection.

It has been correctly acknowledged by tradition that the Sanskrit language that nurtured the classical Sanskrit literature owes its purity and immaculateness to Panini's grammar.

The fact that this grammar continues to be a specialised branch of study even today is sufficient evidence to prove the great respect and high popularity enjoyed by Panini and his grammar from ancient times till today.

There exists a close parallel between Panini's Ashtadhyayi and Euclid's 'Elements of Geometry'. Just as elements start with a few definitions, axioms and

The Sanskrit language that nurtured the classical Sanskrit literature owes its purity and immaculateness to Panini's grammar.

postulates and then goes on building theorem after theorem, similarly Panini has squeezed and distilled his entire thoughts on grammar and put them in the form of 4,000 *sutras*.

Scientific derivatives

Linguists find that Panini's grammar goes to the roots of the word (etymology). While the Greek grammar stops with the word, Panini gives step by step the various derivatives of a root word like a mathematical formula.

Western scholars, especially linguists, are astounded by the scientific derivatives of Panini's rule.

During his wanderings between 1891 and 1892 through Western India,

Swami Vivekananda tried to improve his knowledge about Sanskrit, particularly about the grammar. Too poor to buy the books, he borrowed a few Vedanta books from a friend of his, together with a copy of Panini's Ashtadhyayi.

In his biography by Eastern and Western disciples, one finds the following mention: "On November 19th, he wrote to his friend Babu Pramadadasa of Varanasi who had lent the books, "The Vedas may well be said to have fallen quite out of vogue in Bengal. Many here in the Math are quite conversant with Sanskrit and are able to master the Samhita portion of the Vedas. They are of the opinion that what has to be done must be completed quickly.

They believe that a full measure of proficiency in the Vedic language is impossible without first mastering Panini's grammar. This Math is not wanting in men of perseverance, talent and penetrative intellect. I can hope that by the grace of our Master, they will acquire in a short time Panini's grammar and thus succeed in restoring the Vedas to Bengal".

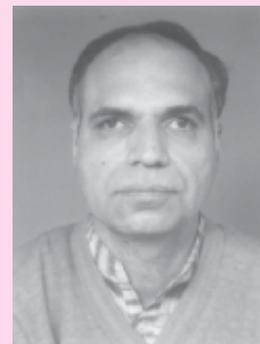
The Swamiji's life-long love for Sanskrit led to himself teaching Sanskrit scriptures, including Panini at Belur Math. He once told an elderly monk and direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna to study, 'Laghu Kaumudi' (the book on Sanskrit grammar) which the senior monk took as a command and obeyed it with love. ■

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'.



Jan Swasthya Sahyog reaches out to villagers with mental health problems

A large number of people living in villages suffer from various mental ailments. Attempts are being made to counsel them using video conferencing, though this technology has its limitations.



Bharat Dogra

is a Delhi-based freelance journalist who writes on social concerns.

MENTAL health problems generally exist on a significant scale in remote rural areas, but these get very little recognition, let alone proper care. Firstly there is an overall shortage of psychiatrists in our country, and then most of them are heavily concentrated in big cities. The chances of people in remote rural areas getting the services of psychiatrists are really low.

However, Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS), a widely appreciated health initiative in Chhattisgarh, is striving to tackle mental health problems in a better way within some existing constraints in its work in Kota and Lormi blocks in Bilaspur district.

The situation of mental health in the information received so far in the course of work done by JSS is quite serious. Several cases of suicides and attempted suicides have been reported. These steps are taken in a situation of sudden, temporary bursts of anger and depression. The victim actually doesn't want to die, and says so when able to make a coherent statement, and such suicides could be avoided by better preparations to deal with such cases and take action in the form of counselling etc. One additional problem is that poison in the form of pesticides and related chemicals is easily available in most households, and there is easy access to it. It is truly a tragic situation when soon after the catastrophic happening the victim of self-inflicted harm regrets his/her action and says that he/she wants to live. But by then it may be too late. Even if the victim survives, he/she may suffer other serious health consequences. What will be really helpful will be to recognise the likely symptoms which indicate high possibility of such self-destructive behaviour so that timely preventive action can be taken.

Senior health activist of JSS Ben Ratnakar says, "The more serious situations arise in the context of patients who exhibit violent behaviour tendencies. The proportion of males is higher among such patients. It is very difficult to bring them from remote villages to hospitals, let alone complete the treatment. Often family members wish that they go away on their own. If they wander away from the village it is considered a relief. If a woman is in such a stage an effort is made to send her to her parents' home. But sometimes she may also be left at an isolated place. Women who are depressed and remain quiet also suffer. Sometimes the husband marries a second time and they get further isolated. Liquor addiction is also responsible for many mental health problems in their villages.

Recognising the seriousness of mental health problems the JSS has taken up the treatment of several mental health patients. It is hoped that the rural communities starting with the basic unit of family can be involved much more closely in the better care of mental health patients in the near future.

By using video conferencing it has been possible to use the expertise of renowned psychiatric Dr. Prashant Gogia in the treatment of many patients of these villages. Dr. Gogia says that this technology can be very useful to reach out to patients in remote villages but this also has its limitations. Particularly for carrying out counselling this technology has limitations as face to face contact is better, but still some progress can be made particularly if the patient is situated in more comfortable conditions at the time of counselling.

Health activists have to learn to be responsive towards this and only then they can involve the communities in mental health issues. ■

Programme Paralysis

The architects of the Nayak committee set up to review governance of boards of PSBs seem to have had a Rip Van Winkle moment.



Anuradha Kalhan
is a Lecturer, Dept of Economics,
Jai Hind College, Mumbai.

POLICY paralysis will be overcome. Once again, there is an excited talk of growth, deregulation and privatisation. A few days before the May election results were declared, a committee appointed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to review governance problems of all banks including public sector banks (PSBs), submitted its report in less than the stipulated three months. It suggested that the way out for PSBs was disassociation from the public i.e. government control. It also suggested that government should reduce its equity share to below 51 percent. A holding company should be created to reduce the direct interference of the government and improve efficiency and, both government and RBI should not be part of the appointment process for the director. RBI and the government should also withdraw their director-nominees from PSB boards. If the government reduces its stake in the banks to just about less than 50% it takes the banks out of the tyranny of Central Vigilance Commission and Right to Information (RTI), while keeping the state as the dominant shareholder. It had also suggested that by doing away with the committee approach of decision making, no single person could be held accountable if something goes wrong. (hoping that no single person can possess all the right information to make the correct and quick decisions are still worth the sacrifice of depositors money). All PSBs will thereafter be incorporated under the Companies Act. All 'nationalising' enactments under which they have been constituted will be repealed. At the moment, all of them are dependent on the government for additional capital requirements. The requirements are huge apart from their bad assets. There are also balance-sheet requirements to meet the new capital adequacy norms of international regulators. Bank Unions have just released a list of about 400 such debtors, who have over Rs 73, 000 crores of bad loans against them. The reasoning is that as government reduces its equity ownership, bank stocks will be available to private investors, the ability of the board of directors to steer banks to higher profitability and lower bad debts will

rise, the capacity to raise fresh equity and increase their capital base will rise, so will the talent to avoid irksome government interference and regulation. This is the virtuous cycle envisioned by the Nayak Committee Report as by other privatisers before. This report also comes in the wake of pressures to increase the number of private banks for whom it suggests only incremental less far reaching, changes in governance.

At the moment the composition of the PSBs boards represent diversity of public interests, there are three directors representing minority (non-government) shareholders' interests; three directors who are expected to represent societal interests; a director each representing the union government, workmen, officers, and regulator (RBI). In addition an independent chartered accountant is appointed as a director and the person usually heads the audit committee. The bank also has three or four whole-time directors including the Chairman and Managing Director (CMD). The Nayak Committee thinks that in effect this is entirely a public selection/nomination process since the non-government shareholders are also usually public held financial institutions. In sum the banks interest as an independent financial organisation are not separated from the interests of the government sufficiently. Many bank directors owe their appointments to considerations other than merit. Once appointed as executive directors, managing directors and in other senior positions the time for a quid pro quo starts. Oddly the report does not mark that in a privatised scenario the directors would represent shareholders i.e. private corporate interests even more strongly.

The architects of this report seem to have had a Rip Van Winkle moment between 2008 and 2014 when the developed world has been through a catastrophic recession and programme paralysis triggered by such a vigorous, virtuous cycle of deregulation of the financial sector in USA. That is why it needed such little time. This unitary solution to governance problems has acquired a cult following in messianic times. ■

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: July 20, 2014)**

Quiz No: 126

1. Who was awarded the Dadasaheb Phalke Award this year?

- a. Sachin Tendulkar
- b. Mukesh Ambani
- c. Gulzar
- d. A R Rahman

2. Which state is known as the 'the city of jewels'?

- a. Manipur
- b. Arunachal Pradesh
- c. Himachal Pradesh
- d. Assam

3. Which is the supreme legislative body of India?

- a. Supreme Court of India
- b. Parliament of India
- c. Board of Control for Cricket
- d. Central Bureau of Investigation

4. Which NGO is under the scanner by the new government?

- a. CRY
- b. PETA
- c. Greenpeace
- d. Akshara

5. After the birth of Telangana, how many states does India have?

- a. 31
- b. 29
- c. 32
- d. 30

Answers to Quiz # 125

QUESTION 1

Answer: (c) Monorail

The Mumbai Monorail is part of a major expansion of public transport in the city. The project was implemented by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA). The first stretch linked Wadala on the outskirts of the island city with Chembur.

QUESTION 2

Answer: (c) Madhya Pradesh

Bandhavgarh National Park is spread at Vindhya hills in Madhya Pradesh. It consists of a core area of 105 sq km and a buffer area of approximately 400 sq km of topography varies between steep ridges, undulating, forest and open meadows. The National Park is known for the Royal Bengal Tigers.

QUESTION 3

Answer: (c) Khushwant Singh

Train To Pakistan is a historical novel by Khushwant Singh, published in 1956. It recounts the Partition of India in August 1947 and depicts the Partition not only in terms of the political events surrounding it but also provides a human dimension which brings to the event a sense of reality, horror, and believability.

QUESTION 4

Answer: (a) Kerala

Kathakali originated from the state of Kerala. It is a stylised classical Indian dance-drama noted for the attractive make-up of characters, elaborate costumes, detailed gestures and

well-defined body movements presented in tune with the anchor playback music and complementary percussion.

QUESTION 5

Answer: (b) Waheeda Rehman

Chaudhvin Ka Chand was made in 1960. It is a Hindi feature film directed by Mohammed Sadiq. A production of Guru Dutt, the film centers on a love triangle between Guru Dutt, Rehman and Waheeda Rehman.



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Quiz No. 125

Winner

**Loukya Bhat
Bangalore**



FIFA Fever

No other sport captures the world's imagination like football and of course the ongoing FIFA World Cup which is its global showcase.



◆ Brazil has won the most – five times; followed by Italy – four times. Brazil is also the only team to have played in every World Cup.

◆ The inaugural FIFA World Cup in 1930 was won by Uruguay, the host nation. So far, six of the eight champions have won at least one of their titles while

playing in their homeland, except Brazil which lost the last time it hosted the games.

◆ The 1942 and 1946 events were cancelled due to the World War II.

◆ In the initial few World Cups, very few teams participated as it took long to travel by sea – European teams would be reluctant if a South American country hosted the event and vice versa.

◆ An estimated 715 million people watched the 2006 World Cup final match.

◆ Fuleco, the Brazilian three-banded armadillo is the mascot

for this year's event. Fuleco is a portmanteau of the words 'Futebol' (football) and 'Ecologia' (ecology).

◆ This year's official song is 'We Are One' (Ole Ola) by Pitbull, Jennifer Lopez and Claudia Leitte. The song 'Dare' (La La La) by Shakira will be used as secondary theme song.

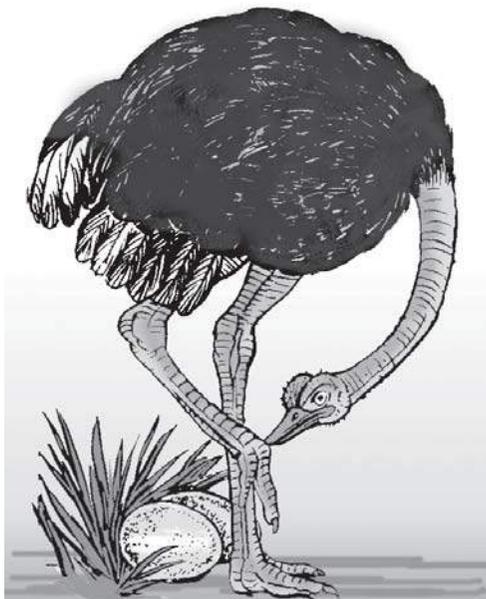


Record Makers

BRAZIL'S RONALDO is the top goal scorer with 15 goals while Gerd Muller and Miroslav Klose (both Germans) come a close second with 14 goals each. While Germany has played the most matches (99), the honour for scoring the most goals (210) goes to Brazil. Legendary footballer Pele from Brazil is the only footballer who was part of the winning team three times – 1958, 1962 and 1970.

AMAZING LIVING WORLD

Giant Creches



OSTRICHES, which are the largest land birds, live in groups of 100 or more. Since they can't fly, this helps them fend off predators and warn each other of danger.

Usually, each group has a dominant male and female. The leading male scrapes out a shallow nest in the mud and persuades the female to lay eggs in it. She incubates the eggs with help from the male. Other females use the same nest to lay their eggs, so a single nest may have dozens of eggs fathered by ostriches from all over the neighbourhood!

After the chicks are born, they travel everywhere with their parents, huddling under their huge wings. When they meet other groups with chicks of their own, the parents will fight, and the winning pair will 'kidnap' the losers' chicks and add them to their own clutch!

Eventually, the crèche may contain 300 chicks and only a couple of adults to rear them.



The Just Reward

STORY

ONCE the king of a certain country lost his valuable diamond ring. He announced a reward for anyone who found the ring. It so happened that a soldier chanced upon the ring. He decided he would go straight to the king for the reward. "If I report this to my superior officers," he thought, "the credit will go to somebody else not to me." When he arrived at the palace, the guard demanded half the reward as his price for informing the king.

The soldier thought for a while then said, "Alright. But you must state in writing that you're to be given half the reward." The guard agreed. The king was mighty pleased to see his ring and sent his minister to fetch 500 gold coins as the reward. "No, wait!" exclaimed the soldier. "My reward should be 200 lashes!" "What!" cried the king. "Are you mad?" "No, I only

deserve 200 lashes," repeated the soldier. Shaking his head in disbelief, the king asked the whip to be brought. Just as a servant prepared to flog the soldier, he said, "Wait! There is someone who is entitled to half my reward!" The soldier produced the note written by the guard. The protesting guard was brought in and given a hundred lashes, while the angry, though amused king gave the soldier his just reward.



Art Beat

Painting Picture Perfect



The Warlis of Maharashtra have developed a unique style of painting. Warli art dates back to the 10th century. Unlike other folk art forms, Warli art does not depict mythological scenes, nor does it use colours. It is characterised by simple, white coloured, geometric, triangular human and animal figures with stick like hands and legs.

The tribals first smear the walls of their hut with wet cowdung and then coat them with red mud. Using a bamboo twig as a brush and rice paste as paint, they draw scenes from their daily life – harvesting, hunting, cooking, weddings and other rituals.

The art was discovered and revived in the 1970s. Today, Warli paintings are also done on cloth and paper and have been appreciated abroad. Jivya Mashe is a nationally recognised Warli artist.

ADMIRAL R L PEREIRA PVSM AVSM

The affable admiral (1923 - 1993)

ADMIRAL Ronald Lynsdale Pereira, Ronnie to his friends, was born at Kannur in Kerala on 25 May 1923. Instead of following into the steps of his father who was a doctor, he decided to join the navy and was commissioned into the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) when he turned 20 in 1943. His first assignment was a command of a wooden fishing trawler, fitted out like a gunboat. The crew comprised of a dozen equally raw sailors. He saw service in Burma (Myanmar) and Malaysia during 1943 – 45 and later with an amphibious task force in Iraq till 1946. A graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, he commanded INS Delhi and anti – submarine frigate Kuthar. His outstanding character traits were integrity, commitment to the service and moral courage. He calmly rejected the recommendation of a Member of Parliament regarding the posting of a sailor but he did not take any action against the ignorant sailor. He was humane and punishment was to improve the individual. A keen sportsman, he represented the Navy in hockey in 1946 and in golf in the 1960s. He got married to Phyllis Bedel in 1952.

His love for sports and discipline made him the right choice as Deputy Commandant of the National Defence Academy in 1971. His cadets recall him for exhorting them to study hard, play vigorously and march smartly. He had an imposing personality. He drove his cadets hard but not needlessly. He demoted a cadet's appointment who, dressed in a dressing gown, was punishing another cadet. He commented, "Uniform gives you authority. Without it you are nobody." He himself was always dressed in crisp white uniform. No wonder that the cadets loved him, respected him and were in awe of him.

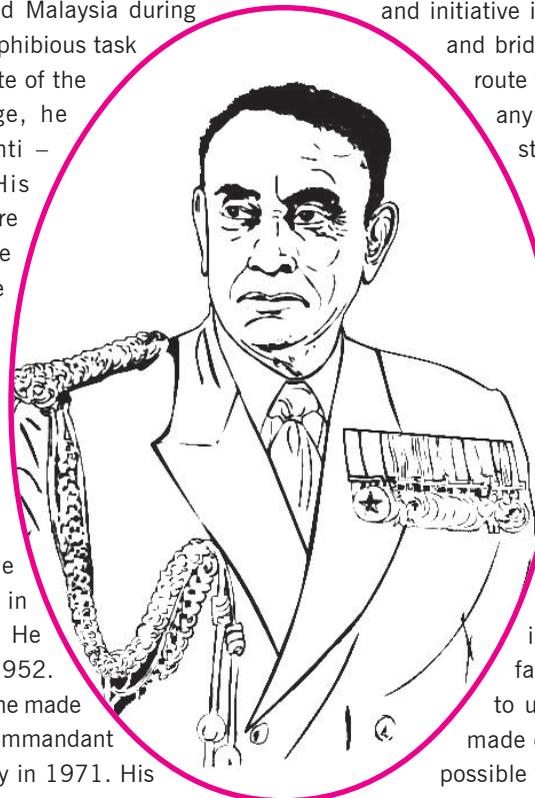
He believed, punishment is awarded to guide a potential leader towards the path of honour and moral behaviour.

Admiral Pereira was awarded Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM) for his outstanding performance of duty. He went

through the ladder of staff and command appointments as Flag Officer Eastern Fleet and Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Fleet. In his address to officers of the Western Fleet, he called upon them not to be "yes men" and have the moral courage to stand up for what is right and wrong. Officers preferred to play safe due to a few disciplinary cases. He assured them, "No officer shall be court marshaled provided he has shown great daring, courage and initiative in a battle tactical situation." Golf and bridge (card game), often taken to be route to career advancement did not cut any ice with him. He never used the staff car for his personal use. After a brief tenure as the Vice-Chief, he took over the helm of the navy on 1 March 1971.

In the 1970s, the superpowers were building nuclear submarines and Russia had offered nuclear submarine on five year lease and arranged a two-year-course for naval personnel. Lease was proposed as purchase would have entailed Non Proliferation Treaty conditions. The Soviet offer included creation of maintenance facilities, which they were wanting to use for their ships as well. It was made clear to them that it would not be possible to extend those facilities to Soviet ships. Admiral Pereira objected to acquire any

nuclear submarines as it would require bulk of budget allotment and manpower. The German submarines were inducted during his command. He was a born leader of men and showed tenacity, resilience, charisma and humour which endeared his men to him. He had impeccable integrity. He was the most loved Admiral in the history of the Indian Navy. He was awarded Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM) for his distinguished service. He retired on 28 February 1982 to live in his home at Bangalore. He was suffering from cancer and passed away on 14 October 1993. ■



– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd)

SUDHATAI VARDE

A feminist committed to values (1930 – 2014)

SUDHATAI Varde was an extremely lively and cheerful person with a dream of an egalitarian society in her eyes. She was petite, demure in her looks, at the same time, extremely forthright, upfront and dedicated to the cause of women's liberation. She passed away on 8 April, 2014 at the age of 84. Hers was a life lived for her commitment for progressive and secular values and socialist and humanist ethos.

Right from her childhood she had great fascination for dancing. She used this talent for her social cause as a volunteer for Rashtra Seva Dal (RSD) which she joined as a teenager. She was involved in the freedom movement through RSD. She met her soul mate Sadanand Varde who was also a mainstay of RSD and in due course she married him. Both of them were gracious and full of life and remained active workers in the social movement as patriotic socialists.

In the post-independence period, Sudhatai played a pivotal role in the development of the cultural wing of RSD. She also encouraged her daughter Jelum to be a classical dancer and shared a beautiful relationship with her daughter and talked highly of her.

Sudhatai was closely associated with Mrinal Gore, Kamal Desai and Pramila Dandwate. Sudhatai's involvement in women's movement began with anti price rise struggles in the early 1970s. She participated in the anti-rape campaign in 1980. She attended all events of new women's groups in response to cyclostyed invitation sent by post to her residence in Bandra West which was initially an office of Mahila Dakshata Samiti (MDS). She participated in anti-dowry agitations (1981), Brides are not for burning campaign, *Parityakta Mukti Morcha* (Deserted Women's Liberation Front), solidarity for textile strike (1982), etc. She was a sympathiser of Swadhar that provided support to women in social distress. Sudhatai attended all *shibirs*, meetings, rallies, sit-ins and public meetings of women's groups and state level coordination committee for women's liberation - *Stree Mukti Andolan Sampark Samiti*.

After communal riots in Bhiwandi in 1984, women's organisations such as National Federation of Indian Women,

All India Democratic Women's Association, MDS, Women's Centre, Forum Against Oppression of Women formed Committee Against Religious Fanaticism work for women's rights, education, status and empowerment. Sudhatai was actively involved in them. In 1987, she took part in protest against emergence of sati temples in Mumbai and re-naming of a road in suburban Mumbai as *Maha Sati Road*. As a representative of MDS she took active interest in Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Selection. She

attended study circles on technical issues such as adverse effects of hormone based injectable contraceptives on women, before joining the agitation against it. She was also a supporter of Narmada Bachao Andolan.

In 1991 at a National Round Table on Women in Decision Making, when Sudhatai was asked to present a paper, she was overwhelmed with emotion and said, "It is so rewarding to see that you, the younger lot of firebrand feminists see value in our thinking!!" To prepare her paper, she frequently visited the Research Centre for Women's Studies Documentation Centre and went through all the reports, resolutions, books concerning the subject and made a brilliant presentation at the Round Table.

She was shaken by Mumbai riots in 1992 and at a meeting organised by Stree Mukti Sangahtan, she asked, "Where did my generation go wrong? How do you explain when children of secular generation are turning out to be religious fanatics?" She made a resolve to focus more on Seva Dal's activities with children to change their mindset towards humanism.

In 1993, both Sudhatai and Sadanandji together founded *Aple Ghar* to care for orphans after the devastating earthquake in Latur. Sudhatai's inspiring and charming persona and her good deeds that helped many will have a lasting imprint on the glorious women's liberation movement in Maharashtra. ■

– Dr. Vibhuti Patel is Professor and Head, Department of Economics, SNT Women's University, Mumbai.



BALU MAHENDRA

The multifaceted genius (1939 – 2014)

BALANATHAN Benjamin Mahendran was born in a professor's family in a village near Batticoala in Sri Lanka, but cineastes the world over knew him simply as Balu Mahendra. The cinematographer, writer, director and editor who gave a new dimension to South Indian cinema passed away on 13 February, 2014. A graduate from London, Balu was inspired to enter the world of the arc-lights after watching a live shoot of David Lean's classic *The Bridge on the River Kwai* in Sri Lanka, as a young lad.

Emigrating to India as a callow youth with stars in his eyes, Balu enrolled himself for a cinematography course in the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune. There he also picked up the ropes in various departments of film making, including inter alia editing, script and story writing, direction etc. He passed out with a gold medal in cinematography and an abiding passion for realistic cinema, which was imbued in most of his films right up to his swansong *Thalaimuraigal* a touching story of the bonds of kinship between an aging grandfather and his young son. Balu who had never stepped in front of the camera played the main protagonist in the film with a great deal of conviction and won instant acclaim from critics and audiences alike. The film fetched him his sixth national award, posthumously, this time the Nargis Dutt Award for the Best Film on National Integration, a fitting finale to a career studded with awards and accolades.

It was the acclaimed Malayalam film maker Ramu Kariat who made the National Award winning film *Chemmeen* who first saw the spark in young Balu and entrusted him with the camera work for his film *Nellu* in 1971. Balu struck gold straightaway netting the Best Cinematography Award from the Government of Kerala. The film provided him a passport to the Malayalam film industry and he worked in several films like *Prayanam*, *Chuvanna Sandhyagal* and so on. But while handling the camera for these films Balu's concentration remained on directing his own films. The opportunity came to him when he helmed the Kannada film *Kokila* starring a then relatively unknown Kamal Haasan.

The film won him his first National Award for Best Cinematography. In the meantime he also cranked the camera for films like *Shankarabharanam* in Telugu directed by K Viswanath, a memorable treatise on classical music and dance. Balu also wielded the camera for the debut films of Mani Ratnam *Pallavi Anu Pallavi* and Mahendran's *Mullum Malarum*. His first foray as director in Tamil was *Azhivatha Kolangal* loosely based on the Hollywood film *Summer of 42*. However Balu will be long remembered by Tamil audiences for his super duper hit *Moondram Pirai*.

Among Balu Mahendra's memorable works are films such as *Olangal* and *Yaathra* in Malayalam and *Moodu Pani*, *Veedu*, *Sandhya Ragam*, *Vanna Vanna Pookal* etc in Tamil. He flirted across genres and never shied away from remaking Hollywood films albeit with an Indian touch. He succeeded in making comedies like *Rettaivaal Kuruvi*, *Sathi Leelavathi* with Kamal Haasan and Julie Ganapathy with the Malayalam actor Jayaram and Saritha in the lead.

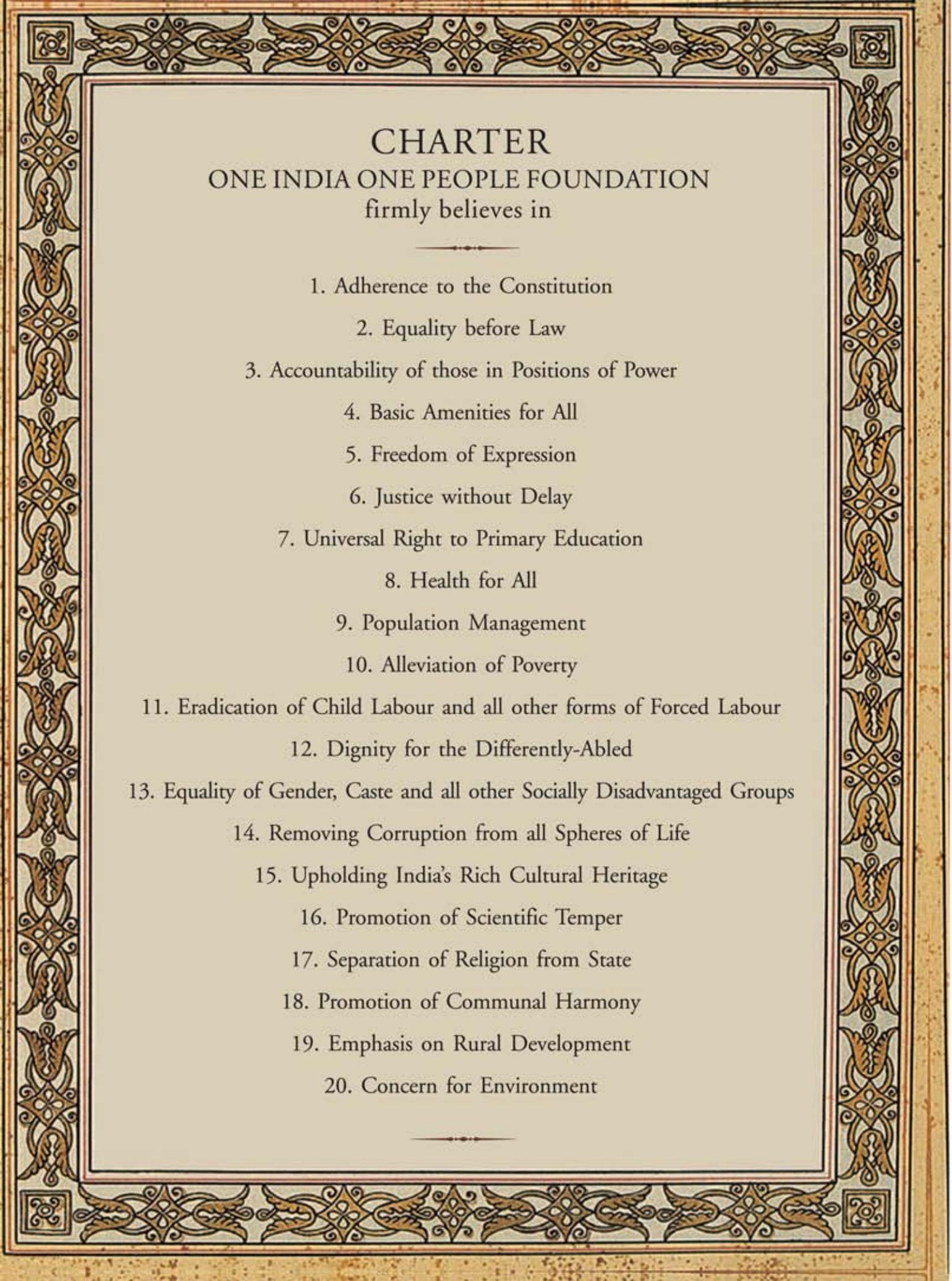
After a few films that failed, *Thalaimuraigal* redeemed the director's image as one of the finest film makers the country has seen. Music was to the fore in almost all his films and Balu found his muse in Ilaiyaraaja who worked with him right from his first film to the last.

With age catching on, Balu retreated to the sidelines but did well to establish an institute in Chennai titled *Cinema Pattarai* to train youngsters in such disciplines as cinematography, editing and direction.

Balu's protégés Bala, Ameer, Vetrimaran, Ram, Seenu Ramaswamy among others are today the toast of the Tamil film industry and have all won laurels at the state and national level. As one who lived and breathed cinema, Balu Mahendra was always spoken of in the same breath as the Tamil film industry stalwarts like Balachander, Mahendran, Bharathiraja and Mani Ratnam but remained a notch above all of them as he was a multifaceted genius. ■

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

(Sketches of Great Indians by C.D. Rane)



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