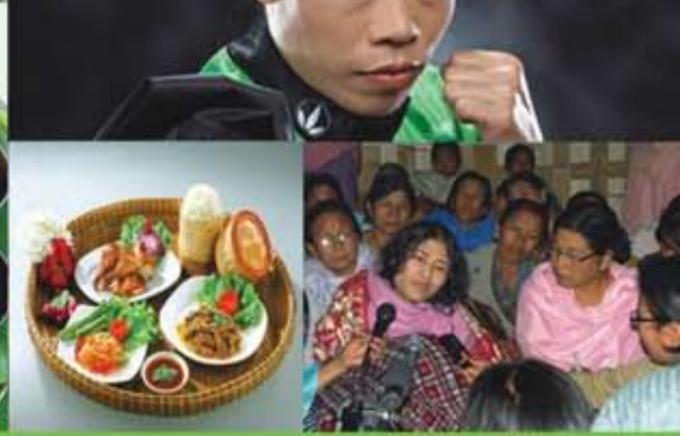
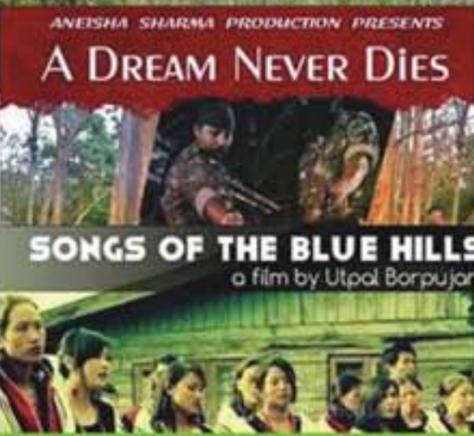


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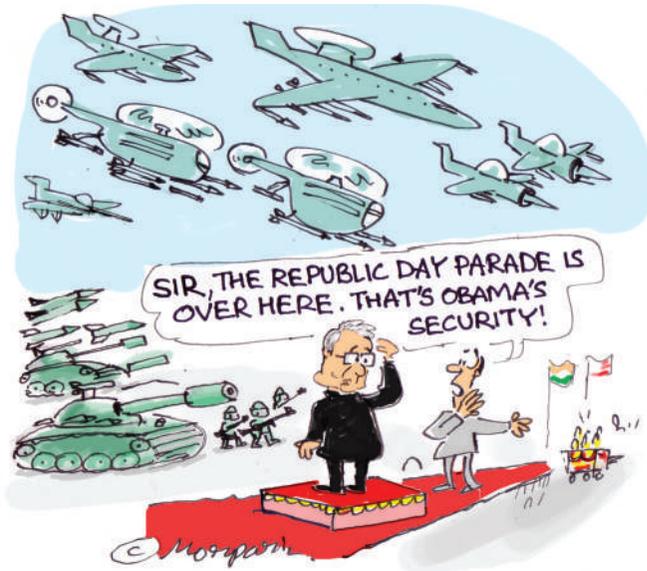
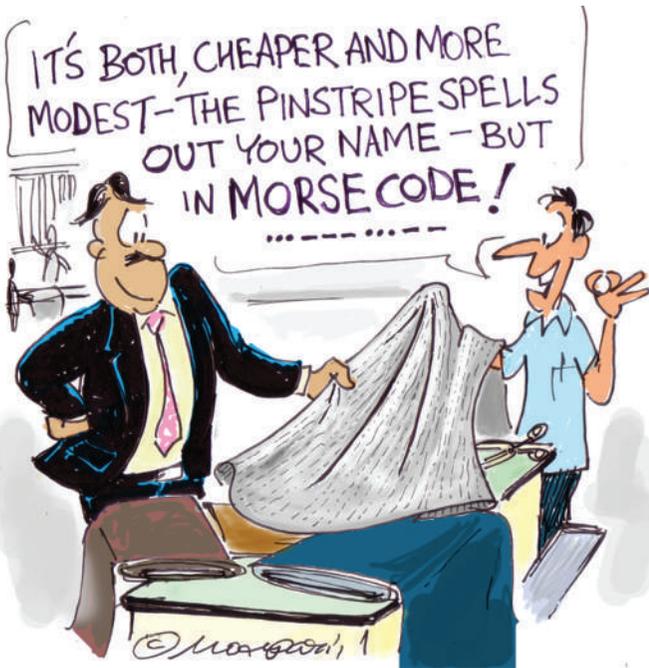
## A Resurgent Northeast?

**KNOW INDIA BETTER**  
 Paradise Unknown:  
 where India begins

**FACE TO FACE**  
 Raghunandan S. Kamath

Great Indians: R.K. Laxman / Lt. Gen. Joginder Singh Bakshi MVC, VSM / Pravinaben Matubhai Patel

**MORPARIA'S PAGE**



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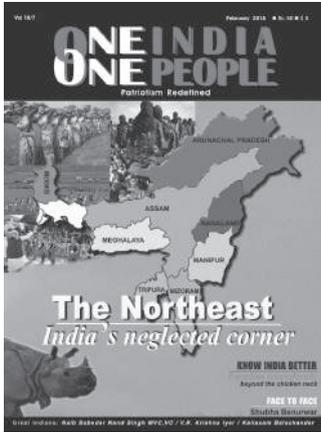
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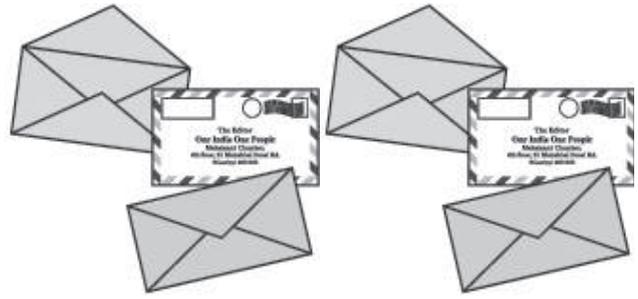
# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



**"I look forward to the future issues"**

I was very happy to see the February Northeast issue as my daughter had to recently do a project on Nagaland and she could identify with the articles. It was a really good effort. Most of us have very mixed feelings about the Northeast partly because we are so ignorant

about this region. I especially liked the *Know India Better* feature and it will be a pleasure to read about the rest in the next issue hopefully. I have one suggestion though. Along with the travel articles, why don't you consider publishing some travel details too? Like, how to get there, best season to visit, some good accommodation options. Such information will make the travel articles especially interesting and informative. The article by Bittu Sahgal on Taley Sanctuary



was also very good and informative. Especially of use was the article by Dr. Rajan on air pollution and respiratory illness. Very lucidly written, it was of real use. I was very touched by the personal narrative of the Northeast girl Ms. Kharpuri. She is very clearly a realist and I am amazed at her complete lack of bitterness at the reality of her community people being unnecessarily targeted. Such stories will surely go a long way in dispelling a lot of unnecessary and unfounded myths about this region of our country. Another really good article was by Lt.Gen.Oberoi on the war disabled taking part in the Mumbai Marathon. What a brave lot they are, our army men! Nothing seems to ever deter them or hold them back. Please keep up your good work and I look forward to the future issues.

– Kirtana Anand, Mumbai

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# A Northeastern Shangri-la, anyone?

*With the Narendra Modi government keen on transforming the Northeast,*

**V. Gangadhar** *hopes the message doesn't get lost in translation!*

**P**EOPLE say that our Northeast is one of the most picturesque regions in the country. At the same time it is also one of the most undeveloped, uncared for, unreported regions. There is always the feeling that the region has escaped or missed out on the main attention of the region. "North-East?" wonders the average citizen. "Isn't it a dangerous, uncivilised border area inhabited by uncivilised savages who carry spears, call themselves 'Nagas,' and are way behind in beauty contests and ramp walking?

All that is set to change in a couple of years. Our tourism minister with the approval of the Finance Ministry obtained permission from the government to spend huge amounts (the exact figure is being worked out), and make the region a paradise. Yes, seriously a Paradise. Scholars from different parts of India, mostly from the Hindi-speaking cow belt are now reading James Hilton's classic novel *The Lost Horizon* (translated into Hindi, of course) and are planning to create a legendary kingdom there.

In Hilton's novel, a strange, unidentified aircraft lands in India and kidnaps half a dozen Indians whose leader is James Conway, a highly educated and articulate diplomat, incredibly handsome, talented, brave and an expert in handling firearms and swords. The aircraft flies and flies and finally lands in a lonely terrain where the air is incredibly pure. After the plane lands the pilot suffers a heart attack and dies. But the Indian visitors are well taken care of - fed, clothed and made familiar with the beauty of the place. Coming as they did from the dirty, dusty, overcrowded planet of India, the visitors do not complain of the change. The co-pilot falls for a local girl while Conway is delighted at the huge library and its wonderful collection of books.

He also meets with the spiritual head of the new place and they have learned and stimulating conversations. Time

passes effortlessly. In one of the libraries, Conway discovers books which are thousands of years old. The spiritual *guru* slowly reveals the secret that he and his colleagues are hundreds of years old. Once a visitor is brought to the place, he cannot leave it and spends hundreds of years in it. But they do not complain about having to spend their lives in this 'Earthly Paradise' which conferred immortality. Conway does not mind, but the co pilot with his girl friend wants to 'return' home. One dark night they escape but as soon as they leave the borders and set foot in the outside world, they are transformed into their normal age (which is in hundreds) and die!

**The think-tank of the NDA government was fascinated by the thought of creating several Shangri-las and attaining immortality. The Prime Minister and his key aides summoned scientists who had talked about 'magic' aircrafts which can fly in all directions at speeds of thousands of miles, and ordered them to build several of these special divine aircrafts for the visit to Shangri-la.**

The think-tank of the NDA government was fascinated by the thought of creating several Shangri-las and attaining immortality. The Prime Minister and his key aides summoned scientists who had talked about 'magic' aircrafts which can fly in all directions at speeds of thousands of miles, and ordered them to build several of these special divine aircrafts for the visit to Shangri-la. The plane, the first of its kind, overloaded with Modi and his aide Amit Shah, *sadhus* and *sanyasis*, and holy men like Baba Ramdev, takes off.

Several decades pass. The VVIPs do not return. But that does not mean anything to the Indian citizens. They feel they can continue to occupy the new land without any problems. In fact, they discover that life is more beautiful and healthy. One day a major trekking party finds the remnants of a diary near a crash site on which were scribbled pages and pages of *Lost Horizon II*. Taken to New Delhi, the new education minister orders the book to be burnt because it does not have a Sanskrit translation. ■

**The writer is a well-known satirist.**



# Looking at the Northeast, sans the blinkers

*India has big plans for her Eastern neighbours, most of which will be implemented through the Northeast region of the country. How far these projects will benefit the Northeast, and whether New Delhi can make a shift in its traditional perception of this region, only time will tell, says **Nitin Gokhale**.*

THE attitude of the people in rest of India towards the Northeast has been like our treatment of a distant relative who exists in the mind, but about whom we know precious little. Our knowledge about this relative is often based on misinformation, half truths and innuendos. That's exactly how the rest of the country largely treats the eight sisters in the Northeast!! Although the divide between "Northeast" and the mainland has lessened over the past decade with more exchange of people and ideas between the two, it is certainly true that in Indian metropolises, the Northeast continues to remain a mystery.

### The Northeast dilemma

So how does the rest of the country view the region? There are two very popular and convenient views. One view is that the region, comprising the eight states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim, is the country's pampered child. Many think that the Centre has been pouring in disproportionate amounts of money into the region, which is ultimately misutilised. The second school of thought holds that New Delhi, and New Delhi alone is responsible for the economic backwardness of the region, and that the neglect by the Centre is monumental.

The truth as usual, lies somewhere in between.

That gap will have to be bridged with careful strategy designed to sensitise people from the rest of the country about what the region really means to India in terms of geography, languages, culture, traditions and even from the point of view of national security, and why the people of the region matter.

For years, a section of the leadership and the educated elite among the Northeastern states have become willing partners with the 'exploiter' class from Delhi. Today, the entire Northeast is dependent upon the rest of India more than it ever was. There is no internal revenue generation worth the



**A segment of the Asian Highway in Assam**

name in these states, private enterprise is more an exception than a rule, and a majority of the population is dependent upon the government one way or the other.

An observation by a high-profile study group, the Northeast Study Group (NESG) constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2002 to draw up a 25-year vision on development of the Northeast, still largely holds water. It said: "A parallel system of governance by the insurgents on the one hand, and ministers, MLAs, the bureaucracy and police on the other, is responsible for the political instability and backwardness in the Northeast".

The group had then felt that the entire system of governance is in a state of collapse in the region. "Whatever money comes into the region for development ends up in the hands of a chosen few," it had rightly observed.

The question is: Why has it happened? There are no clear-cut answers, but endemic corruption and poor management of funds are the two main reasons identified by many analysts. The funding pattern, evolved over the years has given rise to a *nouveau riche* class comprising mainly corrupt politicians,

a section of bureaucrats and businessmen in the region.

So, have we lost the Northeast forever? Many optimists like me, are convinced that the Northeast has several things going for it to catch up with the rest of the country. For one, it can act as a bridge between rest of India and Southeast Asia. Myanmar, now a member of ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), has become a major link between India and ASEAN countries. And Northeast, particularly Manipur, ought to become the center of thriving and integrated economic space, linking the two dynamic regions with a network of highways, railways, pipeline, and transmission lines crisscrossing the region.

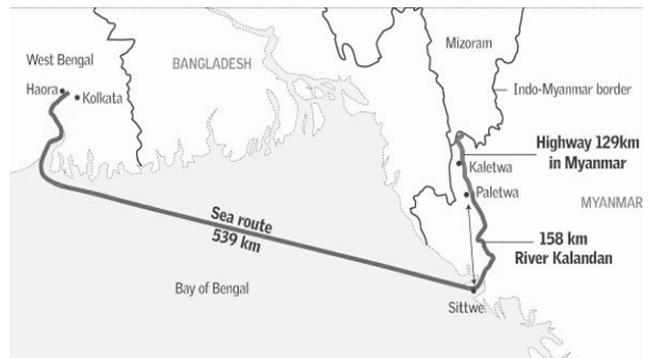
### The vital links to and with Myanmar

Development of the Northeast is also very integral to India's policy on Myanmar.

Northeast is a corridor and a transit route to Southeast Asia. Infrastructure building tops the priority. A big project already under way is designed to turn the Kaladan River into a shipping route, linking Mizoram to Myanmar's port of Sittwe, which India is helping develop. India has also agreed to upgrade an extensive network of roads and bridges in Myanmar that would effectively connect the Northeast (and the rest of India) to Thailand as soon as 2016. Both sides are also exploring the possibility of setting up train routes through the country. Facilitating border transit would make the Northeast a gateway to Myanmar - a potential boon for trade as well as tourism.

A think-tank, Aspen Institute India, has in fact said in its report on Myanmar recently: "With the Myanmar economy opening up and the world showing greater interest, India has to think big and look consciously for a high profile entry. One of the important new initiatives that India could take up is the setting up of a large, multi-purpose Special Economic Zone (SEZ) around Sittwe. Setting up of another SME-oriented SEZ should also be considered in or near Setpyitpyin (Kaletwa), to which point the Kaladan River is being made navigable, in the region adjoining the Indian border which happens to be amongst the most backward areas in Myanmar."

India is currently upgrading the Sittwe port and making 225 km of the Kaladan River from Sittwe to Setpyitpyin (Kaletwa) navigable. This point would be connected to Mizoram by a 62 km road which India is committed to construct. The Kolkata-Sittwe sea route is only 539 km. These projects are



India is currently upgrading 225 kms of the Kaladan River from Sittwe to Kaletwa

designed to provide connectivity between mainland India and its Northeastern states through the Indian Ocean and Myanmar territory.

The report further states: "Sittwe is the hub of these transport connectivity arrangements. The SEZ could have power plants, fertilisers, plastics, chemicals and other downstream industries, export-oriented greenfield projects, tourism complexes, a super-specialty hospital, housing complexes and educational institutions as an integral part of the master plan. Select Indian companies can be encouraged to invest and participate. Such a project would create a high impact economic region for planned and sustainable long term socio-economic development in the country. The need of the hour is to systematically create economic opportunities by bringing together industry and people in well-planned localised areas, with adequate enabling infrastructure and public services. Availability of world-class infrastructure can be a differentiator for Myanmar and improve its competitiveness as a destination for industry and business investment."

India's Northeastern states and Myanmar should be the main target markets of many products manufactured in the SEZs to once again make India's Northeastern states and northern Myanmar a natural economic zone, which they historically were, providing a sustainable economic life line to the Northeast. But this would require enormous fast-paced infrastructure development on the Indian side of the border with Myanmar, which is primitive and is hardly geared to handle the traffic that would be generated due to the Kaladan project. Indian private sector companies have a good track record of setting up greenfield

**So, have we lost the Northeast forever? Many optimists like me, are convinced that the Northeast has several things going for it to catch up with the rest of the country. For one, it can act as a bridge between rest of India and Southeast Asia.**

airports and ports. These could be additional areas of our collaboration.

In terms of land connectivity, India's National Thermal Power Corporation has envisioned a vision plan for the next 20 years. Additional rail link and the Sittwe-Aizwal-North Assam road link are also new plans. These should be viewed as long term strategic investments from India and be expedited.

Manipur shares a 398-km border with Myanmar. But more importantly the border town of Moreh has been a traditional trading hub with Myanmar, and therefore has vast potential to become a major export centre from India for the Southeast Asian region. Here's why; according to available statistics, bilateral trade between India and Myanmar more than doubled between 2005 and 2010, expanding from \$557 million to \$1.2 billion, most of it through Moreh. Disappointingly though, it pales in comparison to the bilateral trade between China and Myanmar which in 2010 amounted to an estimated \$3 billion.

### The Trilateral Highway

The efficacy of various projects related to the Trilateral Highway as a component of the Asian Highway cannot be overlooked. The Trilateral Highway aims at connecting India's Northeast with Thailand via Myanmar. It could mitigate the disadvantages of landlocked Northeast India. There has been an agreement between India and Myanmar on the construction and upgradation of the Kalewa-Yargyi stretch of the Trilateral Highway during recent meetings. In its larger and more ambitious frame, the Trilateral Highway project is an example of triangular road diplomacy between India, Myanmar and Thailand, with a vision of inter-linking the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea. It is a component of the Asian Highway, which is scheduled for completion by 2016. Proposed and implemented by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP), the Asian Highway Project includes the Asian Highway 1 and 2 that would pass through the Northeast, connecting India with its eastern neighbours.

While the Asian Highway is being built along planned

routes to cover a wide spectrum of road network in the Northeast region of India, much more needs to be done by the Indian government to make the road functional. The Asian Highway needs to be interlinked with other critical projects that are envisaged to be completed as part of the 'Look-East Policy' such as the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Project and Trans-Asian Railways."

Nevertheless, with better connectivity and implementation of various development projects, the Asian Highway would enable the Northeast region to become a business hub of South Asia. Economic linkages already exist by virtue of the prevailing legal and illegal trade between India and Myanmar through Moreh, a business border town in Manipur, and Tamu in Myanmar. Concrete economic benefits are expected with the establishment of border *haats*. In addition, internal trade routes have the potential to enhance accessibility to sub-regional markets that connect Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan.

Thus, with the coming of the Asian Highway, Myanmar will become the point of convergence as well as the linking route between India and the other Southeast Asian countries. That, in turn, will lead to the creation of more secure and safe living spaces for the populace residing on either side of the border.

But there are apprehensions too. Local people in the Northeast fear that the opening of the Asian Highway and absence of inadequate enforceable regulation on immigration, illegal migration into the region may increase manifold. Also, past promises have not translated into real progress.

Manipur, and to a lesser extent Nagaland, must take advantage of the liberalisation that is taking place in Myanmar.



But that potential can be fully realised only if New Delhi starts looking at Manipur as an important starting point in India's 'Look East' policy, instead of as a dead end of the country's road network. ■

The writer is a veteran journalist with 32 years experience, who has lived in and reported from the Northeast between 1983 and 2006.

### An interesting trivia

*Idu-Mishmis are a prominent tribe of Arunachal Pradesh known for their aesthetic sensibility and unique craftsmanship, which can easily be seen in making of some products like the traditional hat from cane, rosary and garlands of beads, war coat, and dao (traditional dagger). For making one war coat, a craftsman takes more than a year. The final product is such that even a bullet cannot pierce it! Similarly, the cane cap is so uniquely knitted that it protects the head of the user from rain, and also from the attack of wild animals and human enemies.*

# Why does China fear India's Northeast region?

*India's Northeast region is all of a sudden in the limelight with the increasing realisation in Delhi of its strategic importance. But a developed Northeast region and a strong Indian presence in East Asia may not go down well with China. Lt.Gen. D.B. Shekatkar (retd.) deconstructs the Chinese psyche.*

IT is an undisputed fact of human history that if we make the mistake of ignoring geography and history to evolve philosophy of governance, successive generations will continue to suffer. History and geography have combined to make the Northeast (NE) region, homeland to Mongoloid India, a remote frontier. Partition aggravated its geo-political isolation, even as rising ethno-cultural consciousness among its extraordinarily varied, polyglot population, and migrant pressures have given rise to tensions and violence.

The region lacks the political weight or sufficiently compelling voices to impact on or influence national discourse. At the dawn of Independence, the partition put back the economy of the region by almost 30 years as the NE region lost its markets,

transit routes and arteries of communication and trade. It became a land-locked region with a very narrow land route known as Siliguri corridor of just 20 kms, sandwiched between Bhutan and Bangladesh. NE region includes states of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and now, the state of Sikkim. These states are spread over an area of almost 2,50,000 sq km with a population of over three crores. NE has international borders with Tibet (China), Myanmar and Bangladesh. The

political fragmentation of the Northeast has resulted in the creation of a number of mini-states and autonomous units within them. Except the two princely states of Manipur and Tripura, the states of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh (earlier NEFA), have been carved out of Assam state. There is even now a demand to carve out states of Bodoland and Karbi Anglong! This has resulted in undercurrents of tension,

mistrust and conflict of interests between the states and within states.

Neighbouring countries mainly Myanmar and Bangladesh have been used as safe havens by insurgent groups and anti-India elements. China and Pakistan have taken full advantage and instigated,

supported and have sustained insurgency and unrest in NE region. This region is of great strategic importance to India. The region loosely referred to as remote, forgotten corner of India, is now gradually in the process of emerging as a gateway to East Asia due to its geographical and cultural connectivity and proximity to East Asia. Flights from Guwahati, the capital of Assam take less time to Bangladesh and Thailand, than the flight from Guwahati to New Delhi!

**The importance of being Tibet**



The people of Arunachal Pradesh had religious affinity with Tibet because of successive Dalai Lamas' religious influence. Tibet has always been an autonomous region. It was never ruled by China. The McMahon Line which is the disputed issue between India and China was drawn on British maps based on the Watershed principle. The line has never been demarcated on ground. India's perceptions of boundary are based on McMahon Line which is not accepted by China.

In 1962, China launched an armed attack in the area of Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. Chinese ingress was up to Bomdila in western Arunachal Pradesh and Wallong in eastern Arunachal Pradesh. Due to the neglect of the Armed Forces, we suffered a military defeat during the 1962 war.

After the rude shock of the 1962 war, the central government at Delhi started some notional development in NE and Arunachal Pradesh. The situation is totally different today in 2015. Since 1962, China has developed infrastructure in Tibet region with rail, road and air network. She has developed road connectivity through Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) upto Karachi port. A new port at Gwadar is being developed. Tibet region is of strategic importance to China as well as to India. All major rivers flowing through Arunachal Pradesh into India originate from Tibet region. Arunachal Pradesh has the potential to be a powerhouse to provide water and electricity to India, Bhutan, Bangladesh and even Myanmar. Eastern Arunachal Pradesh also provides avenue for rail, road and air connectivity to China and East Asia through Myanmar. Arunachal Pradesh is also rich in mineral resources which are yet to be fully discovered and made commercially viable.

China has developed all weather connectivity upto Chumbi Valley between Sikkim and Bhutan. She also wants to develop rail communications. This can militarily threaten the Siliguri Corridor which is the only surface route connecting India with NE. China also has a territorial dispute with Bhutan. China has been gradually and systematically increasing territorial claim lines into Bhutan.

Since the last few years, China has termed Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet. Since I have served as member of 'Joint Working Group' and also an 'Expert Group' dealing with boundary dispute, I am fully aware about the Chinese grand design and strategy in Arunachal Pradesh and NE region. China has been supporting and sustaining insurgent groups in Myanmar to increase the area of influence. China needs a favourable situation in Myanmar to have an approach through Myanmar up to Bay of Bengal. To maintain a watch on sea lanes, China already has communication and port facilities on the sea coast of Myanmar. China also has established facilities along the sea coast of Bangladesh. China is presently busy in capacity building in Tibet, PoK, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and

Pakistan. Capacity building takes time, once you have the capacity, the capabilities also improve, and once you have the capacity and capabilities, your intentions can change! This is an undisputed philosophy of governance and warfare.

### **Why does China support Northeast insurgents?**

Since 1963, China has been helping, training, equipping, supporting and sustaining all insurgent groups fighting against India in the Northeast. It continues even today. During possible conflict in the future, China expects these insurgent groups to revolt against India, resulting in internal unrest in NE. Such a situation will have very dangerous implications on combat and military capability of Indian Armed Forces. Despite our efforts to improve our relations with China, it would be unwise to ignore these harsh ground realities.

The entire NE is rich in unexplored mineral resources which are so essential for industrial and economic growth of the region and means of sustenance to the people of NE. Due to conflict and unrest in NE, the private players who have the capacity to invest in industrial and economic growth, shy away from NE. This results in lack of employment opportunities to the youth who in turn resort to violence. It suits both China and Pakistan to keep NE under tension and unrest. China will not be comfortable in increase in connectivity and economic activity of India in East Asia, and NE region holds key to East Asia.

China is pursuing the grand strategy of expanding the natural geographical barriers of its mainland and thus controlling the frontier regions of Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia etc., to make an entry into Central Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Arunachal Pradesh (called south Tibet by China) is of strategic importance to China in its geo-strategic plans in Bhutan, Tibet, Myanmar and Bangladesh. To make a concerted entry into East and South China Sea, East Asia is of vital importance to China. China would like to control both South China Sea and the India Ocean by 2035 to execute its two-ocean strategy of control of Pacific and Indian Oceans. Arunachal Pradesh and NE fit into its overall grand strategy and designs. To pursue these, China has been following several policies in the diplomatic, political, economic, strategic and military domains. China has been reasonably successful in achieving many of these goals! India needs to be very careful of such grand designs and geo-strategic interests of China.

### **Meekness is not a strategy**

China has been carrying out border violations and deliberate border aggressions in Ladakh region as well as Arunachal region. The frequency, depth and strength of the armed intrusions and aggressions have been gradually increasing which is a cause of concern to India. Unfortunately, our meek response during the last 10 years to these violations and

aggressions has emboldened China to carry out more intrusions and incursions. It continues nibbling into our territory. We must remember that China respects armed power. India must face these challenges from a position of strength. Our Homeland Security, Defence and Foreign Policy need to be revised. It is hoped that the new Central government will take China seriously.

There is a need to study the Chinese fault lines. It has always been the policy of India not to interfere in the internal affairs of any of our neighbors, which is the right philosophy. However, considering the combat power, ambitions and hegemonic attitude of China, it is absolutely necessary to understand the fault lines and weaknesses of our adversary and make him aware that we are aware of these weaknesses. China has enough challenges in Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea and most of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) nations.

The emerging protests in Hongkong must be a cause of concern to China. China has been exerting political, diplomatic and armed pressure on the neighbouring countries to force them to accommodate China's ambitions. China has to face and counter three "internal evils", i.e., 'separatism', 'extremism' and 'splittism'. China rightly views incidents related to Uighur activism in Xinjiang and elsewhere as incidents of terrorism, and is finding it difficult to manage and control. Would the present leadership in China (political, diplomatic and armed forces) care to understand what 'damage' China has done to India's peace, security, stability, economy and progress by igniting, supporting and sustaining "armed revolt" and "insurgency" in the entire NE region since 1964? The strategy to contain India and "degrade" India's national power continues even today. The Government of India and people of India do not want any conflict with anyone including China on boundary issues, territorial issues or any other issue. India has made sacrifices in the past, given concessions and accommodated the demands of our neighbours. Indian leadership must understand very clearly that "there is no such thing as an inevitable war. If war or conflict, aggression comes, it will always be due to failure of human wisdom". We have experienced this in the 1962 conflict with China, 1965 war with Pakistan, Kargil wars with Pakistan; the world too has witnessed this since 9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq and now ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)! Human wisdom is very important in resolving outstanding issues and disputes. India would do well to remember the philosophy of Chanakya: "If you know your adversary and if you can deter them, you will live in peace for hundred years"!

China considers India as a weak neighbour; weak in every aspect of national development, stability, economy, progress

and armed power. It is an unfortunate fact that there are many so-called experts, analysts, think-tank who never feel tired of projecting China as a very strong and superior power in every aspect of governance, combat potential as well as military power. Our so-called experts fail to understand and accept the simple philosophy of human survival and human behaviour – 'the weak have one powerful weapon, the errors of those who think they are strong!' China must understand and accept the reality that India is not the India of 1962, 1965 or even 1970. It would be in the interest of everyone to resolve the issues and disputes without failure of human wisdom.

With the change in political leadership, our national vision, our emerging philosophy and our resolve to "make in India, make for the world", India is emerging as a 'Land of Opportunities'. India's security challenges have also become more diversified and complicated in the recent period with non-traditional challenges and threats.

It would be very appropriate to take serious note of an editorial written by Mr. Ahmed Sadik in a very prominent and valued newspaper of Pakistan, *DAWN*. He wrote: "It speaks volumes for the quality of India's 'state craft' in handling of internal situation in a manner that in spite of so many separatists, armed insurrections, it is able to remain strong and stable, and also do business with the world and also thrive economically".

The NE is in transition to a new order. Where does one begin? Too many have got lost in circular arguments to end insurgency, unrest border disputes and boundary disputes. To end insurgency, one must create opportunities; but economic development cannot gain momentum unless insurgency is ended. Too much time has been lost and the problem must be tackled simultaneously on all fronts.

The people of Northeast want peace, stability and progress. This can be achieved by an end to mindless violence. China can join India in infrastructure development, energy production, industrial and agricultural growth, trade and commerce. Such a constructive and meaningful cooperation can result in a win-win situation for both India and China and most importantly, for the people of East Asia and above all, people of Northeast India. ■



The writer, a recipient of PVSM, AVSM and VSM medals, has served in the Indian Army for four decades. He has participated in the Indo-Pak war in 1965 and 1971. During the Kargil war in 1999 he was in-charge of the entire China front in Arunachal Pradesh. He has served extensively in Northeast combating insurgency in Assam, Nagland, Manipur and other areas.

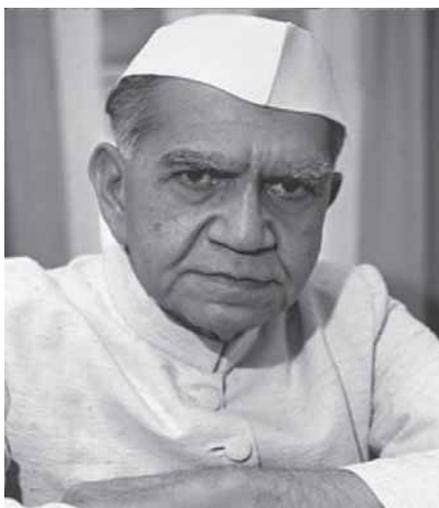
# A glimpse of the Northeast freedom struggle

*The Northeast participation in India's freedom struggle is a tale of valour and courage which started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century itself with a mass peasant uprising against the British and resistance by the hill people. The political events in the rest of the country culminating in Independence in 1947, found a strong support and response in this region. Prof. Chandan Kumar Sharma describes the Northeast struggle and the leaders who spearheaded them.*

THE Northeast region of India went into the hands of the British starting with the occupation of Assam in 1826, after a decade of Burmese control of the land. Till then, the region remained mostly independent of the control of the Delhi Sultanate or any other external power. Assam especially faced many incursions, but thwarted them. Thus the independent spirit of the Assamese people showed in the immediate challenge to the British rule by a group of the erstwhile nobility led by Gomdhar Konwar. Their attempt, however, was suppressed in 1828 and Gomdhar and his associates were imprisoned. One of his associates Piyali Borphukan was hanged.

Meanwhile, British expansion to the hills faced fierce resistance by the hill tribes. The Khasis led by U Tirat Sing fought valiantly against the British from 1829 to 1833. However, the resistance finally succumbed to the British and Tirat Sing was imprisoned in Dhaka jail. Between the 1830s and 1860s, the hill tribes such as the Singphos, Khamtis, Nagas, Garos, etc., offered stiff challenge to the British expansionist policies toward the hills, causing heavy losses to the latter.

The effect of 1857 was also felt in Assam and Maniram Dewan, the first Indian tea planter, who initially helped the British expand the tea industry in Assam but fell out with them subsequently, was the key figure in the plans to drive out the British from Assam. However, these plans were foiled and Maniram and Piyali Barua were hanged in 1858. Many close associates of theirs such as Bahadur Gaonburha and



**Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, notable freedom fighter from Assam, and former President of India**

Farmud Ali were arrested and interned.

### The Phulaguri peasant uprising

While the above attempts were mostly confined to some individuals and elites and large scale popular participation was mostly missing from them, in 1861, the peasant uprising at Phulaguri of Nagaon district of central Assam against the repressive agricultural policies of the British government heralded a new era of peasant protest in the state. Hundreds of peasants, tribal and non-tribal, had marched to the district headquarters to submit their petition to the Deputy Commissioners (DC) regarding their grievances. But the DC behaved with

them abrasively and refused to entertain the peasants' request. The infuriated peasants met at a series of traditional *raij meks* (people's assemblies) to deliberate on the future course of action. On 18 October 1861, when a police party under an Assistant Commissioner Lt. Singer arrived at the spot of an assembly and tried to disperse the latter, the infuriated peasants attacked the police with their *lathis* and killed Lt. Singer. The armed peasants, however, could not withstand when the military launched an attack on them the next day. Thirty nine peasants were killed, many wounded and 41 were arrested. Though most of the peasants in Phulaguri upsurge belonged to the Tiwa and Kachari tribes, peasants of other castes, especially from the Koch and the Kaibarta (fishermen) community, were also involved. Bahu, a Kaibarta leader of the rebels was interned at the Andamans.

After the Phulaguri uprising, the peasantry of the districts of Darrang and Kamrup stood against the oppressive increase in land revenue by the British government, again through the instrumentality of the *raij-mels*. When the land revenue was raised by almost 80%, these resentment culminated in the violent protests of 1892-94 in various parts of the adjoining areas of Kamrup and Darrang districts by the peasants known as 'Assam Riots' in the colonial administrative parlance.

The popular peasant movement of the period started with the Phulaguri upsurge and were rounded off with the uprising at Patharughat in the Darrang district which witnessed a series of *mels* where peasants vented anger against the government and pledged not to pay the increased land revenue. When on 28 January 1894, a troop of armed forces attempted to attach property of the defaulting peasants; many peasants surrounded the police force and compelled them to beat a hasty retreat. Soon popular reinforcement arrived and advanced towards the DC of Darrang district who was camping nearby. In the skirmish that followed between the armed forces and the stick wielding peasants, according to official figures, 140 peasants died and about 150 sustained injuries and the uprising was suppressed. On 29 March 1894, Rash Behari Ghosh questioned the propriety of the government's new revenue policy and expressed his resentment at the repressive policies on the Assamese *ryots* in the Imperial Legislative Council.

With the brutal suppression of the peasants at Patharughat, the violent peasant insurgencies in Assam came to an end and the middle class Assamese elites now rallied around an association called *Sarbajanik Sabha* which believed in addressing the problems of the local population through petition, memorandum etc., to the colonial administration rather than coming in direct confrontation with the latter.

Meanwhile, the British made a number of expeditions to the hills of the present day Arunachal Pradesh to dominate the tribes like the Abors, (now called Adis), Akas (now called Hrusos), and so on. The latter fought hard but were subdued by the superior firepower and policies of the British. In early 1891, the British attempt at intervening in the affairs of the Manipur kingdom faced staunch opposition from the prince Tikendrajit Singh and others. This followed the killing of a number of senior British officials. The British then resorted to a big military expedition to defeat the Manipuri force. Tikendrajit and his associate General Thangal were captured and hanged.



**Gaidinliu (Left), the Naga leader, with then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his wife Sonia Gandhi**

### The Assam Association

While *Sarbajanik Sabha* played some role in articulating the Assamese interest, with the death of Jagannath Barooah, its leading light, the *Sabha* gradually faded away. Meanwhile a new middle class political association of moderate views namely, the 'Assam Association' came to the fore in 1903 which also had many members from the *Sabha* including Jagannath Barooah. Leading members of the Assam Association included almost the entire emerging Assamese middle class (barring those in the colonial service), such as Manik Chandra Barua, Jagannath Barooah, Raja Prabhat Chandra Baruah, Faiznur Ali, Ghanashyam Baruah, etc.

Like the Indian National Congress of the time, the Assam Association pursued constitutional methods for redressing the grievances of the native population. However, its elitist character deterred it from taking a clear stand during the partition of Bengal in 1905 when many parts of Assam were engulfed by public protests against merger of Assam with East Bengal. It was the first occasion when Assamese public opinion and action found direct articulation with a much larger 'Indian' issue.

Nevertheless, the Association successfully fought for Assamese representation in the Legislative Council of the newly formed state of Eastern Bengal and Assam. After the reunion of Bengal in 1911, Assam became a Chief Commissioner's Province with its own Legislative Council. However, with the coming of a new generation of leaders such as Tarun Ram Phookan, Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, Chandranath Sarma etc., the Association assumed a more

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articulate role in tune with the contemporary national ethos. They lent full support to the Home Rule movement of 1916 demanding national self-governance. The Association also sent a two member delegation (Nabin Chandra Bardoloi and Prasanna Kumar Baruah) to London to press for its demand for Assam the status of a Governor's Province as part of the Indian Constitutional Reforms.

The countrywide protest against the repressive Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwalla *bagh* massacre, Khilafat Movement and finally, Gandhiji's call for Non-Cooperation in 1920 left a huge imprint on the younger generation of the Assam Association leadership. They announced full support to the Non-Cooperation Movement. They disbanded the Assam Association and founded the Assam Provincial Congress in 1921. Students of Cotton College at Guwahati left the college *en masse* and went to the rural areas to spread the message of non-cooperation. They also campaigned against opium use which was widespread in the state. Many lawyers also abandoned their practice in support of the movement all over Assam. It was during 1921 that Gandhiji visited Assam for the first time which left considerable impact on the Assamese leaders and masses. Gandhiji himself wrote highly about his experience in Assam in *Young India*. National schools were set up at different parts of Assam. *Hartals*, boycott of foreign goods, picketing, were organised all over Assam. T.R. Phookan, N.C. Bardoloi, Chandranath Sarma, Gopinath Bardoloi and a few others were among the main leaders of the non-cooperation and the civil disobedience movements in Assam. Hundreds were arrested including Phookan. Respected leaders like Rohini Choudhury (who became a member of the Constituent Assembly later on) and Md. Tayyebulla were handcuffed like common criminals. Police atrocities on common people reached such a level that Gandhi had to send Madan Mohan Malaviya and Rajendra Prasad to Assam in 1922 for a field report which confirmed such atrocities.

In 1926, Congress had its session in Guwahati under the leadership of Phookan and Bardoloi with dedicated assistance

from many other leaders and hundreds of volunteers including women. Phookan was also elected to the Congress Working Committee for 1926-27. However, due to his differences with the AICC on the civil disobedience movement of 1930, he resigned as the President of the Assam Congress and the mantle of the latter passed on to a younger generation of Congressmen including Bishnuram Medhi (as President), Gopinath Bardoloi, Siddhinath Sarma, Md. Tayyebulla and Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, under whose leadership the civil disobedience movement spread like wildfire in every nook and corner of Assam. This gradually brought an end to the era of Phookan and Bardoloi, the most prominent and respected leaders of the time.

Around this time, the Zeliangrong Nagas fought the British under the leadership of a teenage girl named Gaidinliu. She asked her people not to pay taxes to the British and launched a heroic insurgency against them. However, she was captured in 1932 and was imprisoned for life to be released later in 1946. Many of her associates were executed.

Post 1935, besides those mentioned above, other important leaders of the freedom movement in Assam included Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed (who later became the President of India), Debeswar Sarma, Siddhinath Sarma, Omeo Kumar Das, Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati, etc. This was a period which saw Congress and other parties experimenting with constitutionalism and government formation in different states of the country. This period also witnessed the rise of Muslim League politics and Assam became an important playground of League politics. It is important to note that Assam's demography changed radically because of large scale immigration of poor Muslim peasants from East Bengal under the patronage of the colonial administration, and later on the Muslim League ministry under Sir Syed Muhammad Saadulla.

When Congress declared the 'Quit India' movement in 1942, the common people of Assam plunged themselves into it. Underground and disruptive activities also accompanied the mass movement.

**The countrywide protest against the repressive Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwalla *bagh* massacre, Khilafat Movement and finally, Gandhiji's call for Non-Cooperation in 1920 left a huge imprint on the younger generation of the Assam Association leadership. They announced full support to the Non-Cooperation Movement.**

(Continued on page 49)

### Lepcha dance

*This popular folk dance of the Lepcha tribe of Sikkim conveys a romantic story of a young boy and a girl. A group of boys ask a group of girls for their hands in marriage. The girls however, turn down the offer asking them to approach their parents instead. This colourful dance is performed to the accompaniment of melodious Lepcha songs and musical instruments, such as sanga (drum), yangley (string instrument), cymbals, yakra, flute and tungbuk.*

# Scoring in the face of adversity

*The Northeast region in India lacks good infrastructure and environment for sports, yet it has produced world class sportspersons who make India proud. Pabitra Gogoi refreshes our memories about these sterling athletes.*

**T**HE Northeastern region of India may be termed as a hub of sporting talent. In 1946, the All India Football Federation handed over the responsibility of leading the Indian football team in the London Olympics to none other than Dr. Talimeren Ao, then T Ao, who was doing his medical graduation in Calcutta (now Kolkata). A frontline defender in the Calcutta league, donning the colours of the Mohun Bagan club, T Ao ably led the Indian team in the London Games; and the lanky Naga youth set an example for the youth of this region.

That was the beginning. Since then, this part of the country has produced numerous sportspersons of international repute. But the sportspersons here have to overcome lots of odds before they can achieve their goal in the sporting arena. Like in other fields, the sports infrastructure here is very limited, and even today, youngsters don't have access to state-of-the-art facilities in honing their skills. Apart from the infrastructure, the youth here have to face some other problems too.

### Sporting icons from the region

Undoubtedly iconic boxer M.C. Mary Kom is the best known sporting product of the Northeast who not only won an Olympic medal, but also has five world crowns in her kitty. A natural athlete, she was named Mangte Chungneijang at birth, but chose the name 'Mary' as it was easier to pronounce. Mary belonged to a poor family and had to help her parents in running the six-member family. As a child Mary tried her hand at various sports like hockey, football, athletics, etc. But Dingko Singh's gold medal winning performance in the 1998 Asian Games inspired her to take up boxing seriously.

Due to her passion for the game, she left her school and

proceeded to Imphal to train under coach M. Narjit Singh. During that time she had to face harsh criticism from all quarters as boxing was considered to be a masculine sport. But her dedication and thirst for doing something for the

country encouraged her to take up boxing seriously, and the rest is history.

Mary's glorious journey started in 2000 with the State Championship in Manipur. After that she won numerous crowns within a span of 15 years that include an Olympic medal, world titles, Asiad gold, Arjuna Award, Padma Shri, Padma Bhusan, among others. These were not scripted in one night, but were a

result of intense hard work and dedication.

Shuttler Dipankar Bhattacharjee is another sporting giant of the Northeast who is a two-time Olympian and three-time national champion in badminton. Hailing from Guwahati, Dipankar, like other sportspersons of this region, had to overcome acute conditions in infrastructure in Assam. But Dipankar was a man of special mettle who practised vigorously under the guidance of his father Iswar Bhattacharjee, who had hardly any technical knowledge about the game of badminton. The old-fashioned Kanaklata Indoor Stadium in Guwahati earned the distinction of producing an international shuttler who became the first Indian to reach pre-quarterfinals in badminton in Olympics during the Barcelona Games.

Bhogeswar Baruah is another person who has been hailed as one of the most charismatic sporting legends of Assam and the Northeast. The gold medallist in the 800-metre event at the 1966 Bangkok Asian Games, Baruah introduced this part of the country to the world with his remarkable show. He also became the first Arjuna Award winner from this region.

Baruah, who used to practise at the bank of Joysagar



M.C. Mary Kom



**Jayanta Talukdar, the charismatic archer from Assam**

Pukhuri (tank) at Sivasagar in his early days, went on to join the Indian Army where his talent was spotted. Finally, he became a national hero with that glorious achievement in the Asian Games. But it is believed that if he had been in Assam during his young age, perhaps he could not have attained such a feat as during that period, Assam athletics was underdeveloped and the concept of middle distance running was beyond imagination. Baruah has been able to set an ideal sporting atmosphere in Assam and the entire Northeastern region by becoming the first ever gold medallist in the coveted Asian Games.

Jayanta Talukdar has been the most charismatic athlete Assam has produced so far. Born in 1987 in Guwahati, Jayanta was spotted in the year 2000 during a selection trial for archery. Prior to that, his father Ranjan Taludkdar bought an Indian bow for him and his brother, from Shillong, with which he practised at his residence at Bagharbori in Guwahati. He was invited to attend a trial at the prestigious Tata Archery Academy, Jamshedpur, that very year. Jayanta surprised everybody by finishing first among the 50 boys and girls at the camp who had come from all over the country.

Archery suited Jayanta who has a strong physical stature coupled with endurance and mental toughness. Immediately after joining the Tata Academy he was selected to represent Jharkhand in the Junior National Archery Championship, and in that very year (2003), he was picked by the national selectors to represent the country.

In the year 2005, Jayanta surprised the whole nation when at the age of 18 and almost at the beginning of his career in archery, he toppled the bigwigs at the 25th Senior National Archery Championship held at Ernakulum, and became the new Senior National Champion in the recurve individual event of archery. He retained the title the next year at Kolkata.

He made his international debut with the Asian Championship in the year 2003 held at Yangon, where the Indian team grabbed a silver medal. He played in the Asian Championship 2005 held at New Delhi, where the Indian team again made a podium-finish with a silver medal.

In the Britain Junior World Archery Championship in 2004, the Indian team won a silver medal and Jayanta was the highest scorer among the national team members. It was the nation's first ever medal at a world championship tournament in archery. Jayanta reached one of the most vital chapters of his career when he was selected for the Indian team for the Sydney Olympic Games in 2004. He finished 11<sup>th</sup> in the team event and 43<sup>rd</sup> in the individual category. Further, Jayanta contributed to his team winning a silver medal at the World Championship held at Madrid in Spain the next year. Significantly, Jayanta was adjudged the best Indian performer at the tournament. In that very year he also won a gold medal in the Colombo South Asian Federation (SAF) Games.

A gold medal in the FITA Meteksan Archery World Cup tournament held at Porec, Croatia in 2006 is the highest achievement for Jayanta in his illustrious career. He is the first ever Indian to achieve the feat. In that championship, Jayanta defeated Magnus Petersson of Sweden by 108-105 points in the final round to win the gold medal. He repeated this feat in 2009 at the same venue, and also struck gold in the team event. This performance took him to a career best world ranking of two. He then won a bronze medal in the team event at the Asian Games in Doha in 2006. Along with Rahul Banerjee, Tarundeep Rai and Mangal Champia, he won multiple gold medals in the team event in the Archery World Cups.

He won a bronze medal in the individual event at the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in 2010 and later that year, he won the bronze medal in the team event at the Asian Games in China. He qualified for the London Olympics and helped the Indian team qualify for the London Olympics when they finished runners-up at the Olympics qualification tournament in the USA in 2011.

In 2007, Jayanta was honoured with the coveted Arjuna Award by the central government. Thus the Guwahati boy became the third Assamese to win the prestigious award of

the Indian sports. Jayanta's meek and mild attitude always attracts those who come close to him. Despite being a hero of Indian sports, he maintains a low profile. ■



**The writer is Chief Reporter, The Assam Tribune and is associated with sports journalism for the last 30 years.**

# Will the Northeast media ever be independent?

*The local media in the Northeast is typically caught between the government and the insurgents. Advocacy and fact-finding is often left to activists. But there are sporadic flashes of journalistic brilliance which need to be encouraged, says Dr.Ningthoujam Koiremba Singh.*

**D**OES the mainstream media – both print and broadcasting channels - still ignore the Northeast region of India as they used to before? Not really! And this is mainly thanks to the array of panel discussions and edit pages that have appeared in the prime channels and dailies in the last couple of years. But most of these issues discussed concerned the discrimination of the Northeasterners in the metros and other cities. Whereas, the real issues of the region like development, corruption, extortion by militant groups, human right violations and many others that are plaguing the society and the region at large, are yet to get the spot light.

### A watchdog called social activism

Firstly, we have to appreciate the relentless efforts of the social workers and activists of the region. They have been vocal enough in taking some of the issues of the region to the ears and eyes of the citizens through the mainstream media. In fact, they have filled the void created by the incompetence of the vulnerable and ineffective local media. Today, the local media is growing, but mostly in numbers. If the people are habituated to blaming the mainstream media of neglecting their issues, they are equally habituated to ignoring the failure of the local media in representing issues of their respective states. But, it would be an injustice to solely blame the incompetence of the local media for the existing condition.

The media in the Northeast relies heavily on the government for its revenue. So, it follows, that they will find it difficult to be critical. In the past, whenever the media chose to be overtly critical, the government had its way of arm twisting them through the archaic Prevention of Seditious Meeting Act, 1911. As with the militant groups, the powerless local media becomes the soft target. Since 1991, 25 journalists

have been killed in the region. Yet, their pitiable condition still continues. Then, there are the civil society organisations, for whom the media either has a soft corner, or have to face the threat of being boycotted or labeled as traitors of their community, if at all they criticise such organisations.

Even the security forces have their own way of keeping a good image through the media by doling out good lunches, liquor and some useful money at every press conference they conduct. So, most of the stories in the local news are mere representations of the press conferences and press releases of the government, militants, civil societies and security forces. But, in recent times, a few of them have raised questions regarding the lack of development in the region.

**In the past, whenever the media chose to be overtly critical, the government had its way of arm twisting them through the archaic Prevention of Seditious Meeting Act, 1911.**

### An urban-centric media

While the local media is incapable of wielding power to change policies at the centre or the state like some of the mainstream media do, there's an obnoxious similarity between them when it comes to representing the issues of the people. The local media are as city-centric as the mainstream media. And in a region where divisions based on ethnic identities run deep, the sense of being neglected by the main media of the region only gives birth to a number of small media outlets representing the parochial viewpoint of one particular ethnicity. This has had a detrimental effect on the region. Having said that, such coverage has also focused on the issues and living conditions of the people in remote places, where diverse ethnic communities thrive.

For any report or news to be authentic, the access to information and verification of the story is vital. But it is often difficult for a common media person in the Northeast as there are too many players, vis-a-vis the government, the militants

and the security forces. As a case in point, Gammon India, Valecha Engineering, TBL and Continental Engineering Corporation withdrew from a National Highway project in Assam in 2009. Extortion, killing and abduction of engineers made it impossible for them to continue the work. And the regional media remained a silent spectator, even though they filed a pro forma report of the case.

The issue of division on ethnic lines makes things all the more difficult for the media to verify claims when there is a clash between two communities. Like in 2006, when there was an alleged mass rape of women from Hmar community by militants, the media of Manipur had a hard time getting access to the region and verify the truth. Moreover, most of the reporters in the local media are untrained to, not only get access to information, but also to have a sense of news, other than filing verbatim, the press releases. On the other hand, reporters of the region are highly underpaid and hence this profession fails to attract the best of talents.

### Emergence of online media

Today, we see many online media mushrooming in the region. And their approach is vastly different from that of the traditional media. In Manipur, for instance, there is a lot of

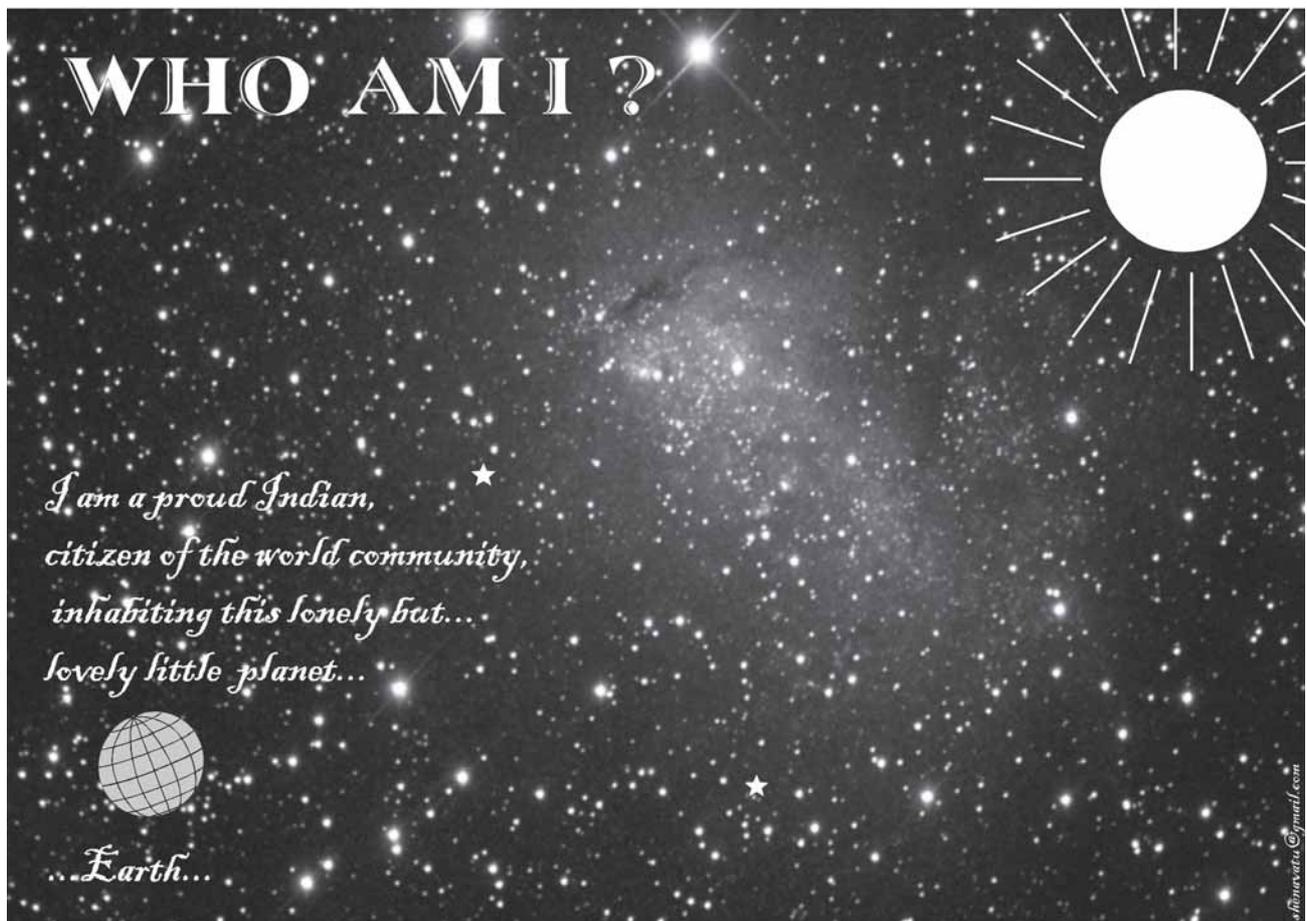
spotlight online on the achievers from the region in the fields of art, culture, sports and so on. They have, either purposefully, or out of incapability, left the main issues untouched.

In such a scenario, the activists representing the region seem to be the only choice to take the issues of the region to the ears of the mainstream media. Many freelance journalists from the region have been anonymously working to provide a breakthrough for the mainstream reporters on some of the critical issues that need to be highlighted at the national level. In the infamous extrajudicial killing in Manipur in 2009, a freelance journalist captured on camera the killing of a young man and a woman by the state police. These photographs were sent to a correspondent of *Tehelka* magazine, and the report caught the attention of the national media.



In times to come, flashes of such journalistic brilliance might bring the issues of the Northeast into the limelight now and then. But for it to receive a constant media attention, a lot is still left to be done. ■

The writer is Assistant Professor, School of Law, Christ University, Bangalore.



# In the land of the golden *langur*

*The Manas Tiger Reserve in Assam, a UNESCO World Heritage Site is a precious haven of biodiversity. While years of Bodo insurgency have taken a toll on the wildlife, especially the rhino population, slowly the reserve is limping back to some normalcy.*

**Bittu Sahgal** chronicles the reserve's travails.

**I**N May 1996, I walked across a burnt bridge and saw the mayhem that had been unleashed on Manas. I spoke with forest guards who had lost friends and inspected guard huts that had been razed to the ground. There were no more rhinos left in Manas, I was told. Yet, the forest itself seemed to burst with good health. Golden grasslands stretched into the distance, capped *langurs* sprang from tree to tree, and though I did not see them, I knew that those of Manas' 21 endangered species that were not on the direct hit-list of poachers and militants – including golden *langurs*, clouded leopards, golden cats and even Gangetic dolphins – were alive and well.

But there were no more rhinos. For 10 long years, the park had been in the grip of militancy and we were among the first 'outsiders' to return to paradise.

### Manas's original protector

How I wished Deb Roy was alive. Almost single-handedly in the 1970s and '80s, he had managed to fight off poachers and encroachers to keep Manas in one piece. He was the first Field Director of the Manas Tiger Reserve, one of only nine forests that had been selected to be a part of Project Tiger when it was launched in 1973. Within a few years, his team made sure that rhino numbers rose to over 100 and that tigers were able to breed and bring up their cubs successfully throughout the park. Almost anyone who visited



Manas grassland



Capped *langur* at the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary

Manas in the early 1980s returned with images of large elephant herds in the forests and grasslands, a stone's throw from the Mothangudi rest house on the banks of the Manas River.

While Deb Roy was alive, his staff was kept free from the interference of politicians and bureaucrats because very few people were prepared to tangle with the straight-talking, extremely popular wildlife defender who knew that protecting the forests was the only way the tigers, rhinos and elephants could be protected from humans.

I have been visiting Manas on and off for a decade now. Against the backdrop of the Eastern Himalaya, this grass and jungle habitat of unparalleled beauty sprawls like a natural womb within whose protective cocoon, golden *langurs* and Bengal floricans, hispid hare and pygmy hogs survive.

### Manas River – the lifeline

As with all tiger reserves, the forest serves as a sponge for the monsoon rain and subsequently feeds rivers that originate in the Eastern Himalaya. Part of the foothills of the outer Himalaya, Manas is a low-lying, linear wilderness that stretches between the Sankosh River to the west and the Dhansiri River in the east. The Manas River itself waters the western part of the sanctuary, forks into the Boki and Hakua rivers in the heart of the reserve, and joins the mighty Brahmaputra, 64 km to the south.



**Yellow vented warbler at Manas**

This silver-blue river, with its smooth-pebbled, sand and shingle banks, is the life blood of the forest. There is no better way to experience the river's changing moods than to sit soundlessly for hours on its bank and let nature come to you. The Manas forest extends on both sides of the river and presents one of Earth's most timeless vistas. As you watch the magic unfold, a herd of elephants might silently appear on the opposite bank, lending a touch of the ethereal to an earthly paradise. Little wonder then, that this was chosen by UNESCO to be a World Heritage Site.

### A slow return to normalcy

But Manas has had a rough past. And its future is still far from secure. The idyllic splendour of the tiger reserve, which represents the entire biotope, was shattered by *Bodo* militants who used the thick forests as a hiding place and casually took a vicious toll on its wildlife, which was traded for cash and arms. Human lives were also lost, those of forest guards in particular.

Though a tentative peace now prevails, the park itself has never quite recovered from the aftermath of the insurgency. Poachers and timber smugglers continue to wreak havoc here, as they do across virtually every wildlife park in India.

Home to wild buffalo, elephant, tiger (and perhaps a handful of rhinos on its fringes), Manas today harbours more endangered species than any other forest in India, a fact confirmed by the Red Data Book maintained by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Fortunately, Manas' forests are extensive, covering 2,840 sq. km. with a core area of 391 sq. km. Across the river, the Bhutanese government has also established the 565 sq. km. Royal Manas Reserve, which



**Malayan Giant Squirrel at Manas**

abuts India's Manas Tiger Reserve.

The goddess Manasa, who gave the Manas National Park its name, would probably be pleased at the park's slow climb back to health. So would the people of the *Mushahari* or tiger clan, part and parcel of the *Bodo* community, who believe that they have descended from tigers. Even today, clan members who witness the death of a tiger go through a period of mourning for a week, much as they would for a parent or child. Tragically, this did little to stop the militants.



In the days ahead, however, it is the sentiments of the *Mushahari* that we will need, to bring the tiger and Manas itself back from the brink. ■

The writer is the Editor of *Sanctuary Asia* magazine.

### Tribal art

*Tattooing in Mizoram and Nagaland is all about wearing a piece of personal art. Manipuri tattoo artist Mo Naga, the most famous tattoo artist from the region, closed his studio in Delhi's Hauz Khas village in 2012, to open Headhunters' Ink in Guwahati, Assam, the first tattoo training school in the Northeast. Mo says he wants to preserve tribal motifs of Manipur and other Northeastern states through his art.*

# The reel life struggle of the Northeast

*The Northeast film industry is eighty years old, but lack of patrons, multiple languages and dialects which create barriers, and the overwhelming thrall of Hindi films have eaten into its legitimate market. **Utpal Borpujari** bemoans this, while saluting the spirit of the extraordinary filmmakers from this region.*

**F**AR, far away from the glitzy world of Bollywood and its equally sparkling cousins in the South, there exists a filmmaking “industry” that’s 80 years old – or young if you would – and yet is largely unknown to the outside world, barring the limited eclectic world of film festivals. This “industry” lives in that part of India that is geographically called the ‘Northeast’, comprising eight states, many in the rest of India do not know much about yet. (There is a deliberate reason why the word “industry” has been put in quotation mark above - you will understand as you read on.)

### An eighty-year-old industry

Cinema in the Northeast is 80 years old this year. It was in 1935 that freedom fighter-poet-playwright-lyricist-tea planter-social reformer and scion of one of Assam’s most-prominent families replete with literary and cultural giants, Jyotiprasad Agarwalla, made *Joymoti*, the first Assamese film after getting himself trained at the UFA Studios in Berlin. To make the film, he established a studio in his family-owned Bholagori tea estate and constructed a set of a palace using locally-available material, so that he could tell the tale of *Joymoti*; she was a princess in medieval Assam who sacrificed her life to protect her husband and later king of the Ahom kingdom, Gadapani’s life from political enemies.

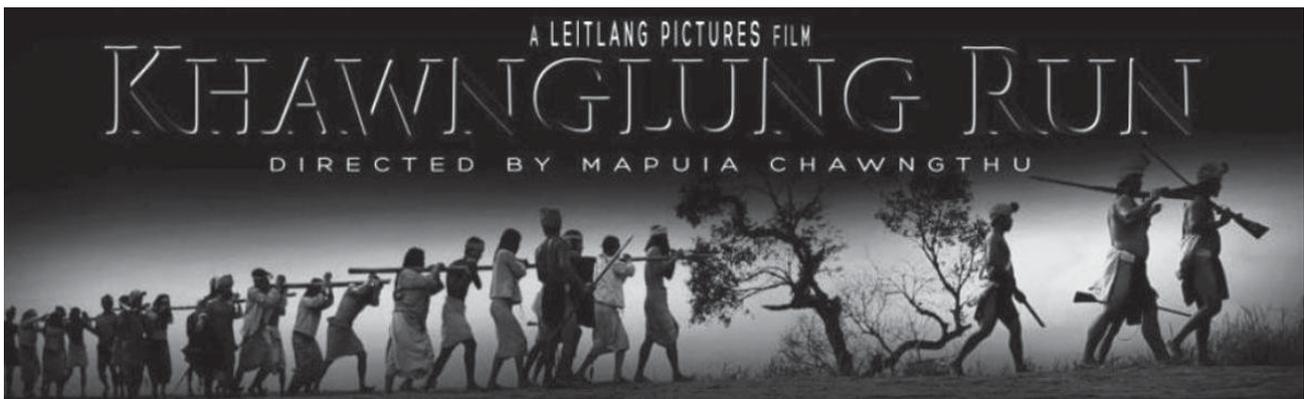
The tragedy was that Jyotiprasad had to release his film in Raunaq cinema in Calcutta (now Kolkata) because there was no cinema hall in Assam. He of course released the film later in Assam, starting with a theatre hall in Guwahati, called the Kumar Bhaskar Natya Mandir. One would dare say that just because of the lack of screening space, *Joymoti* was an unmitigated financial disaster. And a bigger tragedy is that even 80 years after that, filmmakers from the region are still struggling to find adequate space to screen their films. It’s actually a travesty to call filmmaking in the Northeast an industry (which is why, as you would have understood by now, the word industry is in quotation marks at the beginning of this piece).



**Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, a doyen of Northeast cinema**

### Challenges galore

Of course, lack of exhibition space is not the only problem for a region that is a virtual Tower of Babel, with nearly 250 ethnic communities with as many languages and dialects, most of which are not understood by communities other than that which speaks it. So, if a film is made in the Monpa dialect of Arunachal Pradesh, it cannot travel even within that state commercially because only the Monpa tribe people would understand that language, and it’s a community of less than 45,000 people (41,983 according the 2001 census). And they live in villages that are far apart in high mountains in Tawang and West Kameng districts, which makes it impossible for them to come to a hall – even if one existed in their part of the world – and watch a film. In fact, except for Assamese and Manipuri, there is no regular filmmaking “industry” in the region, though in recent years, “films” made for the home video market using cheaper digital technology has taken root in a few parts of the region, especially Meghalaya and Mizoram, as also among some ethnic communities within Assam. Even in Assam, which has the



**Mapuia Chawngthu made the highly-stylised *Khawnglung Run***

maximum number of cinema screens, an Assamese (the language with the maximum reach) film has access to a maximum of just about 40-45 screens.

Quite clearly, films are not made in this part of the world for only commercial reasons, though there was a time when Assamese films had quite a sizeable market. But then, it's not a gloomy story all the way, especially if one takes a look at the 80-year journey. Undaunted by a gamut of other interconnected problems like dearth of funding and a society almost always in turmoil, filmmakers in the region have continued to weave their dreams on the big screen, seeking to tell stories relevant to the region and its societies. From Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, states which cannot boast of even a single cinema hall, to Assam and Manipur where filmmakers have made quality films over the years, the journey is continuing, but, like everything else about the Northeast, it is largely outside 'mainland' India's consciousness.

### The case of the Manipuri cinema

The narrative of Manipuri cinema, and how circumstances made it the first film industry in the country to go fully digital (after all cinema halls in the state closed down making celluloid filmmaking unviable after one of the numerous militant groups active in the state enforced a ban on Hindi cinema in the 1990s – see box), is another interesting example.

Manipur is actually a great example of how one can turn an adverse situation to an advantage. Filmmakers there have devised an economic model in which they shoot their films in the digital format in ultra low budgets and hold ticketed shows in various available halls (theatre halls, community halls, etc., though a few cinema halls in Imphal city have reopened in recent times). In Assam, which in the 1980s had more than 150 halls but now has less than 60 (out of which Assamese films get released in approximately 40-45, and other ethnic language films in virtually none), filmmaking has seen a recent upswing with the availability of cheaper digital technology.

### Notable films and filmmakers

Over the years, the Northeast has seen several filmmakers who have earned high praise nationally and internationally through their socially-responsible cinema. They include Jahnu Barua and the late Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia of Assam, and Aribam Syam Sharma of Manipur, as also the multifaceted genius Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. This, even as some like P. C. Barua, Danny Denzongpa, Seema Biswas, S. D. and R. D. Burman, and Salil Choudhury have made a place in 'mainland' cinema in different eras.

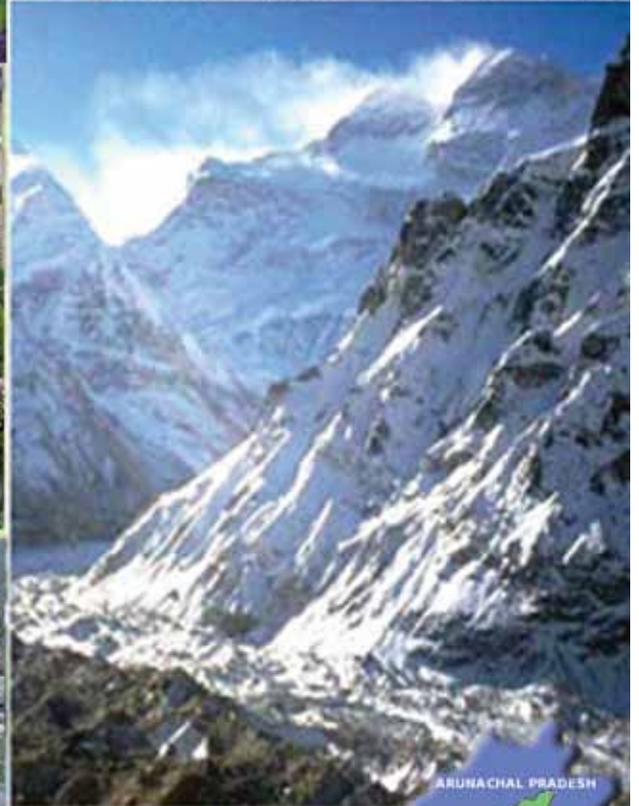
But cinema from Northeast India has remained more or less outside the cinematic narrative of India. Take for example Jyotiprasad's *Jyomoti* itself. It was perhaps the first Indian film to have a realistic treatment and to have a theme that drew from history, and yet had a contemporary resonance. Sadly, in studies or publications about Indian cinema, it has had barely a cursory mention.

Those who follow meaningful Indian cinema would know that in Assam, both Jahnu Barua and Saikia have made some really good films, including the former's *Halodhiya Choraye Baodhan Khai (Catastrophe)* that did commendable international business. But there have been several other filmmakers who have made one or two acclaimed films before fading into oblivion, as despite winning both national and international honours for their initial films, they never got funding for their next films.

Among them the most notable one is Gautam Bora (whose only film *Wosobipo* in the Karbi tribal language was screened at the Berlin Film Festival, apart from winning the Indira Gandhi Award for the Best First Film of a Director at the National Film Awards), and Dr. Santwana Bordoloi (whose only film *Adajya* in Assamese won a jury award at the International Film Festival of India). There have been a couple of notable exceptions though, such as Manju Borah (*Baibhav, Laaj, Aai Ko Naai*, etc., in Assamese and *Ko:Yad* in Mising), and Sanjib Sabhapandit (*Juye Poora Xoon, Jatinga Ityady*, etc.,) who have managed to make socially-relevant films with small

**(Continued on page 39)**

KNOW INDIA BETTER



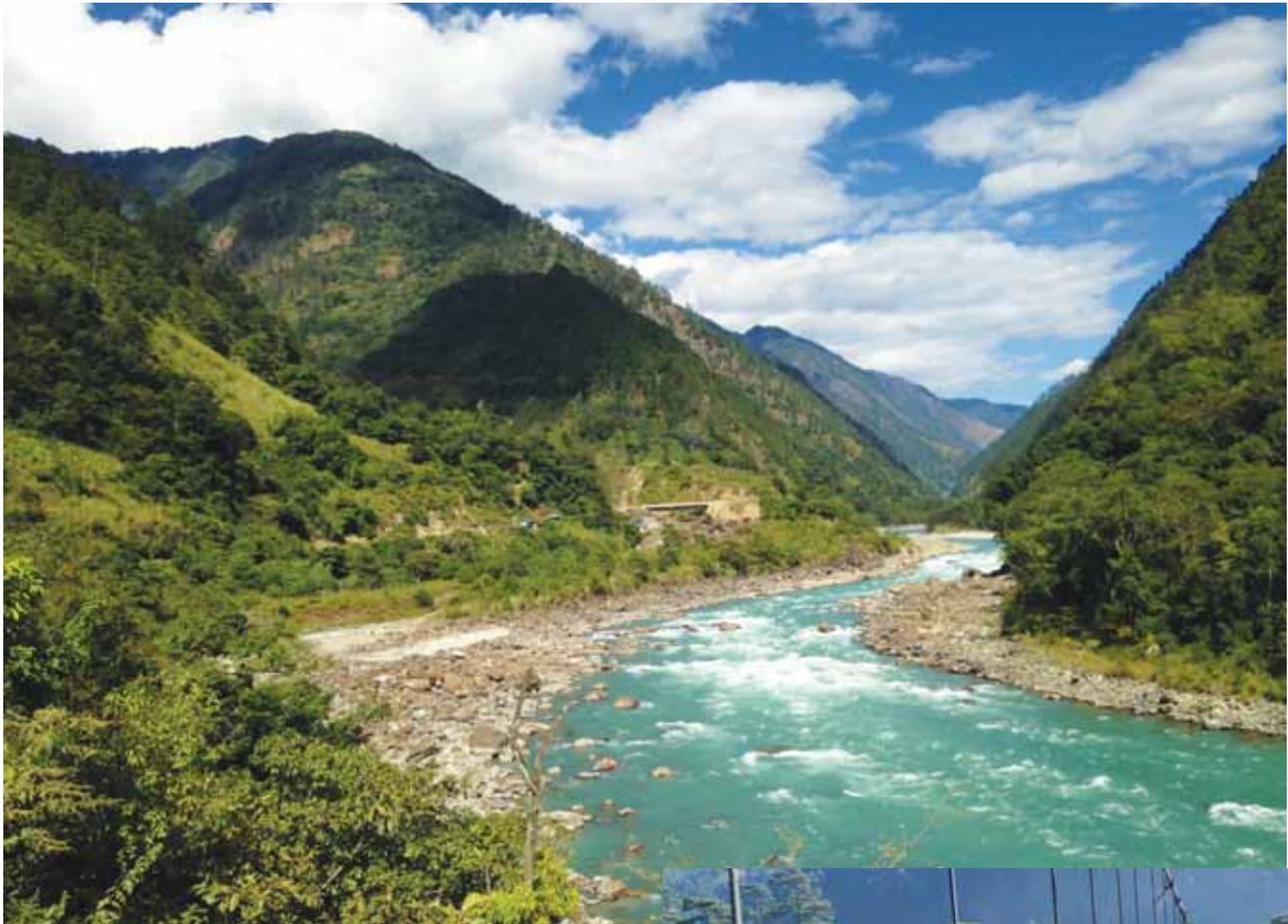
# Paradise Unknown

*where India begins*



*It is infrequently that these Northeastern states find mention in a media which can barely straddle the increasingly diverse mix of regional, national and international news. They sit far from the movers and shakers of the country and the who's-who of the globe that increasingly deem it prudent to visit India. It's a pity that the lands which the Sun kisses at dawn, fall into the shadow of dusk by the time it shines high on the national capital. Read about the enchanting lands of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram in this concluding part of the series on the states of Northeast region, and decide if they should remain unsung and unknown anymore.*

Text and Photos: Akul Tripathi



**The Lohit River on drive to Kibithu, Arunachal Pradesh, the easternmost point of the country**

**Q**UEER, isn't it? The corner of India that is the first to light up every day as the sun continues on its steadfast, unflinching route across the breadth of the country is amongst the least known, spoken about and nearly inaccessible areas of the country. Ironically, the norm suggests that it is places where the sun doesn't shine which get condemned to the dungeons of indifference. However, the frontier states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram brave not just borders in the wilderness, but also the combined, colossal obliviousness of a nation whose mental borders are drawn short of its actual physical ones.

In the long shadows of dusk hides an old magic - the eternal lore of nature, the unmistakable and inimitable call of precarious thrill, legends which were once true, and amidst it all the sheer joy of discovering your own country. Some things choose to step away from the highlights of time just so that someday, some people can feel the adventure of finding it again. Perhaps those days are now and we are the lucky people who can reach into a paradise which is in its darkest phase - the one just before light. Where paradise unknown transforms into an enviable Eden. And when it does, this is what shall be unleashed on an unsuspecting nation.



**Suspension bridge at Dong, near Kibithu**

### **Arunachal Pradesh**

The largest of the Northeastern states, Arunachal Pradesh was aptly named so when it became a state in 1987. Translating as '*the land of the dawn lit mountains*', the name holds special significance as it holds the most northeastern position in the country and borders three countries with Bhutan to the West, the Tibet autonomous region of China to the North and Myanmar to the East. The state is divided into five main regions with the Himalayas running north to south and





**The unique Namdapha National Park**

the Patkai hills in the far east which feed numerous perennial rivers and rivulets, the mightiest of which - Siang, goes on to become the Brahmaputra. Modern-day Arunachal Pradesh is one of the linguistically richest and most diverse regions in all of Asia, being home to at least 30 and possibly as many as 50 distinct languages in addition to innumerable dialects and sub-dialects thereof.

The easternmost point of the country lies in Arunachal Pradesh - Kibithu - the place which wakes to the first rays of the rising Sun over India. Kibithu is very uniquely located at a tri-junction, with China to the North and Burma to the East. Various hurdles need to be surmounted to get to the easternmost point of India. It is reached by a long, painful drive on the easternmost road of India, from the nearest big town of Tezu. Tezu itself is best approached through Assam, Dibrugarh being the nearest airport. Entry into Arunachal itself is a challenge with the necessity of an Inner Line Permit - another remnant from the grand colonial era and applicable in Arunachal, Nagaland and Mizoram. However, the troubles are compensated with interest by the serene landscape enlivened by the tranquil Lohit River, which enters India at Kibithu. Kibithu itself is surrounded by mountain passes which range from 1000 ft -



**Hut of Remembrance at Walong near Kibithu**

16000 ft and offers the option of many challenging treks. It is also the starting point for rafting expeditions.

The serenity and setting of Kibithu make it seem like an idyllic place, unchanged and where nothing out of the ordinary would have happened since the mountains were formed and the river tore a path to the sea. How far it is from reality though! Just over 50 years ago, Kibithu was site to the Battle of Walong (Walong is a small town a few kilometres west of Kibithu) in the 1962 Indo-China War, where India suffered its worst military attack and subsequent defeat, throwing open a gaping hole at the border, and proving how unprepared India was, militarily and politically. At the same time, what stood out was the heroic resistance of the Indian soldiers. In November 1962, TIME magazine paid a tribute to the Indian soldiers who fought in the Indo-China War in Walong. It said, "At Walong, Indian troops lacked everything. The only thing they did not lack was guts". A War Memorial at Walong and another one on the following Namti plains, pay homage to the 4000 soldiers who defiantly presented the 'bloody nose' to the Chinese.

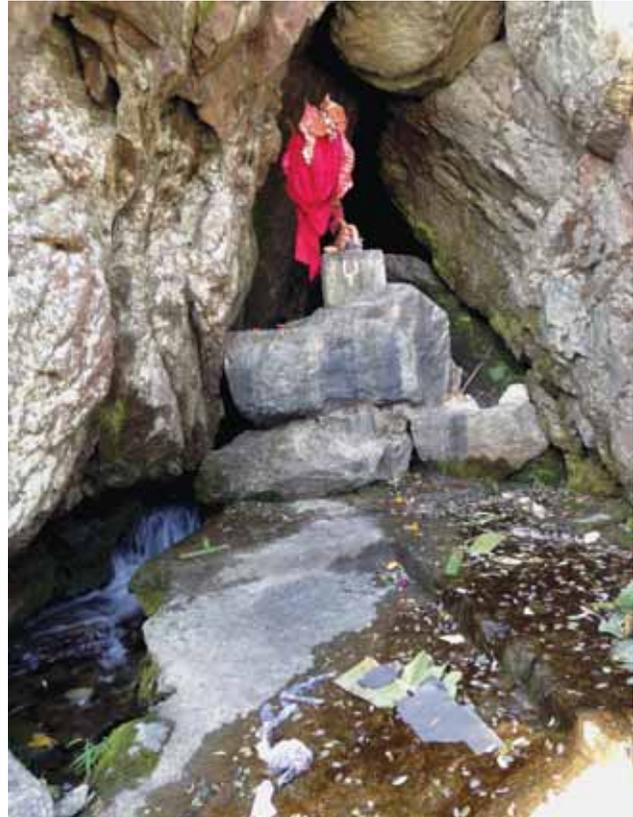
On the way to Kibithu, 21 kms north of Tezu is an important Hindu pilgrimage centre along the banks of the Lohit River - the Parshurama Kund, where according to legend, the great sage Parshuram washed away the sins of killing *kshatriyas* (cause the latter killed Prashuram's father and waged a war against *brahmins*). The site sees devotees flock from across the country and even Nepal, especially on *Makar Sankranti*. As per local beliefs, the site as established by the sage was in existence till 1950, when a massive earthquake shook the Northeast and the *kund* was entirely covered. A very strong current now flows over the original site of the *kund*, but believers insist that the massive boulders embedded in a rough circle are forming another *kund* in place of the old.

Arunachal Pradesh is globally acknowledged as one of the foremost regions of the world in terms of bio-diversity. *Paradise of the Botanists* and *Orchid State Of India* are the other monikers bestowed on it. On its eastern border with Myanmar,



**Parshuram temple near Parshuram Kund**

Arunachal is home to India's third largest and perhaps its most unique national park - the Namdapha National Park. It is the largest protected area in the Eastern Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspot. The park harbours the northernmost lowland evergreen rainforests in the world and is home to the four big cats - Tiger, Leopard, Clouded Leopard and Snow Leopard. Arunachal has perhaps the highest mammal diversity in the country with over 200 species and seven species of non-human primates including



**Fresh water spring of Parshuram Kund**

Stump-tailed Macaque and Slow Loris, Hoolock Gibbons, Capped Langurs, Assamese Macaques and Rhesus Macaques.

The park has 425 recorded species of birds and large areas of the park are still to be explored. Seated in the hills, Arunachal has very minimal and basic road network, a large part of which is constructed and maintained by the army. It is a large state and travelling from one end to another is quite a task as there are various natural hurdles which haven't been circumvented or

### **Legends are made of these**

**D**uring the invasion by the Chinese in 1962, the Indian army had withdrawn defeated from most quarters. However, some quarters were still manned by Indian troops. One such soldier manning an outpost was Jaswant Singh. He refused to withdraw from the lines and with the help of two locals Sela and Naranang, fought the Chinese. The two girls would reload the guns and he would arrange them strategically and fire them together by tying them with a string. In this manner he drove back two waves of the Chinese.

However the girl's father went and spilled the beans to the Chinese. The Chinese now having the advantage of knowledge conquered the outpost. By then, Jaswant Singh had hung himself from a telephone wire and Sela had jumped off a cliff to her death. Naranang was caught and executed and so was their father. Once the war was over, Jaswant Singh's name was on the Indian army's list of deserters to face court martial. The Chinese, impressed by the soldier's bravery narrated the incident to the Indians and declared that if the Indians did not honour Jaswant Singh, the Chinese would. Following this embarrassing incident for the army, Jaswant Singh of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Garhwal Rifles was awarded the Mahavir Chakra (posthumous) and a shrine was constructed in his memory. Two peaks were named after Sela and Naranang. No roads and facilities existed in 1962 beyond Tezpur. The soldiers would go the entire way over the rugged terrain on foot. Just standing there looking at the wire on which Jaswant Singh gave his life for the country, one cannot but imagine the lives that these men live while we run for cover under the air conditioner once the mercury hits 30 degrees. The border areas of Arunachal continue to be manned by the Indian army and tensions often run high as large parts of the state are claimed by China. ●



**Sela Pass, Tawang**

bridged. Fastest access from the easternmost part to the westernmost part is through the plains of Assam, which give way to the hills of Arunachal once again around the town of Tezpur and the climb begins once again into Arunachal and yet another picturesque drive to Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh.

The town of Tawang developed around the Tawang monastery which has a very interesting story behind its making. The monastery was founded by Merag Lama Lodre Gyatso in 1681 in accordance with the wishes of the 5th Dalai Lama, Nagwang Lobsang Gyatso. Tawang in Tibetan means 'chosen by the horse' (Ta – horse; wang – chosen). Legend says that the Dalai Lama let a horse loose and instructed that the monastery be built at the place where the horse is found. Another version says that while Merag Lama was meditating on the problem of the location, his horse went missing and was found standing peacefully on the mountain top. Taking this as a divine guidance, the monastery was built at this place. It is also called the Golden Namgye Lhatse meaning celestial paradise and one look at the monastery on a clear night will make one realise how true its name is. Tawang was historically a part of South Tibet and though Tibet ceded large parts of its territory to the British as per the Simla Accord of 1914 between Great Britain, China and Tibet; which the Chinese did not accept and it became a bilateral agreement between the British and the Tibetan administration.

The British never took active interest or possession of Tawang and it was only in the late 1930s and 1940s that British troops asserted administration in the region. The situation continued after India's independence but underwent a decisive change in 1950 when Tibet lost its *de facto* independence, and was incorporated into the newly established People's Republic of China. In February 1951, Major Ralengnao 'Bob' Khathing led an Assam Rifles column to Tawang town and took control of the remainder of the Tawang tract from the Tibetans, removing the Tibetan administration.

Tawang lies across the Sela Pass which is at a height of 13,700 feet above sea level following a high altitude lake of crystal blue water and rhododendrons running along the road in various colours and hues. During the Sino-Indian war of 1962, Tawang and areas up till Tezpur fell under Chinese control. An unforgettable battle at the pass, which is now the stuff of legends, led it to be named Sela Pass. (see box on pg 26)



## Nagaland

Nagaland, which was granted statehood in 1963 is one of the smallest Indian states and shares an international border with Myanmar. It is known in most of the country as a state rife with violence and Nagas are seen as people who wish to secede from

India. The Nagas as they are generally called are actually people from several tribes, amongst which the Konyaks, Angamis, Aos, Lothas and Sumis are the larger tribes. These tribes are spread over the plains and hills of Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Though a majority of the population in the state is Baptist Christian, tribe and clan customs and loyalties continue to play a major role. Over 60 different dialects from the Sino-Tibetan family of languages are spoken among the tribes while Nagamese, a variant of Assamese, is more commonly spoken. The scores of tribal dances and folk tales speak of a unique history of its peoples and a rich cultural diversity that deserves to be known far from its borders.

After Independence, Nagaland was a part of the Assam province and nationalist movements arose asking for a political union of the native groups. The Indian government saw it wise to quell these movements with the use of force, a strategy used right up till the late 1990's, when cease-fire was declared



**Set on the hill, in the midst of nature, as all Naga settlements generally are, each hut is unique to its tribe** (Photo: Katie Dubey)



**A panoramic view of the 'misty city' Kohima, capital of Nagaland** (Photo: J.J. Roy Burman)

after talks with the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland. This ceasefire has since been extended several times, but it does not take a very close look at the news to realise that dissatisfaction is still palpable in the state.

Nagaland shares borders with Arunachal Pradesh in the North and Manipur in the South, Myanmar to the East and Assam to the West. The best way to enter the state is through Assam via Dimapur. The entry into Nagaland brought us to our base camp for the state – Dimapur. While Kohima is the administrative capital of the state, Dimapur, meaning “city on the great river Dima” (Di – water/river; ma – big; pur – city) is

the commercial hub of the region and the point of entry for Nagaland and Manipur. Its strategic importance can be judged by the fact that the National Highway 39, connecting Kohima, Imphal and the Myanmar border runs through it.

Dimapur in recent history is best known as a seat of the Kachari kingdom and the ruins of the Kachari Palace in the city are under the auspices of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The advanced level of brick making achieved by the Kachari in the middle ages has perhaps allowed the many relics to survive the centuries, and ties in to the name given to Dimapur by the Ahoms (the dynasty from which the state of Assam is named) *Che-din-chi-pen* – the city of bricks.

Onward from Dimapur, to the east lies Kohima - the capital of Nagaland, known as the 'misty city' and also the closest World War II (WWII) came to home. The Battle of Kohima was part of the Burma Campaign, which ultimately turned the campaign in favour of the Allies. The combined casualty list runs well over 10,000. The Earl of Mountbatten eulogised its impact on the War by comparing it to the Battle of Thermopylae. Twenty kilometres southwest of Kohima, at an altitude of 1200 metres is a little and little-known village surrounded by beautiful terraces cut out of the hill slopes. The Khonoma village, called Khwunoria by its dwellers is 400 years old and looks every year of its age. It gets its name from the *Glouthera Fragrantisma* locally known as *Khunwo*, the leaves of which are aromatic



**Khonoma, a typical Naga village marked by clan divide** (Photo: J.J. Roy Burman)

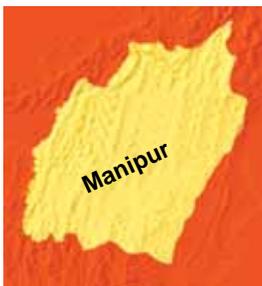


**The World War II cemetery in Kohima** (Photo: Katie Dubey)

and cackle when burnt. The people of Khonoma declared 96sq km of their forests as sanctuary in 1998 to conserve the rare Blyths's Tragopan, an endangered pheasant and the state bird of Nagaland. It is through this sanctuary that one gets to the valley of eternal charm. A further 10 kms from the Khonoma village, the Dzukou Valley is tucked away at an altitude of 2438m behind the Japfti ranges. Most of this remaining distance has to be covered through rough trekking. Famous for its biodiversity, the many streams that run through the valley freeze in extreme winter, while shrubs and herbs populate the stream banks of this predominantly bamboo -filled valley in the summer. In spite of the non-availability of facilities and the difficult terrain, this is one of the most frequented trekking spots in Northeast India.

been at the crossroads of Asian economic and cultural exchange for more than 2,500 years. It has long connected the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia, enabling migration of people, cultures and religions. It has also witnessed many wars, including fighting during World War II. In 1949, as per a treaty signed with Maharaja Budhachandra, the kingdom of Manipur merged with the Union of India. This was disputed by many groups and seen as a step taken under duress and without consensus, and is amongst of the reasons for a 50-year insurgency and ethnic violence.

Perhaps the roads have not been looked after and are less travelled too, as much to make it difficult for the many groups



### Manipur

Standing at Kohima, there are two roads you can take – one towards Dimapur and then Guwahati, and the other that goes south, into Manipur – the road to Imphal. You don't have to go too far down that one to know that it is definitely the

one less travelled.

Bound by Nagaland to the North, Assam to the West, Mizoram in the South and Myanmar in the East, Manipur has



**A section of the Kangala Palace** (Photo: Katie Dubey)



The highly endangered *Sangai* or dancing deer, now protected in Keibul Lamjao National Park, near Imphal (Photo:Katie Dubey)

active in Manipur demanding separation from the Republic of India. The separatist movement that began in 1964 is very complicated as there are many factions involved. Their individual demands are also conflicting and come laden with the baggage

of rivalries between different tribes. To illustrate the difficulties, while the Meiteis want a sovereign state for Mainpur, the Nagas want parts of Manipur to make for a greater Nagaland or Nagalim.



The Kangala Palace in Manipur's capital Imphal, personifies this ancient land and embodies its history (Photo: Katie Dubey)

The capital of Imphal is best known for the historic Kangla Palace which was destroyed by the British in the Anglo-Manipuri War and in recent history as the scene of one of the decisive battles of WWII. The Japanese, wanted to take over Imphal and Kohima, which were also heavily stocked bases of the Allies and then roll down to the Indian plains using the topography to their advantage. Their success in this would have been quite telling in the final result of the war. However, with exceptional bravery,



**The Loktak Lake surrounded by hills in the distance**  
(Photo: Katie Dubey)

clever stratagem and aided by the over-stretching of the supply lines of the Japanese, the Allies held on to the two towns. The battle is estimated to have caused casualties in the range of 100,000.

A two-hour bus drive, or approximately 50 km south of Imphal is the largest freshwater lake in the Northeast region. It is a swamp with floating vegetation, called '*phumdi*'. The *phumdi* is basically the accrual of organic biomass which floats, but is at places strong enough to support the weight of even humans. Loktak Lake is a unique bio-diversity hotspot and a Ramsar site (an international convention for safeguarding wetlands and associated wildlife). Occupying an area of about 40 sq. km., its name literally means '*Lok*' – stream and '*Tak*' – the end, referring to the many streams that feed the lake.

The Loktak Lake is the core around which is formed the Keibul Lamjao National Park - home to the dancing deer of Manipur. Locally known as the *Sangai*, it is more commonly referred to as the brow-antlered deer and is one of three unique sub-species of the deer. The other two are found in Thailand, Myanmar and surrounding countries, but the *Sangai* is endemic to Manipur and naturally occupies a prominent place in local culture and folklore. Once thought to be extinct, it was rediscovered in 1975, and their numbers have increased due to conservation efforts and the establishment of the Keibul Lamjao National Park. The deer have adapted to the floating biomass and have mastered the trick of distributing their weight such as to almost glide over the *phumdi*, making it look like they are dancing. Besides the *Sangai*, the park is also home to 116 species of birds including species of migratory water birds from across the Himalayas. There are also over 200 species of animals including the rare Hoolock Gibbon (which is the only Asian ape), the Indian python, the Sambar and Barking Deer. It is touted, and probably is, the only floating national park in the world.



**An inhabited island in the lake and a *phumdi* floating nearby**  
(Photo: Katie Dubey)

On the way between Imphal and Loktak is a site important in the history of the Indian freedom struggle. In the small town of Moirang, some 45 km south of Imphal where Colonel Malik of Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army hoisted the Indian tricolour for the first time on 14 April 1944. At the site is a museum containing letters, photographs, badges of ranks and other memorabilia.

And amidst this chaos of internal violence, the one thing about Manipur that is definitely known around the country and the world is the classical Manipuri dance form inspired by the theme of Lord Krishna and his beloved Radha's love story and the devotion of the *gopis*. The graceful dance with its elegant costumes has been put on the global map with its many performances at major world events with the backing of ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness). Just the way not many know that the sport of Badminton originated and then developed from Pune in Maharashtra by the British, the game of modern Polo has its origins in Manipur dated by some as far back as 33 AD. The British first saw the locals play a rule-based *pulu* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which they spread first to Calcutta and then to Europe.



**The Raas Leela, the epitome of Manipuri dance, is the thematic representation of the eternal love of Krishna and Radha** (Photo: Katie Dubey)



India-Myanmar border town



### Mizoram

Mizoram – the land of the Mizo (Mi-people, Ram-hill) people; that distant block in the Geography textbook tucked away in a remote corner with a capital one would dread being asked about in exam papers - Aizawl.

The Mizos believe they came on to the Earth from the nether world. Mizo legends talk about their origin from under a large covering rock known as Chhinlung. When a couple of people from a clan called Ralte, who were known for their loquaciousness, started talking noisily while coming out and made much noise, the great God Pathian threw up His hands in disgust and decided enough is enough. He closed the pathway since he believed too many people had already slipped out from the Mizo Hades. It is believed that the Mizos came to Mizoram from the southern parts of China some three millennium ago. Some believe Chhinlung to be Sinlung or Chinlinsang situated near the Sino-Burmese Border. The Mizos themselves have fables of the glory of the ancient Chhinlung civilisation, which further lends credence to these beliefs.

A phenomenon associated with Mizoram is the flowering of the bamboo plants every 48 years which leads to what is called '*mautam*' in the Mizo tongue - literally Bamboo Death.

During '*mautam*', a particular species of bamboo flowers at one time across a wide area which leads to a plague of black rats as they multiply in response to the temporary windfall in seeds. They leave the forests when the seeds are exhausted, and forage on stored grain, which causes a devastating famine. While there is occurrence of this in Manipur as well as Mizoram, the famine in Mizoram has had a telling effect on the region's political history with the ineffective understanding and handling of the phenomenon in the 1959-60 famine coupled with the centralised Assam governance, which led to the creation of



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**Reiek, a Mizo village recreated**

the Mizo National Front in 1961 that wanted independence from India. In 1971, Mizoram became a Union Territory and was declared a full-fledged state in 1987. In recent decades, life in Mizoram has been peaceful.

Mizoram is bordered by three of the seven sisters - Assam, Tripura and Manipur and shares an international border with Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is a highly literate agrarian economy which has seen significant growth in the horticulture and bamboo products industry. Like in most other parts of the country, modern development and architecture are making swift

inroads replacing traditional lifestyles. Changes have been so radical in Mizoram, that just like Rajasthan has its Choki Dhani – a typical Rajasthani village recreated for tourists, Mizoram too has Reiek and Falkawn. Reiek is about 30 kms from Aizawl while Falkawn is 18 kms. The road is dotted with waterfalls and alive with butterflies. The drive to Reiek is pleasant through bamboo groves and tropical forest.

Though they are not as commercial or showcase as much diversity, the recreation is impeccable. Not just a house replicated with intricate detail, the entire structure of a typical Mizo village with the placement of the huts as per the prevalent hierarchies is maintained in the recreation. The houses are made with the same materials used by Mizos and contain everything a typical Mizo house would have.

To the other side of the hill where the typical village has been created are caves in which the ancient Mizos once lived. Pitch dark, wet and slimy, they are difficult to climb even with ropes while the villagers jump and run through them with the ease of mountain goats.

An interesting and unique occurrence in the state of Mizoram is at the picturesque border town of Champhai. The hill town of Champhai is a bustling commercial town and offers a wonderful view of the Myanmar hills. A storehouse of ancient relics, monuments and memorials connected with legends and folklores, Champhai has a background of rich heritage. The small hamlets around the town are dotted with monuments and monoliths that depict success in war, valorous hunting, personal distinctions and achievements. Champhai is significant for the Mizos because as per their fables, their ascent to earth happened near here.

The Tiau Lui River that separates India from Myanmar is 22 kms from the town of Champhai. A metal bridge connects India to Myanmar across a shallow narrow river. The Myanmar flag stands proudly on one side while the Indian flag flutters on



**A breathtaking view from the hill town of Champhai, Mizoram**



Rih Dil Lake at sunset

the other. However, unlike the China and Pakistan borders, this is a soft border. There is no fencing or no-man's-land. People slip in and out quite regularly and the unique one-day visa formality is only for tourists who do not know of the thousands of pathways connecting Mizoram and Myanmar.

Just across the bridge are Burmese shops that stock excellent textile - batik shirts and wraparound skirts. A few kilometers away is the heart-shaped lake Rih Dil. The wonder of this lake is that though it has no visible external inflow or outflow of water, it is constantly clear and has invoked many interesting folk-tales. The Mizos believe that the departed souls make their way to heaven, which they call *Pialral*, through here. Permission to visit the lake is easily available through the Deputy Commissioner's office and the Indian army, which has a very negligible presence for a border town, sends a representative along to accompany the tourists. Ethnically and culturally, this part of Myanmar is extremely similar to the way of life of the people of Mizoram. For this the Mizos have a joke; they call Rih Dil the largest Mizo lake which is in Burma.

### An epilogue for 'Big Brother'

Yes, they are a great distance away, these states. They are hard to get to and everything about them is completely unlike anything the mainland is habituated to expect from



Just across the border is Myanmar

'India'. And yet, in the midst of this incalculable diversity, are people nursing the same aspirations as those anywhere else on the subcontinent. The desire to better their lives and the dream of an India bigger than the myopic glasses it received



through centuries of dominion by forces from the west. Somewhere, we have forgotten to look east. And when we do, we will realise that it's only the physical distances that are unalterable. The hearts - they beat as one. ■

The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.

## Our Last Six Issues

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The Northeast	Music	Human Rights	Foreign Relations	Tribal	New Government

# The ice-cream man



**Raghunandan S. Kamath** has whipped up a revolution in ice-creams. Using fresh fruits, dry fruits, milk and sugar, with absolutely no preservatives, colouring agents, chemicals, gelatin or any other additive, he has made Natural Ice-creams a household name in Mumbai, Delhi, Indore, Jaipur, Goa, Bangalore, Raipur Hyderabad, and many other places. Tasty, smooth and soft ice-creams with exotic Indian flavours like *sitaphal* (custard apple), chickoo, mango, jackfruit, tender coconut and almost a hundred others, Kamath has carved a solid niche in ice-cream making and distribution. Kamath (61) is a simple man, whose office and home in Mumbai are surrounded by fruit trees, as he loves fruits. His factory at Kandivili in Mumbai is huge and he lives in an expansive bungalow at Andheri with his wife, two sons and a daughter-in-law.

There are over a 120 Natural Ice-cream outlets in India, the majority being in Mumbai where he started his business in 1984 at Juhu. The

latest outlet, inaugurated in December is in Delhi, and it has already created waves. His USPs (unique selling points) are many. Besides the non inclusion of preservatives, he believes in creating totally Indian flavours, like even cinnamon and muskmelon. Kamath has revolutionary ideas, he strongly believes in his work which is his passion and he has risen to this place through sheer hard work, good standards and honest approach to business. He has now involved his sons Srinivas and Siddhant and other family members in his expanding business. The 25,000 sq. feet Natural Ice-cream factory at Kandivili in Mumbai is a hub of activity. Huge containers, machines and hygienically strong conditions manufacture mouth watering ice-cream by the tonne. At any given time there are at least 20-25 flavours being produced, since fruit based ones are seasonal and they have a hundred different flavours waiting to be developed and marketed.

In his office at Kandivili where one can see the terrace garden with several fruit trees, the 'ice-cream man' spoke to **Veena Adige** at length about his childhood, his fetish for ice-creams and fruits, his vision and future plans. He also spoke about what makes every scoop of his ice-creams so very natural.

#### Please tell me about your childhood.

(His eyes light up when he answers this question). I had a very happy childhood. I am the youngest among four brothers

and three sisters, all of whom were in Mumbai when I was small. I loved climbing trees, going for *jatras*, playing, swimming and being naughty. Being the youngest my parents never scolded

me. I was not very good in studies and failed in the seventh standard. My father was a fruiterer from whom I learnt the basics of distinguishing fruits and selecting the best ones. I came to Mumbai and joined my brother who makes Gokul ice-cream. We have an Udipi-style restaurant where ice-cream is also sold. But I wanted to diversify and I separated from my brother in 1983. I collected money from my brothers and friends and put up an ice-cream outlet in 1984 at Juhu and from the very first day it attracted a lot of customers.

### What is your USP?

*Mere paas maa hai!* I have taken a lot of ideas from my mother and also from my wife's kitchen. I observed my mother and how she tackled various problems in her kitchen and I used them in my field. For example, when she wanted to remove the stones from rice, she would put it in water, swirl it till the stones settled down and the rice would be scooped from above. I used this in deseeding *sitaphal* which used to be a tedious job. It took a long time to deseed custard apple and this being a seasonal fruit and the flavor being in great demand, I invented a machine to deseed and now we can almost match the demand with our supply.

I used my mother's techniques of blowing air (while cooking with wood), not using spoons but gently tossing fruits so that they do not break, using different techniques of cutting (for *upma* she cut chillies lengthwise and for others she cut them into small pieces, and still for others she ground them), which I used in cutting fruits, each differently and other such ideas. My mother's problems became my bread and butter. Every fruit, every flavour has different techniques and my team and I researched, got the best out of it and that is why we have reached where we are. Without seeming to be too proud I can honestly say that Natural Ice-cream reaches places where even McDonald's or Subway do not reach. Also we do not make common ice-cream flavours. Ours are different- *zara hatke*. We have no favourites, all flavours are equal for us and all have their own special techniques of treatment.

### How did you expand?

There was a lot of demand for my ice-cream and in the tenth year, in 1994, I decided to have more outlets and we started five more in Mumbai. They all started doing well and I decided to go to other places. Today there are 120 outlets. I plan on having more franchisees and outlets even in far off places like Kolkata and others.

### What is your turnover now?

It is ` 85 crores and I plan on taking it to a hundred crores soon.



**Kamath at his Kandivili factory**

### How do you combat the onslaught of multinational companies which are introducing newer ice-creams in India?

By being entirely Indian. I am cashing in on truly Indian flavours and Indian tastes. We have introduced flavours which no MNC (multi-national company) can duplicate. We have tender coconut, *chickoo*, seasonal fruits and other flavours. We have identified where we can get the best quality fruit, like Mangalore for jackfruit, and we go to great lengths to get them. Our quality control is very strong. We test and give the best. Our approach is like that of a mother, she wants to give her children hot, fresh and hygienic food. She does not want to give junk food. We take similar care in giving our customers the very best. Our ice-cream is a unique blend of *kulfi* and ice-cream.

### What new flavours can we expect in the future?

We are planning on Indian sweets flavours like, *tilgul*, *gajar ka halwa*, *thandai* during holi, *jalebi*, *boondi laddoo*, *chikki* etc., and we are seeking permission for all this. We may go in for *ginger honey* ice-cream in winter and even *cucumber flavour*.

### What are the most popular flavours?

We have over a hundred flavours and some flavours do well in certain areas and others elsewhere. Like jackfruit flavour is appreciated in South India and even Pune, but in Delhi people are not aware of it. Also, it clashes with mango which is a hot favourite. By and large, tender coconut, chickoo, litchi and mango do very well. We want to develop a new flavour every week. *Tulsi*, *chai patti* (which is *takka tan* in konkani language) and few other flavours are also in the offing.

**(Continued on page 46)**

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## The reel life struggle of the Northeast

(Continued from page 22)

### A ban that stayed

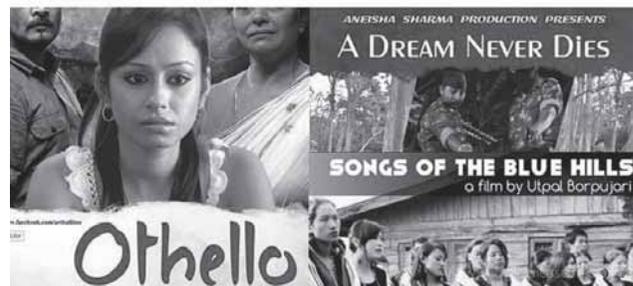
It was in September 2000 that the Revolutionary People's Front, one of the 30-odd insurgent/militant groups active in Manipur, called for a 'ban' on the screening of Hindi cinema as they were seen as representative of the 'decadent' culture of 'mainland' India that was 'destroying' Manipuri culture and language. The few cinema halls that existed in the Imphal valley, most of them in the Imphal city, closed down as a result of that as they became commercially unviable, especially since only a few Manipuri films were made every year. For some time, the local film industry also went into a stupor, but slowly it devised a way to resurrect itself – by going fully digital.

In fact, Manipur was the first state in India to go completely digital as far as filmmaking goes. It was also through the efforts of Manipuri filmmakers that the National Film Awards and Indian Panorama started accepting digital films as valid entries. Now Manipur makes nearly 60 films every year in digital format, though they mostly have unbelievably low budgets - usually slightly less or more than ₹10 lakh! Some cinema halls in Imphal city have even reopened as there is a glut of Manipuri films now. And yes, thanks to DTH and pirated DVDs, every Manipuri now watches Hindi films at home. They did the same also with *Mary Kom*, which also could not get released in Manipur as it was in Hindi, though the film was based on Manipur's international icon and boxing legend M. C. Mary Kom. And yes, the space created by the ban was somehow taken by Korean films, but that's another story to be told another time. ●

budgets. There have been several other serious filmmakers who have shone through their films, such as Sanjeev Hazorika (*Haladhar*, *Meemagxa*), Bidyut Chakraborty (*Raag Birag*), Ahsan Mujid (who made *Sonam*, the only film till date in the Monpa dialect), and so on.

Manipur, where Aribam Sharma made outstanding films like *Imagi Ningthem* and *Ishanou* (screened in the 'Un Certain Regard' section of the 1991 Cannes Film Festival), younger filmmakers are making an effort to make films to tell stories that capture the turmoil of the present-day society, as well as folk tales and stories from literature. But the flip side is that in both Assam and Manipur, one regularly also sees films that would perhaps fit the bill of "B" grade action or romantic films inspired by 1980s Hindi cinema, and recent Telugu potboilers.

## 3 Assam Films for IFFI 2014



However, some remarkable young talents are emerging from states like Mizoram (from where self-taught filmmaker Mapuia Chawngthu made the highly-stylised *Khawnlung Run*, or *The Raid of Khawnlung*, with a miniscule budget of only ₹12 lakh), Arunachal Pradesh (from where a young Sange Dorje Thongdok has made *Crossing Bridges*, the first feature film in the Sherdukpen dialect, which was acquired by Insomnia Films of France), and Meghalaya (where young filmmaker Pradip Kurbah made the dramatic Khasi language film *Ri*, which sought to create a debate around the sense of alienation among the youth of the region, and how some of them get sucked into a world of violence).

*Khawnlung Run* attracted much attention when it was screened at the 44<sup>th</sup> International Film Festival of India in Goa in 2013, as the opening film of the first-ever Focus section on Northeastern cinema (curated by this author). So did films like Prashant Rasailly's sensitive *Kathaa* from Sikkim.

### The language conundrum

These filmmakers face the dilemma of how to continue making films in their own ethnic languages, considering that they can get hardly any theatre to release their films.

In Assam, the exhibitor-distributor combine often remove a local film that is having a fairly decent run as soon as even a moderately big ticket Hindi film is up for release! Filmmakers like Thongdok or Chawngthu cannot even dream of having that 'luxury' as their states do not have even a single screen. Chawngthu was able to recover just about half of his investment in *Khawnlung Run*, earned by screening the film in community halls, theatre halls and by selling DVDs. At least he has the advantage of his language Lushai being spoken all over Mizoram. Thongdok is further disadvantaged by the fact that

## Shillong Wine Festival

*Shillong resident Michael Syiem started the Shillong Wine Festival, and it continues to be an annual event in the capital of Meghalaya - usually in cold November. Did you also know that there are many versions of the rice beer? For instance, the Apong from Arunachal Pradesh takes about three months to prepare. A mixture of rice and millet is dried, smoked on fire in damp weather, fermented and then filtered. The first flush is considered the best in potency and taste.*

his native tongue Sherdukpen (also the name of his tribe) is spoken by only a few thousand people spread across inaccessible mountains of Arunachal Pradesh (just like the Monpa tribe).

Similarly, in Assam, those who make films in tribal languages like Mising or Bodo have no avenues to show these films to people who speak those languages unless someone creates a system of taking the films to the people in the interiors using a 'travelling cinema' model, something that a few people have tried and failed till now.

In India, it's a tragedy that we don't get to watch our own varied cinemas outside the film festival circuit and on the big screen, except for Hindi films, because of the obvious limitation of languages from one region not being understood in another. Of late though, this trend has seen a slight change, with big budget mainstream films in various languages getting released in theatres at least in the main cities, while PVR's 'Director's Rare' programme has been giving a limited release to indie films across some of the bigger cities. A couple of Assamese films have got an exposure through this distribution process too – Jahnu Barua's *Baandhon* (the opening film of Indian Panorama at the 43<sup>rd</sup> International Film Festival of India, 2012),

Kenny Basumatary's martial arts-comedy *Local Kung Fu*, and Rajni Basumatary's *Raag*.

Northeastern cinema has and will continue to have the limitations of local marketing because of diversities of languages and sparse populations of various ethnic communities. But at a time when cinema is the most-popular art form globally, it's important that smaller communities and languages too get the opportunity to tell their stories in this medium that connects instantly with people at an emotional level. Quite clearly, the state governments and the Centre and the eight states need to play an active role in enabling filmmakers do so, and the filmmakers need to learn to access the various sources of funding from various film funding agencies across the globe. ■



The writer won the *Swarna Kamal* for Best Film Critic at the 50<sup>th</sup> National Awards, 2003, and has made the critically-acclaimed documentaries *Mayong: Myth/Reality* and *Songs of the Blue Hills*. He is currently making a documentary film on the battles of World War II that were fought in parts of Northeastern India. He is based in Delhi. He can be contacted at [utpalb21@gmail.com](mailto:utpalb21@gmail.com)

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## THE NORTHEAST

# Slurp it up!

*The food of the Northeast is much more than just momos and thupka says Larisa War. She describes the rich cuisine of the region which typically uses less oil and spices, and is a balance of meats, rice and mostly home-grown, organic vegetables.*

**S** EVEN sisters and one brother – that is how the Northeast states comprising Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Sikkim are often referred to. Ethnically, culturally and linguistically different from the rest of India, it is no wonder that our cuisine and food habits are also markedly different from the regular Indian cuisine.

*Momos, thupka*, bland boiled stews are often (wrongly) regarded as the only representatives of Northeast cuisine. But thanks to the rich cultural diversity here, its traditions, and its abundance of natural and often rare vegetation, the cuisine is not limited to this. In fact, it is as varied as the various ethnic groups that inhabit this beautiful region.

### We love our rice!

So what do we actually eat? Well, rice is our staple food and we have it for lunch and dinner. Even though the day begins early compared to the rest of the country, breakfast as such, is a modern concept for us. Among the Khasis of Meghalaya, a typical day would begin with a cup of tea and *kpu* which is made from rice flour. The rice is hand pounded in a big wooden mortar and pestle, and it is either steamed in banana leaves, hollow bamboo trunks or deep fried. Lunch is usually done by 10 a.m, tea by 3 p.m and dinner is had by 6 p.m!

Rice, meat or fish, vegetables and *chutney* are often what comprise lunch and dinner. Vegetables are often steamed or boiled or quickly flash fried to retain their crispness and colour. As Paul from Mizoram says, "We half boil the veggies – which is usually plucked fresh from our garden, or just drop them in boiling water for a few minutes and remove them before it is fully cooked. We don't use any spices at all – turmeric, pepper, green chillies, onions, garlic and ginger is all we use to flavour our food." No wonder then, that the Northeast cuisine has been described as bland, healthy, pungent, hot.

### The meat is close behind

The people of the Northeast love their meat – be it pork, beef, chicken, duck, venison, silkworms, rabbit, or fish, and no meal is complete without a meat item. Pork obviously is the speciality and *doh khlieh*, a kind of dry meat salad made



**Thupka, the ubiquitous noodle soup dish of Sikkim**

from a pig's head is a specialty of the Khasis. Meat is often made into a stew with vegetables, or barbecued or smoked. Smoked meat is a lip-smacking delicacy in the Northeast. The meat – usually pork or beef - is cut into strips and smoked over many days over the kitchen fire. This preserves the meat which is then used in a variety of ways. It is either made into a gravy with potatoes, with bamboo shoot or yam leaves. Sometimes, this meat is pounded and a dry *chutney* is made out of it garnished with only onion, ginger and chillies. Fish is cured either by cutting them into strips, removing the bones and left to dry in the sun or by preserving them in salt. This is then made into a *chutney* with tomatoes, onions, and chillies.

Given the abundance of fresh leafy vegetables that grow here, we also consume a lot of vegetables. And it is no wonder then that Mizoram and Sikkim are the only two organic states in the country. The vegetables are either cultivated in kitchen gardens or plucked from the forests. Ferns, wild herbs, wild crocuses, pumpkin leaves, yam leaves, mustard leaves, banana flowers are some of the popular ones. These vegetables are either boiled, tossed into a salad or made into *chutneys*. Sometimes, radish, carrots, wild plums and wild pears are dried and preserved to be used either in cooking later or to be pickled.

So which food items are special among the Northeasterners? Fermented soyabeans is one. The fermented soyabeans are simmered on a slow flame for hours. Pieces of



**Misa Mach Poora, a popular fish dish of the Mizos**

pork, ginger and chillies are added to it to make a lip-smacking blackish *chutney* called *tungrymbai* in Khasi, *Akhuni* for the Nagas and *kinema* in Sikkim. Relishing this winter specialty is often an acquired taste! Bamboo shoot – whether dried or fresh – is another specialty of this region and is added to meat for a distinct pungent taste. Sometimes rice or local specialties are cooked in hollow bamboo trunks which give it a smoked flavour. Roasted and ground sesame seeds – both black and white – are also used abundantly.

Since the cuisine is natural and preservative free, it goes without saying that no readymade spices are used. Fresh root ginger, garlic, black peppercorns, turmeric and chillies are always used fresh. *Garam masala* is an alien concept! The ginger and turmeric especially the Lakadong variety grown in abundance in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya are often exported because of its high curcumin content.

### The region-wise specialties

Assamese cuisine is a wonderful amalgamation of the hills where fermentation and drying are favoured as well as of the plains where fish and fresh vegetables are used in abundance. Rice is a staple eaten with usually fish, duck or squab (young pigeon) and vegetables. The meat is either smoked, barbecued or boiled with either little or less amount of spices and oil, ginger, *norosingho paat* (curry leaves) and lemon juice. Fish is usually steamed or roasted in banana leaves (*paatotdia*). *Hukuti* is a special fish dish prepared from dried small fish (*puthi maas*) pounded with arum stem and dried and stored

in bamboo tubes. This is roasted and along with green chillies, tomatoes, ginger and garlic, are pounded in a mortar and pestle and served as a *chutney*.

The cuisine of Meghalaya tends to lean towards rice. *Jadoh* – literally translated as rice meat is rice cooked with pig's blood, the offal, ginger, turmeric and salt. Nowadays though, *jadoh* is cooked either with chicken stock or fish head stock. Another specialty of the Khasis is *dai neiiong* where the dal is cooked with roasted and ground black sesame seeds, and *doh neiiong* where any meat, usually pork, is cooked with black sesame seeds. Roasted and ground white sesame seeds are used to flavour cabbage or *mooli* salads. *Soh baingong dieng* or tree tomato – a vegetable that looks like a small brinjal but grows on trees and tastes like a tomato, is made into a fiery chutney with onions and chillies.

In Mizoram the food varies between different tribal communities. The most common among them is *bai* which is a stew made by boiling assorted vegetables, bamboo shoot, pork and spinach. Mizos love their fish sautéed in mustard oil, duck cooked with bamboo shoots and *Misa Mach Poora* which is shrimps grilled in banana leaves and delicately flavoured. *Vawksa Rep* or smoked pork is another popular side dish where pork chunks are cooked in open fire and flavoured with bamboo shoots and local herbs.

Due to its proximity to Nepal, the influence of Nepali cuisine can be seen in Sikkim cuisine. *Momos*, *thupka* – thin noodle soup with vegetables and meat is popular while *Shapalay*, a spicy, deep fried stuffed savoury similar to momos are foods that must be tried. *Gyari* a pork based curry style dish cooked with tender bamboo shoots is served with rice.



**Hukuti, a special fish dish popular among the Assamese**

### Did you know?

*Ima Keithel or Mother's Market, around 100 years old, in the heart of Manipur's capital Imphal, is run entirely by women. Around 3,500 women work here. Irrespective of communities and religion, any woman can set up a store here.*

Sikkim is also well known for *chhurpi* a traditional cheese. *Gundruk* made from mustard leaves, radish and cauliflower and *Sinki* made from radish tap root are traditional fermented vegetable products prepared during winter.

Naga cuisine also features an abundance of meat and fish which are primarily smoked, dried or fermented. Zuben, from Nagaland says that traditional Naga food consists of meats cooked with a lot of chillies, bamboo shoot and/or soyabeans. In fact the various Naga tribes - there are sixteen major tribes and an umpteen number of sub-tribes – each have their own distinct food habits. The Lotha tribe, for example, prefers cooking their pork with bamboo shoots, while the Sumi tribe has a strong preference for cooking with soyabeans. The Ao Nagas meanwhile love to make their pork with a preparation of dried yam leaves. The Nagas love their *Raja mirchi* or *Bhoot Jholokia* and generously flavour their meats and *chutneys* with this dynamite.

Like the other Northeastern states, Manipuri cuisine is light, tasty and fresh as they hardly use oil or spices either. Since the vegetables are grown in their own kitchen gardens, the food is seasonal. *Eromba* is a dish where the vegetables are boiled or steamed with red chillies, smoked fish and mashed together. *Singzu* is a *chutney* prepared from green vegetables, banana stems, banana flower, chick peas, local herbs and fermented fish called *ngari* and is relished all over the state.

A traditional meal is incomplete without an intoxicant and

locally brewed rice beer is their poison of choice. In Arunachal, the local rice beer is called *opo* or *apong*, in Assam it is called *laopani* or *kshaaz*, *chuak* in Tripuri and *ka kiad* in Meghalaya, with each tribe having their own method of distillation. However tea drunk with or without milk is the preferred drink of choice today.

For any Northeasterner, however far from home they are, comfort food is always the traditional cuisine. Personally for me, a Khasi, who has lived most of her life in South India and Europe, my cooking is an amalgamation of different cuisines. In our home, though traditional Khasi food finds its way to the table very rarely and that too only on special occasions, the method and style of cooking leans towards less oil and spices. But for a person living in the Northeast, everyday food is the traditional food, and whenever we travel home, whether in my mom's place or at my in-laws, this is what is usually served. One thing I do though, without fail, is to carry back



with me turmeric, ginger, peppercorn, and organic vegetables from my mom's garden - the vegetables in the city somehow lack the fresh and organic taste that we get back home! ■

The writer is a mother of two who was born in Shillong, grew up in Chennai, lived in Brussels and London, and settled in Bangalore. She loves travelling, reading, baking and good food - though not necessarily in that order.

#### FORM IV

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Sd/-

Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde

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# The 'Barack'-Modi chapter of Indo-US relations

*US President Barack Obama's parting shot about the need for religious tolerance notwithstanding, his visit to India as our guest on Republic Day was a game-changer in many respects. Dr. P.M. Kamath dwells on the Presidential visit and its tangible outcomes.*

**T**HE President of the United States (US), Barack Obama came on his second visit to India for three days - 25-27 January 2015, becoming the first American President to visit twice, as also the first American President to attend India's Republic Day celebrations as the Chief Guest. Having followed relations between the two countries from the time of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933-1945) to Obama, one can say that the relations have never touched the pinnacle as during the period of Modi-Obama – despite the latter's passing sermon at the Siri Fort auditorium on 27 January.

Hence, may I say that Obama came, he met Modi and the two conquered one another! In this article I will try to analyse concrete achievements of the meet with particular reference to strategic partnership, and its complementary issues like pushing forward implementation of Civil Nuclear Deal (CND), defence and economic cooperation. These achievements move from complete abstraction to increasing concrete realisation and understanding. India's relations with the US began to improve since the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1991. But it was more of arm-twisting in the Bill Clinton-Narasimha Rao phase to toe the American line on important issues like Kashmir, opening of Indian economy, Pakistan-promoted



**PM Modi with President Obama in New Delhi**

terrorism, China-Pak collaboration against India and the nuclear issue.

A real change in the India-US relations took place only after the Indian nuclear tests of May 1998 conducted by the Vajpayee government, and subsequent visit to India by the US President Clinton in March 2000. Vajpayee had termed India and the US as natural allies. Ever since then there was no looking back but only moving forward - though there were plateaus as it happened during the UPA's second term between 2009-14. During the last two years of the UPA, even pro-India American politicians and academic commentators were frustrated with the lack of movement in all-round US relations with India.

## **Strategic partnership**

The American desire to strengthen its overall relations with India and their frustrations with Indian vacillations were making US to look desperately for a change in India. Desperation was best expressed by Hilary Clinton during her visit to India for an annual strategic dialogue in July 2011. Then she had said: "It's time to lead" for India. She repeated it while she was in Chennai. She said: Washington was looking for India to "reclaim and play its rightful role" from farthest northwest of the subcontinent (Afghanistan) to deepest Southeast Asia.

Hence, despite US's past differences with Narendra Modi, they were convinced of his leadership skills - even before he assumed the office of Prime

Minister (PM). While campaigning in Arunachal Pradesh in February last year, Modi asked China “to leave behind its mind-set of expansion”. China had labelled Arunachal Pradesh as a disputed territory between India and China by laying a claim to it and calling it southern Tibet! But Modi made it clear to China: “No power on earth can snatch away Arunachal Pradesh from India.” Post-elections, he made it abundantly clear to China he means what he speaks. After he extended a red-carpet welcome to Chinese President Xi Jinping, he did not hesitate to tell Xi that improvement of economic relations cannot be at the expense of India ignoring continued Chinese incursions into Eastern Ladakh. As he said, even small incidents can impact the biggest of relationships, just like the toothache that can paralyse the entire body.

Needless to add that from George W. Bush onwards, the US was looking towards India to balance out the Chinese aggressive policies. Before his US visit last September, Modi had visited Japan to strengthen India-Japan-US strategic interests as they converged. All three nations had a common threat perception of China. While US-Japan had an alliance from 1945, China was keen to keep India out of a strategic partnership with US. But the three democracies went ahead with cooperation among themselves and others having similar perceptions, like Australia and Vietnam.

Bilaterally, India has carved out a position of strength since PM Modi’s visit to Washington DC last September. The joint statement then issued had “expressed concern about rising tensions over maritime territorial disputes, and affirmed the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over-flight through the region, especially South China Sea.” The “US-India Joint Strategic-Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean

Region” issued during the summit meeting on 27 January 2015 referred again to South China Sea publicly. The US welcomed “India’s interest in joining the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, as the Indian economy is a dynamic part of the Asian economy.”

### **Clearing the nuclear hurdle**

The Modi-Obama summit meeting’s success was illustrated by the momentum to nuclear energy cooperation. The Civil Nuclear Deal (CND) signed earlier by the former PM Manmohan Singh and Bush in July 2005 had one major aim of enabling nuclear energy cooperation between the two, by ending nuclear apartheid against India. Though the two countries had approved it in 2008, they had their differences on the Indian Nuclear Liability Act, 2010. The US government and nuclear reactor-manufacturers considered Indian law on nuclear liability, as a roadblock to resume nuclear trade with India. Companies like General Electric, Hitachi Nuclear Energy

were to setup two nuclear reactors in Andhra Pradesh, and Toshiba-Westinghouse was to setup two nuclear reactors in Gujarat in partnership with Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) as operator. But in addition to operators’ liability for a nuclear disaster, the law imposes liability upon the suppliers of the nuclear reactors and its sub-contractors, if any, to compensate victims.

The liability law is a byproduct of insensitivities shown by the then Central and Madhya Pradesh governments after the Bhopal Gas tragedy in 1984 that saw thousands die and many languish even now without any compensation for their miseries. The law is also bipartisan as the BJP, while in opposition had supported it. Politically, it cannot easily amend it. The option that the government proposed is to have the suppliers’ guarantee covered by the Indian General Insurance companies to meet any such claims against suppliers for faulty design or parts, with government extending its support to insurance companies.

Then there was another difference between the two sides: the condition in the 123 agreement that the US authorities be allowed to monitor use of nuclear material purchased by India from even third countries. This was not acceptable to India. Then, President Obama used his executive power to end the nuclear stalemate, helping to resume nuclear cooperation and trade; somewhat similar to PM Modi resolving the WTO (World Trade Organisation) stalemate on trade facilitation agreement. The significance of the India-US nuclear cooperation is this; it will open the doors for other doubting nuclear-power nations, including Japan to sign the agreement on nuclear trade with India.

It must be made clear that strategic partnership is not a revival of Cold War

**Hence, despite US’s past differences with Narendra Modi, they were convinced of his leadership skills - even before he assumed the office of Prime Minister (PM). While campaigning in Arunachal Pradesh in February last year, Modi asked China “to leave behind its mind-set of expansion”.**

type military alliance. Neither the US nor India are interested in 'containing' China, as both have further improved their trade relations with China. It is only making politically clear to China that India is not alone in experiencing China's aggressive designs. This should help China to contain its territorial ambitions. This should also help India to find a solution to border problems. With coordinated efforts one could also visualise restoration of Tibetan autonomy and return of the Dalai Lama. Signs are already visible in these directions.

### Defence and economic cooperation

During the summit, Modi-Obama were also able to renew the US-India defence relationship signed in 2005, for another 10 years. Under Modi's 'Make in India' programme, US has promised to transfer cutting edge technology and

avionics to build aircraft carrier, electro-magnetic aircraft launch system and several others. Former US Defence Secretary (DS), Chuck Hagel had said last August, that for India everything is on the table and he had offered seven specific technologies for joint production; India has only to decide systems which it can absorb. Similar was the tone of present DS, Ashton Carter at his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on his confirmation.

India has emerged as the world's No. 1 importer of weapons systems. The new Defence Technology and Trade Initiative should help India to enhance its military capability as well as economic growth by selling weapons systems to friendly countries.

In conclusion, we can say that there are huge gains for India in various agreements—almost covering every

aspect of human life. Hence, India-US relations should not be clouded by Obama's parting patronising advice to India. As much as Indian leaders have their domestic compulsions, Obama has them too, as the President of a predominant Christian society with his dual Muslim-Christian religious identity. Unity in diversity is not an invention of free India; it is inscribed in Indian psyche from the Vedic times! ■

**The writer is formerly Professor of Politics, University of Mumbai and currently Hon. Director, VPM's Centre for International Studies, and Adjunct Professor, Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal University, Manipal. US-India relations with reference to strategy and security has been an area of his academic interest.**



## The ice-cream man

(Continued from page 37)

### How much fruit do you use daily?

It depends. We use about 5000 tender coconuts daily. Other fruits being seasonal we use according to demand. We make about 6.5 tonnes of icecream. We use 10,000 litres of milk, 800 kg sugar, 500 dozen custard apples (in season) and mangoes. Earlier we needed 10 people working for 8 hours to deseed 50 dozen sitaphals. Now with the machine we need only two people who can deseed 500 dozen sitaphals in 8 hours.

### Who is your inspiration?

My mother, of course. I learnt a lot from her and her techniques. And also my wife who is a very good cook. She has given me a lot of tips. I have incorporated the ideas of my mother, my wife, my father, brother and others' and have constantly improvised. I am open to ideas and constantly learn new things. Customers are the best teachers. They give ideas and suggestions which are used.

### Where do you manufacture the ice-cream and how do you transport it to other places?

We manufacture all the ice-cream at our Kandivili factory. We have special packaging to take it to other places. At the moment we are concentrating only in India so the ice-cream can be taken anywhere and still remain fresh. Each flavour has a shelf life, generally 15 days for fresh fruit. Dry fruits, chocolate and other flavours have a longer shelf life.

### Natural ice-cream has received a lot of awards.

Natural Ice-cream is in the Limca Book of Records. On 26 February 2009, as part of our silver jubilee celebrations, we made the biggest strawberry ice cream candy bar weighing 3,235 kgs at the Kandivli factory. We used 3,420 litres of milk, 600 kgs strawberry pulp and 342 kgs sugar to make it. About 33,000 scoops were distributed free to people. We got the National Record in 2010 and entered the Limca Book of Records. Besides we have won the Coca-Cola Golden Spoon award for 'Most admired Foodservice Retailer of the year' in 2011 and 2012. We were also featured in the Top 50 'Unusual Entrepreneurs' in India Today.

### What advice would you give young entrepreneurs?

To succeed you need to do something innovative and something you love so that you will not be working, but enjoying what you are doing. Your accounts must be clear, you should pay your taxes! ■

# The cinema of resistance

*There is a new wave of film festivals being held in different parts of the country, which give voice to alternate cinematic expressions, especially realistic films and documentaries.*

**Shoma A. Chatterji** explores this and explains why such cinema is vital.

**A**WAY from the razzmatazz of a *Happy New Year* or the surrealistic explorations of *PK*, a revolution of a different kind is brewing in different parts of India, where committed social, political, human rights and gender activists are organising a film festival called the *Cinema of Resistance* which is now an 'umbrella' title for similar festivals being organised and held across the country.

*Cinema of Resistance* is not about entertainment. It is about education, information and awareness with the hope that it will inspire like-minded people watching these films to awaken to the reality of a different kind of cinema. The festival held annually in different parts of the country, is committed to presenting stimulating films by tough minded independent producers, who challenge us to think about the social and political realities around us in ways not designed to make us feel more comfortable, but to make us reflect and introspect. So,

in addition to screening of an entire gamut of documentary films and some feature films, there are group discussions, debates and one-to-ones with the directors, who are specially invited to speak about their filmmaking and their films.

## The beginning with Anand Patwardhan

How and when did this all begin? Thirty years before *Cinema of Resistance* was born, the black era of the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975 inspired a young filmmaker to make a documentary called *Waves of Revolution* (1976). His name was Anand Patwardhan.

This was the darkest era of censorship of the media in Indian history. Patwardhan's film captured some of the massive student protests and popular resistance preceding the Emergency. Due to the absolute



*Muzaffarnagar Baki Hai*, another film was screened at *Cinema of Resistance*

and total censorship, the raw footage had to be smuggled out and edited abroad. Following this, Patwardhan made *Prisoners of Conscience* (1978). This documented the Bihar movement, the subsequent Emergency and the political repression that continued after the Emergency was lifted. He first drew the attention of the mass audience with *Bombay, Our City* (1985) screened at the Filmotsav Hyderabad the following year. This documented the struggle of slum dwellers against their forced eviction from the slums where they have lived all their lives.

*An Indian Story* (1981) jointly directed by Tapan K. Bose and Suhasini Mulay narrates the horrific story of the blinding of around 37 peasants who were jailed on trumped up charges by the Bihar state police, working on the implicit orders of the landlords who had implemented an oppressive and brutally torturous oppression in rural Bihar. The film had to go through a protracted struggle with the Censor Board. But in some shocking footage, it succeeded in stirring the complacent conscience of the ignorant urban masses of India.



M.S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa* was screened at *Cinema of Resistance*



*Gulabi Gang Four* was also screened

### Then came the *Cinema of Resistance*

In 2006, some cultural activists got together and pooled contributions from the people of Gorakhpur and organised a film festival called the *Cinema of Resistance*. The films screened told real stories the *Hindutva*-dominated masses of Gorakhpur were not used to. This became an annual affair with this year being its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. However, what was not unexpected was the proliferation of *Cinema of Resistance* festivals. Sanjay Joshi, one of the founders of the festival stated how, over the years, this festival grew roots in more than ten cities spread across seven states. Inspired by the U.P.(Uttar Pradesh) experience, chapters were born in Bihar, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. In 2014, the movement took its first steps in four more states, namely Haryana, Delhi, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

“We had a few guidelines in front of us to shape our model on. This was in the form of the rich legacy of the film society movements of Bengal and Kerala. The efforts that reached a climax with John Abraham’s legendary work with the Odessa Collective. Through the making and screening of his full-length feature film *Amma Ariyan*, John and his friends had demonstrated powerfully the feasibility of people-funded cinema that

could be made outside of the realm of market forces, that could be released, distributed and screened with people’s support.

We decided focussing on the genre of cinema that

was truly concerned with issues facing us as people,” writes Sanjay Joshi in *From Gorakhpur to Kolkata - Eight Years on the Road of Resistance* published last year. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Kolkata People’s Film Festival was the 43<sup>rd</sup> in the series of *Cinema of Resistance* film festivals held across India, on a people-funded no-sponsorship model.

The Kolkata organisers put together their own *Cinema of Resistance* they have called ‘The Kolkata People’s Film Festival’ recently at Jadavpur University (JU) Complex for four days, for the second year in succession. Anand Patwardhan was the keynote speaker on the first day while Dr. Binayak Sen was specially invited to inaugurate the festival. The entire festival was a tribute held in memory of writer Nabarun Bhattacharya who succumbed to cancer last year. He was not a filmmaker but he was a writer of great distinction having veered away from the trodden path of mainstream romance, comedy and thrillers, to weave in stories of social and political satire by mingling human characters with surreal ones. This poet-writer is known for his invincible will power, his fight with his pen, his brazenly open anti-Establishment stance and his complete shunning of awards as his expression of resistance. In personal life, he was the son of author-activist Mahasweta Bhattacharya.

“We managed to collect a total sum

of around ₹1.20 lakh this year to fund the festival which included the fare of the main guests, their short stay at modest hotels and guest houses, the electrical charges and the screening paraphernalia. This is one of the unique features of this festival,” says Kasturi, one of the main organisers, currently a research scholar at the JU. She adds that like last year, they have brought out a wonderful souvenir with insightful articles, some of them translated from the original English, and it is called *Protirodher Cinema* – Bengali for *Cinema of Resistance*. This year’s theme for the festival is ‘resisting fascism and gender violence’. Besides not cowing down or compromising on sponsorship, any outside funding and any other pressures that might bring about compromise in choice of films, in selecting speakers, etc, anyone can walk into the screenings because screening is free and ticketing is absent. This year saw serpentine queues for some of the more heard-about films. But a hat was passed around for voluntary contributions. This has been the practice at every *Cinema of Resistance Festival* across the country.

There are positive stories of development that have grown from the grassroots by the local people themselves. Among them is *The First Cry (Pehli Awaaz)* directed by T.G. Ajay. This 52-minute film documents the story of Shaheed Hospital in Dalli-Rajhara, a small town near Bhilai Steel Plant in Chhattisgarh, where a number of iron ore mines are located. The hospital, built in 1983, is a unique institution built by the contract workers in the mines. It caters to these workers and is also run by them. Ajay tells the story without frills, with a steady camera following doctors on their rounds and recording the testimony of patients, nurses, mine workers and others. There’s no music, just the ambient sound of cars passing, horns blaring and children crying.

Among some of the classics were



### Cinema of Resistance, Kolkata

Anand Patwardhan's *Jai Bhim Comrade* (2011) which is a brilliant portrayal of how music performed as a crusading, powerful weapon of resistance, raised consciousness and protest against the Establishment, the ruling party and the police by the Dalits. Patwardhan worked on it for 14 long years and the trigger was the random firing by the police on 11 July 1997 on a crowd of Dalits in Mumbai, felling 10 young activists forever. The violence was spurred on when a statue of Dr. Ambedkar in a Dalit colony in Mumbai was desecrated with footwear. As angry residents

gathered, police opened fire, killing 10. Vilas Ghogre, a leftist poet, hung himself in protest. Ghogre featured in Patwardhan's earlier film *Bombay, Our City* (1985) in which he sang his own songs of rebellion. Patwardhan was shattered by his death and *Jai Bhim Comrade* was born.

Among the few feature films, one must mention M.S. Sathyu's debut film *Garm Hawa* held as the best Indian film about the impact of Partition that forced Muslims to cross over to Pakistan though they felt their roots were in India. The festival saw premiere screenings of

three films - *Muzaffarnagar Baaki Hai* (*Muzaffarnagar Remains*) by Nakul Singh Sawhney, *Naam Poribortito* (*Identity Undisclosed*) by Mitali Biswas and *Ei Mrityu Upatyaka Jar Desh Na* (*Poet from Death Valley*) by Pavel. A total of 17 recent documentaries, five short films and two feature films were screened. An anthology of essays was released during the festival. Two panel discussions - on 'Class Caste Gender and Cinema' and 'Faces of Fascism' were held. ■

**The writer is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for 'commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues' among many**



**awards. She is currently Senior Research Fellow, ICSSR, Delhi, researching the politics of presentation of working women in post-colonial Bengali cinema 1950 to 2003.**

## A glimpse of the Northeast freedom struggle

(Continued from page 14)

Underground leaders like Jyotiprasad Agarwala played a critical role in guiding the movement during this period. Many demonstrators were arrested and imprisoned. A 16-year old girl Kanaklata and Mukunda Kakoti were shot dead when trying to hoist the tricolour at a police station. Kushal Konwar was hanged because of his alleged role in derailing a military train. Altogether, 29 people, men and women, were killed and 50 more were injured at police firings during the Quit India movement in Assam. In various places, 'independent states' were also established.

The period from mid-1940s was the most critical period in the history of Assam. As per the Grouping Scheme of the Cabinet Mission, Assam was wrongfully grouped in the Group C as a Muslim majority state which meant that it would be merged with East Pakistan after Partition. There was widespread protest throughout Assam. Gopinath Bardoloi played the role of an indomitable statesman during this hour

of crisis when all Congress leaders gave a go ahead to this scheme. It was only Gandhiji who offered moral support to Bardoloi. His untiring efforts with full support from tribal leaders like Rv. Nichols Roy, Rupnath Brahma and others finally saved Assam and it became a part of India. Bardoloi became the first Chief Minister of the state. His contribution was recognised with a posthumous Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, in 1999. ■



**The writer is Professor in the Department of Sociology, Tezpur University, Assam. He was educated in Cotton College, Guwahati and Delhi School of Economics, Delhi. His special areas of interest include issues concerning identity politics, environment, development, immigration and culture, with special reference to the Northeast region of India. He is also the Co-ordinator, Maulana Azad Centre for Research on Northeast India at Tezpur University.**

# Water of life, anyone?

*It sounds highly unpalatable, but there is no gainsaying the fact that urine therapy has its proponents. A. Radhakrishnan urges us to get over our revulsion and adopt this miracle cure.*

I was young when I first heard of the term 'urine therapy'. I had balked in disgust. Then I heard that our then Prime Minister Morarji Desai used to consume urine regularly and also bathe with it! My dam of disgust burst, and I sniggered with my friends at the thought.

This was till years later when I came across Dr. G.K Thakkar, a Bombay tax consultant and advocate, who had suddenly become the most ardent exponent of urine therapy in the country. Intrigued now, I met him and realised it was a serious health science.

He later went onto set up a charitable trust called *The Water of Life Foundation*, with the avowed goal of popularising the therapy and guiding new adherents. He was later conferred with a doctorate at the 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Complementary Medicines in 1989 at Athens, Greece. With the zeal of a preacher and missionary, he travelled far and wide, his profession almost forgotten.

"Urine", he tells you with great enthusiasm, "will cure anything. A pimple? Apply stored urine". "Today I am 62, but took to the therapy only six years ago. The results of the *Shivambhu Kalpa Vidi* have encouraged me to go deeper into the subject for mankind's sake. Imagine my amoebic dysentery, a 20-year-old problem, and eczema, just disappeared. My wife who ailed from constipation, joint pain, etc., was freed from them!"

Inspired by his *guru*, Kisanlal Tejpal who helped him and his wife get over their initial repulsion, Thakkar says, 'This beautiful god given gift which we all have from birth can only be compared to divine nectar or water of life.'

The therapy originated in India almost 5000 years ago, although it was John W. Armstrong of England who pioneered it in modern times. It has been referred to in the Vedas, the Mahabharata and almost all volumes of *Ayurveda*; in *Bhavprakash*, it is termed *vishaghna* or 'killer of poison'; *rasayana*, which can rejuvenate the old and *raktapamaharam*, which purifies blood and cures all skin problems.

From the Allopathic viewpoint, this therapy's functioning is closely related to the theory of bacterial infection. The bacteria in urine have proved to be effective against any disease. The yellow bodily waste appears to have a beneficial function that can reduce tissue damage in cancer, ageing, inflammation and heart disease.

'That people believe urine to be a toxic substance or dirty body waste is sad', says Thakkar. 'Innumerable clinical and laboratory tests carried out over several years in Japan, China, US and Switzerland have conclusively proved that urine contains enzymes of different kinds, vitamins, antigens, antibodies, amino acids, valuable salts and minerals, carbonates, bicarbonates, pigments, carbohydrates

and hormones", he adds.

For 79-year-old Bao Yafu, urine therapy is just another daily routine: he drinks three cups of his own urine every day, and even washes his eyes and wipes his face with it. "In these 22 years of urine therapy, I have never caught a cold. My eyesight has become clearer and I don't have any age pigment," Bao told local newspaper *Wuhan Evening News*, also revealing that a medical check conducted by a local hospital recently showed that he has the bone density of a 30-year-old.

Let's end his article by recalling public figures who were urine therapy adherents. They included Morarji Desai, the 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Prime Minister, who in 1978, averred that urine therapy was the perfect medical solution for millions of Indians who cannot afford medical treatment.

Former Major League Baseball player Moises Alou urinated on his hands to alleviate calluses, which he claimed allowed him to bat without using batting gloves. Madonna explained to talk show host David Letterman that she urinates on her own feet to help cure her athlete's

foot problem. ■

*Isn't it time we joined too?*



**The writer is a Pune based freelance writer, poet and short story writer.**

# One Life Is Not Enough

an Autobiography

**Author : K. Natwar Singh**  
**Publisher: Rupa Publishing**  
**Year : 2014**  
**Pages : 464, Price : ₹ 225**

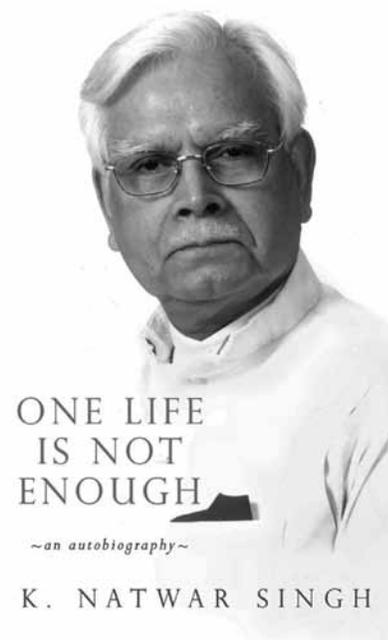
**K**. Natwar Singh, former diplomat and Congress politician was close to the Nehru-Gandhi (no relation to Mahatma Gandhi) clan in diplomacy as well as politics. He is the first Rajasthani to be selected to Indian Foreign Service (IFS). As a probationer he had met Jawaharlal Nehru in April 1953; and later, he served Nehru in various positions from the Ministry of External affairs (MEA). He served not only under Nehru but Indira Gandhi as well. He resigned from diplomatic career in 1984, and joined politics under Rajiv Gandhi to serve him, and after him continued to assist his widow, Sonia Gandhi.

But it is under Sonia, that he became a critic of the Congress Party and thus of Sonia herself. In fact, the only person from the Nehru Gandhi clan he gives handsome compliments to, is Sonia's daughter, Priyanka. He describes her as "attractive and with an engaging personality (and) she shares with her mother's sartorial elegance". And, he goes on to add: "Unlike her mother and brother, she is a natural communicator".

Sonia Gandhi, learning from his interview in *Economic Times* of 28 April 2014, walked into his home on 6 May 2014, he writes in the preface, with Priyanka, who had sought in advance time to visit him. Sonia had come to find out whether he intended to cover in his book "the events that took place before the swearing-in of the UPA government". He says, on that day, Priyanka was on a "feminine mufti." Obviously, he was not going to skip that story!

And the story Sonia Gandhi was so concerned with, and probably keen to prevent it seeing the light of the day, was how and why she decided to make Manmohan Singh the Prime Minister (PM), though earlier she was planning to become the PM herself. Natwar Singh thus claims to know the reasons why "Sonia Gandhi made Manmohan Singh Prime Minister in 2004". Natwar Singh narrates: "Rahul Gandhi was vehemently opposed to his mother becoming Prime Minister, fearing that she would lose her life, much like his grandmother and his father."

Turning to foreign policy contents, as a Minister of State under Rajiv, he claims that he was privy to Rajiv's handling of the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis that flared up a year before Indira Gandhi was assassinated. Rajiv's agreeing in 1987 to send the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka at the request of the President J. R. Jayewardene, had disastrous effects on Indian foreign policy. Until then India was an honest peace broker between the two warring sides - the Sri Lankan government on one side and the V. Prabhakaran-led Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). India had core national interests - of security of Tamils in Sri Lanka, at the same time preventing Sri Lanka from seeking the help of any third country like the United States (US) or Pakistan. But Rajiv's decision, at once made him a partisan, supporting the Sri Lankan government against the LTTE. As a result, the Indian government was neither fully trusted by the Jayewardene government, nor did



the Tamils think that the Indian action was in their favour. Sri Lankan Tamils, in reality, felt that IPKF is Innocent People Killing Force!

Natwar Singh was the Minister for External Affairs during the first two years (2004-05) of the UPA I. This review so far has shown that he is not a follower of Sonia Gandhi. But he was also not a fan of Manmohan Singh. Despite the fact that Manmohan Singh, former PM considered India's Civil Nuclear Deal of July 2005 with the US as his best achievement, Natwar Singh writes that Manmohan Singh "didn't have" a foreign policy. Foreign policy "was run from Prime Minister's Office (PMO)." Natwar Singh was Minister for External Affairs from 2004 to 2005. He ought to know it better. Yet, he forgets the fact, whether it is made from PMO or from MEA, it becomes PM's foreign policy! ■

**Dr. Kamath is a former Professor of Politics, University of Bombay and currently, Hon. Director, VPM's Centre for International Studies (Regd), and Adjunct Professor, Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal University, Manipal.**

# Lost, and not yet found – innocence of life

*In today's screen-driven, connected world, we strangely seem to have lost the connection to ourselves and the immediate world around us. Every gesture and action today seems to be dictated by the demands of the social media, rather than spontaneity and originality, rues **Urvish Paresh Mehta**. We should take time to savour the simpler, more real moments in life, he says.*

**R**EMEMBERING birthdays of our near and dear ones is passé these days. We have the 'Birthday Reminder' App on our Android Phones. When this app pings, we 'WhatsApp' our wishes to the concerned person. It's comical to imagine that birthdays have become more 'app-ening' than 'happening'. Children have become more conscious of Facebook notifications as compared to notifications their mothers want to share verbally. An event which isn't photographed hasn't happened at all. In our quest to get the ball rolling in the clutches of fast-paced world, have we lost those quintessential silent pauses?

Eighteen-year-olds consider entertainment as a 'stress buster'. Was it long ago that entertainment was just an extension to our usual selves? It is gloomy to note that families prefer an evening in a shopping mall as opposed to an evening in a park. Kids can survive a day without their siblings, but not a day without their so called 'smart' phones. Undoubtedly, change is the only thing which is constant. Nonetheless, do the benefits of 'changing' outweigh its cost? Definitely not.

The unending pursuit to be always connected to the world is somewhere distancing us from ourselves. We undertake no activity without first analysing its potential aftermaths.



**Eighteen-year-olds consider entertainment as a 'stress buster'. Was it long ago that entertainment was just an extension to our usual selves? It is gloomy to note that families prefer an evening in a shopping mall as opposed to an evening in a park.**

There's no originality or spontaneity left today. There's no bigger loss like losing one's own self. We may know what our friend sitting in the United States ate last

night, but may well be ignorant of our immediate neighbour's failing health.

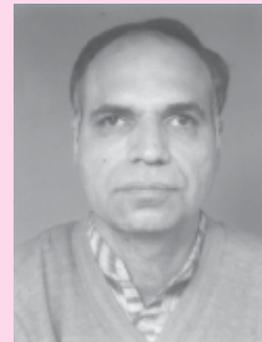
The joy of rejoicing in a friend's achievement, the adrenaline rush after ringing a door bell and running away, the excitement of hearing grandparents' childhood tales, those moments of fighting with a friend over the last slice of pizza, the elation of clicking a photograph without any intention to keep it as a WhatsApp display picture, walking an additional kilometer for the favourite ice-cream flavour, the ecstasy of visiting an old school teacher... somewhere down the line, these moments matter the most. These events span only a limited time, but their impressions are rarely forgotten.

Being busy is one thing, and having no time at all, is another. People have forgotten what distinguishes the former from the latter. True, we cannot isolate ourselves from our pinging phones completely. But it's not a bad idea to wake up early some day and listen to birds chirping! ■

**The writer is a 19-year-old B.com student of Narsee Monjee College of Commerce and Economics, Mumbai. He is also pursuing Chartered Accountancy simultaneously. Writing is his passion and he regularly participates in Inter-Collegiate Literary Art Competitions. Various articles of his have been published in newspapers and magazines. The author also follows cricket religiously. The author endeavours and dreams of living in a 'Happier India'.**

# The last of their kind

*We show scant respect for indigenous communities like the nomads and the knowledge and earth-friendly practices they have perfected over generations. On the other hand, we try to fit them into our narrow mental moulds. It is time we respected their opinions and wisdom.*



**Bharat Dogra**

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

**T**RAVELLERS in North India frequently encounter groups of nomadic or semi-nomadic pastorals such as *van gujars*, *bakkarwals*, *bhotiyas* or *gaddis* with their flocks of buffaloes and cows, sheep and goats. In addition, there are non-pastoral nomads like the artisan community of *gadoliya lohars* as well as some nomads associated with acrobatics and folk-dance.

All of these communities bring a wealth of colour and diversity to our culture, but like the gypsies of Europe, they have been frequently misunderstood. Highly distorted, unjust policies concerning them have been formulated, without taking the trouble to consult them. In India and elsewhere, most governments took it for granted that nomadic life is a sign of backwardness and try to impose 'settled' life on them. It is a fact that nomadic pastoral people still constitute a significant percentage of the people in some countries. In India they exist in significant numbers in some regions such as parts of the Himalayas and parts of the Thar Desert.

In India, a much valued traditional role of nomads has been to make available hardy breeds of cattle. The Royal Commission of Agriculture noted, "If inquiry were to be made into the history of such breeds...we believe it would be found, in most cases that their excellence was due to the care bestowed on them by the professional cattle breeders, usually nomadic". The *Van Gujars* are a colourful community of nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoral people, who live in the west Himalayan hills and the plains immediately below these hills. In the winter they live in the forests of the plains with their buffaloes, and in the summer most of them migrate to high altitude hills.

According to a document titled *Community Forest Management in Protected Areas*, the skills of the *Van Gujars* in buffalo breeding are evident from the special breeds they have, which are particularly suited to the nomadic life. It says, "*Van Gujar* buffaloes are not the rather dopey

animals one see commonly in Indian villages, but a livelier and altogether more robust breed with the endurance to cover great distances on very little food and the strength to scramble over rocks in high mountain pastures.

A study of the *Bhotiyas* of the Kumaon Himalayas titled *Living on the Move* by Vineeta Hoon establishes that "The *Bhotiyas* recognise the unique seasonal opportunities offered by their mountain environment and utilise them in an ecologically sustainable manner". Some nomadic groups have also made an important contribution to the development of water resources. To meet the water needs on their preferred routes, some of them in water-scarce areas showed great skills in locating and digging water sources which ultimately proved a blessing for settled villagers as well. The Pichola Lake, an important source of water in Udaipur city, was constructed by *Banjaras*. The *Maldhari* nomads of Kutch developed a unique rain water harvesting system called 'Virda'.

It is possible that a nomadic community may need some help to make its seasonal migration more secure. It is also possible that with changing times they may like to gradually move towards a more settled existence. However, such decisions have to be taken on the basis of a detailed, democratic consultation among the nomads. It is a welcome step that recently some educational programmes have been initiated among the nomadic communities. Unfortunately however, the modern, formal system, of education is unable to play such a role among the *Bhotiyas*. According to this study, "It has been very successful in eroding indigenous knowledge, and at the same it does not prepare *Bhotiya* children with survival skills to either live successfully in their own habitat or in the outside world."

Thus, even well-intentioned development programmes can be harmful if they downgrade the time-honoured value systems, traditional wisdom and self-esteem of nomadic people. ■



## IMMORTAL COMIC CHARACTERS

**A**GE is no factor when it comes to enjoying a Tintin comic. The boy-reporter with a tuft of ginger hair first appeared in a comic strip in the children's supplement of a Belgian newspaper in 1929. The stories were later published as comic albums, 23 in all. The original stories were in French, but today we can read the adventures of Tintin in 50 languages.

Captain Haddock with his colourful vocabulary, the bumbling detectives, Thomson and Thompson, and the deaf genius, Professor Calculus are part of many adventures along with Tintin and his pet white terrier Snowy. The stories happen in distinct settings all around the world. While grown-ups enjoy the well-researched plots, humorous dialogue and the fine, detailed art-work, children will never tire of the elements of mystery, adventure, science-fiction and fun packed into every book.

Tintin was the creation of Belgian artist Georges Remi, better known as Herge (that's how R.G., his initials, are pronounced in French). He created other comic characters too, but none has stood the test of time like Tintin. Herge did a great deal of background work for each of his stories. The 24th story in the series, Tintin and Alph-art, was unfinished when he died in 1983. It was published posthumously.

### Light of Truth Award

In 2006, the Dalai Lama honoured the character of Tintin and Herge with the Light of Truth Award. 'Tintin in Tibet' probably introduced the amazing landscape and culture of Tibet to the world. Unique tribute, indeed, to an artist and his creation.

## Tintin



### The Tintin Museum

The Herge Museum, in the little Belgian town of Louvain-La-Neuve, is a museum devoted to the globe-trotting comic character Tintin and his creator, Georges Remi. Made of glass and steel, it has been built to look like a stranded ocean-liner.

The museum has over eight thematic galleries. It has scale models of cartoon inventions like Professor Calculus's red and white moon rocket. One of the galleries contains over 30,000 cuttings from magazines and newspapers that Georges Remi had collected over the years along with photographs of speeding cars, royal palaces and African witch doctors, that he used for reference and inspiration. The museum also displays the other comic characters that he created.

## AMAZING LIVING WORLD



### Spotted cat

The tiger quoll or spotted quoll, which is one and a half times bigger than other quolls, is the world's second largest carnivorous marsupial after the Tasmanian Devil. It has white spots on its tail—a feature that distinguishes it from other quolls.

Quolls are cat-like marsupials native to the Australian continent. They are also known as native cats.

They have a long bushy tail and brownish-black fur speckled with white spots. Their pointed snouts enclose a row of sharp teeth. Quolls feed on insects, birds and small animals such as mice and frogs. These solitary, nocturnal animals are known for their agility on the ground as well as in climbing trees.



## SAINT POETS

## Bahinabai

Bahinabai was born in 1628 in a town named Deogaon near Ellora in Maharashtra.

Her father was a village scribe and he married her off at the age of five to a man who was much older than her.

They faced difficult times when Bahinabai's father ran into debt and the family moved to Kolhapur.

Jayaram Swami, a well-known *kirtankar* who had closely observed her, told her husband that she was no ordinary mortal but a saintly woman. That was an eye-opener for her husband who had till then ill-treated her.

The couple then moved to Dehu near Pune and stayed in a temple dedicated to Tukaram. Bahinabai felt blessed as she could listen to his *abhangs* and *kirtans* all through the day.

Legend has it Bahinabai meditated for three days at the end of which Tukaram appeared before her and blessed her. That

changed the course of her life.

She transformed as a saint poet and started composing devotional songs. Her fame spread far and wide and she got many disciples.

Her poems speak of her troubled life and her regret at being born a woman.

Bahinabai died in 1700 in Shirur at the age of 72 years.



*Look upon your body as the universe itself.  
But always stand above as a witness.*

## STORY

## Monkey mind

There was a young student-archer who became so good that he could shoot an arrow into a tree and then cut that arrow into two with the next shot.

He began to boast that he was a greater archer than his teacher.

One day his teacher, an old man, asked the youth to go with him on a journey. They walked in silence till they came to a deep gorge. A single log spanned the gorge. The teacher went down to the centre of the log, and taking an arrow shot it into a tree on the other side. His next shot cut the first arrow into two. "Now it's your turn," he said, walking back to where his student was standing.

The youth stepped hesitantly on the log and made his way cautiously to the middle. But he was frightened to death. His hands trembled so much, that he found it hard to focus. So when he let go of the arrow, it missed the tree altogether. Crying now, he turned around.

"Help me!" he shouted to his teacher. "I'll fall!"

The old man walked up to him, took his hand and stepping backwards led him to safety. Neither of them said a word on the return journey but the boy realized that mastering the bow and arrow was not enough. He had to learn how to control the mind, too.



## SPARKLER

## Compassionate doctor



Oliver Goldsmith, while studying medicine before embarking on his writing career was once called to attend to a poor patient in Southwark, England.

Goldsmith after examining the patient, a labourer, realised that the man required food more than medicine. He gave him a bottle of medicine and told him to take a little of it three times a day. Then he took all the money he had with him, put it in an envelope and gave it to him.

"And from this," he said to the man, "take as often as required."

The patient soon recovered.

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## R. K. LAXMAN

A requiem for a cartoonist (1921-2015)

ONE of India's most acclaimed cartoonists Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Laxman, famous all over the country as R. K. Laxman, passed away on 26 January 2015 in Pune. For over five decades Laxman enthralled readers from all walks of life through his pocket cartoons simply titled 'You Said It', that appeared every single day in *The Times of India*, the daily where he spent a large part of his working life.

The central character in the cartoon was the ubiquitous 'Common Man' with his frayed coat, rubber slippers and spectacles, a few strands of graying hair and a countenance that revealed both hope and helplessness in equal measure. The common man was a hapless bystander to the march of time, a witness to political drama as it unfolded, ever remaining an epitome of patience and dignity. R. K. Laxman, who developed a penchant for art very early in life, used to illustrate the stories and novels of his elder brother the famous novelist R. K. Narayan, even as a student.

Keen to acquire more proficiency in art he applied to the famous J. J. School of Art in Mumbai (then Bombay), only to be rejected as the authorities decided that he did not possess adequate talent to qualify for admission. Though disheartened, a young Laxman vowed to pursue a career in art and after his graduation freelanced for journals like *Swarajya* and *Blitz* before landing a job in the Bombay-based daily *Free Press Journal*, where he struck up an enduring friendship with another budding cartoonist Bal Thackeray. The duo in a bid to widen their horizons applied for jobs in *The Times of India* where Laxman was selected and Thackeray proceeded to start a political outfit, the Shiv Sena.

Laxman as a gifted political cartoonist was highly inspired by the British cartoonist David Low. Even though he had to compete with several illustrious cartoonists of the time like Shankar, Abu Abraham, O. V. Vijayan, Kutty and Sudhir Dhar, he remained on top of the popularity charts for decades on end.

Laxman never spared any of the leading politicians of the day and he satirically depicted their peccadilloes, shenanigans

and shortcomings with sharp rapier thrusts of his pen. His cartoons featuring famous politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru, Acharya Kripalani, Morarji Desai and Indira Gandhi down to Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi and more recently, the present Prime Minister Narendra Modi, were all delightful thanks to his excellent illustrations and eye catching captions.

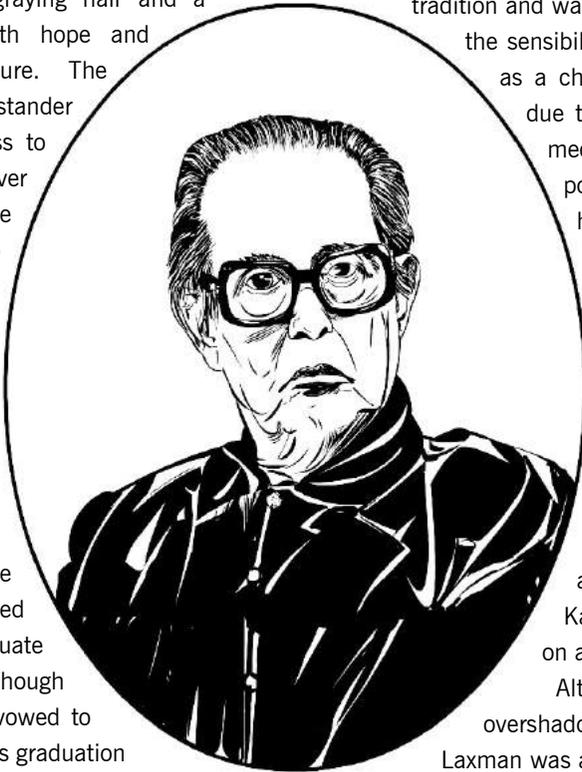
The cartoonist however adhered to certain principles and always had a point beyond which he would never venture. Laxman never touched on subjects like religion, caste or tradition and was always extremely cautious about

the sensibilities of his readers. His durability as a chronicler of our times was largely due to his originality, his grasp of the medium and his grip over the wide political spectrum he surveyed in his oeuvres. Laxman was also famous for his other illustrations, especially his fascination for the common crow and his black and white sketches of the humble bird adorn the homes of many of his close friends. Apart from illustrating his brother's books and articles, Laxman also did all the sketches for 'Malgudi Days', a teleserial directed by the late Kannada actor Shankar Nag, based on a novel written by R. K. Narayan.

Although his fame as a cartoonist overshadowed his other achievements, Laxman was also a gifted writer who apart from

his autobiography *The Tunnel of Time*, also wrote novels like *The Hotel Riviera*, *The Messenger* and also penned a short story collection *The Distorted Mirror*. Laxman was earlier married to the dancer and film star Kumari Kamala and later to a children's book author also named Kamala, who remained his constant companion till his last days. A Magsaysay award winner, Laxman was also conferred the *Padma Vibhushan*, the second highest civilian award by the Government of India. The peerless artist though no longer with us, will continue to live on in memory through his inimitable work and as long as the Common Man remains a living symbol of the average Indian. ■

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



# LT. GEN. JOGINDER SINGH BAKSHI MVC, VSM

The soldier saint (1928-2014)

**J**OGINDER Singh Bakshi was born on 10 March 1928, and graduated from King's College, Lahore. He was the fifth generation member of the family to join the army, and was commissioned into 5 JAT in June 1950. He got married to Ranjit Kaur in 1957. He was later transferred to 16 JAT and took over the command of that unit on 7 June 1966.

The unit had been engaging in counter-insurgency operations in Nagaland and Manipur from 1963 onwards. The battalion moved to Mizoram on 20 October 1967 to continue operations against the Mizo hostiles.

It had a difficult time as the insurgency was at its peak during that period and the battalion suffered some casualties. Major H. S. Brar and a few soldiers were killed in an ambush. Incidents of this nature raise doubts whether the troops were lax and it always reflects on the competence of the commanding officer. The soldiers felt anger and frustration due to lack of realism in the appreciation by the senior commanders. The hostiles would attack and disappear into the jungles. Joginder Singh's resolute leadership and determination kept up the morale of the troops and led to a highly successful operation against the hostiles. The diary of the Mizo commander was captured in this operation.

It recorded the valour of Major Brar and *jawans* in the counter-ambush. There could not be any reservations or doubts about the skills of the troops and of the leadership of Jogi (as his friends called him). His contributions were well appreciated by General (later Field Marshal) Manekshaw who stated in the Infantry Commander's Conference in 1970, "You must learn from Jogi how to command a *paltan* in counter-insurgency operations". He was awarded VSM in January 1971 for outstanding work in Mizoram and was posted to College of Combat, Mhow.

He had invited his friends to celebrate the award of VSM when a call came from the Army Chief to inform him of his nomination for a course at Fort Benning, USA. He had been serving in field areas for seven years. Mrs. Bakshi and the

children accepted another tenure of separation with the usual patience and grace of army families. After the course, he was posted to HQ Eastern Command to train the 'Mukti Bahini' in overt and covert operations in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and then raise the Counter- Insurgency and Jungle Warfare (CIJW) School at Vairingte, Mizoram.

On promotion to the rank of Brigadier, he took over the command of 340 (I) Infantry Brigade group which had already concentrated in Balurghat, West Bengal, for the 1971 operations. Between 7 and 16 December

1971, the Brigade cut the waistline of East Pakistan, launched a series of successful attacks and captured a number of well-prepared enemy localities, culminating in the capture of Bogra. He ensured good law and order in the liberated territory taking measures against any looting or damage to property. The Pakistani soldiers who had surrendered were treated correctly in accordance with the rules of Geneva Convention. He was awarded the MVC for his distinguished services. The brigade returned to its peacetime location at Trivadrur and he managed to get a number of benefits from the state government for the serving and retired soldiers. He completed a project for the construction of a War Memorial designed by the

well-known architect Laurie Baker. He commanded the CIJW School which he had raised and then proceeded to Iraq on deputation to establish the War College there. He retired on 31 March 1986, and settled down in Defence Colony, New Delhi. Instead of seeking any job in industry, he undertook to help aspiring officers for staff college examinations without charging any fees. The soldier saint passed away on 19 August 2014. He was God fearing and gave his best to the Service in peace or war. No setbacks unnerved him and he overcame them with renewed confidence and determination. His friends and soldiers who had an opportunity to serve with him remember him for his sterling leadership qualities and integrity. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



# PRAVINABEN NATUBHAI PATEL

An angel of mercy (1935-2015)

**M**Y mother, Pravinaben Natubai Patel was a highly gifted and courageous lady with a tremendous sense of humour and great will power. Her life guided me to see a spark in every 'ordinary' human being that I met. Her wish for personal growth remained unfulfilled due to early marriage and motherhood, but she helped so many people who aspired to achieve their dreams. She always stood by young couples ostracised by the community for their inter-caste and inter-religious 'love marriage', and came forward in providing moral and material support exhibiting great personal courage.

My father had 18 transfers in Western, Northern, Eastern and North Eastern parts of India, burden of which she singularly shouldered. My mom had to manage her life by herself as my father was a civil engineer and had erratic and demanding work-schedule.

She would always confront anyone who made sexual innuendoes in the street, bus, train and in public places. In those days, common ways of sexual harassment of a woman walking or travelling unescorted was, "Want to come with me?" Without getting embarrassed she would look straight in the eyes of the harasser and say, "Yes, I want to come with you along with my three children!"

In 1977, Amar and I had a court marriage (inter-religious) in Vadodara. She was extremely sensitive to my Muslim husband, who was looked at with suspicion by many of my relatives. She neutralised them by discussing his work for the poor, workers and public health.

When Amar was arrested as a convener of Textile Workers Solidarity Committee, I remember, we reached the Dahisar police station. The police officer made several phone calls and finally found out that Amar was in Jacob Circle police custody. We rushed home, made *theplas*, *muthia*, *sukhadi* etc. Armed with food, we left home to meet Amar and his comrades.

During the National Conference on Perspective for Women's Movement in India, in 1980 and 1985, she cooked

rice-based food - *Pongal*, *masala* rice, mixed vegetable rice for delegates from southern states and brought it to the conference venue. Her logic was, "Women from rural areas of South India must be feeling home-sick and craving for rice." During the 1980s, she would send food packets for women from rural and tribal areas visiting Mumbai to press for their demands such as employment guarantee, land rights etc. Any activist who came to her home, tired, famished, would not only get food and rest, but also care and emotional solace from her.

When they thanked her for her selfless action, she would quote a Gujarati proverb, "Educated like you prepare the balance-sheet, while less educated like me stand by with a lamp." Pravinaben was known as a 'giver'. She taught 'juvenile delinquents' at remand homes to cook, embroider, write and read.

At the time of any calamity (flood, famine, riots), her home would be the centre for collection of food, medicine and clothes. In her daily life, vegetable vendors, milk man, *raddiwala*, fruit seller, postman, gardener, rickshaw drivers, needy neighbours received timely support from my mom in terms of school fees, financial aid for medical treatment, textbooks, uniform, ration.

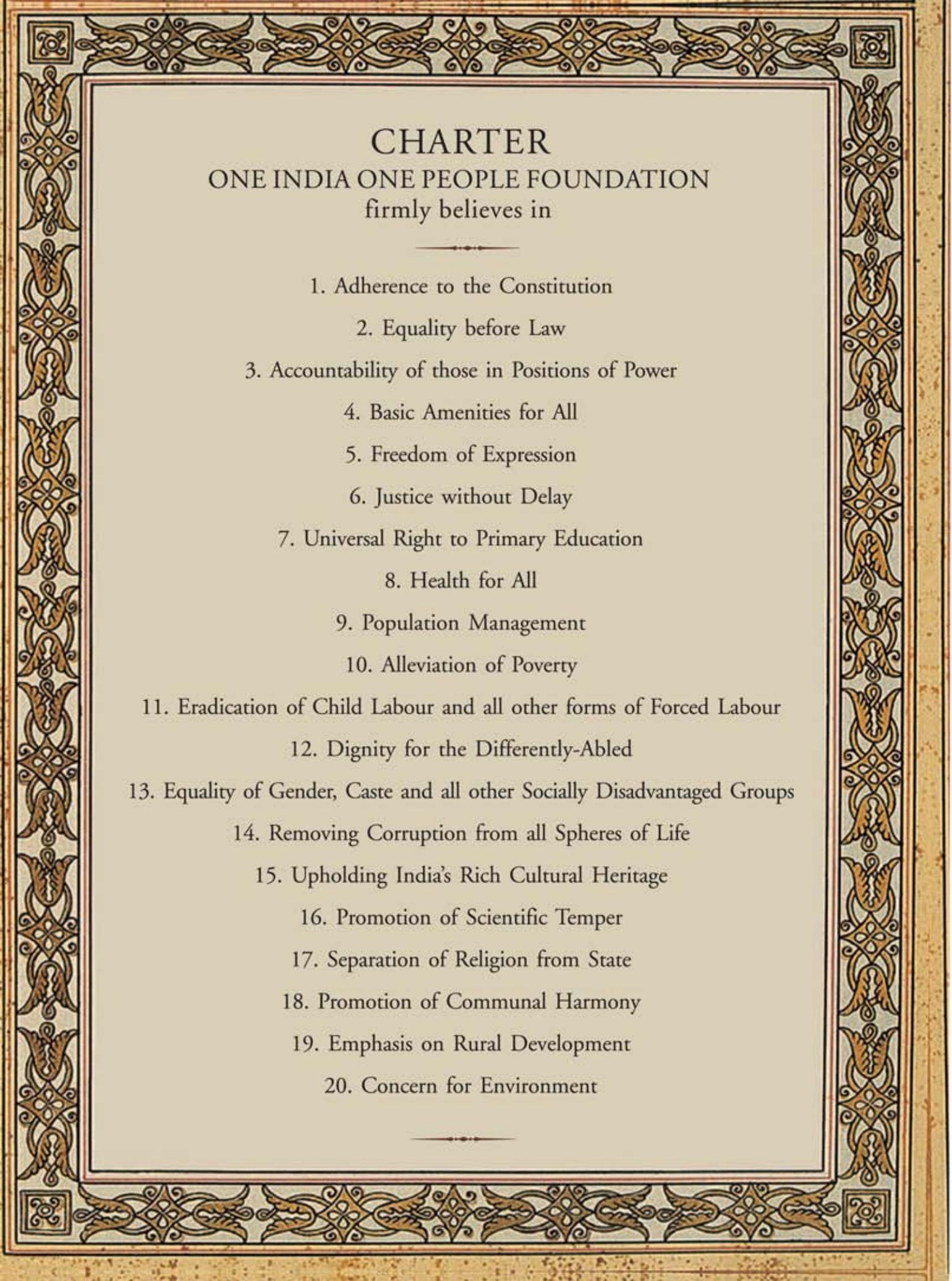
In 2007, she made up her mind to donate her body after her death to the medical college. She also convinced her peers for body donation.

In November 2014, a road was getting constructed in front of her residential society. Around 15 tribal families were working in cold weather. She gave them shelter in the basement of her house. She inhaled a lot of carbon monoxide as the workers cooked on firewood, and developed pneumonia. After a month long hospitalisation, she passed away on 1 January 2015. All of us were with her. As per her wish, no 13<sup>th</sup> day rituals were observed; instead, my brother instituted a Gold Medal for University First student in M.A. in Economics at SNTD Women's University, Mumbai. ■

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

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





CHARTER  
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION  
firmly believes in

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

# WHO AM I?

- Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I the President of India first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I the Prime Minister of India first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I the Commander-in-Chief first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a supporter of any 'ism' first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a white-collar/blue collar worker first or an Indian first?*  
*Am I a youth/senior citizen first or an Indian first?*

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

(October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1930 – February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE