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Patriotism Redefined



Yours medically, India

Border tourism is here!

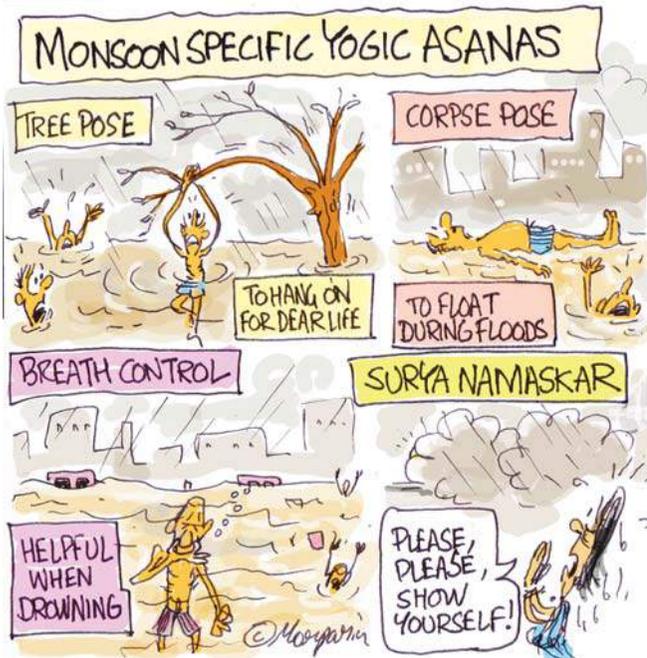
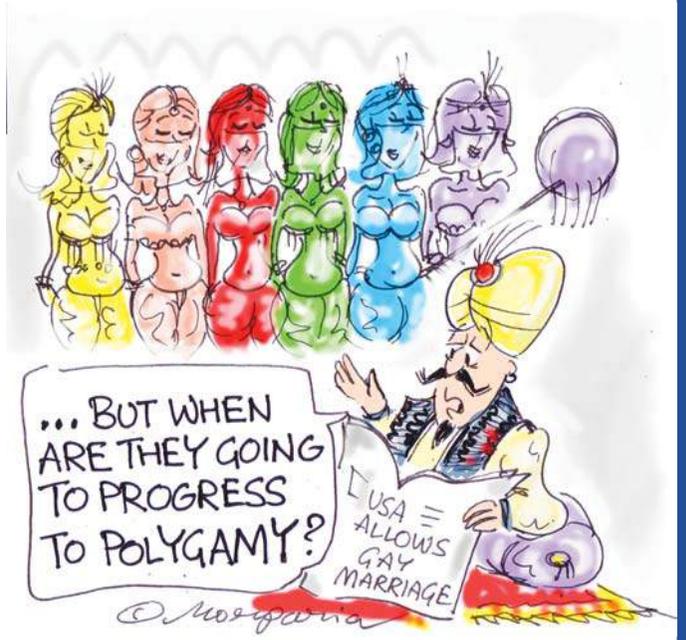
Touring a slum

KNOW INDIA BETTER

Wellness Abodes

PROFILE

Beno Zephine



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AUGUST 2015

VOL.19/1

THEME:

Alternative Tourism



Beno Zephine

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Printed & Published by
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Mumbai - 400 026
Tel: 022-2353 4400
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e-mail: oiopfoundation@gmail.com
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Printed at:
Graphone (India) Pvt. Ltd.
A1 /319, Shah & Nahar
Industrial Estate. S. J. Marg,
Lower Parel (W)
Mumbai – 400 013

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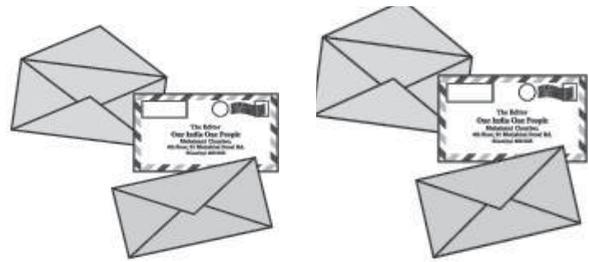
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

“Proud to read of the great achievers”

I was very happy and proud to read of the great achievers who have quietly but very effectively made innovations with limited resources and created wealth and convenience for society and country ('The Innovative Indian', *One India One People*, July 2015). I have always been a strong believer in the creative and progressive thinking of the average Indian, who has learnt to live, survive and prosper in the most adverse circumstances. I have been a witness over the years to many more such unsung heroes who have done wonders in terms of inventions, adaptations, 'jugaad' and have carved out a new path where there was none.

The only sad part is that these people not only do not get their due recognition, they are at times harassed by corrupt officials, laughed at by society, and ridiculed by their own family members. What is needed is a change in the mindset of society where such unique people are recognised, appreciated and encouraged. I am sure the young generation of our country has much more to offer us if given a level playing field.

– Dr. Ali Khwaja, B Tech (IIT), MIE, MIIM, Ph.D,
Counsellor, writer and life skills coach



“Excellent issue”

'The Innovative Indian' (July 2015) is excellent. The personal stories of committed individuals despite insurmountable odds (especially 'The menstrual man') are inspiring. Such entrepreneurs with passion and innovative ideas need the backing of the society and banks.

– Professor B. Ramesh Babu, Hyderabad

Errata: Milind Joshi, who wrote the theme article 'Spurring the innovative mind' in our July 2015 issue, is an IIT Bombay alumnus and has worked in the IT industry in India and the US. He is an entrepreneur himself and has been mentoring startups in India and the US for over 10 years. He can be reached at mmjoshi@iitbombay.org



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The tourist flood

After years of neglect India has woken up to its tourism potential. But this will be tourism with a difference, says V. Gangadhar.

MANY nations survive on tourism. But for years we have missed the bus. Now, there is hope. Agencies after studying the tourism issue submitted detailed notes to the Union government on improving the tourism potential. Let us have look at the details which include the problem areas.

Medical Tourism: Befitting our size, India offers an amazing variety of medical tourism sites which should bring millions here. Every state offers its own brand of medical tourism. The number of cases steadily go up from thousands to lakhs, new diseases crop up, medical admissions shoot up. All these can raise the number of medical tourists to record levels. Let us illustrate. Which metropolis gets afflicted with so many epidemics year after year, season after season. Mumbai this year reported sharp rise in malaria cases, dengue and higher immunity of mosquitos to DDT and other drugs. More areas, more building sites, more flats mean more cases of malaria and dengue. The world was amazed at the increased opportunities for doctors, medical students, adulterated drugs and so on. No wonder, the scope for medical tourism shot up. By the way, Mumbai, we are told, secured the highest number of rat bites and BMC's rat killer squads eliminated a record number of rodents, more than the Vietnamese killed by United States Marines in the Vietnam war!

Border Tourism: Another spectacular increase in tourism. We do not know if this was due to the swearing in of a new government. Formerly, border tourism was calculated on the basis of protest notes sent by GOI to Pakistan government on the border incidents. Today, this has diversified with the 'enemy' diversifying his strategy. Over and above protest notes, the government spread more awareness on the topic creating more patriotic movies, songs, TV shows and so on. The process will get a further fillip once Gajendra Chouhan, the famous 'Yudhishtir' of Mahabharat serial fame is sworn in as the head of the FTII (Film and Television Institute of India). He will concentrate in the border areas and develop border tourism, with or

without his four brothers, noble wife and mother.

Rural Tourism: This is a god's gift for the overall development of India. With never-ending drought, rural population declined drastically. This is exactly what the government and its Ministry of Tourism wanted. More and more Indian rural population is migrating to the cities. Foreign tourists who had all along been inspired by classic rural-based films on Indian poverty like *Pather Panchali*, *Mother India*, and *Do Bigha Zaameen*, are now enthralled by new waves of rural cinema with mini-skirted extras flirting around with no Manoj Kumar to control them. The new wave rural cinema is a major attraction in popularising rural tourism.

Heritage Tourism: Time and again we are told of the rich cultural tourism in India which attracts millions of visitors to the country. Forget Mohen-je-daro or Harappa, today there are hundreds of more new tourism sites which are appreciated the world over. These are due to the ingenuity of the Indian mind – its builders, contractors, planners and so on. We don't know how old Taj Mahal is. But today our genius builders can construct brand new Taj Mahals which develop crack in five or six years because of the use of adulterated cement, malignant marble and so on. But this becomes a boon for our tourism industry by displaying a new brand of 'heritage culture'. The 'redeveloped Taj', the redeveloped 100-storeyed Leaning Tower of Pisa restaurant (copyrighted from the Italian original) located at Gandhinagar are exâmples. Included as heritage samples are heroes displayed in statue forms –Shivaji (43), Gandhi (102), Bal Thackeray (87) and so on. HeritageTourism in



India has one hazard. The space is so overcrowded with Na Mo statues (we lost count) that foreign visitors stumble and fall down frequently. But a special grant of ₹ 500 crores will soon solve this problem. ■

The writer is a well-known satirist.

Tints of tourism

The cause célèbre in today's world is uniqueness, which was not the case earlier when sameness and homogeneity were valued. Individuality and alternative options, whether of tourism, a set of events or a business, is back in our lives. But will this lead to real, big changes, only time will tell, says Akul Tripathi.

GLOBALISATION. The word has become old. It is so last decade. The fascination with a highly integrated world and nations is growing stale. The idea is now cliché. The globe has moved on.

However, the years in which the idea spanned research, books and all sorts of media and artistic representation, it created an atmosphere for many experiments, which have left as much of an impact on the world as the printing press did in medieval England.

After a burst of realising how similar we global citizens are and learning to connect with each other with scant appreciation of subtleties, we are now hopping firmly back into old territories which proclaim our individuality. This realisation of the unique self due to exposure to the universal set and an honest appraisal of the uniqueness on offer backed by the technology and knowhow to actually offer it, has created ripples and waves through every industry; spawning a plethora of start-ups, mom-pop shops and individual enterprises out of garages, kitchens and pavements, harassing the mighty giants of the industries like ants would an elephant.

The stately heavy weight industries with every garnishing of age old nobility, who belittled the kindling enterprises as a passing trend offering only baubles as alternatives and incapable of becoming serious competition or assuming their gigantic proportions as doyens of their respective industries, have realised to their dismay that just the way several small fishes move individually yet together in a school to mimic and project a large single fish that can thwart predators in the perilous oceans, these alternatives have coalesced to become its own industry - the alternative industry.

And a world that was growing tired of standardised everything - from food to hairstyles - the septic tank of one-size-fits-all that globalisation and traditional industry had created as a by-product, finally saw an outlet and what began as a trickle is approaching flood levels. What were considered trinkets have become streams defined as alternative (medicine, travel, farming etc.,) ad infinitum.

Celebrating uniqueness

Needless to say for a country like India which in its very

essence is the union of several, who chose one alternative, the opportunities presented by such a market are, well, ad infinitum. As inheritors of an ancient way of life and having over the centuries infused several cultures into a lifestyle which continues to be an inseparable mixture of various cultural elements, there has always been more than one way of doing a thing or finding a solution. From Gods to grandma's get-well-soon fixes, options have always abounded and this multiple choice heritage is finding great resonance in a world where globalisation and its largely Western derived consistencies are falling by the wayside.

While these options always existed for us in this land, the opening and understanding of this unique heritage of ours as compared to the rest of the globe, by us and people who think it as exotic, has created a broader industry within the various specific alternate streams - alternative tourism - where conventional tourism or visiting of a foreign country is combined with another stream of offerings unique to the particular destination country, and can be looked at in many ways as mixing work or obligations and wanderlust.

India's biggest attraction in this market is undoubtedly the kaleidoscope of cultural diversity it has to offer in the different ways of life that have evolved in this ancient land settled by varied people, their dress, jewellery, dance, music, cuisine and architecture along with the unique customs, traditions, fairs and festivals; a firsthand encounter of which can truly be a burst of several flavours to be sampled in one country on one visa.

A branch from the same tree creates the alternate religious tourism circuit offering a peek into some of the most ancient religions and traditions in the world. As a birth place of four major world religions - Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism along with an ethos that blends Islam, Sufism, Christianity, Zoroastrian faiths and several others in a distinctive manner; it offers perspectives that are difficult to accumulate in any one land.

The geographical diversity of the subcontinent provide an ideal platform to indulge in land, water and aerial adventure activities, which though in a nascent stage as compared to other countries specialising in any one particular activity, holds

unimaginable potential throughout the subcontinent. Its sister alternatives of eco-tourism, wilderness tourism and sports tourism are languishing in the same dark hole of inexperience and apathy towards the giddy possibilities that lie in store.

Besides this historical and natural legacy, the modern face of an educated India with open markets and a drive towards being reckoned with the first world industrialised and developed countries have created other niches which the connoisseurs combine with the age old ritual of travel and tourism. Chief among them remains business tourism where tourism is combined with business while attending meetings, conferences or formalising of business transactions. Agro and food tourism forms an alternative which borders between being one that is inherited through the traditional agrarian nature of the economy and populace's mindset, along with the stupendous business potential that the country's large tracts of fertile land have to offer.

The emergence of a large educated set of professionals in a country which holds education in high esteem and importance has created an environment of a huge set of top notch professionals, while the competition has kept the prices competitive while providing services which cost a fortune

in many countries. This holds especially true for health tourism, mainly the medical profession and has launched the trend of several patients opting to perform procedures, especially routine ones, which are frightfully expensive in their own country in the best hospitals of India and before or after recovery taking in the sights and sounds of the country - still at a fraction of the cost it would have taken them to carry out only the medical necessities in their domicile. Related streams of wellness, ayurveda, yoga, spiritual and naturopathy as both preventional and alternative healing centres are gaining ground in a world where people want to veer off destructive allopathy towards more natural substitutes. The alarm of drug resistant strains of several diseases is adding to the need to experiment with such options.

A less highlighted alternative tourism branch that is fast gaining traction is the educational tourism sector. The affluent of neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have traditionally stopped in India at some point for at least a part of their education. The booming potential market that is India is further encouraging students from across the world to spend some time of their formative years here, to have a better grasp of the functioning and ethics of a country where there is a strong likelihood of them having to come for work and business. While the quality of education cannot be compared with many international education destinations like England or USA in terms of facilities and infrastructure, it is the first hand experience of one of the world's biggest markets, that is doing the trick for India.

In a fast evolving new age industry and market, these alternatives too have already become traditional in light of

the quirkier options that are a rage across the globe and finding footholds in India. Chief amongst these is rural tourism and ghetto tourism that promise a peek into the primitive way of life of third world countries and specific locations such as urban slums or societies strictly adhering to a traditional or novel lifestyle. Social and



Farzana

pop-cultural event based tourism along with tourism that plugs-in with special sporting events is a trend that is on the rise even for India's domestic tourists.

Among the quirkier set of alternatives is tourism to places of specific interest like wars (including contemporary and historical battlefields), borders, previous war zones, ghosts/supernatural, drugs (the narcotic variety) and even fertility tourism.

These types of categories are a crude way of bunching together types of need or mission based tourism. Though they are never quite as clear as the names suggest, as tourists are constantly engaging in activities that may overlap into more than one fixed set.

(Continued on page 41)

Yours medically, India

Tourists travelling to India for medical reasons, is a triumph for Indian medical expertise and quality of its healthcare, even though a majority of Indians themselves do not have access to these facilities. Be that as it may, Indian medical tourism continues to see a healthy growth, says S. Saraswathi.

TOURIST destinations in India today are no longer confined to the Taj Mahal, the temples of South India or the beaches of Goa. Our state-of-the-art hospitals are attracting a fair share of 'medical' tourists from across the globe these days.

India is fast growing into one of the leading and most preferred global health destinations in the world. From 850,000 medical tourists in 2011, the number is expected to go up to 32,00,000 this year.

Chennai, the hub of medical tourism

Chennai, which is considered the healthcare capital of the country, attracts 40% of the visitors from abroad, and also caters to about 30-35% from the rest of the country. With super and multi-specialty hospitals mushrooming all over the city, boasting internationally trained doctors, cutting-edge procedures, and the most advanced facilities, the prospects have gotten even brighter.

"A good balance of highly professional well-trained doctors and world-class services make India one of the most sought after destinations for patients across the globe", says Dr. P.K. Thomas, Consultant Pulmonologist at Apollo and Fortis Malar Hospitals, Chennai.

"In the last 5-7 years, the country has seen a significant increase in the number of patients visiting the country. Most of the big hospitals have an International Patient Service Division with an entire team to look after their every need. Patients are usually offered an all-inclusive package that includes treatment, transport from their country, airport transfers, assistance with visa formalities, accommodation for the attendants, food and every other little detail. The hospitals do everything in their power to ensure that their stay here is as comfortable as possible. A language interpreter, usually a native from their own country, who speaks flawless English, is employed to help with their interaction with the doctors, nurses and other staff. They are totally pampered and this facilitates a steady stream of overseas patients into the country", he explains.

At present, there are 23 JCI-Accredited Organisations (the Gold Standard for hospitals across the globe) in the



Apollo Hospitals, Chennai

country. India today attracts patients from West Asia, Middle East and several African nations for treatments as diverse as cardiothoracic care, hip and knee replacements, bone marrow transplants, cosmetic surgeries, infertility and alternative medicine.

Dr. Thomas says that cost-effective treatments without compromise on quality is our biggest strength. "It first started with patients from the low-end Middle East countries like Yemen and Oman. But now you find patients from several Asian and African countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and the Ivory Coast. Patients usually travel abroad, if their country does not provide a particular treatment or if it is too expensive for them. So it makes more sense for them to come to India, where they can get treatment, which is on par with those available in European nations. There is absolutely no doubt that we offer international standards and the best quality care for less than one-fifth of the rates charged in developed nations".

He adds that the biggest advantage of coming to a country like India is that here the people run the system, whereas if you go to United States (US) or United Kingdom (UK), it is the system that runs you. "You have insurance and a waiting

period, and it usually takes a long time to get things done. Just the day before yesterday, I had this patient from Cuddalore with a subdural hematoma. He came to see me at 8 in the morning, had a CT done at 10, operated at 3 and night 8 o'clock, I see him with his eyes wide open. You rarely see this kind of speed anywhere in the world".

With the government easing visa restrictions, which earlier required a two-month gap between consecutive visits for people from certain countries, medical tourism has received yet another boost.

In the last one decade, India has seen some radical changes in the healthcare industry. With the emergence of the corporate sector and the liberalisation and privatisation policies of the government, healthcare service in the country is flourishing.

The other side of the story

Medical tourism has grown into a multibillion dollar industry, but there is another side to this success story. "People today need to understand that despite the best hospitals, latest technology and the most qualified doctors, the harsh truth is that 99% of our population still cannot afford these services", says noted pulmonary expert Dr Raj B. Singh at the Apollo Hospitals, Chennai.

Talking about the misconceptions surrounding this industry, he says, "Medical tourism can be looked at from different angles. From the perspective of the patient, they go elsewhere, when their own country does not have a particular facility or cannot provide the treatment at a cost that they can afford. They do not make this decision out of choice. So how can this be described as a good thing for the patient? It is the responsibility of the government in such countries to really look at the healthcare services in their country and improve upon it, so such a situation becomes unnecessary".

He further adds, "There is no doubt that medical tourism is a very good business; it benefits the recipient and the provider, as well as the respective countries. There is money in it for everybody. As a business venture, it is no surprise that their primary objective would be to make money. When a hospital gets patients from outside, they earn more and acquire a better image, which in turn gets them more business. But the question to be asked here is whether medical care should be bought and sold like a regular commodity. Let us not confuse medical tourism with health care. Healthcare is the basic right of every individual and should be the responsibility of the government; it is certainly not a business". He continues, "One prime example is that of the British. Their healthcare programme is one of the best. The state is responsible for providing quality healthcare to all the residents of the country, which prevents them

from going outside for treatments. Earlier, they had a long waiting period for certain surgeries like hip replacement and prosthetic surgery, which prompted some to seek treatment in Greece, Italy or India. But the government immediately recruited more doctors for these surgeries, efficiently taking care of the problem".

Suggesting that India should be spending a lot more than what it is doing now on healthcare, he points out that, "Indian government spends among the least in terms of percentage of GDP for healthcare, when compared to other countries like Sri Lanka and China, which spend 3-4% of their GDP on healthcare".

For centuries, people have been travelling across national borders to access better treatment facilities. In olden days, people visited healing waters or temples to seek relief from their various ailments. Crossing borders to find a cure is not a new concept, but the sheer volume of medical tourists these days is staggering.

The adverse impact of medical tourism

Regardless of its exponential growth, it is vital to determine the impact of medical tourism on the public healthcare system in both the countries; the country from where they depart and the country to which they travel. While in countries like US and UK, the system of healthcare is highly regulated, this is sadly lacking in other nations, where there are no effective guidelines.

There are various dimensions to medical tourism that are still not very clear. The risks, controversies and the ethical implications of globalisation of health services need to be researched and analysed. Cross-border travel increases the risk of spreading infectious diseases. The long transplant waiting list has given rise to organ trafficking and commercial transplantation targeting vulnerable individuals.

Even a developed nation like the United States, which continues to attract medical travellers looking for world-class facilities, has a good number of patients travelling outside in search of treatment at more affordable rates.

Whatever the reason for an individual travelling across international borders to seek medical expertise, be it accessibility, affordability, or quality, medical tourism only serves to emphasise the shortcomings of the healthcare system in their own country. And definitely benefits the host country, in this case, India. ■



The writer is a freelance journalist residing in Chennai and specialises in features and human interest stories. She is a voracious reader and contributes frequently to Rediff and other publications.

Border tourism is here!

India's various border posts attract a fair share of tourists, the most popular being the Wagah border between India and Pakistan. Brig. Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.) gives us an account of the attractions along our border that could be of interest to tourists seeking an alternative.

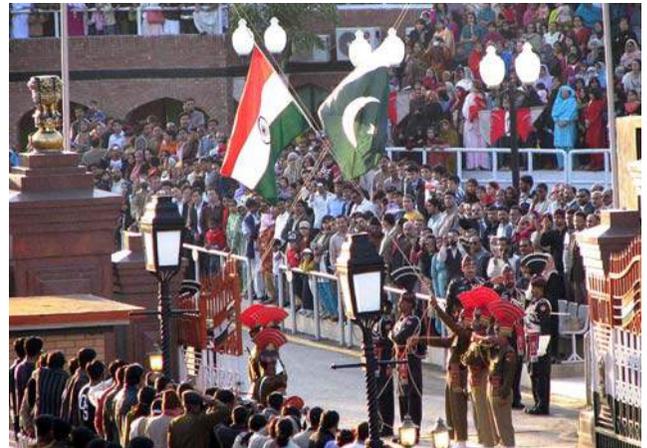
THE less common tourism in border areas of India offers an exciting view of nature and experience of travelling along rushing torrents and singing breeze. People live close to nature and display captivating hospitality. The flora and fauna changes from sub-tropical to cold Tundra like desert in a few hours. In these historic sites, every stone is embedded with the blood of brave hearts who have ensured the safety of the nation.

Ladakh

Ladakh is the coldest desert in the world and lies on the crossroads of the ancient Silk Route from Sinkiang to West Asia. At an altitude of more than 9000 ft, it has a breathtaking landscape of extreme deserts, glaciers and sand dunes. It is known as the mysterious land isolated by high mountains. It is a unique experience to drive on its roads or walk on trekking paths in biting winds. The thin snow tops on the mountains are a majestic view.

The best time to visit is from April to October. Festivals are held in winter. There are regular flights from Delhi. Tourists may also opt for road travel from Srinagar or from Manali-Rohtang Pass - Khardungla Pass. Adventure oriented young people have been making trips on motorcycles. Buses serve the whole area from Kargil and Leh. No permits are required for both Indian and foreign tourists except to visit the inner line. No border crossings are allowed from Ladakh. Leh has a large selection of hotels.

The places to see are the beautiful valleys and monasteries. The Takse monastery is the largest structure in central Ladakh. The 15 metres high statue of Maitreya (future Budha) is a marvel. Leh palace has eight stories and is similar to the Potala palace at Lhasa. Ladakh has a range of trekking and rafting options of varying degree of difficulty. The most difficult and exciting option for rafting is on the River Zaskar. An interesting option is to drive along the River Indus from Leh to Dungi where it enters India from Tibet and travel back via Chushul- Changla Pass to Leh. At Razang La, Major Shaitan Singh MVC and his soldiers fought a hard battle till the last man and last bullet. Chushul



The Wagah border ceremony, which is a big hit with Indian tourists

is one of the four Border Personnel Meeting points for Indo-Chinese talks.

Wagah

Thirty kilometres from Amritsar on the Grant Trunk Road, Wagah village was initially the only transfer point for personnel and goods between India and Pakistan. After 2005, three more transfer points have been agreed upon for limited traffic. It was established on 11 October 1947 by Brig. M. S. Chopra of the Indian Army and Brig. Nazir Ahmed of the Pakistan Army to build up peace and harmony when large scale riots had broken out. The two officers were responsible for peace along the border and had belonged to the same regiment. The purpose of the site has not been forgotten. Border Security Force (BSF) of India and Rangers of Pakistan man the site and the Retreat ceremony of lowering the flags is conducted daily. All drill movements, lowering of flags and closing the door are carried out simultaneously and true feeling for the nation rises from the events. It has become a popular site for tourists including foreigners and the Government has decided to upgrade it. It is planned to increase the seating capacity from the present 5000 to 13,525. It will have a museum, covered waiting area for visitors and barracks for the guards. The BSF has inducted ladies also in the guard.

The border is open from 0900 to 1530 hours daily and can be reached by road or railway. People wanting to cross over must obtain permits in advance. The six feet tall jawans have cordial relations and exchange sweets on festivals and Independence Day. There has been only one incident of exchange of hot words in May 2011 and it was quickly resolved by intervention of senior officers. There was a blast on the Pakistan side on 2 November 2004, killing 52 people and injuring about 200. It was revenge for the killing of people by the Pakistan Army in North Waziristan. Pakistan Rangers wanted to suspend the ceremony for three days as a mark of respect to the dead but later decided to continue the drill. Even during the days of terror acts in Punjab, there was no tension here.

Trade is a good recipe to promote peace and understanding. Formal trade between the two countries at Wagah is about USD 2.7 billion. Trade through third countries is about USD 10 billion. This is due to Pakistan limiting trade only for 137 items and not granting Most Favoured Nation Status (MFN) to India. There is also significant trade through unrecognised channels.

Poonch

Situated at an altitude of 3200 feet, it is separated from the Kashmir Valley by the Pir Panjal mountains. Earlier, there was only one approach road from Jammu-Rajouri. The old Mughal trek has recently been developed into a road from Poonch to Shopian in the Valley. It has a small air strip which was well used by the IAF to supply arms and ammunition in the 1947-48 War.

Summers are short and pleasant. The best time to visit is from April to June. Good hotels are available. Movement and trade across the border has been permitted since 2005 in order to improve the economy of the region. The trade is mostly barter of vegetables and fruits. In 2013, trade was closed down for a few days due to tension and in 2015, due to transportation of drugs by a Pakistani trader in a vehicle. It was resumed after discussions and checks.

A popular site for visitors is the fort built by Raja Rustam Khan in 1713 in the style of Mughal architecture. The front block was constructed by Raja Moti Singh. There are holy sites for Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Some other tourist spots are Noor-e-Chamb waterfall, Swai Kote Valley and Krishna Ghati, which have a natural landscape.

Nathu La

At an altitude of 14450 ft, Nathu La is 56 km from Gangtok and was a major route for travel and trade between India and Tibet. The Dalai Lama had used this route to travel for the 2500th birthday of Gautam Budha. Prime

Minister Nehru and Indira Gandhi had used this route to travel to Bhutan in 1958. It was an off-shoot of the ancient Silk Road. It was closed in 1962 and reopened in 2006. Foreigners are not allowed and Indian citizens can visit on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. They have to take permits from the Sikkim Tourism and Civil Aviation Department through a recognised travel agency. Flow of visitors is regulated to save the environment. Visitors can stay at hotels in Gangtok.

Approach to the pass is along the Tsomgo Lake on one of the highest roads in the world. The climate varies from the sub-tropical at the base to alpine climate as you go along, and on to cold Tundra desert at the top. The drive exposes the visitors to breathtaking beauty of snow clad mountains and varying vegetation. On a clear day, one can see the Chumba Valley in Tibet. The best time to visit is March to November, and the pass is closed in winter.

It is one of the four Personnel Meeting Points. Numerous trade agreements were signed when the route was reopened on 6 July 2006. Delegations of one hundred traders each from the two countries crossed over to respective trading sites. Presently, trade is limited to 29 items. Recently, agreement has been reached for a journey to Mansarovar by road. It takes only two days and some pilgrims have already completed the journey.

Moreh

Moreh, 130 kms from Imphal, is situated on Manipur-Myanmar border. The climate is moderate and the rich forests, watered by eight rivers, offer a stunning landscape. There are regular flights from Delhi, Guwahati and Kolkata. The nearest railway stations are Dimapur and Modpur from where good road transport is available. The road transport of the state is efficient.

Moreh is famous for its foreign market. It is a dream destination for visitors wanting to buy clothes, electronic goods, household goods and canned food. It is the commercial capital of Manipur and a railway to Imphal is being planned. It will be connected to railway networks of Thailand and Myanmar. People wanting to cross to Myanmar have to obtain permits. It is likely to develop into a major trade centre due to the Modi government's Look East Policy.



The Government of India has plans to upgrade the post to an Integrated Check Point. ■

Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.) served in the Army for 30 years. Post retirement he served the telecom industry with multinational and Indian corporates. He is also a freelance journalist and has interests in national security issues.

Touring a slum

*It is bustling with activity and has a thriving economy, finds out **Disha Shetty** as she takes a slum tour of Dharavi that is meant to paint a positive picture of India's largest slum. Join her and five hundred others who reportedly take this slum tour every day.*

NO, the smell of garbage will not assault you. The homes have roofs and children play happily outside the *pakka* structures that have TV, fridge and even air conditioner. Men – mostly migrants - are hard at work at the various small scale industries in India's largest urban slum - Dharavi. They stare at us glassy eyed, as I and two South African nationals, Thirona and Thesigan Moodley, stopped to look at them, as a part of our slum tour. Their face bore no expressions, their spirits shattered by the exhausting, bone bending and soul sucking repetitive work they are subjected to, so that they can earn ₹ 200 – ₹ 250 every day, thus ensuring that their families back home in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar have food in their bellies.

A busy, busy hive

"The slum tour is meant to show the positive side of Dharavi. People work very hard here. There are recycling industries, leather industry, pottery and even food producing units. We want outsiders to see all this", says 22-year-old Kamlesh Parmar, our tour guide. His tour group called Slum Gods that was started a year-and a half ago, caters to a few of the 500 foreigners who visit Dharavi every day. They organise a slum tour every day, even private ones at a premium, and tourists are warned against taking pictures as the locals might not like it.



Workers at an aluminium manufacturing unit where they breathe toxic air and work in high temperatures

Thirona and Thesigan, who are on a four-day-visit to India, say the slum tour was one of the things an online travel portal informed them would be an interesting experience to have. The tour began with a visit to the industrial section of Dharavi where 'companies' functioned out of godowns with tin roofs. Here plastic from the garbage dump yards of Mumbai was being sorted to be recycled. Workers were unloading plastic sheets of



Famous for its leather manufacturing units, the leather products from Dharavi can be found at swanky malls and retail outlets with inflated price tags

different colours and sizes from the trucks that barely fit into the narrow alleys, working without any safety gear or even gloves. We are told that the company owners offer them lodging and food and they work as daily wage labourers, returning to their homes for a month in a year – mostly during the monsoons.

We then move to the inner parts of the industrial area where aluminium products and glass containers are made. The temperatures rise, and the air is a toxic mixture of different gases, yet the workers continue with the repetitive work, barely even registering our intrusive presence. When they finally notice us, they give us a blank stare, their faces without any hope for a better future. Kamlesh tells us, "The company owners have provided them with safety gear but they don't wear it as it gets too hot inside and they find it uncomfortable to wear." Do they not know about the health effects of their work environment, I ask? "Of course they understand. But, they are not very educated and they cannot find work elsewhere", is the reply I get. A question Kamesh later tells me he gets asked often but if they could get better jobs, why would they be working here? Tourists don't understand how difficult it is for the uneducated to get jobs, he adds.

Moving on, we are taken to the residential area of Dharavi. Almost all the homes are *pukka* ones and they have basics like a fridge, TV and internet connection we are told. Some residents even own a Rolls Royce, says Kamlesh. What I see however, are homes so cloistered together that there is barely

Why take the slum tour?

Thirona and Thesigan Moodley from Durban, South Africa say they were curious to know how the locals lived and it was on a travel portal that they read about the slum tour and thought that it would be an interesting experience to have. "The tour has showed me the strength of the human spirit and how hard people work to make a living here", said Thirona. The two said that while slums were present in their home country as well, they were not so formally organised. Thesigan added, "I thought that most of the people who lived in the slums were unemployed. I did not know about the fact that it also had recycling units and industries of these kinds."



Thirona and Thesigan Moodley from South Africa were on a four-day-visit to India and were impressed with the entrepreneurship of the residents of Dharavi



Kamlesh, 22, our tour guide who is a local, was trained by his company 'Slum Gods' for this job. He speaks fluent English and assures me that the facts told to the tourists are well researched

any space for fresh air to enter. Drain lines run right below, making it a nightmare when the area will flood during the monsoons. We pass by a group of women, each standing at their doors, chatting away happily.

We stop at a *khari* manufacturing unit and Kamlesh tells the South African nationals that this is the puff pastry that makes its way to markets across Mumbai. "You mean they could be possibly ending up in restaurants as well!" exclaims Thirona and her horror struck, open mouthed expression only gets magnified further when both

I and Kamlesh reply with a resounding, Yes! Kamlesh then takes us to the leather manufacturing units and we are told fakes of international brands like Gucci too are made here and all the malls and big retailers do is change the tag. He leads us to one of the shops of the manufacturers and the three of us indulge in some retail therapy, taking the opportunity to buy cheap leather wallets and bags.

Next on the tour is the pottery area and on our way there we pass by a busy market street and a bustling school. Education is taken seriously by residents here who want a better life for their children. While there are ample government schools here, parents still prefer to send their children to the private ones as the quality of education is perceived to be better there. Rows of pots are kept to dry in the narrow space of the alleys between the homes. Children too young

to go to school, play barefoot. Their faces are dusty and voices loud and excited as they show each other some trick they just thought of. The pots made on wheels are baked in an open kiln that gives off toxic smoke for hours. The residents know the effect it will have on their health, but this is their daily bread and butter.

A slum with dignity

The founders of Slum Gods wanted to show the world that Dharavi is not just about poverty as portrayed in the Hollywood movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. There is much more to the slum apart from its dingy surroundings. The competition is tough as there are several tour organisations that have sprouted up suddenly. While we were on our tour, we saw another tour guide leading five foreigners along the same path that we had been a few minutes ago. The organisations are small ventures with one or two tour guides each, and almost all are locals. Slum Gods charges ₹ 650 for this tour that takes around two hours. The three founders of the company pump much of the profits back to the local community, giving recreational hip-hop lessons to dozens of children in the community. Kamlesh who has a B.Com degree from Mumbai University, hopes to be an entrepreneur himself one day.

Taking foreigners to each and every nook and corner of Dharavi affects them too. As Kamlesh tells us towards the end of the tour, "I want to give back to the field of education. When I see the poor people on the roads, day after day,



while I take people on a tour, I feel bad for them. I want to do something for them. When I branch out on my own, I will spend money to send the street children to school". ■

The writer is a young journalist who has recently discovered the joys of travelling.

The legacy of heritage tourism

*India's wealth of heritage structures attract their share of tourists, but the potential is much more. The present central government seems to be serious about promoting heritage tourism in a big way, writes **Usha Hariprasad**. She also gives examples of states which have developed the heritage tourism circuit well.*

THE heat is oppressive, the temperatures soaring as high as 41 degrees Celcius in Chennai. Yet, the scorching heat does not prevent millions of tourists from visiting Mahabalipuram, a heritage site near Chennai. This year, this ancient seaport of Pallavas registered around seven lakh domestic tourist visits in the month of May. April and May put together saw another 70,000 foreign tourists to this site. The surprising fact; many of the tourists who visited Mahabalipuram were not aware that it was one of the World Heritage Sites in India. They came, lured by the impressive sculptures of this temple town. Such is the incredible power of heritage in our country.

Treasure trove of heritage

Thirty two World Heritage Sites, 46 more properties registered on the tentative list of World Heritage Sites, more than 3680 ancient monuments and archaeological sites of national importance; India's heritage is rich, an amalgam of various cultures and traditions. It is this cultural diversity that attracts tourists from all over the world.

The most important tourism circuit in the country has been the Golden Triangle in the North covering Delhi, Agra and Jaipur cities. The popular destinations so far have been the Taj Mahal in Agra, Mandwa Castle in Rajasthan, Mahabalipuram and Madurai Meenakshi temple in Tamil Nadu, Ellora-Ajanta caves in Maharashtra, Khajuraho temples of Madhya Pradesh, and the forts and tombs of Delhi.

Apart from historical wonders, India is home to nearly 100 National Parks and 514 Wildlife Sanctuaries. Seven of these natural sites are a part of World Heritage List.

Heritage tourism – a specialised branch

No wonder then that with such a bounty of natural heritage in the country, heritage tourism is a lucrative market in the tourism sector. Heritage tourism means “traveling to experience the places, artefacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past”. This definition is defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation of United States. Heritage tourism is all about providing tourists with an opportunity to understand, and experience the heritage of the region.

Social and economic benefits of heritage

Tourism today contributes 6.7% of India's GDP and is

responsible for creating 40 million jobs in 2013. And it is predicted that it will continue to grow at the rate of 2.1 percent by 2023. So leveraging on heritage tourism can significantly promote tourism growth in our country.

Kerala and Rajasthan are classic examples as to how developing this niche is profitable. Tourism in these destinations contribute

significantly to the total income of folk artists and artisans of the area - Kerala around 96% and Rajasthan around 90%.

As new markets open up for local arts and crafts, there is



The Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram, which is a World Heritage monument

a sense of pride, an increase in incomes and self-worth too, in the community.

“When locals see an economic benefit because of their heritage, they will start thinking of protecting it. Instead of crying about the mismanagement and loss of heritage, this is a better way”, says Ajay Reddy of GoUNESCO, who organises runs in World Heritage Sites in India.

The threat to heritage through urbanisation is very real. Poornima Dashrathi who runs a travel company in Bangalore recalls the case of a megalithic site gone missing near Bangalore that was under the purview of ASI (Archaeological Survey of India), Bangalore.

“Chikkajala that is close to Bangalore and which falls on the International Airport Road is a pre-historic site that has gone missing”, she says. There is a 100 metre long burial ground dating back to 500 BC that has disappeared due to emergence of new layouts, roads and stone quarrying units. In fact, the ASI has documented that there are 35 protected monuments that are untraceable. Shocking, but true!

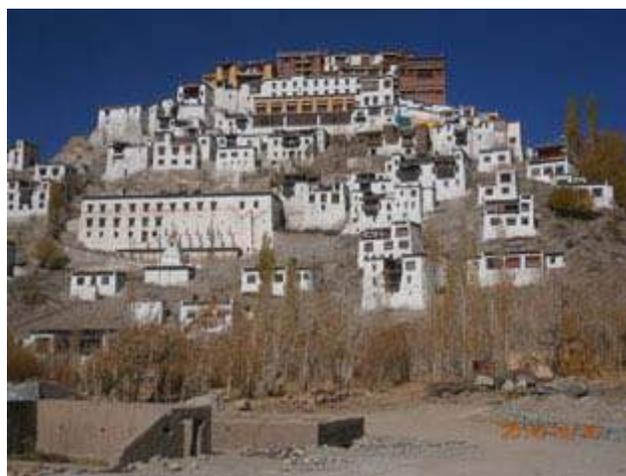
So is heritage tourism being ignored and the rich heritage of the country being taken for granted?

Pro-tourism budget- there is hope still

The budget of the new government highlights that tourism is high on its priority list. The Union Budget 2014-15 gave due emphasis to the tourism sector – ₹100 crore for development of archaeological sites, ₹ 500 crore for developing five tourist circuits, ₹ 200 crore for National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY), that is a scheme for conserving and preserving the heritage character of 12 cities; a clear signal that the stance of the government is pro-tourism.

- **Development of tourism circuits:** There are plans to develop tourism circuits in all parts of the country to promote off-beat destinations. The government so far has identified 50 circuits in the country. Some of the heritage related circuits are the Krishna Circuit (Mathura-Vrindavan belt in Uttar Pradesh (UP) going till Dwarka in Gujarat), Ramayana circuit (100 villages from Ayodhya to Janakpur in Nepal), Buddhist circuit covering the states of UP, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (MP), Beach and Fort circuit from Mumbai to Goa etc.

- **Three routes** – The sacred circuit (5-7 days), the extended sacred circuit(10-15 days), and Buddhist Heritage trails covering 11 states are identified for promotion to attract international tourists. Some of the states getting included as part of these heritage trails are Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal etc. The Buddhist trails are expected to bring in more tourists from



The Leh Palace, which has been placed under ASI protection

South East Asia, Japan and Sri Lanka.

- **E-Visa:** Tourist visa on arrival - electronic travel authorisation scheme is available for tourists from 44 countries. This means that a foreign tourist can apply for a visa online, pay the fees and his e-visa will be sent within 72 hours. To increase domestic and international investments in this sector, 100% FDI is available for all tourism construction projects. There is also a five year tax holiday for 2,3 and 4 star hotels set up around heritage related destinations.

- **Other initiatives:** Along with initiatives like Incredible India and Athiti Devo Bhava to promote tourism, there are some new programmes to conserve heritage. The Ministry of Tourism has launched the ‘Swachh Bharat, Swachh Smarak E poster’ initiative that aims to preserve and protect the National Heritage monuments. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has identified 25 monuments as Model Monuments and these would be under its protection. Konark temple, Hampi, Leh palace, Red Fort are some of the monuments listed under this. Web-based e-ticketing has been launched for some monuments like the Taj Mahal, Agra, and Humayun’s Tomb to help visitors.

Incentives and transparent policies by states

States have long woken up to the need for friendly policies and incentives to develop tourism. Five year exemption on luxury and entertainment tax for heritage hotels in UP, property tax for tourism projects at residential tax rate in Maharashtra, concession in stamp duties for new tourism projects in Karnataka, reimbursement of stamp duty in Andhra Pradesh, waiver of electricity duty, interest subsidy, incentives on generation of employment are some of the fiscal incentives offered by the states.

There are development plans to renovate heritage sites in Srinagar. The conservation plans look at restoration and preservation of old structures like the 18th century Sher Garhi – a power centre of Dogra rulers, Baba Naseem Shrine Complex, old assembly, preserving of 40 structures in Bijbehara etc. River cruises to heritage destinations, development of artisan clusters at Safa Kadal are other initiatives to revive tourism in this area.

Kerala has done a lot more. A brand image for tourism, transparent tourism policy engaging all stakeholders, strong political support indicate that tourism is a serious business in the state. The state has focussed on training people, establishing Tourism Information Centres, targeting international markets, participating in international fairs, conducting road shows, ensuring security through tourist police, creating internal platforms like Kerala Travel Mart etc.

The individual contribution

Individuals, volunteer groups and organisations are pitching in too. The Madras Heritage Run, for example, conducts runs in the Marina coast with the route taking you through heritage spots of the city. The proceeds from the runs go towards Prastara Public Charitable Trust that is working towards conserving heritage. Similarly, GoUNESCO founder Ajay Reddy, conducts the Go Heritage Runs that are a series of fun runs organised at heritage sites. “Not just a run, it is a complete experience!” says Ajay. Through the runs they highlight lesser known aspects of these heritage locations.

Then there are walks. Andhra Pradesh Tourism conducts heritage walks in Hyderabad. So does INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage). ‘Unhurried in Bangalore’ is a bunch of likeminded individuals, passionate about heritage and history. They conduct various walks in the city and also tours in other cities like Mysore, Hampi, Anegundi etc., to highlight its rich heritage. “We bring history to life, a history that one can touch and feel. The walks enhance experience and you relive the past, relating better to the city, its culture and its people”, says Poornima.

In Chennai, Sriram V, a writer and historian conducts heritage walks in the city. He believes that there are at least 100 heritage routes in city. So far he has mapped 30 of the routes and has also launched a mobile app - Chennai Past Forward that creates awareness of the city’s heritage places. Similarly, in other metro cities like Calcutta, Pune and Delhi, these walks are popular.

Groups like Cycling Yogis are encouraging members to cycle to heritage sites and share their experiences. There are cycling tours and biking holidays in various heritage locations like Udaipur, Jaipur, Sikkim, Ladakh, Goa etc.

There are also enterprises that are benefiting the entire community. The Coconut Lagoon Project is one such project in Kumarakom. Started by the Casino Group of Hotels, the project was launched in Kumarakom community that was largely rural; farming and fishing being their chief occupations. The community was poor and they were planning to move out to bigger cities in search of a better life.

The fifty room Coconut Lagoon resort project was initiated here; local resources were used for construction, local people were employed, transport like boat rides, cruises were given priority and the resort also created markets for local produce. Today, the resort has grown with heritage hotels, home stays etc., with the whole of Kumarakom directly or indirectly involved in this project. Now they have started such projects in other locations like Lakshadweep, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu etc.

A long way to go

Yet, we still have a long way to go. Heritage sites are defenceless when it comes to facing natural disasters like floods, earthquakes. Illegal constructions near heritage sites are a common problem in cities. In Ahmedabad for example, the ASI has issued 800 show cause

notices for illegal constructions coming up near heritage sites. Pollution is ruining many monuments. Charminar monument of Hyderabad, Lotus temple in Delhi, Taj Mahal in Agra – to name a few.

Trained guides are not common too. “Local auto and cab drivers play the role of guides in many places but they may not be trained very well. Many mobile apps like audio compass and guidoo are trying to bridge this gap now”, says Ajay Reddy.

This only goes to show that along with policy support, fiscal incentives and conservation laws, the common man also needs to be directly involved in conserving these monuments. Only then will there be some concrete results. ■



The writer is a freelancer who is fond of travelling, discovering new places and writing about travel related destinations around Bangalore at Citizen Matters. Currently, she works in a trekking organisation.

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Tourists in search of the ‘self’ (not selfie)

India is the land of yoga and by extension, a source of spirituality to outsiders. The hub of this is Rishikesh, where the annual International Yoga Festival hosted by the Parmarth Niketan Ashram attracts many visitors. But why is Rishikesh the hub and what is the attraction that yoga holds? **Rena Pathak** explains it all.

PARMARTH Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, is one of India's largest ashrams, nestled between the lush, pristine Himalayan forests and the banks of the divine Mother Ganga. On the opposite bank of the Ganga lies the outer edge of Rishikesh, the city and land known as the birth place of yoga. Rishikesh is a holy and sacred land whose rich spiritual energy remains imbued from the presence and penances of sages, *rishis*, saints and pilgrims over the millennia. Rishikesh is abundant with temples, ashrams and busy narrow lanes packed with locals and tourists alike, all jostling between the many roaming cows. From Tripadvisor to Lonely Planet guides, Rishikesh has been advertised and listed as the capital of yoga throughout the world.

Rishikesh - the yoga destination

Although Indians have always known of Rishikesh as a spiritual destination in itself, or a stopping point on a Himalayan *yatra*, it was relatively unknown outside India until the 1960's when the Beatles put it firmly on the world stage when they stayed at the Maharishi's Ashram to explore and deepen their spirituality. Since then, westerners have come to both Rishikesh and Parmarth Niketan, seeing it as a natural destination for spirituality and alternative tourism.

The Ashram offers a range of yoga courses throughout the year for people of different abilities, but there is always daily yoga, meditation and the divine Ganga *aarti*. Each evening, hundreds of people from the Ashram and beyond, gather together on the banks of the river and, as the sun sets, give thanks to the divine and the Ganga. Together, they light lamps, join in prayer and *satsang* to end the day in unity and gratitude. The Ganga *aarti* has become an integral part of the Ashram experience and attracts visitors and dignitaries from around the world.

However, the flow of visitors has grown rapidly in the last few decades and the Ashram now welcomes thousands of pilgrims and visitors from all over the world throughout the year. There are dedicated western visitors, NRIs and Indians



The annual International Yoga Festival hosted by Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Rishikesh

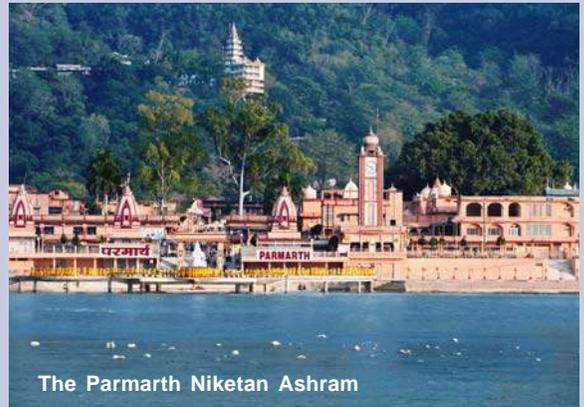
who come to participate in voluntary work or attend intensive yoga courses, but many visitors come to just spend time in the Ashram. The motivation for coming to Parmarth lies in the sheer simplicity of ashram life, where days can be spent in contemplation, having Pujya Swamiji's *darshan*, as well as bathing in the holy waters of Mother Ganga. Visitors come from many different faith backgrounds; they do not all necessarily want to learn about Hinduism, but they wish to have the space to recharge their batteries in the rich spiritual vibrational energy that surrounds them.

Within this incessant flow of visitors from all races, creeds, castes, religions, wealth and professions, one event has caught the imagination of thousands of people around the world: The International Yoga Festival, held every year at Parmarth Niketan from March 1-7, which has grown to become one of the biggest internationally recognised yoga festivals in the world.

The festival, which is jointly organised by Parmarth Niketan and the Uttarakhand Tourism Board, is now in its 17th year, and offers its truly international audience the opportunity to experience a blend of learning from the most learned traditional Indian masters as well as world class international western masters from established yoga schools and styles. Over 1000

A spiritual haven

The Parmarth Ashram, which is a thriving, living, working embodiment of its name - "for the welfare of all" is led by its spiritual head His Highness Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati, one of India's most revered saints. Pujya Swamiji has dedicated His life to be in the service of God and Humanity and, under His guidance and leadership, the Ashram has become a living expression of deep universal spiritual values and is now one of the best known ashrams in the world. Despite its size and status, the Ashram has a small dedicated team working from small, simple offices who run innumerable environmental, humanitarian and vocational projects to help those in the greatest need, the most recent being a huge disaster relief project to bring shelter and water to the Nepalese people after the tragic earthquakes. Alongside work with the United Nations and a global campaign to clean up the Ganga, the Ashram serves over a hundred schools in remote and rural areas as well as running a Gurukul onsite to provide food and shelter for orphaned and impoverished boys. These young boys are given a home as well as full education and scholarly training in ancient Vedic texts. All the services and projects of the Ashram are supported by many visiting volunteers attracted by the opportunity to be in service. –**Rena Pathak**



people from over sixty countries come together to participate in over 60 hours of yoga, meditation, *satsang*, discourses and *seva*, whilst practicing the multiple styles of yoga including Kundalini Yoga, Power Vinyasa Yoga, Iyengar Yoga and Kriya Yoga.

Why yoga?

Western travellers to India are increasingly coming specifically to learn yoga or are incorporating yoga as part of their vacation. There could be many reasons attributable to this trend, but in truth they are being driven by an innate feeling that there is something more to life. In the western world, and increasingly in the east, the concept of materialism and consumerism has become embedded in the culture and politics of daily life. For many though, this experience of material wealth has not provided them with the fulfilment, peace and the deep meaningful connections they desire. Actually, the western paradigm has been far from fulfilling and in the United States, the top ten medications that are prescribed by doctors are now for depression, anxiety and sleep disorder. These medications are taken just to get people through a day and they sadly reflect a culture that has created a nation full of people with dis-ease - a lack of ease in their body, mind and spirit. His Highness Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati (see box above) is very aware of this phenomenon and gives a beautiful observation that in the West, people have shelves that are full. These shelves are full of material objects and symbols of wealth and yet their 'Self' remains empty. But now interestingly in the West, there is a deeply rooted growing awareness that there actually is more to life than material gain, and in order to fulfil their 'Self', thousands

are turning to the truth of yoga.

The degree to which this 'touch' of truth is received will vary in each person. But throughout the history of the yoga festival, the continuous theme has been to experience the joy, and sometimes pain, in taking a personal journey and realising that yoga is not just the union of nose to knees, of fingers to toes, but the union of our body, mind and spirit. This union leads to the union of our 'Self' with the divine. That connection is the key to everything that ails us, everything that is the source of our dis-ease in our hearts, emotions and bodies.

In the West and now increasingly in the East, that inner connection between our 'Self' and the divine has been broken and the spirit's call for connection is responded to and, ultimately, healed through yoga. People come back to the yoga festival year after year; they bring their friends and family and so the festival grows. Yes, it's wonderful to have the friendship, food, schedule, new experiences and joy of being at the ashram on the banks of Mother Ganga. In reality, people continue to come because, through the grace of Pujya Swamiji and the divine, their 'Self' is given an opportunity to become full. When the 'Self' is full, it comes to the realisation that a

righteous life - a life of honesty, integrity, non-violence and purity - replaces their dis-ease, the dis-ease which no amount of full shelves can eradicate. ■

The writer is a British Asian, who, having had Pujya Swamiji's darshan twenty years ago, has remained His devotee and does *seva* at the ashram in between her work and family commitments.



Travel for a cause

India's seeing a new trend of voluntourism or tourism with a purpose, where young students spend a few months with a social service organisation, while also getting to know the local culture. **Dr. Julie Richards** writes about her own experiences in India, as well as of the groups of students she brings over every alternate year.

FOR as long as I can remember, I have been intrigued by India. As a young child, images of India, with such rich colours, textures, and overcrowded cities, intrigued me. I was from New York and have always been an extravert who loves crowds. However, nothing I was familiar with (including Times Square) compared with the images that I saw of India's cities: so vibrant and exciting!

As a teenager, I discovered Indian cuisine. I chose to become a vegetarian at age 12, but it wasn't until around age 14 that I tasted my first vindaloo. Finally, flavourful vegetarian food! At the same time that I was discovering Indian cuisine, I was increasingly involved in volunteering. I visited elders in a nursing home, spent time with adults with developmental disabilities in a residential programme, and spent one summer volunteering in a psychiatric hospital. I loved these experiences and they led me to pursue a career in social work.

I studied social work as an undergraduate student and had hoped to spend a year in India after graduation working in some capacity with population growth and impact. However, since this was all before the internet and the world wide web, I wasn't able to find an opportunity.

Volunteering in India

The years rolled on and I eventually pursued a graduate degree in social work, married, and was blessed with children. When my second child was born, I shifted from my school social work practice to join the ranks of academia. Following the birth of my third child, my desire to travel to India to volunteer or somehow contribute to social and educational programming resurfaced stronger than ever. With the support of my family, I began looking into how I might be able to realise my lifelong dream of volunteering in India.

In 2004, I had been teaching social work at The University of Vermont for seven years. About a third of our students studied abroad, but rarely had a social work experience or the opportunity to volunteer while overseas. Additionally, many of our students didn't have the privilege of being able to be away from work for a full term to study abroad. So I began to think that perhaps I could bring students for a two week, winter inter-session course to India where we could volunteer with



Dr. Julie Richards (standing, centre), with one of her student groups

an NGO. However, I did have one major obstacle: I had no connections in India.

Through the internet, I reached out to some international social service organisations to inquire about any possible opportunities to bring students to India to volunteer. I heard nothing back for a year or so. Then one day, I received a message from the Director of Jewish Education at ORT India in Mumbai. My e-mail inquiry was forwarded to him and he was curious about what I had in mind. We scheduled a phone meeting and discussed my interest in bringing a group of undergraduate social work students to volunteer where we don't know the language and are unfamiliar with the culture. Expanding one's experiences far beyond one's comfort zone while navigating unfamiliar territory is a critical element of social work training. Social workers need to be able to suspend their personal frames of reference in order to be available to truly understand their client's perspectives, needs, and goals.

During that phone conversation, the director invited me to Mumbai and persuaded me that he would be able to help me arrange some volunteer opportunities. I wrote for a grant to fund my travel and nine months later I was meeting my new colleagues in Mumbai. The Director's previous career was in social work so he and his wife (who was also involved in human services) connected me with several of their friends

who graciously took time out of their busy schedules to meet with me and discuss what I had in mind for my students.

I felt that it would have been presumptuous of me to have something in mind for my students. Rather, I asked what would be helpful from such a group as ours. I had met with people from Down to Earth, Akanksha, and Saraswati Mandir Trust to discuss how my students might be helpful to the work of their organisations.

India journeys begin

I returned to Mumbai in December of 2007 with nine students to volunteer with the three NGOs mentioned above. Three students were matched to each NGO for the two weeks that we were in Mumbai. At Down to Earth, the students taught evening English and geography lessons to children in a makeshift classroom within a community in Cuffe Parade. Some of the parents of the children told my students, this was their first experience with foreigners coming into the community. By the end of the two weeks, they welcomed my students into their homes with incredible hospitality and generosity.

Another three students were placed at Akanksha. At two classroom sites, the social work students taught morning or afternoon English lessons and mathematics, as well as spent a great deal of time engaging with the children around cultural exchange.

Finally, the last three students were placed at Saraswati Mandir/TULIPS school in order to help with a research project on developing and documenting benchmarks and measurements for student progress. In later years, the social work students worked directly with children with disabilities, helping them with communication and fine motor skills.

At the end of each evening, the students and I gathered to share, debrief, and reflect on their daily volunteer experiences. Conversations would inevitably lead to discussions of issues of poverty and its impact on the human condition and social development. We would speak about the role of social work and anti-oppressive practice. We would also reflect on social work practice skills that we were using in working in the various communities and organisations. We also did a great deal of reflecting on, and drawing connections to, the similarities between our experiences in Mumbai and our work in our small, rural American state of Vermont. Lastly, at the end of the course and one month after arriving back home, the students also shared their reflections of what knowledge and skills they would bring home with them to incorporate into their emerging social work practice.

I continued teaching this course with these partnerships for a few years and then gradually, and with another American colleague co-teaching the course with me, transitioned to

partnering with the TATA Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). With TISS, we now offer a Field Practicum in Social Care Policy and Practice. For this two week course, we collaborate with TISS's Centre for Health policy, Planning, and Management. Following an orientation session and some critical agency presentations, our students, in partnership with TISS students and faculty, work in small groups to study particular NGOs in depth so that they can describe the work of the NGO, its goals and objectives, administrative structure, funding and utilisation of services and programmes by the community, and solicit and provide feedback to the provider and the beneficiaries.

At the end of the course, the students make presentations to various stakeholders. Through this project, the students learn to analyse and understand various health problems of marginalised community members, hone their interviewing and collaboration skills while considering innovative prevention and intervention strategies that they might suggest, as well as examine and understand the role of professionals and para-professionals in providing services to vulnerable and marginalised people. Throughout this experience, once again each night we met as a group to debrief and reflect on what we have experienced, the various issues that confounded us, and how we want to move forward in our professional development based on this experience.

It is a privilege for me to travel every other year to Mumbai with a new group of students to volunteer in various capacities. People often say how noble volunteering is. However, for me, it feels selfish. As much as we have supported the work of various NGOs in Mumbai through research, teaching, or just sharing information, we often leave feeling we get so much more out of the experience than we could possibly give. We are forever changed by the experience. Whether it is because people are so very appreciative of our assistance or involvement, or whether it's because for many of us, we haven't before witnessed the extent of poverty nor the profound and vivid juxtaposition of wealth and poverty that Mumbai offers, or whether it's the unprecedented and phenomenal Indian hospitality, we cannot help but be forever changed as we board the plane back to the States.

The writer is Senior Lecturer at the University of Vermont, United States. She holds a PhD in International Family and Community Studies from Clemson University. Her current research focuses on refugees' retained and adapted childrearing practices in resettlement. She is also beginning a study on child welfare permanency planning. Her particular areas of interest include intercultural practice, school social work, developmental and emotional/behavioural disabilities, family-strengths assessments, and cultivating global collaboration in the social work curricula.



A taste of real India

Rural tourism initiatives are not only giving city dwellers a taste of life in India's hinterland, they are also providing villagers alternate sources of income and improving their economic status. However, the key to boosting rural tourism lies in improving rural infrastructure, writes Dr. Mir Sofique.

INDIA is a land of diversity. To the world it is also known as a "Land of Villages". Its 29 states and seven union territories offer a wide variety of culture, traditions, cuisines, languages, costumes, beliefs, gods, goddesses and monuments that attract domestic as well as international tourists.

India's journey of rural tourism began with a hope of eradicating poverty for those living in the villages and also to showcase the unique lifestyle, art, craft, culture, heritage, etc., to the domestic and international travellers who want to experience 'the real India'. Rural tourism helps in income generation and raising the living standards of the local population. In a country like India where approximately 70% of its population lives in villages, the concept of rural tourism certainly holds a lot of significance.

FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) was one of the first to take the initiative to explore rural India in collaboration with the Union Ministry of Tourism & Culture. In September 2001, it organised an International Conference and Exhibition on Rural Tourism in India jointly with the Udaipur Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Udaipur (Rajasthan). It was at this workshop, the basic concept of rural tourism was envisaged with benefits accruing to local community through entrepreneurial opportunities, income generation, employment opportunities, conservation and development of rural arts and crafts, investment for infrastructure development and preservation of the environment and heritage. States like Rajasthan, Kerala and Maharashtra were the early movers in adopting the concept of developing and promoting rural tourism and have today grown into a 'replicable growth model' for other states to follow.

To begin with, the Ministry of Tourism identified a few villages which besides having natural beauty, and authentic charm had the core competency in handlooms and handicrafts. It has undertaken many projects for the improvement of rural tourism sites of various states and this has benefited locals in a big way.

There are a fair number of home stay facilities that have come up across the country as a part of the initiatives to boost rural tourism. Staying in homes of villagers, tourists



Pipili in Puri district, is famous for applique lamps

can learn various activities like milking cows, ploughing the field, harvesting rice, plucking tea leaves, cooking, fishing, bird watching, clay modeling, making local handicrafts, etc., or they can simply chill out in the serene surroundings. During the stay, visitors get to interact with the local communities, learn about their life styles, customs and traditions and indulge in local cuisine.

Interacting with the urban tourists has helped the rural folk in their social, cultural and educational growth. Rural activities have got a boost and their economic status has improved as they have been able to sell some of the locally manufactured products. Villagers have understood the importance of sanitation, preserving their natural habitat, biodiversity, monuments and also their unique skills which have been passed down from one generation to another. The focus on promoting rural tourism has also led to improving infrastructure of the villages and making them more accessible to visitors.

Some states where rural tourism has evolved in the last decade are:

- **Hodka village in Gujarat-** The village is believed to have been set up by the 'Halepotra' clan from Sindh who were cattle herders in search of pastures. The Meghwals, traditional leather craft and embroidery craftspersons, from further north, have also settled in Hodka over time. Here one can discover the Great Rann of Kutch and live with its communities in

Hodka's village resort, the Shaam-e-Sarhad (Sunset at the Border). It is owned and operated by the Village Tourism Committee of Hodka village. A rural yet incredible experience is certain at this resort with its majestic natural surroundings and warm hospitality from locals who feed you heartily, share their culture and showcase their craft.

- **Naggar village in Himachal Pradesh** - Just 22 km from the popular tourist destination Manali, Naggar is situated at a height of 5750 ft from sea level and gives a mesmerising view of the mountains. In the 17th century, Naggar was the capital of Kullu under Raja Jagat Singh. The Naggar Castle, Nicholas Roerich Art Gallery and Museum, Gowri Shankar Temple, Dagpo Shedrupling Monastery are some of its famous attractions.

- **Raison village in Himachal Pradesh** - This town located at a distance of about 16 km from the famous town of Kullu is actually a small cluster of villages on the banks of the Beas River. It is famous for camping sites and as the starting point for white-water rafting.

- **Pochampally in Andhra Pradesh** - Pochampalli which is 50 km from Hyderabad, is the largest centre for Ikkat, the intricate tie-and-dye craft. Gurukul learning of Ikkat is of special interest to the visitors.

- **Nepura in Nalanda district, Bihar** - Nepura village is 12 km from Rajgir on the Buddhist circuit in Bihar which has renowned Jain and Buddhist sites. It is in the vicinity of the ancient Nalanda University.

- **Karaikudi in Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu** - Karaikudi village is known for its fabulous mansions, temples and craftsmanship. Besides, there are many places of interest to see around in the radius of 20 km of the village.

- **Lachen in North District, Sikkim** - At an altitude of 8500 ft Lachen is alluring in its simplicity. The village comprises of less than 200 houses, earlier inhabited only during winters by their owners who spend their summers on the alpine pastures bordering Tibet tending to their yaks. Lachen is the starting point for some of the most interesting treks in North Sikkim as well as the gateway to the holy Guru Dongmar and TsoLhamu lakes.

- **Pipili in Puri district, Orissa** - Pipli is famous for applique lamps. These colourful handmade lamps made by the locals add a zing to wherever you hang them. One can visit the village to see how these lamps are made.

- **Chitrakote, Bastar district, Chhattisgarh** - Chitrakote is situated 38 km from Jagdalpur, the district headquarters of Bastar district in Chhattisgarh, 340 km from the state capital Raipur. Here, the Indravati River takes a plunge of 100 feet to create a mighty waterfall.

- **Beloon Eco Village, Burdwan district, West Bengal** - This village is 175 kms from Kolkata. Rural life of Beloon Eco

Village is unique and a village tour is enough to rejuvenate ones senses. A walk by the Shibai River, rafting in a nearby lake, watching dolphins in Kalyanpur Ghat, plucking fresh vegetables from the farm and bird watching are activities tourists enjoy here. They can stay in traditional mud houses, eat delicious home-cooked Bengali cuisine prepared from freshly picked vegetables and fresh catch of fish. Visitors can also volunteer in conserving the local wildlife and rehabilitating them in nearby forests.

- **Dariapur village, Burdwan district, West Bengal** - The village is famous for Dokra metal craft. The locals here are very poor and their income depends on the sale of handicrafts made by the local craftsmen.

- **Ballavpur Danga, Birbhum district, West Bengal** - This village is three km from Santiniketan, the celebrated home of Nobel laureates Rabindranath Tagore and Amartya Sen. Here visitors can learn the traditions and culture of the Santhaladivasi tribal community. Attractive designs adorn the walls and floors of their homes, with colours made from red earth and cowdung. At night, it is a treat to watch the tribals dance around the campfire to the rhythmic beats of the *madal*, their traditional musical instrument and listen to adivasi myths and history in the form of songs and stories.

- **Amar Kutir, Birbhum district, West Bengal** - During India's freedom struggle, this place was a refuge for revolutionaries. It is now a cooperative unit that produces leather goods, *kantha* work saris, bamboo crafts and batik prints at affordable prices. Its leather-craft unit employs mostly women.

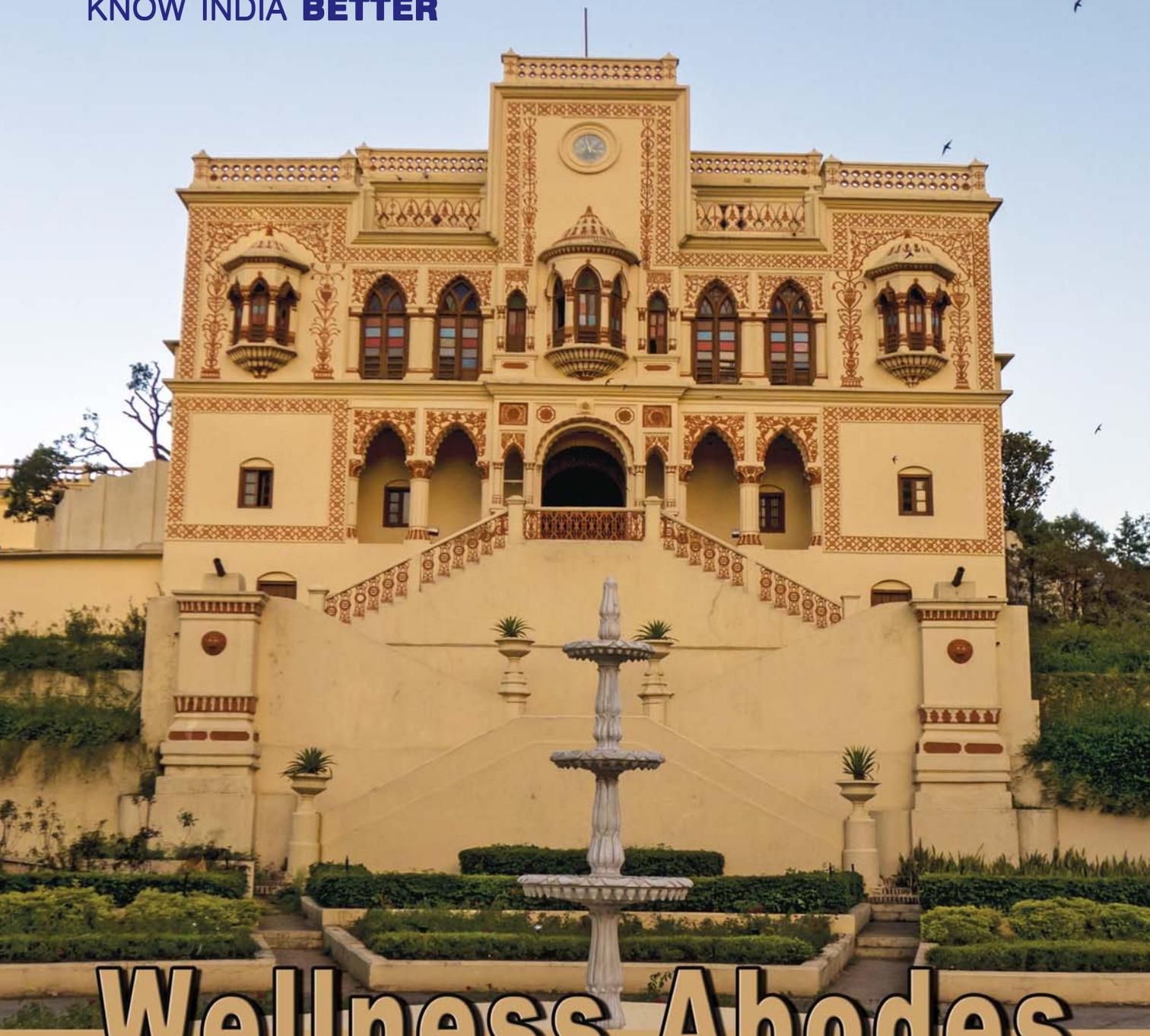
Conclusion

Rural tourism is gaining importance in India and playing a vital role in bridging the gap between rural and urban India. City dwellers get a feel of the real India by living with villagers in their homes. It can also help in marketing the resources of rural India to domestic and foreign tourists. A lot of effort has gone in promoting rural tourism in the last decade but there is a lot more that remains to be done to improve the living conditions of the villager dwellers. For rural tourism to become a big draw, the state government and the Centre will have to invest substantially in developing good infrastructure like roads,

transport, water, communication and most important, build toilets and improve sanitation. The development of these basic amenities is the key to boost rural tourism and make it a success story. ■



The writer is Associate Professor, Department of Tourism Management, University of Burdwan, West Bengal.



Wellness Abodes

Ananda in the Himalayas, a luxury destination spa and Kalari Kovilakom in Kerala, a palace of Ayurveda, may seem like they are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. One is located in the Himalayan foothills and the other in the deep South. But in fact they have a great deal in common – an unwavering commitment to wellness and authenticity and to India’s ancient healing systems.



High Tea at the Viceroy's Palace

Ananda in the Himalayas

THE Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal looked down at us benignly from his gilded portrait that hung on a wall of the elegant, chandeliered drawing room of the Viceregal Palace, part of the Ananda in the Himalayas destination spa complex. The current maharaja's father had built the palace to entertain Lord Mountbatten, the then Viceroy of India, and his entourage.

We were attending High Tea, hosted by the general manager of Ananda, Nikhil Kapur, who yet carries on with this royal tradition. Period furniture, sepia-toned portraits of famous guests, moulded ceilings and fire places... we felt enveloped in an atmosphere of refinement and venerable tradition. Prior to the High Tea, we were welcomed with an aarti ceremony and a signature health drink in the reception of the spa complex which is also located in the Viceregal Palace.

In front of the Viceregal Palace rises the maharaja's petite palace of beige and red terracotta, and at the rear of the two palaces and just a buggy ride away are the dedicated spa facilities (a generous 24,000 sq ft spa), a low-rise building of guest rooms hewn into a hill, villas and the restaurant of Ananda, as well as an outdoor pool - all snuggle amidst a sal forest. The rooms, suites and villas reflect the subtle colours of nature that surround them, and the stunning views that they command - of the Rishikesh Valley or of the palace or of the gardens.

At the award-winning Ananda, we saw history and royal

tradition combine in a heady mix with the ancient Indian wellness regimens of Ayurveda, Yoga and Vedanta and modern spa-style pampering. "Ananda is located in Dev Bhoomi, the Abode of the Gods", said Kapur, gesturing to the expansive parkland that girdles his wellness outpost. "This is where sages and *rishis* have meditated for millennia and where Ma Ganga begins her descent into the plains. This region vibrates with positive energy", he said. He related how the visiting masters of Reiki, Past Life Regression, Abdominal Massages, Cranio-Sacral therapy et al who hold special workshops and sessions at Ananda, have corroborated the fact that this leading destination spa is located in a sacred space and does not even



Portraits of royal guests Lord and Lady Mountbatten, Viceroy's Palace



A yoga class in progress at Ananda

need spiritual cleansing!

Much of this energy comes from the past, we were told, thanks to the royal family and their cordial relationship with their subjects. Not surprisingly, the oil used to light the first lamp at the holy shrine of Badrinath, when it opens in June after months of being snow-bound, is mixed and blessed in a ceremony at the palace where the maharaja is in attendance. After the ceremony, the maharaja meets his people in the adjacent courtyard.

Yes, pomp and pageantry are part of the cocktail that Ananda serves its guests. The focus of the Billiards Room in the palace, for instance, is a 100-year-old billiards table, the oldest in India, which has witnessed many leading political personages of the time play there! The present-day, light-filled Viceregal

Hall, now used for conferences, was earlier the location of the maharaja's skating rink! The wood-panelled library adorned with the royal crest is another charmed space where we would often relax after a spa session or some yogic contortions. And perhaps most poignant of all is the bagpiper who plays his melancholy bagpipe at Sunset Point and the strains float downwards into the valley even as the fiery orb takes a bow.

And what is beguiling is that the entire spa experience has been infused with life-affirming joy. As a luxury destination spa, Ananda guides its guests to redefine their lifestyles, but does not police them. Want to go birdwatching in the 100-acre grounds? Prefer to head off on a trek in the Shivaliks, the foothills of the Himalayas, or attend a moving soulful Ganga *arti* in Rishikesh? River rafting anyone? Intrigued by the art



The oldest billiards table in India is at Ananda



The bagpiper's melancholy strains can be heard at sunset



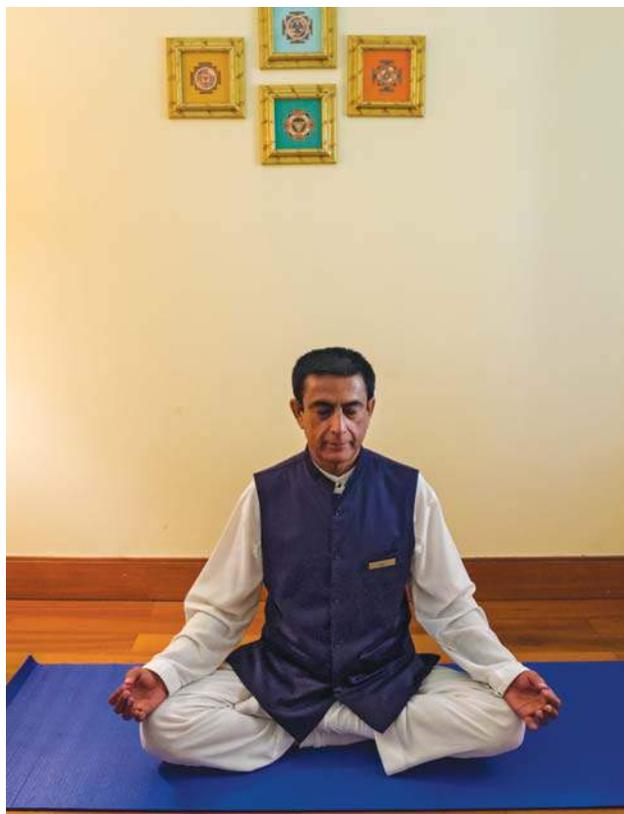
A Vedanta class in session

and science of Ayurvedic cuisine? Attend some of the cooking demos held by the spa's talented chefs. All this can be crammed in between some spa therapies, personal trainer interludes, one-on-one-yoga sessions, meditation and Vedanta classes based on the ancient wisdom of the Vedas...

The cornerstone of Ananda's philosophy is: "We don't cure, we heal, cleanse, relax and revitalise!" Indeed, Ananda has over 80 body and beauty treatments on offer, garnered from the Ayurveda, Oriental and European systems of holistic health, which aim to de-stress, detoxify and cleanse, as well as relax and address the problem of weight gain. There are no invasive therapies either nor any pretensions to cure everything under



The Spa's *shirodhara* treatment room with a view



Ananda has one-to-one yoga sessions too

the sun!

Yet, repeat guests come as frequently as thrice a year and leave behind glowing tributes in the guest book. A consultation with the Ayurvedic doctor, often preceded by a chat on the telephone or online, prior to arrival, an assessment of a guest's physical condition by pulse reading and a discussion of his or her ailments and health issues is followed by a prescriptive list of treatments, customised diet and wellness routine. If you wish to avoid the more rigorous methods of toxic elimination, Ananda is flexible on that score, too.

According to Ayurveda, mind, body and spirit are intertwined and need to be treated in unison. Additionally, the universe



An Ayurveda cooking class

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Fine dining and Ayurveda cuisine

consists of five primordial elements – air, ether, fire, water and earth. The human body is a combination of these elements and the three principal body types – vatta, pitta and kapha – are a combination of these elements. When one of those dominates in a person to an extraordinary degree, imbalance may be created and it's this imbalance that Ayurveda seeks to correct.

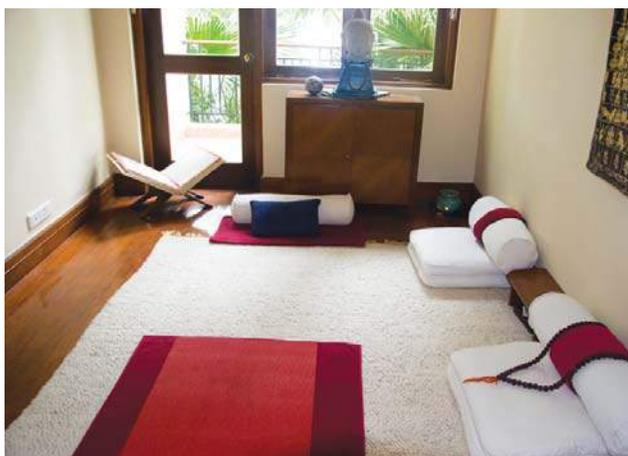
From then on, wellness is fast-tracked with a sheaf of therapies in which age-old powders, oils and poultices are used to ease joint pain, relax the muscles, stimulate circulation, etc. The highly trained therapists kneaded, pummelled and massaged us into total submission of our *doshas* and out-of-whack systems. Outside the therapy room, the tall sentinel bamboos rustled and whispered to each other while post the treatment, as we emerged from a trance-like state and walked back to our room, evocative décor touches registered on our consciousness – the Buddha statue with an orange wrap-around; a marble fountain; mandala paintings, diyas... all subtly conveyed sublime messages of spirituality and wellness.

Our reward after yoga and meditation sessions and work outs and morning stretches in the state-of-the-art gym was the exquisitely presented and created Ayurvedic meals that were pleasing to both the eyes and the palate. We dined at

candle-lit tables placed on the wood deck outside the restaurant, in the lee of ancient trees and within hand touching distance of timeless views. No matter that lunch and dinner commenced with ingesting a powder made of 32 herbs which had to be swallowed along with a lime and melon juice concoction!

But we consumed three, exotica-studded meals a day without guilt because the number of calories was mentioned alongside, and the menus were crafted to balance our *doshas*! A sampler: Green peas and mint gazpacho with herb drizzle; organic vegetables and tofu filled pancake Tian with tomato sauce and mayo relish would precede the main course of carrot and green pea risotto, with parmesan shavings and fresh herbs. The dessert would be a coffee panna cotta, with wild berry coulis! All of it concocted with raw material from Ananda's organic farms near Dehra Dun. We would leave our table satiated yet feeling as light as air!

Oprah Winfrey, Prince Charles and a number of celebrities have sipped Ananda's elixir of life. And they had left, feeling 10 years younger, fitter and perhaps even wiser. And we, too, have embarked on our wellness journey, fully aware that there will be no looking back.



The Spa meditation room

Fact File

The closest airport is at Dehra Dun from where Ananda is a 45-minute drive away.

Ananda offers a variety of packages to suit different needs – there are the Getaway Packages that include a two or three-night stay, including breakfast and dinner, and a choice of spa experiences; special Couples Connect packages of three and five nights and also options for brides to be.

There are Wellness Packages too which include Weight Management, Rejuvenation, Detox and Yoga Programmes. Apart from Ayurveda, try their exotica like the Tibetan massage or a Swedish massage.

The Ananda Active Programme is an innovative creation which includes treks, river rafting as well as spa experiences chosen to support and rejuvenate your outdoor schedules.

For more information, visit: www.anandaspa.com



The colonial wing of the Kovilakom

Kalari Kovilakom

WE got an insight into what the monks of yore might have felt on entering a monastery as we stepped into Kalari Kovilakom, the palace of Ayurveda. Perhaps a mixture of dread and anticipation? Of stepping into the unknown and sinking into a bottomless void?

Our fears were unfounded. An aura of spirituality and warm friendliness clings to Kalari Kovilakom, located in the 19th century palace of the Vengunad dynasty in Kollengode, Kerala, the heartland of Ayurveda. Indeed Kalari is billed as the doorway to the union of mind, body and spirit.

“Please leave your world here”, urged a sign at the entrance. And we did just that! We left our worldly cares at the imposing gates of the palace even as we shed our identities by way of our clothes, shoes and our cell phones and donned crisp white kurta-pyjamas and canvas slippers instead. We joined the other guests from across the world who flitted around like celestial beings in white. They too, like us, were in search of health and fitness, the Ayurveda way.

As befits a monastery or palace of Ayurveda, we had to adhere to a cloister-like discipline which was strangely liberating and comforting... Minus newspapers and TVs, the age-old addictions of tea, coffee and of course alcohol, we felt like we had cut off our moorings in the real world. In the hushed silence of the palace, we surrendered our minds and bodies to Ayurveda, the 5,000 year-old Indian health regimen that helped

us balance our *doshas*.

After a consultation with an Ayurvedic doctor and a pulse reading, our *doshas* were determined and a plan of therapies, customised diet, yoga and meditation sessions was drawn up. Soon we found ourselves retreating every morning and afternoon to the comforting ambience of the therapy room, shrouded in greenery from the outside. After a foot massage and a prayer, we would lay down on the wooden Ayurveda table. Two experienced therapists would rub and massage medicated oils into our bodies and pound our joints with herbal poultices and our Third Eye seemed to open with *shirodhara* or the oil-drip treatment.



A cottage at the Kalari Kovilakom



A carved panel over a doorway of the palace

As we lay there and surrendered ourselves to the expert ministrations of our therapists, we pondered on the meaning of life and our existence thus far. Candle-lit meditation sessions, chanting, early morning yoga stretches and cultural performances filled our evenings. Soon we began to feel like we were living in a perfect world and cavorting with the Gods of health and fitness. Our world had shrunk to within the confines of the palace and nothing could touch us. We felt like superior beings who had mastered the art of detaching ourselves from temporal concerns.

Kalari Kovilakom has to be taken on its own terms, we were told; this is not a spa, nor hotel, nor even a typical Ayurvedic hospital and a minimum stay of 14 days is mandatory. One's stay can be extended to 21, 28 days or more. In this world devoid of tea, coffee, meat, alcohol and even afternoon

naps, life was reduced to its purest, simplest form. We would be woken up at around 5.30am when the sun had yet to peep over the horizon, for our morning yoga session. In a thatched lamp-lit pavilion, we would limber up with gentle yoga *asanas* and then pad up eagerly to the palace for breakfast.

There, staff in crisp white uniforms with gold-bordered shawls would serve us like we were guests of royalty. (After all we were living in a palace!) Our hands would be washed with warm water poured from a gold-plated, spouted samovar and breakfast would be served - a hefty helping of a solitary fruit – like a papaya or water melon – as prescribed by the Ayurvedic doctor on our daily diet chart. No amount of fantasising and salivating at the thought of crisp *dosas* and soft puffy *idlis* or a spicy omelette would help to quieten the pangs of hunger that would be clawing at our innards, once we had completed our



The chef in his traditional Ayurveda kitchen



A healthy, well-balanced Ayurvedic meal



Traditional thalis with individual menu slips



The pillared dining hall

morning consultation with our doctor and the prescribed therapy.

Around noon, a bell would chime and resonate across the vast lawns, seemingly in synch with our growling stomachs. We would rush to tuck into lunch, served on an open-sided, wrap-around verandah of the palace, shaded from the hot sun that poured its beams on the green lawns that flared beyond the patio. Two signs “Let us not disturb the silence”, and “Don’t let the silence disturb you”, kept rumblings of hunger and overt signs of rebellion against the strict regimen under control! Warm water infused with cardamom or cumin would accompany our simple meal of a salad, three types of vegetables served in shining copper *thalis* and washed down with butter milk. The subtly spiced meals are customised according to a guest’s bodily requirements, and in keeping with royal tradition, these are cooked in stone and copper vessels.

In the course of our stay, we savoured snake gourd curry, ripe banana curry, vegetable stew, yam, long beans, barley *dosa*, pumpkin soup, carrot-tomato soup – all very healthy and balanced, as good nutrition is the key to restore a diseased body to its natural state of wellness. Relish your food and eat calmly and consciously, we were counselled.

After fourteen days, we feared that we would be reeling from serious caffeine deprivation and become comatose! But strangely, our spirits lightened as though we had discarded a crutch on which we had leaned on for far too long. “The greatest lesson I learnt here,” said a guest as she was leaving, “is that one’s digestive system is the key to good health; hence awareness of what to eat is crucial...We often eat out of boredom or when sitting in front of the TV. I used to have 10 cups of coffee a day. Now as I step out into the real world, I’m



Yoga is a big part of the wellness regimen at the Kalari Kovilakom



A demonstration of the martial art, *kalari payattu*

sure that I can do without a single cup,” she said. Her arthritic companion could walk without limping after three weeks of therapy, and was sorry to leave the healing confines of Kalari, the next morning.

We slipped easily into the natural rhythm of the place and its healing practices. As the first rays of the sun exploded on the complex of teak-pillared buildings with charming, sloping red-tiled roofs, guests would gather to perform a Surya Namaskaar and then gather at the pond to feed schools of eager fish, a form of Karma Yoga or “selfless work.”

At sunset, the palace would take on magical overtones. It was the loveliest time in Kalari when, satiated with our massages, wholesome diet and suffused with a feeling of wellness, we would tune into the call of birds roosting for the night and the shrill cry of a peacock would blend with soft wind chimes. Suddenly, the place would be filled with classical music. Yes, every night after dinner artists and dancers would perform for guests in the central courtyard of the palace. And then silence would engulf it like a warm embrace. Oil lamps would flicker to life and one would be reverentially placed near the statue of a royal ancestor set in an alcove. A wise king and statesman, he is said to be keep silent, benign vigil over the palace.

So does Dhaatri Valiya, Rani of Vengunad, the queen who built the palace...her statue at the bottom of a finely carved wood staircase and glowing portraits seemed to follow guests wherever they went as though urging them to continue on their journey of wellness! The Queen had with great foresight constructed the palace on a sacred site that was once a *kalari* – a training ground for Kerala’s ballet-like martial art, *kalari payattu*. Even today, the staff, particularly the therapists, continue to practise *kalari* to boost their stores of positive energy which is then transmitted to guests during therapy. It is even believed that curative energy fields converge underneath the palace ground, for *rishis* used to meditate at this spot, eons ago.

Indeed so therapeutic is the site that way back in time, it

is whispered, a prince with a skin ailment from a neighbouring kingdom, was told to bathe in the spring waters of the mountains of Kollengode. He did and was cured! Prince Dharmavarman stayed on to found a kingdom – Vengunad or the land of the *venga* tree. The *venga* tree, incidentally, has healing properties.

When we woke up on our last morning, the sun had risen in a glorious palette of colour, daubing the sky in multiple hues. The vastu-compliant palace is located in the Western Ghats and early morning mist was banded around the verdant bellies of the hills. We felt an ineffable sense of loss and sadness at our imminent departure. We bid goodbye to the staff who had become good friends, retrieved our shoes and donned our work- a-day clothes and fractured identity once again. We felt like the world was surging around us to meet us head on, but we were ready to meet any challenge or googly it would throw at us. As we reclaimed the footwear we had surrendered when checking in, our senses were on red alert while physically we felt on top of the world.

As the gates of the palace closed with a resounding finality behind our car, we had an inexplicable desire to jump out of the vehicle and go back to the safe secure haven that we had just left behind. Silently, we resolved to return some day to its holistic, healing embrace. ■

Fact File

Kalari Kovilakom, located in Kollengode in Kerala’s Palakkad district, is a two and a half hour drive from Cochin International Airport and an hour and a half away from Coimbatore airport.

The palace has 18 heritage suites, 10 treatment rooms in a separate block and qualified Ayurvedic doctors and therapists. An organic garden with Ayurvedic herbs, a well-stocked library, yoga, meditation and a pillared hall for cultural performances make this a self-contained world.

For more information, visit: www.cghearth.com

Gustasp and Jeroo Irani are travel companions for whom life is a never-ending journey. Over the last 25 years they have travelled extensively across India and the globe, taking the rough with the smooth; sampling different cultures and cuisines. In the process they have trekked in the Australian Outback, slurped snake soup in Hong Kong, have danced with the Samburus in Africa,



stayed with a local family in a Malay village, cracked the Da Vinci Code in Paris... For them, writing and photography are more than just freezing moments of that journey; it’s a passion.

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The river Cauvery often beckons the denizens of Bangalore. The Galibore Nature Camp on the banks of Cauvery is the perfect starting point for those who want to start their acquaintance with this river. E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan tells you the reasons why.

THE weather in Bangalore was warm, though not unpleasantly so. But it was tempting to get out of the city for a couple of days. The landlocked city, with its congested traffic felt a bit stifling. We had for long heard about the Galibore Nature Camp on the banks of the river Cauvery, about 100 km from Bangalore. The thought of being near a

flowing, gurgling river was suddenly a very attractive picture in our minds. It very soon became a compelling need!

The journey

We got out of the city and very soon got on to the Mysore Expressway. It puzzles me why the exit from a city can be so messy. It's the same in Mumbai too. One has to negotiate bad roads, messy traffic and chaos before reaching the smooth Expressway. Once we were on the Expressway, we made good progress. The Gulmohar trees were in full bloom and formed a pleasing canopy over many sections of the road.

We arrived at Jungle Lodges & Resorts (JLR) in time for lunch. But lunch was for once farthest from our minds as we took in the resort. To begin with, JLR is not a luxury resort, as it is government owned. There are several individual cottages, each with a small sitout facing the river. The cottages are very simply furnished. What the resort lacks in luxury trappings, it makes up for, by its location. The entire resort is set in an enchantingly dark glade of thick trees through which the sunlight barely penetrates. It's a balm for the tired mind.



The Gulmohar trees formed a pleasant canopy on the way to Galibore



The resort has simple cottages overlooking the Cauvery

The Cauvery

At first sight, the river looked gentle and placid. Too gentle I thought for the mighty Cauvery. We stood on the banks of the river, where a sign warned us to beware of crocodiles. This was almost an invitation to gaze more intently at the river and the opposite bank hoping to catch even a fleeting glimpse. We were not lucky. There were remnants of last night's barbecue. A meditative mood descended upon all of us. We sat on the plastic chairs and contemplated the river as it flowed past.

The place takes its name from the hillock called Galibore right behind the resort. The resort is set in thick deciduous forests and is home to a variety of flora and fauna, some of which we spotted now. This river was once a favourite spot of anglers who doggedly hunted the Mahseer. But because of the poachers, who used dynamite to hunt the Mahseer, thus leading



An important sign at the river

to their large-scale slaughter, a ban was imposed on fishing, which stands even today. But then fishing was not the only activity here, as we were to learn during the course of our stay.

The resort staff interrupted our reverie to inform us that lunch was ready in the 'Gol Ghar', literally a round thatched building which was the resort dining facility. The lunch was served buffet style and was sumptuous. The thorny, fried river fish was the highlight for us, while we also gorged on the rest of the vegetarian fare. The dining room was covered by net from all sides, and we soon understood why. Monkeys! There were many, running around the resort, but kept out of the dining area by the net and an inherent fear of people. It was a different story after we moved away, though. In a flash, they



Monkeys run amok here



The coracles being put to dry

were overturning the bins, and running across tables. Soon, they were clambering up the swings and the roofs of the cottages. The staff let them be.

It was hot and humid. Bangalore had been pleasanter. The trees and dense foliage were a help. There were enough hammocks strung around the resort. There were swings tied to tall trees, which delighted my son no end. He ran amok, even as some of us settled into the hammocks with a book. Bliss! Despite the heat, the slight breeze and the swaying branches soon lulled us into a gentle sleep.

After tea, it was time to explore the Cauvery. When we reached the banks of the river, we saw coracles being loaded. A coracle is a large, round boat made of strong bamboo and painted on the outside with tar and covered by white tarpaulin, making it completely water-proof. It can seat up to four adults. We gingerly got in and the boatman pushed away. Our boatman Sreeram was very knowledgeable. He steered the boat close to the banks, where the overhang of the trees like *jhumlum* shaded us from the hot sun. "When the *jhumlum* fruits ripen, the bears come down to feast on it", he said, pointing to the opposite bank, from where the hill rose. Suddenly, he caught a moment in the water and silently drew our attention to it.



Our boatman, Sreeram, was knowledgeable and patient



The Cauvery is gentle at Galibore

We tracked the twin movements moving steadily through the water ahead. A crocodile! But it quietly slid away, till it was completely submerged in water. Much to the disappointment of my son!

After some steady rowing, our boatman took us close to the bank, where a huge cloud of the most colourful butterflies hovered over a bush. We briefly went on shore to photograph them. They darted around us, giving us a halo of almost psychedelic colours. Sreeram pointed to birds like the kingfisher and the green pigeon which flashed by. We relaxed in the coracle till suddenly Sreeram asked us if we wanted to experience a 'whirlpool'. Immediately, we perked up. He took us to the deepest part of the river, gave a strong push with the oar and suddenly we were whirling around in the same spot at increasing speeds! It had to qualify as some sort of adventure sport; the adrenalin rush was so high! Slowly, the coracle ride came to a close. We disembarked and boarded the jeeps to take us back to our resort. We wondered how the coracles would make it back. Perhaps be rowed back? But no! The coracles were loaded on to the trailer behind us and we were one happy bunch who headed back.

That night it rained. The rain was a welcome relief from



The butterfly bush



Kids had a good time bathing in the Cauvery

the sweltering heat, but there went our hopes of a barbecue on the river bank. Instead, we sheltered in the Gol Ghar, watching wildlife movies and tucking into steaming starters and wholesome food.

No one was in a mood to retire for the night. The monkeys had gone silent, there was a hush in the air, except for the gentle sound of the river. We stood and watched the river for some time. We had to be up early morning as the youngsters had been promised a bath in the river, a little upstream, where "crocodiles don't come". On that note we slept a dreamless sleep.

Swimming in the Cauvery

The next day dawned clear and cool. The resort staff led the way through the forest, armed with towels and a small picnic hamper. We had to walk about a kilometer upstream to reach the bathing spot. The overnight rains had created small puddles on the forest floor. The forest around the resort has many animals like the spotted deer, the endangered grizzled giant squirrel, snakes and over 230 species of birds, the guide informed us. Wild elephants visit often too, and were in fact in the habit of visiting the river spot we were headed to. We were alert, though the guides were nonchalant. They know the signs of an imminent arrival and can interpret bird sounds and animal calls.



There is enough to keep children occupied at Galibore

The bathing spot was a narrow, shallow cove, sheltered from the rest of the fast-flowing river by a line of rocks and stones. The kids jumped in and splashed around, churning up the mud from the river bed. The rest of us sat on the rocks around, while the guides told us stories of floating carcasses of the mighty Mahseer laid waste by the illegal poachers, and foreigners who tragically perished because they underestimated the rapids in the river.

The swim done, we chewed on our cucumber and egg sandwiches and returned to a large breakfast at the GolGhar. We were leaving for Bangalore soon. After packing our bags, we bid goodbye to the river and the green glade which had been our home for a brief day. We promised ourselves that we would be back soon to explore yet another part of the mighty Cauvery.

Best time to visit: The best time to visit Galibore is between August and February, when the forest is rich and green, the river flows fast, and the weather is pleasant and cool.



Activities: Apart from coracle rides on the river, one can go rafting, trekking, bird watching and biking. ■

The writer is Assistant Editor, *One India One People*.

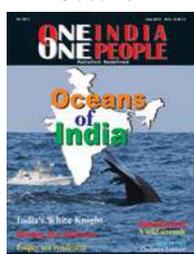
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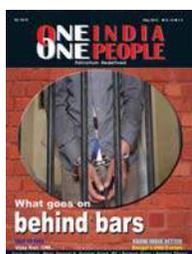
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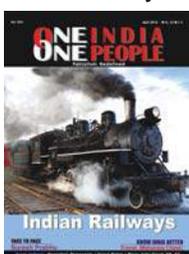
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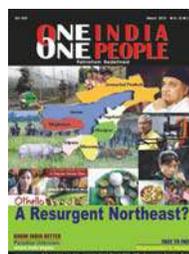
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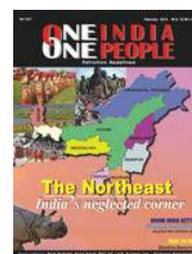
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A surfing paradise called Mahabs

*In recent times, surfing has become the raison d'être for many tourists visiting places like Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu. They come, they surf and they stay on, says **Liz Thottan**, who herself gave up an urban lifestyle to devote time to surfing and running her homestay in Mahabalipuram. She writes about the magnetic attraction this town holds for her and hundreds of other tourists-turned-locals.*

TODAY I can proudly say, I am living my dream. The dream of freedom, free spirit, and a free life. I chose what to do, how to live and where to live, because I loved it, and not because the society wanted it or would not accept me. I found a niche to stand away from a society that seemed toxic to my well being. I found my ground where there are less judgements and more acceptance. A live and let live attitude. In this journey, I found my purpose. And that purpose was to live each day with a smile on my face.

Finding the true passion of surfing

One day in July 2013, a friend invited me for a beer to Mahabalipuram, a UNESCO heritage site one hour from Chennai. It was then I saw for the first time, kids and some fisher boys riding the wave. In less than half an hour I was sitting with Mumu of Mumu's Surf School in Mahabalipuram, getting ready for a lesson from him. It was July 16, 2013. My first ride lasted less than 30

seconds, but in those 30 seconds, I knew right there on that red board, that this was a life changing moment. As I rode that first wave, there was an explosion of joy, freedom and crumbling of ego within me. I was riding on a board 9 ft long, along the mighty ocean, a humbling experience, yet at the same time, I felt I had conquered all the demons in my head. Everything else that was bogging me down seemed so

insignificant. I went on and on for three hours in the water that day. When I was done for the day, for the next few days, I could not stop a smile or stop talking about this amazing ride.

It was a pure state of Zen out there in the ocean, where the mind, body and soul were in complete harmony. While waiting for a wave there are various thoughts in the mind, and then when I start to paddle all I can think of is I have got to conquer this wave, and then it's the purest form of joy. Weather it's lying down on the board, on my knees (my preferred style due to a severe locked knee problem) or standing up, the euphoria is the same. Surfing calmed me down in

many ways, it taught me patience, sometimes waiting for the right wave can take about 20 minutes, and against the mighty ocean we are just a small speck and that thought is extremely humbling.

Every weekend I found myself drawn to Mahabs

(Mahabalipuram) to surf. It was like a drug, an obsession. In addition to this passion, I also found some new friends, whose alternative lifestyle soothed my soul, reiterating that it's alright to live a nomadic and gypsy like life and many of their thoughts echoed with mine. The fishing village of Mahabalipuram welcomed me with open arms.



Many foreign tourists visit Mahabalipuram and stay back as locals

An alternative lifestyle

In the meantime, I picked up a small one bedroom apartment for my weekend getaway, this also gave me a better understanding of life in a village as compared to a city I have always lived in. Would I be comfortable minus all the conveniences of a city? I would take short one week breaks from work and live in Mahabs. I started to fall in love with that lifestyle, having my own organic garden on the terrace, fresh fish, people with the same thoughts and wavelength as friends. The smiling faces on the streets, the kids' laughter, and this one big community lifestyle made me realise, what I was missing in Chennai rather than what I would miss from Chennai.

After a long thought I decided to give up the luxuries of a city life, and move to Mahabs, a town I fell madly in love with. I found soul in Mahabs and its people. Surfing became the dominant feature, and I wanted to make that my way of life at any cost. I have never loved anything with such passion. By December of 2014, I finally bid goodbye to city life and moved to Mahabs.

From a pragmatic angle it wasn't such a tough decision. If I lived in Chennai I would need at least ₹ 60,000 to survive a month as compared to Mahabs, which would cost me just ₹10,000. In my new found alternative life, I just need rent for a single bedroom tiny apartment, surf shorts and Ts. There was not an iota of doubt in my mind of this dramatic and unrecognisable change I was embarking on. From stilettos, Zara and Marks and Spencer, to flipflops, board shorts and t shirts. Many loved ones thought it was an impulsive decision that I would regret. While deep within me I knew they were voicing their own fears of such a plunge.



Surf tourism is becoming Mahabalipuram's main attraction

I am lucky to have the attitude to dig deep and realised I was living in a very shallow society, which dried my soul of any joy. Surfing happened to me at such a moment in life. With that I broke free from all the norms of life, unconditioned my mind and followed my instincts and gut. Every time I came out of the ocean, I was smiling for the rest of the day.



Eli's Homestay in Mahabalipuram offers local cuisine and hospitality

Having a background from the Taj group of hotels, I knew what I had to do to sustain myself. I picked up a house with two bedrooms to run as a homestay and a kitchen, to pursue my passion for cooking. Thus was born 'Eli's Homestay and Kitchen'. Meeting people from different walks of life, gives me the perspective I need. Being a part of the surf culture, it's not easy to find guests for Eli. Word of mouth is my best testimony and friends, surfers and facebook keep my guest house full and active.

Why we all look for a change in lifestyle is because we are so unhappy where we are. And change is always scary. But without taking risks you can never find what's on the other side of the coin. Many of us are happy in our comfort zones. But there are many others who are rebels, who desire to live life on their terms. I am one amongst them.

Mahabs and surfing – made for each other

Mahabalipuram is a soulful town. It is a UNESCO heritage site with some of the best Bas relief in the world. It is the third most visited place in the country next to the Taj Mahal and Hampi. The setting of the Shore Temple as a backdrop to the surfing beach makes it completely a magical place to be. Many Europeans, Australians and Americans have made this their home. Today, my friends in this town are people who came here for a visit, fell in love with the simplicity and charm of this fishing village and continued to stay on and make this their adopted home. In 2007, Dave Hearn, from Australia, a good friend visited this fishing village and introduced surfing to the kids. A surfer all his life, for him this is the Mecca of surfing in India. Today Mahabs is gaining popularity as a surfer's paradise in India.

The rock wall built around the shore temple, gives a great reason for a wave break and this forms the perfect paradise for surfers. It is nicknamed as the rock or the point, and during the peak season you will easily find 50 to 60 surfers queuing up for their wave at the point. When you get a wave at the point, a long boarder can take a glorious ride upto a minimum of 300 metres. This perfect setting along with the gorgeous Shore Temple as a backdrop, makes Mahabs one of the best surf spots in India. Since the start of surfing in this town in 2007, it has become one of the biggest revenue earners during the offseason of June, July and August.

We have had people flying in from Delhi, Bangalore, Varkala and other places to surf these waves during its peak season. To our great surprise, in the year 2014, we had 4 Hawaiians who came for a visit but stayed on for 3 months till the end of the season. To them, the beautiful glassy waves, the people of Mahabs and the food were a perfect reason to not go looking for any other place.

Surfing has become a part of life in Mahabs. We have various set ups to help and enhance the sport like Mumu's Surf School, Temple Surfboards (surf board manufacturers), and very soon, the second surf competition in August. During the weekends Mukesh of Mumu's Surf School holds classes for approximately 20 to 30 students.

Mahabalipuram is a fishing village with really simple people. You will hardly find a person here without a smile, their homes

are always open to visitors, and the aggression level is negligible. When foreign tourists come for a visit, many of them are completely taken by surprise at the unpolished, stress free and gypsy like lifestyle. To Alfonso Arias, my Spanish surfer friend, who visited most weekends from Delhi, the biggest joy was to walk the streets barefoot and not be judged. Our urban lifestyle has become inundated with judgements on everything we do. So when you get to Mahabs and these simple people, mostly fishermen do not bother to judge you in any way, this becomes a paradise of free spirits.

Most of my friends in this town are people who fell in love with the town and decided to stay on. They are happy to return home, just to make some money to sustain themselves for another year in Mahabs. People make a place, and I can say without a doubt that the simplicity of the people of this town is what keeps the foreigners coming back. I couldn't have asked for a better spot to hone my

skills, and a more fitting place to be happy, which to me is the real purpose of all our lives. The relaxed island like culture is very appealing to any soul. That's why Mahabs! ■

In the writer's words: "In our youth, many of us talk about quitting at 40 and living life on one's own terms. Have you met any such person yet? Here I am. My life as a nomadic wanderer".



Tints of tourism

(Continued from page 7)

Alternative tourism – big enough yet?

To call alternative tourism an industry may just be, in my opinion, a bit of a stretch just yet. While many of the categories read like parts of traditional mass tourism, perhaps the major distinguishing factor here is the intent of the tourist - to come to the tourism destination solely for that particular activity because of it being better, unique or considerably cheaper as compared to the tourist's home country. Irrespective of whether the activity or place being visited may be in the list of most publicised and frequented tourist attractions of that country.

This thin edge of the tourism wedge still has a long way to go in India as it battles the familiar demons of ignorance towards its nature, dimensions and even the power of tourism itself. A lack of ability to determine level of sustainable development, to manage the tourism itself and control its development along with a lack of appreciation of its impacts as a formal industry combined with a lack of agreement over levels of development, control and the future direction of tourism itself are keeping these innovative sparks of enterprise

from becoming a roaring flame.

Like in all things, the survival of the fittest and the most lucrative will determine which of these shall in the coming years be called sporadic or seasonal and which makes the leap to being an industry born of the doings of crazy minds. For me, the biggest concern and challenge that alternative tourism will come to face is its perhaps unintended projection of being 'appropriate tourism'.

The world is in a flux. It is larger in terms of access and smaller in terms of ease of access than it has ever been in the earth's history. Perception and opinion are as fickle as the incessant quantity of information being churned out. Absence of any level of filtering or authenticating between genuine and sensational data being made available en masse holds a greater threat to the bud of alternative tourism than

its actual potentials or strengths.

And finally it will be retweets, likes and rating stars that will determine the fate of these gladiators battling it out on the sands of a global digital colosseum. ■

The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.



The triumph of Beno Zephine

*This is triumph over adversity, at its best. Meet Beno Zephine, India's first blind Indian Foreign Service officer, who overcame her disability to shine at the civil service exams. Her parents were her source of strength and encouragement, says **Meera Krishnankutty**, who met Beno and came away completely impressed by the smiling confidence and determination of the young woman.*

THE stage was set. The audience was all ears. The little girl took to the mike. Like a seasoned speaker, she began. She talked and talked. Without any pause or hesitation, she poured out all that she knew about Chachaji. She concluded with a thundering applause ringing in her ears. Stepping down, clutching the gift earned for the best oration, she was smothered with handshakes and hugs from her overjoyed teachers and loving kisses of her teary eyed, proud parents.

That was a little more than two decades ago at the Little Flower Convent for the blind. The winner that day is now, none other than the 25-year-old Beno Zephine, who has created history after becoming our country's first, completely visibly challenged officer of the external affairs ministry! She was ranked 343rd in her batch in the 2013-14 civil service exams.

"I was in my nursery class and that was my first attempt at public speaking. My joy was doubled when I realised how happy my parents were", Beno recalls the memorable day with a smile. "It gave us tremendous faith in her potential after her maiden speech, which fetched her the first prize", Luke Anthony Charles talks fondly of his daughter.

That was the beginning. Beno, the bold and brilliant, notwithstanding her handicap has talked her way since, to become an IFS (Indian Foreign Service)



Beno Zephine, the exemplary achiever

(Photo courtesy: Sreeram Selvaraj)

officer, an achievement that would inspire many.

A normal childhood

Homed in Chennai, at Villivakkam, Beno was born to Mary Padmaja and Luke Charles. Charles is an employee of the Indian Railways. Bruno Xavier, her elder sibling, is an engineer working in Canada.

"We were shocked and disheartened to know our child was born blind. It was miserable. We feared for her future, like any other parent. But, we accepted God's verdict and decided to name her Beno Zephine. Beno means God's child and Zephine denotes hidden treasure. Soon,

as days passed, true to her name, she proved to be a God sent gift. Beno was a bright and happy girl", Mary Padmaja, recalls affectionately. Beno grew up in a joint family along with her father's relatives, which she says helped her in a big way. She was treated without any special consideration, which actually helped her.

After her schooling at the Little Flower Convent, she did her graduation in English literature at Stella Maris College, and her Masters at Loyola College. "I enjoyed my childhood and my studies as well. Never once did I worry about my future. I had strong belief in myself. Yes, I am a differently abled person! I do accept it and I expect no sympathy from others. Why should I? I am not less or inferior to any one! One should understand that the differently abled also have their own dreams, aspirations like any other. I believed in sharpening and strengthening my other senses to weaken my weakness and to move on. I am very positive about achieving my dreams", Beno's statement, was loud and clear.

The dream of civil service

Civil service was her dearest dream which she held close to her heart. "The seed was sown when I was in school, in my eleventh grade to be precise. Till then the confusion prevailed, whether to be a lawyer or a lecturer," she says.

"My father and my teachers played

a big role in planting it. I was basically a talkative girl. My father, who noticed it early, encouraged me to participate in all the elocution competitions that came by. Like fish to water I just took to it. My teachers in school happily nominated me to speak, within and outside the school, as and when occasions arose. I never let go of any opportunity to express myself”, Beno recollects. Her father made her listen to the radio news and the current affairs analysis aired on all major channels every day. He was Beno’s resource person and most of his salary was spent on her books!

Beno’s father had excellent raw material to work with. “Any topic under the sun, Beno was ready to experiment on. She was good at extempore also. From cancer awareness, environmental or social issues, to world politics, the subjects varied. The intense interest developed in national and international topics, drew her to the idea of the civil services”, comments Charles, who made it a point to take her along with him to as many places as possible. “I never let her miss any family function or public meeting. I wanted her to hear and feel the world and understand the different characteristics of the people and their mindsets. Beno was like an overflowing question bank. Her quest to know was amazing. She sought answers from people, places, books, and experiences. Every word she heard was promptly registered and saved for future use”, Charles proudly comments.

Her mother chipped in too in a big way. “My mother was my trusted reader. She would read out for me whenever and whatever books I chose. Her workload increased when I reached college and the coaching classes. The volume of books had doubled by then. It was not possible for me to scan all the pages and read through my laptop. But not once has she refused or shown her displeasure!” Beno says.

Charles has more to add about his



Beno Zephine with her parents, Mary Padmaja and Luke Charles

(Photo courtesy: Sreeram Selvaraj)

daughter who is his world.

“Beno never bothered us with any demands or needs. Her passion was books. She loved good food like all children but she never insisted on her favourites. She was very mature and understanding even at a young age. She could sense our slightest change of mood. “Let me complete my studies and get a job, then I will take care of you”, we remember her reassuring us, while she was just a primary class student. She would only get irritated on certain issues like wasting water or electricity! ‘It’s public wealth’, she would proclaim! We used to tease her, calling her ‘Collector Beno’. Yet, she never disclaimed it since the idea had already taken root in her mind!”

Before writing the civil services exam, Beno completed her post-graduate studies. “After I completed my Masters I got selected as a probationary officer in the State Bank of India. During the group discussions I turned out to be the best of the candidates. It was a wonderful experience. My finest moment was when I could buy my father and mother each a small piece of gold with my first salary”, Beno happily

recalls.

Her strength she says is her self-confidence. But there have been moments of despair too, though they didn’t last too long. “During my undergraduate days when I made my first attempt at the civil service examination, I failed. It really put me down. But not for long. I decided that I should not be failing in my preparations at least. And that paid off well. The second time it was much easier and the score was excellent”.

Whom does she attribute her great success in the civil services? “I thank God, my father and mother who have sacrificed everything, and all my teachers who have made me what I am. My college mates who treated me as one amongst them, helped me to be independent. The coaching classes were also very fruitful”. Advanced technology also came in handy. The software JAWS (Job Access With Speech) was an excellent tool to work with.

Beno has a passion for literature, which she says was also an additional advantage. Literature was not a mere study of classics and poems and dramas. It was also the study of various periods,

the cultural, economic and social issues associated with those times. It taught rich lessons of social history, all of which helped her in preparing for the exams. Getting into the IFS was a big high for her. "I admit that I was not sure of getting into the IFS, though I was trying for it. Till date there has not been a precedent of a totally blind candidate getting into the IFS. I was at the pinnacle of joy when I heard the news."

Meeting Sushma Swaraj

Beno was invited to Delhi to meet the External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who took the decision of appointing a hundred percent visually challenged person in the Department, weighing talent above disability. "I was greatly inspired and motivated when she said that she had great faith in my ability and talent and was sure

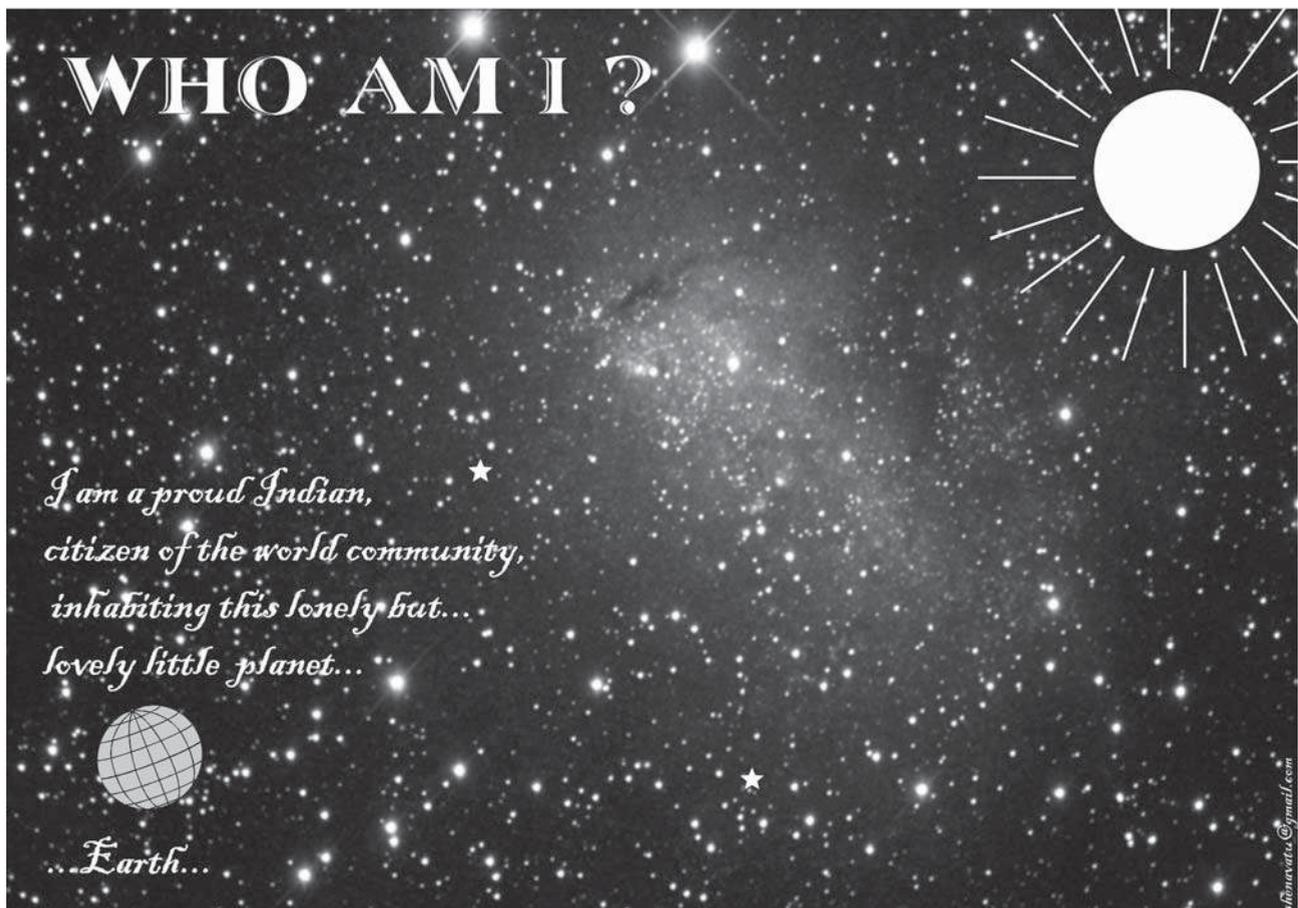
that I would make an efficient officer. I promised her that I am ready to serve to the best of my ability, in any department, anywhere, for my country".

Her life is her message

"Lamenting one's disability will not take one forward. Strengthen your strengths and weaken your weakness. That will be the key to your success. She maintains that one should be equipped to take the right decisions at the right time. Without understanding people and situations through education and wide exposure, it is not easy to make balanced decisions. "Generally in our society, we are used to seeing the father taking the decisions in a family. And the mother implementing it. Children grow up accepting it as the standard rule to be followed. Not many would dare to defy, either by habit or of the fear

of rejection. I would say that decision making is a woman's right too, which adds dignity to her status, just as the economic empowerment, within the family and society", Beno concludes with her brilliant smile, ready to move on, touching many hearts with her determination. Beno knows that the difference between the impossible and possible lies in determination! ■

The writer is a Chennai-based freelance journalist and has contributed articles to several English and Malayalam publications. She has also scripted, directed and produced several theatre and TV plays in Malayalam, apart from interviewing prominent personalities for Doordarshan, Asianet and Amritha TV channels.



A report card of the Modi government

It's been a mixed bag from the current Modi government, where education reforms are concerned. The controversy over the Human Resources minister's educational qualifications aside, there are some good proposals in the pipeline, avers P.M. Kamath.

THE BJP led NDA II (National Democratic Alliance II) government under Narendra Modi has established itself as a harbinger of much needed changes, since it came to power in May 2014. There is an excellent list of achievements directly under the Prime Minister (PM) in the area of foreign affairs, national security and defence. He has coined several attractive phrases in English as well as in Hindi to make certain that Indian voters are impressed by them. There is thus, 'Make in India' or idea of 'Red Carpet' welcome to investors instead of subjecting them to Indian bureaucracy's 'Red Tape,' and many others.

Educational arena

In the field of education, the PM has chosen Smriti Irani, as the Minister of Human Resources Development (HRD). She is the youngest person in the cabinet; she too is fond of developing several catchy phrases in Hindi/Sanskrit like 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao', 'Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat' etc. But early in her innings, she created avoidable controversies about her educational qualifications. She took certain hasty steps in her over enthusiasm to implement certain, in my opinion, nationally good programmes, like introduction of Sanskrit in Kendriya Vidyalayas, on which she had to beat an early retreat. But the media and

opposition parties like the Congress have been mocking her mainly because of her lack of higher educational degrees.

But record of even highly-qualified HRD ministers like Dr. Murlu Manohar Joshi during the NDA I or during eminent lawyer, Kapil Sibal's tenure under UPA II has been mixed. Sibal for instance, is a very smart and quick learner; that I learnt from a personal encounter with him. I was facing a problem with the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) in Delhi, which was objecting to giving their affiliation to our English High School because the building in which we housed it, also accommodated a Kannada medium school affiliated to the Maharashtra State Board.

I posed him in Mumbai a question: If your objective under the Right to Education (RTE) is to universalise education, why should the CBSE object if a school building being used by the CBSE is also used by a State Board school? Within 10 days, a new rule was made to accommodate use of the school building by any other institution as long as it is not put to 'commercial use', and we got the permission! But Sibal was not necessarily good when it came to other school issues, which will be discussed here below. Point is, as long as you have your ear close to the ground reality, not having a degree should not matter!

Higher education

What have been the achievements of the HRD ministry? Though 13 months are a short period to make an impassioned assessment, there has been the creation of new IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) and IIMs (Indian Institute of Management); while the move is good, the effort has to be to create world class infrastructure. The creation of the National Digital Library is another good move. Similarly, a new scheme of 'Global Initiative for Academic Network' has been launched to bring to India, globally best known educators. There are many other initiatives, but space is a constraint!

School education

In the field of school education, Smriti Irani has done well in trying to introduce Sanskrit; but her hasty move turned out to be her undoing. It is a tragedy of Indian education that during the British times Sanskrit was taught widely in schools and colleges. However, it was gradually withdrawn from schools and colleges. There are great advantages for all Indian languages in studying Sanskrit, as these are rooted in that language. Today, the younger generation is unaware of it. When I say in the Hindi heartland *Jalapatra* the audience says, "Oh, you know Hindi". When I have used that word in Gujarat, students have expressed surprise, that I speak Gujarati!

Necessary changes

More urgent changes are required in school education - Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary; some to be changes in the so called reforms of former HRD Minister, Kapil Sibal and a few pro-actively by the present Minister. Certain disastrous changes introduced by Mr. Sibal should go. For example: 1. If an over-age student, who has not had any education - formal or informal, seeks admission, he should be admitted to a class according to his age and not according to his level of academic achievement. 2. Age for admission not to be insisted; schools are expected to admit on the basis of estimated age.

The previous government's order not to fail any student on whatsoever ground/s till Class VIII is not a good decision and needs to be changed. Primary school children do not commit suicide because of failure in a class. RTE is fundamental, but there is no fundamental right to pass! Dr. Pallam Raju, successor to Mr. Sibal had favourably spoken about changing these atrocious prescriptions, but went out of office without achieving his aim. A student enrolled in a school has a right to know the level of education achieved by him or her. How can children learn that there is a grading system in the society? It is inevitable in all walks of life!

However, it is also necessary for the minister to proactively take certain steps such as, nationally implement uniformity in the number of classes covered by a specific section like Primary, Upper Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary. As of today, while CBSE and ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education) consider up to Std. V as Primary, within Maharashtra, there are different patterns like some considering up to Std. IV as Primary, while some are calling up to VII as Primary!

The worst feature of the RTE as envisaged by the previous government and unfortunately also embraced by the present at the federal level

is an overwhelming emphasis on universalisation, without any concern for quality of education; main concern is to make every child enter a formal educational institution. The emphasis on quality of education is completely missing. This will ruin a generation before the government realises its folly and agrees to change.

There are certain welcome steps which are being debated. The best one is the proposal to increase the age of school admission from present five to six; even seven should be considered, as toddlers should be allowed to enjoy their free years. During the British rule, school admission was at seven.

There are certain welcome steps which are being debated. The best one is the proposal to increase the age of school admission from present five to six; even seven should be considered, as toddlers should be allowed to enjoy their free years. During the British rule, school admission was at seven.

Conclusion

Comparatively, in my opinion, higher education in India is better than school education. It has become a standard expression that even after 68 years of Independence, we have not been able to produce a world class university that can be counted in the world's top 200! But, our higher education has created a sense of urgency to reform education

in the United States as evident from Obama's frequent references to the fact that Indians are capturing American jobs!

However, the problem of qualitative universal literacy is gigantic. Last year, the UNESCO published their Annual Education for All Global Monitoring Report, which stated that India alone has 1.38 million children in the age group of 6-11, who have not seen the doors of a school. India is the fourth top illiterate country. India needs to double the allocation for education. In 1999, it was 4.34 % of the GDP and it came down to 3.35% in 2012, according to a World Bank report.

Even if the government wants to achieve a semblance of universal education, it needs to construct 100 thousand primary schools with eight rooms and every room accommodating 30 students. The task is not impossible but the government needs to take a bold decision to double allocation in the budget for education. Instead of doing that, the governments under the UPA II and the NDA II have been following the same policy—since it is decided by the same bureaucrats. Thus, there is the pressure on privately managed schools to admit 25 per cent of the children under RTE. The Supreme Court had exempted minority run schools from the RTE reservation. But the bureaucrats are busy finding out where and how the pressure can be mounted on minority run schools to accommodate students under RTE quota! ■

The writer, a former Professor of Politics, University of Bombay and currently Chairman and Hon. Director, VPM's Centre for



International Studies (Regd), is also Hon. Secretary of VPM, an educational trust in Mulund and Airoli, managing educational institutions from KG to PG since 1962.

A labour of love

*The colossal work of the legendary Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande has finally been compiled into two CDs titled 'Samarpan' by Pandit Indudhar Nirody. The journey was arduous says **Vithal C. Nadkarni**, who was completely entranced by this seminal compilation.*

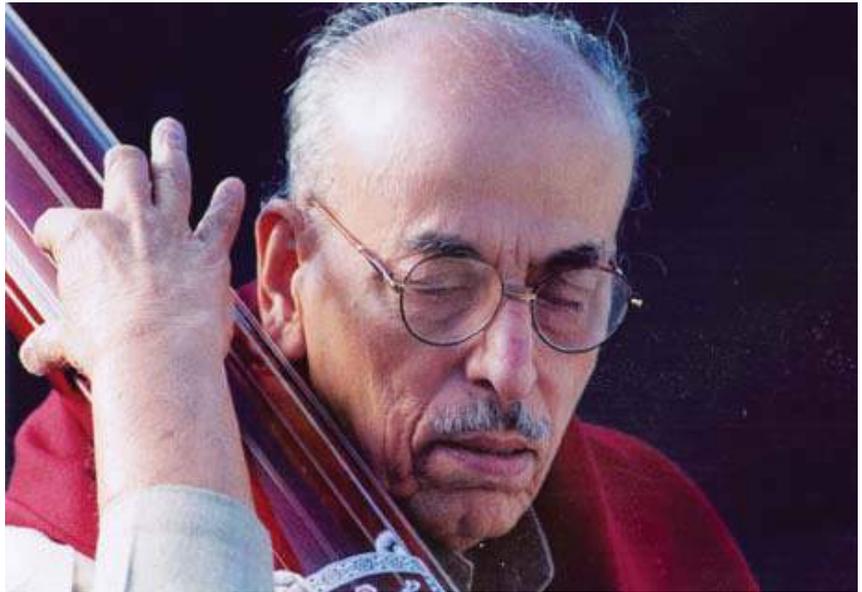
RECENTLY, this writer was entranced by a fabulous Kadarpiya *thumri* in the *raga* Kafi sung by Pandit Indudhar Nirody. The Mysore-based 81-year old maestro had recorded it in a set of CDs appropriately called *Samarpan* (Dedication), a fine tribute to the legendary musicologist Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande.

Samarpan is a truly monumental project that took six years and was entirely self-financed. This encompassed, hold your breath, all the 2,000 *bandishes* contained in that century-old-six-volume classic called 'Kramik Pustak Malika', which had been compiled by Pandit Bhatkhande (1860-1930).

The *Samarpan* audio clips have harmonium and tabla accompaniments by Pandits Veerabhadraiah Hiremath, Ramesh Dhannur and Bheemashankar Bidnoor.

Learning the Kafi

Now to get back to the Kafi, I tried to learn the piece by playing the *bandish* again and again. Only then did I realise the hidden beauty of this seemingly simple piece composed by Miya Kader Mirza. (He was a minister at the redoubtable aesthete-composer Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's Lucknow court). How bewitchingly tuneful Pandit Nirody made it sound. As Maihar sarod maestro Pandit Rajeev Taranath said once, "Music, like painting, is an art of immediacy. Pandit Bhatkhande's monumental work was waiting for this transformative touch of immediacy. With Pandit Indudhar's



Indudhar Nirody, who has compiled the monumental *Samarpan*

voice reanimating the compositions, the songs have got a soulful touch".

To cut a long litany short, only with determined effort did I manage to learn Kadarpiya's Kafi, which complains about flashing thunder and pouring rains that make the night seem interminable. The lover's song seems singularly appropriate to greet the arrival of the monsoon this month.

Imagine how difficult this exercise might have been had I tried it in earlier times which lacked modern amenities such as recorders, computers and the internet which we take so much for granted today.

Those were the days when one learned by the time-honoured *sina-ba-sina* or face-to-face method from the *guru* to *shishya*.

That's when the great lawyer-turned-

musicologist Bhatkhande got hold of all those pieces and published them in an annotated form for the masses in his multivolume 'Pustak Malika' series. Bhatkhandeji had gathered the compositions with a persistence and tenacity worthy of a Machiavelli or a Narad Muni from tight-fisted *ustads*, irascible pundits and condescending connoisseurs from all over the country.

To democratise the dissemination of this most melodious of our legacies, the great organiser had devised a notation or *sargam* system of his own to unlock their melodic content. He had also composed over 300 of his own pieces and signature tunes (*Lakshangeet*) to make the *ragas* easy to remember and render.

Says Pandit Nirody of his great-grand-guru, "We can only barely fathom the amount of knowledge he had. It

would not be possible for us to scale the heights nor digest that amount of information in several lifetimes! And he accomplished it all in his lifetime!”

Although in his own times, Bhatkhande’s work drew mixed responses from the musician fraternity, today his work is widely admired, both by scholars and musicians, because it recorded for posterity compositions that may have vanished had they been restricted to oral transmission alone. “Thanks to Panditji’s pioneering efforts, knowledge that was confined to hereditary musician families opened up to the public at large”, says Sumana Ramanan in her online appreciation of Pandit Nirody’s achievement.

Pandit Indudhar Nirody’s own feat turning Bhatkhande’s vast *vidya* from annotated and symbol-coded *avatar* into a computer-friendly format, is revolutionary in its own right. Recognising the scope and width of its potential impact, the Sangeet Natak Akademy had awarded its prestigious award upon Pandit Nirody for his lifetime achievement of dedicated service to the cause of Hindustani classical music. President Pranab Mukherjee will do the honours at Rastrapati Bhavan soon.

However, with characteristic humility, Pandit Nirody acknowledges the contribution of his fellow artistes. “Everyone involved in the project was committed,” he says. “They knew its importance. The recordist, a Carnatic violinist, A.P. Srinivas, accommodated us according to our convenience. A lot of credit goes to him”.

The staggering contribution

Incidentally, Pandit Nirody retired as a high-ranking honcho with the Life Insurance Corporation of India after 40 years of service, and settled in the state of his birth - Karnataka. Working almost daily for six years, the Mysore-based musicians completed the mega project.

Earlier, speaking at a felicitation

function held at the Y. B. Chavan Centre in South Mumbai, noted sitarist Pandit Arvind Parikh called it, “an epic moment not only for the pedagogy but also connoisseurship of one of the world’s greatest and oldest classical musical traditions: All the compositions painstakingly collected by that genius grammarian and musicologist have now become freely available for students and scholars alike thanks to the silent, but monumental work by Pandit Nirody and his inspired bunch of colleagues”.

For the more than four decades that he lived in Mumbai, till his retirement in 1995, Pandit Nirody studied music with other stalwarts such as Gurudutt Heblekar, Dinkar Kaikini and Chidandand Nagarkar, besides Pandit Ginde and Bhat. His father had moved from Udipi in southwest Karnataka to Mumbai when his son was 15 so that he could learn from top-notch musicians.

The project on recording Pandit Bhatkhande’s repertoire originally began at ITC’s Sangeet Research Academy under Acharya K.G. Ginde. However, Pandit Ginde, a grand-disciple of Pandit Bhatkhande himself, and a *guru* of Pandit Nirody, passed away in 1994 and the project got stalled. Pandit S.C.R. Bhat, who was also Pandit Nirody’s *guru*, carried it a little further. But it remained incomplete.

“I strongly felt his work had to be taken up again and brought to fruition,” Pandit Nirody said. “With the help of the right people and selfless colleagues, we started recording. I would say that it was due to the blessings of my *gurus* that this project has now been completed successfully”.

As the chairman of Popular Prakashan Ramdas Bhatkal, who is also a *gurubhai* of Pandit Nirody, said, “I was simply awestruck when I heard about the successful completion of *Samarpan*”.

To
buy *Samarpan*
the book and two CDs,
send a cheque of ₹3,000 (for
addresses in India) or ₹ 4,500 (for
addresses abroad)



To
Swarasankula
Sangeetha Sabha
#1226 3rd Cross,
Gange Raste, Kuvempungar,
Mysore 570023.

Renowned Patiala-Kasur *gharana* maestro Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty echoes similar sentiments in a letter: “I was really surprised that it (the rendering of the entire repertoire) was possible with one person who is none other than Indudharji. I believe it will definitely help all the *raga* music lovers all over (the world) to learn Bhatkhande’s different and difficult compositions by listening directly from Indudharji’s singing”.

Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, one of India’s top *khayalists* and a much-in-demand *guru* at Kolkata’s Sangeet Research Academy, as quoted by Sumana Ramanan, eulogised Nirody’s *Samarpan* as “a commendable effort”. He further added that “even performing musicians cannot learn all *ragas* or all compositions in a *raga* from their *gurus*. And notations have their limitations. So (Pandit Nirody’s) recordings will be hugely beneficial both to students and musicians”. ■

The writer is a senior consulting editor and columnist with the Times of India Group of Publications. He is also a fellow of the London-based 21st Century Trust and a recipient of the US-based Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship.



What does the *mangalsutra* signify?

The mangalsutra is quite the ubiquitous Hindu symbol of marriage in India. Across cultures and regions, married women wear it to denote their marital status. Only the design, texture and colour differ, explains Shoma A. Chatterji.

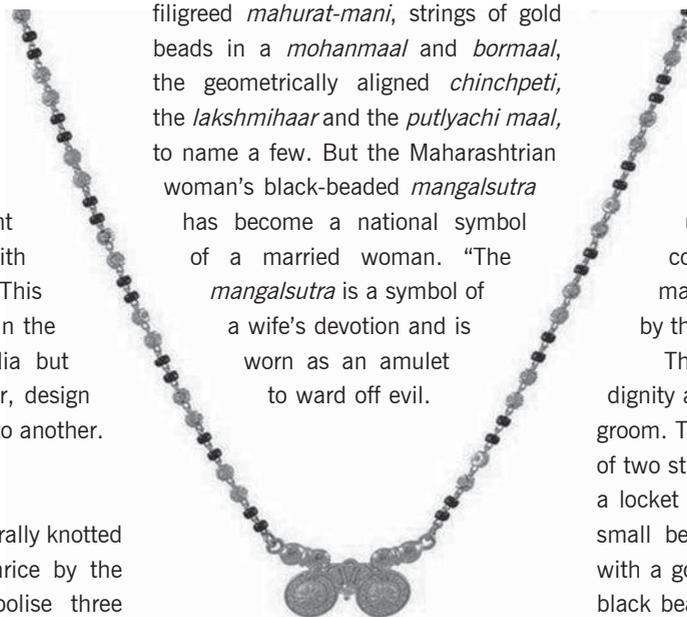
IN an age where the world is your oyster, and where cultural and ethnic schisms are getting increasingly blurred, it would be interesting to focus on the significance of a marriage symbol – the *mangalsutra*. This is a ritualistic symbol that gives a woman identification and recognition of her married state. In other words, a single girl or a widowed woman does not wear the *mangalsutra*. Though over time, the *mangalsutra* ('mangal' meaning 'auspicious' and well-being and 'sutra' meaning 'thread') has transcended socially constructed barriers of ethnicity, culture, language, caste and geography, this black-beaded chain woven together on a single string of gold with one or three little semi-circular bowls of gold defining the pendant is universally identified with the Maharashtrian bride. This chain spreads itself widely in the south-western parts of India but it changes in texture, colour, design and shape from one region to another.

The marital significance

The *mangalsutra* is generally knotted around the bride's neck thrice by the groom. Three knots symbolise three different aspects of a married woman – the first knot represents her obedience to her husband, the second to his parents and the third represents her respect for God. Marriage is a sacrament, which brings about a union of two personalities into one, for the purpose of social proliferation and for the upliftment of the two through mutual co-operation. It is a

rich heritage soaked with the promise of eternity. It carries forward traces of an indelible past into the present that will hopefully shape our tomorrows.

The *mangalsutra* is not the only chain the bride wears. She also wears around her neck, as a matter of tradition rather than a part of mandatory ritual and custom, the best in jewellery that forms part of her trousseau. Though this is predominant among Maharashtrians, it is also part of marriage symbols in the south, in Karnataka where it is called the *mangalsutra* differing somewhat from the Maharashtrian one. These are – the pearl *tanmani*, the exquisitely filigreed *mahurat-mani*, strings of gold beads in a *mohanmaal* and *bormaal*, the geometrically aligned *chinchpeti*, the *lakshmihaar* and the *putlyachi maal*, to name a few. But the Maharashtrian woman's black-beaded *mangalsutra* has become a national symbol of a married woman. "The *mangalsutra* is a symbol of a wife's devotion and is worn as an amulet to ward off evil.



It is believed to have the *shakti* (power) to attract all that is auspicious and favourable. The semi-spherical bowls that define the pendant could be one or three, depending either on the traditions of the groom's family or on its choice," explains Lakshmidas Bhatt, a priest who

has been performing and presiding over Maharashtrian weddings for more than two decades now.

The groom ties it around the neck of the bride on the day of their marriage signifying their union at an auspicious moment picked out by the priest from the holy book known as the *panchang*. "My grandmother told me that each black bead stands for one year of the husband's life. But I am not sure about the authenticity of this belief or whether it is backed up by scriptures," says Priya Das, who married a Bengali and does not wear the *mangalsutra* as a regular habit.

South Indians wear a different version. It is a simple gold chain necklace with a large pendant at the bottom called the *thali*. The pendant is unique to the particular family/community/caste that you have married into. It is said to be gifted by the relatives on the groom's side.

The *mangalsutra* is a token of dignity and love given to a bride by her groom. The most common type is made of two strings of small black beads with a locket or pendant. It is also made of small beads of gold and black beads with a gold and diamond pendant. The black beads signify protection from evil power.

It is believed to protect the marriage and the life of the husband. It is considered auspicious for married women to wear *mangalsutra* after marriage. In fact, many years ago, there was a film in Hindi called *Mangalsutra* starring Rekha.

(Continued on page 51)

Chhau – behind the mask

Not many of us are familiar with the dance form of Chhau, which belongs to the eastern region of India and is characterised by the mask and martial, stylised movements of the performer. **Dr. Kanak Rele** demystifies this art form and describes its special characteristics.

THE three forms known by the generic term 'Chhau' belong to the eastern area of India, spread over the three states of Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal. The term Chhau gets divided into three distinct art practices - Seraikela Chhau from Bihar, Purulia Chhau from West Bengal and Mayurbhanj Chhau from Orissa. This vast area from which these art forms are born is full of diverse manifestations in ecology, geographical and social environments and the multiplicity of ethnic types of people. The area is rich in tribal culture.

These three forms, however, are not identical in their form as well as content, yet all belong to the group of arts which can be best described as 'dramatic spectacle!' Though each form has its own distinctiveness, all the three share certain major aspects which are similar.

Interpretations of Chhau

There are different interpretations for Chhau. Some scholars insist that the term rises out of the Sanskrit word 'Chhaayaa' which means 'shadow', which may be linked to a very special feature of Chhau which is the mask that is worn over the face.

But a more plausible interpretation can be given from the Oriya language where the three colloquial terms are:

- Chhauka – the quality of attacking stealthily
- Chhari – an armour
- Chhauni – military camp.

If we look at these three meanings, it immediately becomes clear that all



the three have a very definite martial link, and thus we can and should interpret Chhau as a 'war dance'. This interpretation is strengthened by the strong martial overtones in the technique itself. It appears that the initial inspiration for Chhau has come from the war-fields. The basic steps and gaits (stylised walking) that are used in this spectacle, point to a pertinent fact that Chhau, in general, can be termed as a 'dance' also. Both Saraikela and Mayurbhanj schools fully complement the view that Chhau is a 'Martial Art'. To correctly perform the basic steps and gaits, the performer has to hold a sword in the right hand and a shield in the left.

Here, one can draw a parallel with the strong military tradition of Kerala, which made them strong military nations. The sword in Oriya tradition was extremely heavy in weight, which required tremendous physical strength and fitness. To achieve this, special exercises and massage were prescribed. Even today, these exercises are performed by the Chhau performers to discipline their bodies to perform the typical leaps, jumps and twists.

Like any discipline, Chhau, in general has the three distinct aspects

– *nritta*, *nriya* and *natya*. The basic *nritta* aspect, which in effect dominates the Chhau technique and performance, consists of basic steps (*uflī*) and gaits (*topka*). *Topka* in the colloquial Oriya means a springy or bouncing gait. Both *uflī* and *topka* have a very strong element of 'imagery'. It must be remembered that both, *uflī* and *topka* are not stances or gestures, but are in the nature of cadence of the movements of the body. Thus, it is not possible to freeze these at a given particular time in a static pose.

The *uflīs* are inspired from:

- Daily household work of an Oriya woman
- Casual labour performed by the village youth
- Martial performance
- Movements of animals, birds, human beings

A third aspect of Chhau technique is *bhāngī* which is a unit of dance which is created by synthesising more than one *topka* and *uflī* according to the demand of the theme and the creative imagination of the artiste.

Each of the three terms have a very distinct connection with allied forms of their individual region and also with each other. Thus, in the context of Chhau, it would be fruitful to look at all the three as regional manifestation of the region from which each has sprung. The Saraikela and Mayurbhanj have many points of contact in their performance technique and musical accompaniment. However, Parulia and Saraikela have the common element of masks, but not in Mayurbhanj.



Saraikele Chhau

Saraikele Chhau (Orissa)

A very important aspect of this practice is the direct involvement and patronage of the princes of the state. This form is invariably performed during the *chaitra parva* (the spring festival), and during this festival, the members of the royal family and commoners mingle without any caste or rank consciousness; it is truly a people's festival.

The origins of Saraikele Chhau are hidden in the mists of ancient history. But the *chaitra parva*, which is full of traditional rituals is celebrated with due respect for the tradition. It is from the *chaitra parva* that the Chhau dance has evolved.

The presiding deity of Saraikele Chhau is 'Ma Paudi', a form of goddess Kali who is propitiated with great pomp and veneration.

Unlike other classical Indian dance practices, in Chhau the dancer's feet and legs are the most expressive parts of the body. Instead of the *hastas* (hand gestures), the Chhau has evolved a method of communication with the movements of the legs and feet. The toes act as the centre of power which provide the spring or bounce in the movements, whereas the feet supply the rhythm to the other parts of the body to achieve expressions and moods.

The most enthralling and lyrical are those presentations which deal with birds, animals and supra-mundane beings. Some of these are *mayura* (peacock), *baana-viddha* (a deer pierced by an arrow), *naabik* (fisherman), *Chandrabhaga* (story of the maiden Chandrabhaga), *phul-o-basant* (flower and spring), *sagar* (the ocean) – in which we can very clearly discern the outward and the inner movement. In the outward movements one can discern the thematic presentation of the central focal point, but it is the inner which is spiritual, allegorical as well as philosophical.

The Chhau mask and music

The Saraikele Chhau mask is a thing of beauty. The mask is fashioned out of dark clay which is found near the banks

of the Kharkei river. The artist fixes the clay model of the character on a wooden plank and lets it cool and harden. Then a muslin gauze is pasted on it with layers of paper. Upon this, once again, muslin is pasted and upon that there is one more coating of clay applied. Once dry, the mask is scrubbed and polished and coloured.

Fashioning these masks is an independent art which requires a deep study of human character. Masks of animals and birds are of special interest, for example, *mayur* (peacock), *prajapati* (butterfly), *hansa* (swan). The mask comes to life when worn by the dancer to suit the theme.

The musical instruments used are specially intended for outdoor performances. A huge drum called Dhumsa is played by beating it with two big sticks. Nagada, the kettle shaped drum, is shriller in sound, while the Dhol is played on both its sides. The wind instruments are Bheri, Ranasingha, Singhada (trumpets), Shehnai and Bansi. Shehnai lends a festive touch to the performance. A noteworthy feature is the use of song compositions of famous Oriya poets. ■



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

What does the *mangalsutra* signify?

(Continued from page 49)

Today, the concept of wearing a *mangalsutra* has changed. It is more of a fashion statement than a symbol of marriage. The credit goes to daily soaps and to Hindi films. Styles and designs have mutated over the years. Earlier, women would wear simply designed *mangalsutras* with small pendants. The trend is to wear short-length chains woven with a single string. Instead of gold pendants, modern brides choose

diamond pendants. But the black beads remain constant. Whatever may be the reason, the *mangalsutra* symbolises the real essence and concept of a marriage in some regions in India. Earlier, women wore heavy and elaborate gold *mangalsutras*. The trend today is to wear short, sleek and single string ones with small designer diamond pendants. However, the black beads remain to ward off the evil and uphold the sanctity of marriage as a socially

sanctified institution. ■

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.

Wisdom of the ages

Our forests are full of little feathered warriors who are fighting a losing battle of survival against the onslaught of chemical pesticides. Shouldn't we be concerned that these same chemicals can cause untold harm to humans too?

"For whatever happens to the beast soon happens to man. All things are connected.

– Chief Seattle of the Suquamish Tribe 1786-1866

I love trekking. And I love taking my own sweet time getting to places, rather than racing from one destination to another. En route, at tea shops and small villages, one picks up more information from locals about the lay of the land in an hour, than might be possible from weeks of individual exploration. Nevertheless, when it comes to natural history experiences, the best ones are those you experience for yourself.

I watch birds. I'm not particularly good at identifying exotic species at sight without the aid of a bird book, but have more than a working knowledge of evolution and find myself continually investigating why a particular bird does what it does, what use its colours are and what ecological circumstances favours its survival where it is found. All too often I make something of a game out of figuring out what kind of food a bird might be eating, why its beak is shaped just so and what kinds of plants or trees it most relies on.

As one who is fighting almost daily to protect species and habitats, the question that intrigues me most, of course, is how birds manage to survive the many trials of life we humans seem so expert at manufacturing for them.

High in the canopy of its tropical forests, the camouflaged nest of the Small Minivet, for instance, sits relatively safe. A marvellous little collection of twigs, grasses, leaves and lichens, it is glued together by cobwebs and is largely protected by its inaccessibility. For millions of years, these



The Small Minivet bird

tiny forest jewels survived nature's challenges by adapting and adjusting to their subtly changing ecological circumstances. Turning adversity to advantage, they have even managed in recent times to take up residence in the many gardens, plantations and woodlots that fringe our vanishing forests.

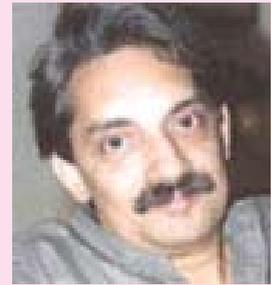
But the endurance of such consummate survivors has limits. Across India, in our enthusiasm to industrialise and to subdue farm pests, we have unwittingly let loose a chemical war on all living things, including eagles, vultures and yes, even minivets.

Our use and abuse of pesticides and other chlorinated compounds and plastics, particularly PVC, releases unbelievably lethal by-products into the environment, including such killers as dioxins and furans, among the most toxic substances known to science.

Dr. Paul Connett, a world-renowned expert on dioxins explained to a small group that living creatures cannot escape the consequences of such folly. But, he added, women can actually rid themselves of dioxins quite dramatically – by simply having a baby!

As we sat in stunned silence, he used simple illustrations to explain how as much as 25 per cent of the body load of dioxins in the bodies of pregnant women are 'discarded' by the simple expedient of delivering a baby! Of course, the young one then is born with an implanted 'time bomb' and is more likely than its mother to contract cancer, or develop genetic defects that would show up in later life.

Perhaps we should pay closer heed to the wisdom of the ages, as exemplified by Chief Seattle. ■



Bittu Sahgal

Editor, Sanctuary magazine

Spot the difference

By keeping silent on the burning issues of the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is doing exactly what his party had accused the former premier Dr. Manmohan Singh of doing. So, one year down the line, how different is this government from the previous dispensation?



C. V. Aravind

is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.

THE chest thumping by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the euphoria witnessed in the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) on the completion of one year in office dissipated faster than mist in the morning sun after the ruling party, the BJP, found itself in the midst of a series of scandals, one more devastating than the other.

The BJP which had never missed an opportunity to raise Cain whenever the UPA government put a foot wrong during its decade in power, has now been saddled with the unenviable task of defending its own flock. Narendra Modi rode to power on the plank of good governance and a corruption free administration, both of which were conspicuously absent in the UPA years. His External Affairs Minister and one of the BJP's seniormost leaders Sushma Swaraj, who had even served as the Leader of the Opposition in the previous Lok Sabha, has been trapped lending her considerable weight to a fugitive from Indian justice and former cricket tsar Lalit Modi, to enable him to get travel documents from the United Kingdom (UK) government. And then came even more serious charges against the Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje, who found herself in the dock for handing over a witness statement to the UK authorities recommending the same Lalit Modi's continued stay in that country.

Meanwhile, two ministers in the BJP ruled Maharashtra Pankaja Munde and Vinod Tawde came under a cloud for their acts of commission and omission. But to cap it all, the Vyapam scam involving large scale malpractices in college examinations and recruitments, which could well evolve into the mother of all scams, rattled the BJP in Madhya Pradesh (MP). What distinguishes this scam from those

in the past UPA government and various other scams the country has seen is that Vyapam has been leaving a cold trail of death, a macabre chain of events that shows no sign of ending. Mysterious deaths of accused in the scam, including the son of the MP Governor, whistleblowers, witnesses and a journalist probing the death of a young woman associated with the scam, have lent an eerie touch to Vyapam, investigation of which has now been handed over to the CBI by the MP Chief Minister, Shivraj Singh Chauhan, albeit reluctantly.

What has been most intriguing in every single case that has put the ruling dispensation on the mat with the opposition baying for its blood, is the silence of Prime Minister (PM) Modi, which is so unlike a leader whose communication skills have been lauded even by the opposition parties. The BJP which taunted the former PM Dr. Manmohan Singh for his lengthy silences when the UPA was sinking into a morass of corruption, and even labeled him as 'Maun'mohan Singh, now has egg on its face. The opposition, the media and the voters expected the PM to voice his opinion on all these sordid happenings in his radio broadcast 'Mann Ki Baat'. Here too, he skirted the issue in toto without as much as even a passing reference.

What is now emerging is a situation where the BJP's promise of providing a corruption free government at the Centre and in the states ruled by it is going to be observed in its breach. What is worse is that it is prepared to sweep everything under the carpet and carry on defending the indefensible come what may. So the inevitable question that ought to be uppermost in the minds of the people across the country should be: 'So what is different about this government?' ■



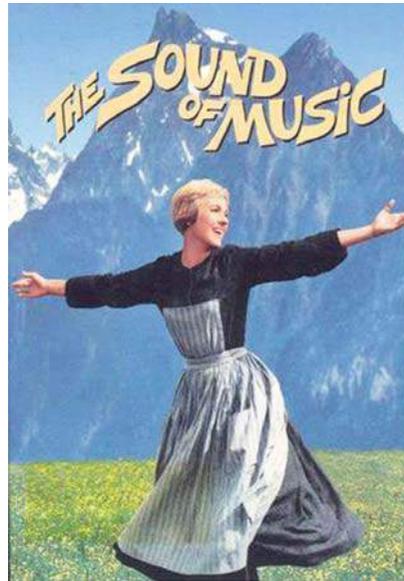
Striking the happy note

The classic Hollywood musical, 'The Sound of Music', celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

THE Sound of Music is one of the greatest movies of all time. The film, which was released in 1965, was the biggest box-office hit of the year. It starred Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer in the lead roles. The movie swept away the major awards at the Oscars and Golden Globes including the top honours for Best Picture, Director, Actress and Music.

The film is based on a memoir, 'The Story of the Trapp Family Singers' by Maria von Trapp. It is a heart-warming story about an Austrian governess who falls in love with a naval captain with seven children and how the family escapes the Nazis as the Second World War looms large on the horizon.

The movie was largely shot in Salzburg, Austria, against the breathtaking



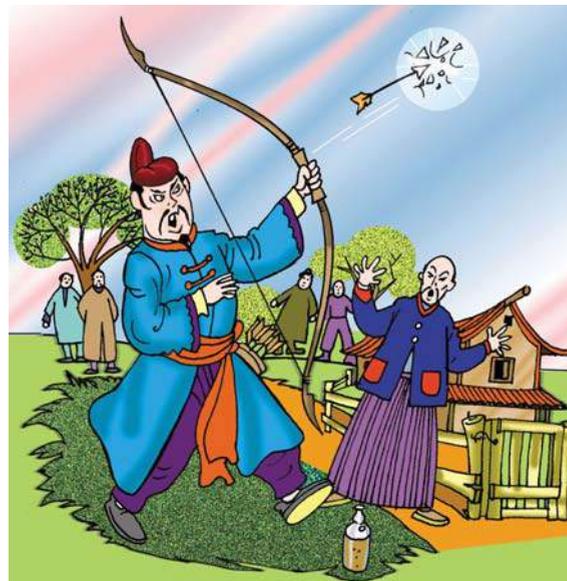
backdrop of the Alps. Though the movie is not popular among the native Austrians, the city draws millions of tourists from around the world who want to see the filming locations.

Did You Know?

- The real Maria von Trapp appears as a peasant woman in a scene in the 'I Have Confidence' song. While filming the song, Julie Andrews tripped while walking. Though it was an accident, the director liked it so much he kept it in the movie.
- The child actor who played Marta, the sixth child, had many loose teeth during filming. When they fell out, they were replaced with false teeth!
- When the film was released in South Korea, it did roaring business. One theatre owner in Seoul figured out a way to squeeze in maximum number of shows by cutting out all the songs!

STORY A matter of practice

An archer was giving a demonstration of his art, and the crowd that had gathered was full of admiration for his skill. There was loud applause when he threw an apple into the air and shot three arrows into it before it hit the ground. Only one man, a sour-faced fellow who seemed to be a hawker of some sort, seemed unimpressed. "It's all a matter of practice," he sneered. "Can you shoot better?" asked the archer. "I can't shoot, but I can do something else," said the man, keeping down a bag he had with him. He took out an empty bottle, and a jar of oil from it. Keeping the bottle upright on the ground, he covered its mouth with a coin that had a round hole at its centre. "I'm an oil-seller," he explained. "Now watch." Expertly, he poured oil from the jar into the bottle, through the hole in the coin. "Observe," he said, to the archer. "Not a drop fell on the coin. Not all oil-sellers can do this, but I don't go around demanding praise for this skill. I know it is only a matter of practice. Just as your skill too is just a matter of practice." "How can you compare your silly skill to this great archer's?"



shouted the spectators. "Begone, fool!" The oil-seller hastily gathered up his things, and left. **Moral:** Don't belittle another's talents, give praise where it is due.

INDIA



ART BEAT

The Fringe

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

The Fringe began in 1947 along with the more prestigious Edinburgh International Festival to encourage less famous and more off-beat artists. Over the years, it has grown.

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

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



DESI DIARY

Soldiers' village

Located along the banks of the river Ganga in the Ghazipur district of Uttar Pradesh is Gahmar, famously known as 'Soldiers' Village'. Gahmar has a unique tradition of producing hundreds of soldiers who have served the Indian Armed Forces with distinction. Every household in this village with a population of about 75,000 boasts of at least three or more soldiers! The inhabitants of Gahmar include more than 10,000 military personnel serving in all the three branches of the Armed Forces. There are about 5,000 military veterans in the village.

Interestingly, the village has not lost even a single soldier in the various battles after Independence including the Kargil War. Villagers believe Goddess Kamakhya whose temple is situated in the village protects the soldiers.



MINDBENDER

Who stays where?

Nine students — Mihir, Aakash, Parth, Rohit, Yohaán, Ananya, Yash, Aryan and Tanmay – stay in a three storeyed hostel, with three rooms on each floor. There is a room each in the West wing, Central wing and East Wing. If each student is allotted a single room, find out who stays where from the clues given.

- Aryan does not live on the ground floor.
- Ananya lives directly above Tanmay and next to Aakash who lives in the West wing.
- Yohaán lives in the East wing and one floor higher than Ananya.
- Rohit lives directly above Ananya.
- Yash lives directly above Parth.



West	Centre	East
Mihir	Tanmay	Parth
Aakash	Ananya	Yash
Aryan	Rohit	Yohaán

Answer: From the highest floor to lowest:

GENERAL P. P. KUMARMANGALAM, DSO

Intellectual warrior (1913-2000)

GENERAL Kumarmangalam was born on 1 July 1913 in the family estate of Kumarmangalam near Thiruchengode in Salem district of Tamil Nadu. His father, P. Subburayam was a prosperous landlord, freedom fighter, Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency, a minister in the Nehru cabinet and Governor of Maharashtra. He had his early education at home and went to a prep school in United Kingdom at the age of 11 years. He did his secondary education at Eton College and joined the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. He was commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery in 1933, the second Indian officer to do so. He was the last King's Commissioned Indian officer in the Indian Army.

In September 1940, the Italian Army attacked Egypt, which was then a British Protectorate. The attack was beaten back. Tobruk in Libya was captured and held by the Allies. The Africa Corps under Rommel arrived in Africa in February 1941 to help the Italian Army and commenced advance on 24 March 1941. Tobruk was a good harbour between Tripoli and Alexandria. It was vital for the Allies to hold on to Tobruk and successive attacks by the German Army were beaten back. The Tobruk siege was lifted by the 8th Army on 27 November 1941.

Rommel abandoned Tobruk and resumed offensive on 21 January 1942 after receiving reinforcements and supplies. He captured Benghazi on 28 January and pressed on Tobruk. In early 1942, Kumarmangalam was posted to the artillery unit in Tobruk. On 27 May, Rommel attacked the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade which had been deployed at Ghazala at short notice. It faced the full fury of attack by German tanks and the position was overrun in two hours. Two hundred soldiers were killed and 17 officers including Major Kumarmangalam and about 670 JCOs and soldiers were taken prisoners. For his courageous action, Kumarmangalam was awarded DSO and MBE.

On 1 June 1942, Tobruk fell. The soldiers were released

due to shortage of water and the others were flown to Italy. Kumarmangalam was the senior most Indian officer and was appointed Camp Senior officer. Incidentally, Captain (later C-in-C Pakistan Army) Yahya Khan was the Camp Adjutant. They were later moved to PW Camp PG 91 (PG stands for *prigione di guerra* meaning prison of war) in Avezzano. In the confusion that followed the surrender by Italy in 1943, Kumarmangalam, Lt. Sahibzada Yaqub (later foreign minister of Pakistan) and Lt. Abhey Singh managed to escape from the camp. Yaqub spoke Italian and

with the help of sympathetic villagers, they tried to move towards the Allied troops in the South. They were captured by the Germans after four months and sent to a prison camp in Silesia in Germany. The escapes through tunneling has been depicted in two films, *The Great Escape* and *The Wooden Horse*. On 27 January 1945, they were taken to Sprengberg when the Russian Army was just 20 km away. They were liberated by the United States Army on 29 April 1945 and returned to India.

Kumarmangalam went to USA for artillery training and became Brigadier in 1948. He commanded the elite Parachute Brigade and carried out various staff and command appointments. He was the Adjutant General at Army HQ when

Y. B. Chavan became Defence Minister after the 1962 debacle. He took charge of the Eastern Command in 1963, followed by a tenure as Vice Chief. He was appointed Chief of Army Staff on 8 June 1966, the first artillery officer to be so honoured. He prepared the army for the next war and was decorated with the award of Padma Vibhushan in 1970 and retired on 7 June 1969.

He enjoyed cricket and polo and was president of the Indian Polo Association and World Wild Life Fund. The brave warrior, intellectual and sportsman passed away on 13 March 2000 at the age of 87. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



CHARLES CORREA

Architect and urban planner par excellence (1930-2015)

CHARLES Correa, architect, urban planner and activist, credited with the creation of modern architecture in post-Independence India, was born on 1 September 1930 in Secunderabad, and passed away on 16 June 2015 in Mumbai. After higher studies at St. Xavier's College, Bombay, he went on to study at the University of Michigan (1949 -53) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (1953-55).

In 1958, he established his own Mumbai-based professional practice and went on to be conferred the Padma Shri in 1972, the Padma Vibhushan in 2006 and the 1984 Royal Gold Medal for architecture, by the Royal Institute of British Architects, as also Goa's highest civilian honour, the 'Gomant Vibhushan'.

Among his sterling work which stand tall are the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Museum, Ahmedabad; the Kanchanjunga Apartment tower, Mumbai; the Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur, Navi Mumbai city, MIT'S Brain and Cognitive Sciences Centre in Boston, Parumala Church and the Champalimad Centre for the Unknown in Lisbon, to name a few. In 1984, he founded the Urban Design Research Institute in Bombay, dedicated to the protection of the built environment and improvement of urban communities.

He hated glassy towers, and instead of creating inept replicas of a Manhattan skyline, designed buildings with terraces and courtyards that responded to the India that surrounded them and did not seek to cocoon the resident. "Visual quiet" were his watchwords. He loved unobstructed spaces and they seeped into a lot of his projects, incorporating the concept of "open-to-sky" spaces.

"Being able to see the sky from inside a building can make a difference between liveable habitat and claustrophobia", he would say, placing special emphasis on prevailing resources, energy and climate as major determinants in the ordering of space in all his creations. For more than half a century, Correa championed modern architecture, planning cities and designing nearly 100 buildings in the country, from luxury condominiums to housing for the poor.

The quintessential Renaissance man, all his projects breathe the same concept. He extended these ideas to whatever he touched; his projects range from low-cost houses and educational institutions to state-of-the-art research centres and industrial townships, to cultural centres and urban hubs.

A legacy that he has left behind is a rare spirit of frugality, freedom, sustainability and rootedness in Indian culture, traits that distinguished his work and which shaped the trajectory of post-colonial modern architecture in India.

But alas, the knight in shining armour that Mumbai deserved was thwarted by administrations and lobbyists who tripped him up and he was very bitter at how Navi Mumbai turned out.

Two years ago, Correa donated all his drawings, models and records to the Royal Institute of British Architects as he couldn't find any archive whose standards lived up to his own. In 2013, the Institute held a retrospective exhibition, "Charles Correa – India's Greatest Architect", about his influence on modern urban Indian architecture.

"To work in India is the great advantage of life in the Third World. The issues are so much bigger than you are; they give you a chance to grow," Correa wrote in his book 'Housing and Urbanization'. In another book 'A Place in the Shade', Correa talks about Mumbai, "While it is getting better and better as city, and disintegrating (very rapidly

and quite unnecessarily) as environment...perhaps what we are experiencing is the last burst of energy. . . the spastic twitches before the end...A state of euphoria has set in. Maybe that's what is happening to us in Bombay, as every day we find it getting to be more and more of a great city... and a terrible place".

Correa has done pioneering work in urban issues and low-cost shelter in the Third World. He was also involved in researching alternatives to water recycling, renewable energy, rural habitats, conservation and regional biodiversity. His philosophy and work will certainly inspire several generations to come. ■

– A. Radhakrishnan is a freelance journalist based in Pune, Maharashtra



SISTER NIRMALA

Humble and grounded visionary (1934–2015)

SISTER Nirmala, the nun chosen by Mother Teresa to carry on her legacy of service to the poor, the dying and the destitute, passed away on 23 June 2015 at the age of 81 in Kolkata. She had stepped down from the position of Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity in 2009 for reasons of health. Born Kusum Joshi on 23 July 1934 at Regmi Village, Syanja, Nepal, her family is believed to have later shifted to Doranda in Ranchi. She was the eldest of the ten children born into a Nepali Hindu Brahmin community. When she was taught by Christian missionaries in Mount Carmel, Hazaribagh, she came to learn about the work of Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity. She soon converted to Catholicism and was baptised on 5 April 1958. In May 1958, she joined the Missionaries of Charity with the name of Nirmala, which means “purity”.

Sister Nirmala was known for her humility, her groundedness, her loving nature and her courage to correct herself when proved wrong. She studied at St. Margaret’s High School at Bahubazar Ranchi and had a Master’s degree in Political Science from Patna Women’s College. She assumed office as the head of the Missionaries of Charity on 13 September 1997. She made way for Sister Prema in 2009 and returned to a life of prayer after 12 years as Superior General. The same year, the Padma Vibhushan was conferred on her. Sister Nirmala visited the Vatican to attend the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops.

In 2008, Sister Nirmala launched an appeal to all Indians to break the chain of violence in Orissa. The Italian bishops’ conference also launched a day of prayer and fasting on 5 September 2008, as a sign of solidarity with the persecuted Christians. Her appeal came after the cycle of violence that broke out against Christians in Orissa following the assassination of the Hindu radical Swami Laxamananda Saraswati by a group of Maoists. By then,

at least 20 were killed, hundreds wounded, 45 churches burnt, social centres, hostels, orphanages, and hospitals destroyed, and hundreds of homes burnt down. Sister Nirmala asked for eternal rest for Swami Laxamananda and for the massacred Christians, calling upon the “brothers and sisters” of India not to “use religion to divide us” or “use it as an instrument of violence”.

When Sister Nirmala joined Missionaries of Charity in 1958, she was studying law. After she joined, Mother insisted that she carry on with her studies and this turned her into a full-fledged lawyer. She was the first Sister to have been sent abroad.

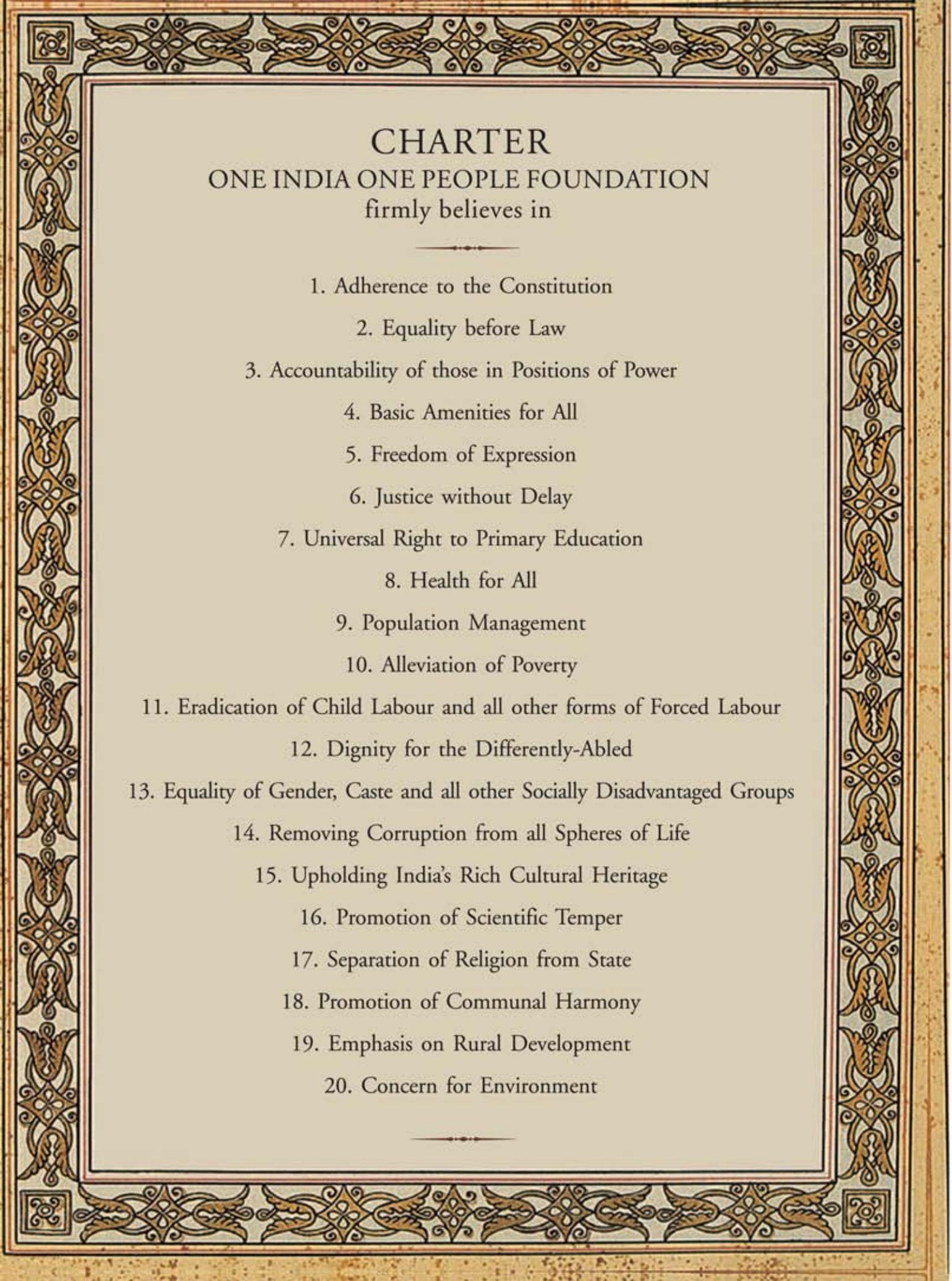
It was not easy for Sister Nirmala’s parents to accept their daughter’s decision to become a Catholic. “Initially, my parents did not like the idea. Two years later, they accepted my decision and were happy about my vocation. My youngest sister became an apostolic Carmelite, called Sister Marie Therese, and this indirectly helped convince them. When my father and mother fell ill, my sister returned to look after them, surprising them because, although she had converted to Catholicism and had become a sister, they saw the Hindu ideal of self-sacrifice and service from the heart fulfilled in her”, said Sister Nirmala.

The “legacy” of Mother Teresa for Sister Nirmala was a crucifix and a rosary. These are the two indispensable and most effective “tools” with which to serve the poor everywhere. Sister Nirmala, like every Missionary of Charity, took them everywhere with her. It matters little whether these two objects actually belonged to Mother Teresa. ■

– Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author, who has won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema.

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





CHARTER
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION
firmly believes in

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

WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

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

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE