

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

## Children & Challenges

Living on the edge

To flip or to click

A television-free life!

**KNOW INDIA BETTER**

The unsung monuments  
of Mehrauli

**FACE TO FACE**

Sunder Ramu



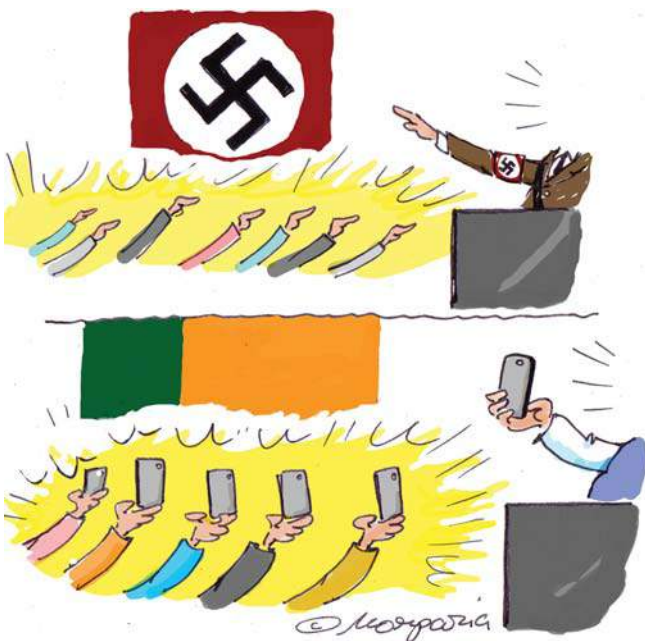
MORPARIA'S PAGE



SWACCH BHARAT-II



JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE JUNGLES OF RAIGADH...



E-mail: morparia@hotmail.com



# Contents

NOVEMBER 2015

VOL.19/4

**THEME:**  
Children



6



23



37

Sunder Ramu



Tenali Ramakrishna



Air Commodore  
Narayanrao Khanderao  
Shitoley, DFC



'Aachi' Manorama

<b>Morparia's page</b>	2
<b>Of baby rats and races</b>	5
<i>Nivedita Louis</i>	
<b>Living on the edge</b>	6
<i>Sadia Saeed Raval</i>	
<b>Our poor children</b>	8
<i>Dr. Harish Shetty</i>	
<b>Listen to your child!</b>	10
<i>Shammi Nanda</i>	
<b>Quantity v/s Quality</b>	13
<i>Dr. Madhav Chavan</i>	
<b>Pappu eighth class pass hai!</b>	15
<i>E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan</i>	
<b>To flip or to click</b>	18
<i>Vinitha Ramchandani</i>	
<b>A television-free life!</b>	20
<i>Nidhi Jamwal</i>	
<b>Know India Better</b>	
<b>The unsung monuments of Mehrauli</b>	23
<i>Rangan Datta</i>	
<b>Face to Face</b>	37
<b>Sunder Ramu :</b> <i>E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan</i>	
<b>Features</b>	
<b>A 360° look at India's foreign policy</b>	39
<i>V. Pramod</i>	
<b>Building a smart India?</b>	41
<i>Avani Jain</i>	
<b>Wart a problem!</b>	43
<i>Dr. T.D. Rajan</i>	
<b>Mallika's tryst with child labour</b>	45
<i>Kirthi Jayakumar</i>	
<b>Partition, once again</b>	46
<i>Shoma A. Chatterji</i>	
<b>Cultural Kaleidoscope</b>	
<b>Bangles for the bride</b>	48
<i>Shoma A. Chatterji</i>	
<b>Not just Tamasha!</b>	50
<i>Dr. Kanak Rele</i>	
<b>Column</b>	51
<b>Rural Concerns :</b> <i>Bharat Dogra</i>	
<b>Economy :</b> <i>Anuradha Kalhan</i>	
<b>Young India</b>	54
<b>Great Indians</b>	56



**Managing Editor**  
Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde

**Editor**  
Anuradha Dhareshwar

**Assistant Editor**  
E.Vijayalakshmi Rajan

**Design**  
H. V. Shiv Shankar

**Marketing**  
Mahesh Kanojia

**OIOP Clubs Co-ordinator**  
Vaibhav Palkar

**Subscription In-Charge**  
Nagesh Bangera

**Advisory Board**  
Sucharita Hegde  
Justice S. Radhakrishnan  
Venkat R. Chary

Printed & Published by  
Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde for  
**One India One People Foundation,**  
Mahalaxmi Chambers, 4th floor,  
22, Bhulabhai Desai Road,  
Mumbai - 400 026  
Tel: 022-2353 4400  
Fax: 022-2351 7544  
e-mail: oiopfoundation@gmail.com  
oiopsub@fouressindia.com

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

visit us at:  
**www.oneindiaonepeople.com**  
[www.facebook.com/oneindiaonepeoplefoundation](http://www.facebook.com/oneindiaonepeoplefoundation)

## Warm thanks

A very warm thanks to Mr. T. Sadanand, who has been a well-wisher of One India One People magazine and the Foundation since a decade. Here, he is talking about the magazine to students of Changu Kana Thakur Vidyalaya, New Panvel (East). He also spoke to the students about the Foundation's charter and purpose. He urged the students to read the magazine regularly in order to get more familiar with their country.



**WORLD CLASS  
QUALITY MEDICINES  
AT AFFORDABLE PRICES**

**BLUE CROSS LABORATORIES PVT LTD.**  
PENINSULA CHAMBERS, LOWER PAREL, MUMBAI - 400 013,  
INDIA.

# Of baby rats and races

*So, life is a rat race. And our little ones are the new rats on the block, scurrying around to the tune of their parents' weighty expectations. Can the parents be reigned in? asks Nivedita Louis.*

THE race is on. As the rats look either side and run faster, I stand clenching my hands in tension and anticipation. My baby rat is on the right most lane and I crane my neck to have a peek. Prayers are sent Heavenwards for divine intervention to save my baby rat. All the spectators have their own prayers, some folding hands, some kneeling and most of them yelling, with sweat dripping down their temples. With a sudden jerk, I open my eyes. Too much of chicken and rice can give you such nightmares in broad daylight! I have two little rats at home. They run the race pretty well, but I am not satisfied. "This is a cruel, cruel world", I tell them looking all sincere, as they hold the joysticks of their PS3. The bigger rat just nods his head and the little one keeps kicking someone on the large TV screen.

Our children are rats and chickens to us. Rats because they run the race and broiler chicken because they are custom made to a feeding cycle. It is corn flakes in the morning. As the schools cry for a healthy lunch, we pack those two chappatis with a tomato sauce smiley or that spoonful of rice with fried potatoes. Night comes and the lazy career woman syndrome sets in, as we dial for that delectable pizza with cheese dripping from it. Weekends are spent at KFC and Domino's as we watch our 'slightly' over weight kids lick the finger good.

We have visitors, our rats promptly run to their holes armed with their tabs. Not even a courteous 'Welcome aunty' or 'Hi uncle'. All their childhood they spend growing vegetables in Farmville and feeding the chicken in Hay Day. While we were bathing in the rivers with cousins and played in the fields, all our children have for company are the dragons they slay in Game of Thrones. Locked in their own world, clutching the tab which is their lifeline, the kids stay at home, waiting for their Mom and a sloppy dinner.

So... do our children socialise? Yes, they do. When it

comes to chatting and socialising, they are way ahead of us in Whatsapp. Statuses like "I am what I am", "I have an attitude" and little red hearts pop up. Locking themselves up in rooms physically, in chat groups mentally, we know not the paths they tread. When you have that aged uncle and aunt visit you, calling out the kid, "*Beta...kaise ho?*" the little one's facial expression is priceless. Neighbours are always "*Chintu ki mummy*" or "*Bunty ke papa*" and relatives are "*Woh lal saree auntyji*". The moment they say their byes, they dash away in a flash to the sanctum of their rooms, back to their Lara Crofts raiding tombs.

The number of classes they attend to satisfy the unquenched thirst of the Mom and Dad needs all fingers of both hands and legs to count. Starting from abacus classes where the poor kids shake and chuck their fingers like crazy to the karate classes where they break tiles imagining them to be their parents' faces, children today are put under undue

stress. Our unfulfilled dreams are our children's additional baggage. We keep honing their 'skills' for succeeding in the rat race, in material pursuits, that we forget children are just children and their dreams are filled with balloons and bubbles, not Newton's laws and Pythagoras theorem. I am still wondering if there will be a day when I will really put to use my favourite  $(a+b)^2=(a+b)(a+b)$  algebra that I learnt in my mom's favourite *kneel-asana!* Spending quality time with the children and plain 'listening' to their babble would suffice. Watching their sleeping form with a smile on our lips

is enough. All this I write as my little rats play God of War, a smile playing on my lips. ■



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



# Living on the edge

*If our children grow up to be achievers, but stressed and unhappy, we would have done the biggest disservice to them. Parents are increasingly transferring their own fears of the future onto their children, says **Sadia Saeed Raval**. The only way to mitigate this stress is to demand less and support more. Are we capable of doing that?*

**A**RE urban kids on the edge today? This question has a lot of significance, at least in the psychologist's office, where what is happening in society is reflected in real-time. Increasing behaviour difficulties in children is one such change that we are seeing over the decade.

## Why are children more stressed today?

Children are the mainstay of the future. When the society expects the future to be more competitive, more difficult, less safe, naturally it will impel parents to gear children up for facing such a future. What these little beings are going through today is perhaps a reflection of the entire social system's anxiety of what it expects to convolute into tomorrow. Naturally, the expectation of children is to grow up faster, be smarter, know more, and all in all be geared for something difficult where they will be thrown into oblivion if they do not match up.

And how is this being achieved? This is being achieved by having more schools, different boards (no longer just ICSE, CBSE or SSC), more expensive schools where parents have to pay a fortune in the hope that their children will be a cut above the rest. Not to mention classes. All children under 10 years of age, mostly belonging to the relatively 'affording' strata of society, have tried their hand at some sport, some musical instrument, some dance form and additionally, maybe some general knowledge, or some kind of a different math or self-defense class.

We often find that children have such busy schedules that even when they come in for play therapy for some behavioural concern, they find it difficult to consistently spare one hour of the week for therapy as it interferes with their list of other classes/tuitions etc.

## The fallout of stress

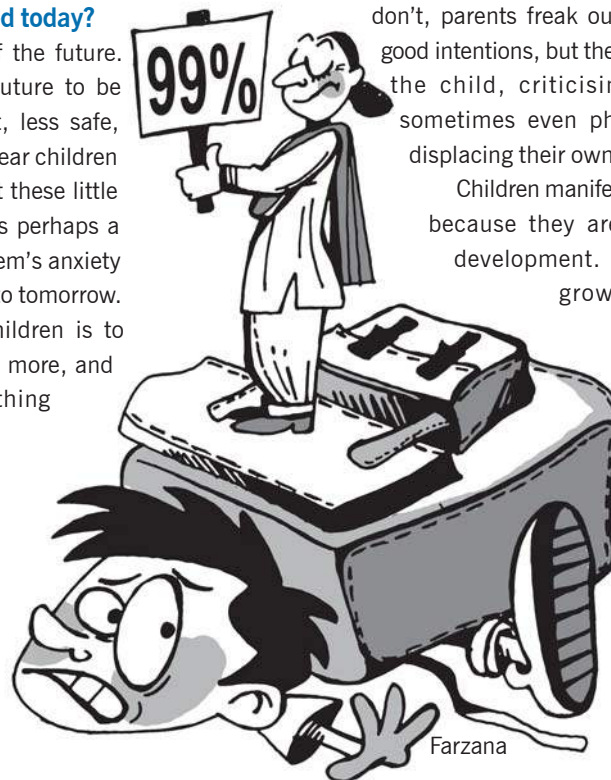
When such heavy investments are made for the child - expensive education, classes, best sport equipment and so on - naturally, rewarding outcomes are expected. Parents watch their children with great anxiety. Children are in the spotlight under which they are expected to perform and if they don't, parents freak out. They step in to help, with all good intentions, but the help can take the form of pushing the child, criticising and comparing the child, sometimes even physically beating the child and displacing their own fears of the future onto the child.

Children manifest behavioural difficulties primarily because they are missing out on their natural development. Nature has a way of allowing growth and development. During

certain periods of life, certain psychological developments naturally take place. It takes place by meeting other children, having a lot of free play time, especially through unstructured play time where there is no binding on what they do and also very little adult supervision in terms of what kind of play is valid. Adults are naturally not as spontaneous as children and

therefore structuring of a child's playtime through adults is an impediment to growth, to say the least.

When children's natural order of psychological growth gets impeded and disturbed by new demands being placed on them to be structured and to learn in a structured way, naturally their system revolts. The system's revolt could be in the form of a burnout where they refuse to perform on some front (academic, vocational or social). They may show less interest in activities that they are meant to do, or they simply escape the sense of burden by escaping into excessive television or video games.



Often, children also start to act out, rebel and get stubborn in order to maintain sanity. Other children may get over-anxious, feel weak and get physically sickly.

Irrespective of which way they act out and the thwarting of their natural growth, the truth underneath is that they all feel a sense of low self-worth and guilt at not living up to their parents' expectations. They internalise a sense of not being good enough. As psychologists we not only meet children, but also adults carrying this sense of low self-worth through their lives.

Are parents to blame? I believe not! Parents are caught up too. They are afraid for their children. They believe in the fears of extreme competition and want the best for their child and everything else they do is simply a result of this belief system. And since everyone is caught up, everyone voices the same fears; mothers talk to other mothers and find them equally worried about their children. Fathers discuss future finances for the child's education. The fears only get reinforced.

### The way forward

We need to choose wisely. As a social system and in that as individual parents, we need to really sit back and weigh the pros and cons of what bringing up healthy children really means. Does it mean giving them all opportunities and products

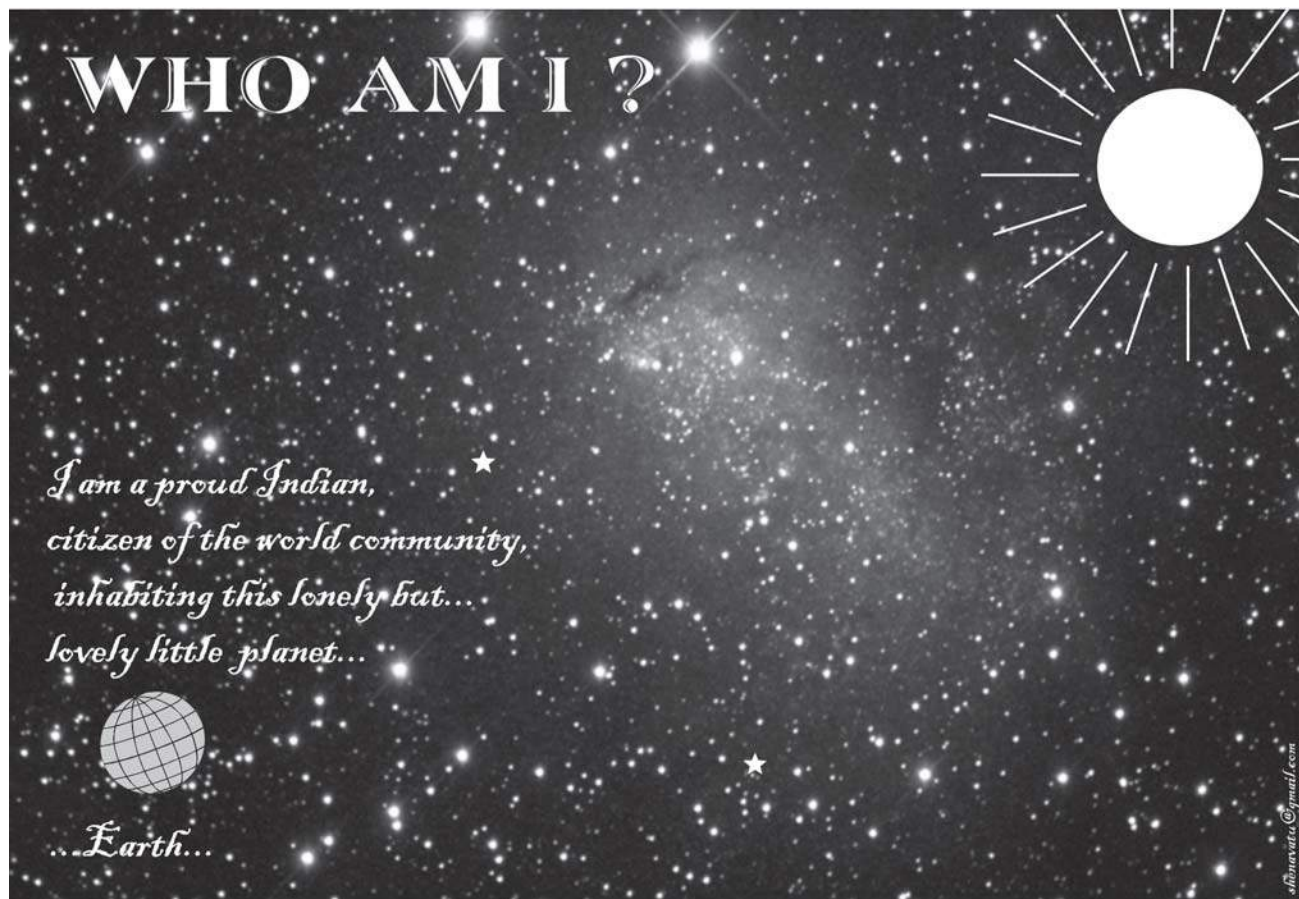
that they need, or does it mean allowing enough time for them to figure out their growth naturally, while being supportive facilitators of the process. If you believe the only way your child will succeed in life is by getting a particular kind of job, think again. People are happiest and most productive when they have an opportunity to discover and cultivate their unique talent, and that doesn't happen by exposing children to all possible options.

Put in a nutshell, demand less and support more is the parental mantra for happier and healthier children. ■

The writer is founder and chief psychologist of Inner Space - a counseling and psychotherapy center located in Mumbai. Prior to Inner Space, she had a private practice and was a consultant at Karuna Hospital and a visiting child guidance expert at Sol's Arc (Assessment and Remedial Center). An ideology that has formed an integral part of her practice is that of Mindfulness. She has conceptualised the "Integrated Mindfulness Program"



for individuals and the "Working with Presence" for organisations. Sadia has also worked with special populations such as children and adults suffering from Juvenile Diabetes and HIV + orphans. She has volunteered with Borderless World Foundation, an NGO working with orphaned girl children in Kashmir. She has also been a visiting teaching faculty for psychology in Nair Hospital - Department for Physiotherapy and in S.N.D.T University - Department of Nutrition.



# Our poor children

In these times of increasing material wealth and 'use and throw' philosophy, the unintended victims of this materialism are our young children. Where are the conversations and security that the children need to experience in their daily lives? asks **Dr. Harish Shetty**, as he tries to dissect a society gone wrong.

**T**HE juvenile mind is changing. Battered by a new age where 'Dollar' is the God and siblings are an endangered species, s/he is defining newer boundaries and engaging in thrilling encounters of a destructive kind. The other side of the picture though has a large number of the young breaking through tough barriers. The world is inundated by the smart Indian teenager winning awards, competitions and excelling in all areas of education and enterprise.

In recent times, one has seen an increase in the involvement of young boys in rapes, murders and other major and petty offences. Have the children become rapists overnight? No! Adults have let down children by a deluge of antisocial acts across the country...from corruption to rape. As children watch the corrupt living in mansions without being punished and incidents of rape as common as petty theft...those at high risk join the mob rather being a bystander or the moral cop.

## The tearing social fabric

The cultural censor or the societal super ego is collapsing....The fantasies expressed in the washrooms are being enacted live in a manner that may be interpreted as 'daring' by the child. 'Might is right' feels the child...In India everything goes...When cops can be beaten up by politicians, female cops violated by mobs and the powerful go scot-free after every criminal act, the message is clear. There is no risk...and the slogan 'just do it' appears simple.

For the juvenile everything is in the open and there is a thrill and a thirst for notoriety, where the belief is, everything is ok! In the yet to be developed minds, there is a "NORMALISATION" of the act of rape. There is a sense of invincibility. Adults and the State have let our children down. One screams for death sentence for the juvenile involved in the Nirbhaya rape case because he was supposed to be the most vicious. But the car driven by the juvenile on the roads also runs at break-neck speed. There is raw passion, no reason and a desire to outwit, outbeat the adult driver on the road and show I am stronger than you.

Globalisation is the new mantra which boasts about a



**The unintended victims of our greed and materialism**

product made by people in different countries and sold to everyone in the world. The manifestation of this religion is not the same everywhere. We in India embraced the new change without shifting systems, killing corruption and rebuilding our core institutions. So we have a new book with old classrooms, a corrupt black board and leaders who are richer than the economies of smaller countries.

## Increasing wealth, shrinking bonds

So the juvenile sees prosperity inside his/her home with shrinking conversations, and also sees the same around and feels grossly deprived of the same. Deprivation and poverty causing crime are old stereotypes that have been thrust down our throats by social scientists. Is this true? Well, deprivation and wealth in India have always coexisted and there was reasonable harmony for many hundred years in a society that was deeply feudal. But today where the world is getting horizontal, the coexistence with shrinking conversations has caused confusion in the mind of the juvenile. The desire for an unaffordable 'mobile phone' by a teenager is the source of disharmony and conflict in hundreds of Indian households. Your money is my money; your mobile phone is mine are thought prescriptions that hold no guilt. This can escalate to



violence, blackmail, threats, till the parents yield. Parents are also at the receiving end of violence in many cases. The Draft Juvenile Justice Bill has been passed by the Loksabha and is awaiting consent in the Rajyasabha. The bill states that juveniles need to be punished similarly to adults in heinous offences. This is absurd.

So where do we go from here? Let us look at the mobile phone. It is, 'Buy one and get three addictions free!' The phone encourages the teenager to get addicted to the Internet, pornography and video games. The conversations for procuring 'addictive drugs' is largely facilitated by the mobile phone. Yet one needs to acknowledge that technology does help to connect, build and assist education and communities to be in touch when physical distances are too huge.

### What then is the way forward?

The first step to help the juveniles live a normal life is to make adult institutions strong and effective. The world needs to appear safe, secure and strong to nurture, protect and correct the juveniles. The second is to acknowledge that the crisis due to alienation is big and unless there is a massive turn around, this is going to be a big crisis. It is not only violence, but also suicides that have increased among the young. Angst and pace causes anger and helplessness. It also causes a milieu where latent criminal tendencies can be expressed without fear or shame. Emotional blinding occurs in communities steeped in anonymity and helplessness.

Though stress busting through methods and techniques are touted by many to improve emotional health and emotional wealth, thereby building the emotional energy bank, this may not suffice. Building the soul alongside is the second vital step and that makes for a complete person. Several institutions, largely spiritual, are involved in this process with good results. When someone asked me recently whether yoga should be introduced in schools, I had answered it should have been hundreds of years ago. The eastern practices facilitate soul building and connects the teenager with the entire sea of humanity. The compassion curve improves. It is compassion that is the antidote for both violence and suicide. Pace kills compassion and makes one cruel, indifferent and insensitive. The life of a child needs a million pause buttons that helps him to reflect, evaluate and think. There is no need to be doing things all the time. 'Doing nothing' is an excellent exercise for all ages and more so a software that has to be inculcated in the young.

In my experience I have found the kitchen in the house to be the 'calming force' for the teenager more than the prayer room. Those boys who spend time in the kitchen calm down drastically. There is something in vegetables and fruits that when handled, cut, minced and felt, changes the way one



### Children need to be in touch with nature to maintain their balance and calm

behaves. No, it is not the skills here but the feel that makes a big difference. May be it takes the young back to the fields, orchards, grass that is so sparse and unavailable. I have seen tribal children in different parts of the country much calmer than their city counterparts as they are in deep conversation with nature moment to moment in their life. Unnatural concretisation breeds alienation, disconnects and is the source for festering anger and violence. Sea facing or lake facing apartments makes very little difference and sophisticated violence here though invisible, is as much as among children living in crowded hutments.

I have sent many 'wild' teenagers to volunteer with organisations and then there is a sea change in their lives. Not by observing, but by actually doing with their hands, legs and their being is what brings them closer to themselves. Genuine volunteering without a photo op helps discover compassion and assists soul building.

Building wealth and prosperity is the mantra of a new age world. But gross disparity in its distribution will breed more violence. Wealth building is also a myth as energy across the universe is constant. The philosophy of 'use and throw' is spurring the so called economy and that to my mind is purely artificial. Yet, one cannot be blind to advances in the silicon chip, science and technology that have contributed to the quality of life on the earth.



It is the time and the space for meaningful listening and conversations with the young that is vital in promoting peace. Strangely, the answer will come from them. ■

The writer is a counsellor and psychiatrist who works intensively with children.

# Listen to your child!

*How do we communicate with our children? Are we often dismissive of them or do we really attempt to see and hear their point of view? **Shammi Nanda** shares his experience of practicing and conducting workshops on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) with children as well as parents, and his beautiful takeaways from them.*

I have been practicing and sharing Nonviolent Communication (NVC) for the last five years. This process that has been created by Marshall Rosenberg, is about engaging with the world in a way that everyone matters and we try to find solutions which work for each one of us.

## Partnership parenting

My engagement with NVC has been very inspiring and nourishing, and I have lately been offering workshops on NVC based parenting. In this, we look for ways where we see children as having the same needs as adults, and when the needs are met or not met, they create similar feelings in them as those of adults. NVC encourages everyone to come to a place of partnership with our children, where we figure out things together with them and make sure we find solutions which are meaningful and joyful for everyone concerned.

I am amazed at the ease with which children are able to receive the ideas of NVC and integrate them in their life. For example, when I was in Aman Setu School in Pune, a girl Zara, around 10 years old, when asked by her classmate during the workshop if in a particular challenging situation her need was 'to be seen'? She responded by saying, "Yes I want to be seen, but not just from the eyes but from the heart too". Hearing her, I saw that their teacher Nikhil immediately



The writer (left) with a workshop participant



Shammi Nanda (standing, centre), conducting an NVC workshop

had teary eyes. I too was impressed by the simplicity and depth which she expressed in her statement. I believe that children do not have that many layers of past stories as adults and are able to get connected to their needs and feelings much more easily than adults.

While I was showing them how in a challenging situation they need to understand the needs of the other person too, one of the boys, Srujan asked another boy Sunil, who was hit by Aditya – "I know when Aditya hit you, it hurt you and you wanted respect, but can you try to see why Aditya hit you in the first place and what was he really wanting when he hit you?" He kept reframing his question in many ways and was trying to evoke the curiosity in Sunil to find out the needs of Aditya. I was amazed at the ease with which this child integrated the fact that in every challenging situation, we can try to look at the needs of the other person, no matter what they do. I was impressed by their capacity to learn NVC and that gives me hope for the world.

## Children and their need for 'autonomy'

I believe the biggest lesson for parents is to understand that one need that often comes up for children and is often unmet and not understood by adults is the need for autonomy



or 'power in their world'. I believe, the way the world is designed, often children don't have much choice in deciding how to spend their day, who to spend time with, how to keep their room, how to learn, whom to learn from, when to do what they do, the choice to earn and use money etc., and all these situations create an unmet need for autonomy. Even when they want a pizza, their first need could be diversity or taste, but when they are told 'No' by the parent, what gets triggered is the need for autonomy or power in their world, and that's a painful place for them as we all want to control our daily life. I believe, if they have enough supply of this need, they might be able to live with some moments where this need is not met, but if most of the day they go through the negative experience, they can get triggered easily when they hear a 'no' from adults. So I believe that if the parent consciously makes sure that there are enough opportunities for children to meet their need for autonomy, then they will be more at peace and in harmony with the world around them.

### Finding ways that work for all

I often tell people who come for my workshops on NVC and Parenting, "If you have come here to learn NVC to just ensure that your child does home work or cleans the room, you are in the wrong place as NVC is not about getting your way done from others, but a way of interacting with anyone including your child, where we look at solutions, where everyone's needs matter. In other words, to "find ways of doing things which work for everyone".

Besides, it's important for children that their needs are seen and matter to others, even if they are not met all the

*The "WE" Approach ensures better understanding, respect and acceptance than "YOU" and "ME" approach in a conflict situation*



**Do children have much choice in today's world? An NVC workshop in progress**

time. For example, when I was mediating between 12-year old Shreyas and his mom in Bangalore, Shreyas was saying that he does not like it when his mom says, "We will go to check for an ipad on Saturday" and then on Saturday she says, "Something else has come up and we can't go today".

He said that he is frustrated and does not know what to do. The mom was explaining during the mediation that she had forgotten that she had tuitions on Saturday when she had promised him, and realised it later when the kids who take tuition from her came home. I told the mother that even if you can't go on Saturday and have a valid reason, can you imagine how this disruption of plan is painful for your child, and can you at least acknowledge to him that you regret not being able to keep your promise? Since Shreyas was also asking me for support, I asked him also to realise that his mother had wanted to go and that the plan cancellation was not intentional. I asked the mother if she would appreciate it if Shreyas asked, "Mom, is it that you did want to go, but you forgot that there are tuitions today?" And the mother had a smile on her face and said she would really like it if he spoke like that. I asked Shreyas, "If your mom also acknowledged, "Shreyas, I see it's difficult for you to have a change of plan and I am not happy that I forgot about the tuitions and that we did not go to check the ipad today", would you like it? He said "Yes, I would", and there was relief on his face.

### Ask Why?

I was doing a workshop with children and parents together at Arohi learning space ([www.arohilife.org](http://www.arohilife.org)) near Bangalore. At various points, the children were moving around and talking



**Children actively participate in a workshop**





### We need to trust our children more

among themselves or were not able to focus on the persons who were sharing their experiences. Someone who was there and also runs a pre-school was amazed at how I didn't get flustered with the so-called 'disturbances'. She said if she was there, then by the end of the day she would have a headache and would be super frustrated. I responded to her that I also at times felt challenged, but there was one key word which helped me remain at peace and that was - "Why". What I meant was, whenever a child wants to do something which challenges me I don't begin to think that he or she is doing this 'just to create a problem', but that the child has some beautiful need and I try to adjust the space so that the child's need is considered or met. Or in other words, I look for, "Why does the child want to do what he or she is doing?" and when I find the answer to it and see their beautiful reason or the need behind their action, I am in a bit more peaceful space and am able to find solutions that all of us can live with or enjoy.

### Honestly trusting your child

At Arohi one day, a ten-year old girl and her mom were standing outside the dorm at 9 pm and arguing about something. I got to know that the girl was asking the mom to put up the mosquito net on her bed and her mother was saying, "Why can't you put the net?" or "Why should I put the net, you can also do it." I asked the girl why she was saying 'No' to putting up the net? She answered - "I don't know how to do it." So I looked at the mom and asked her if she believes that the child does not know how to do it. The mom said yes to it. So, I proposed to the child, "is it ok that today you help the mom to put up the net and learn it, so you can put it up yourself later on?" The girl said 'Yes'. The mom was also relaxed and I shared with them my learning from the situation that "If we can have the curiosity as to why the



### A young participant shares her thoughts at an interaction

other person is doing what they are doing, or what's the positive intent behind their need, then we connect better with people around us."

Often parents ask me if they can share their real feelings and needs to the children and if the children are capable of understanding them? They are implying if they can honestly tell the child their own challenges and insecurities. My answer to this may not apply to every situation, but I tell them, "I think feelings and need and talking about your vulnerability is going to land much better than your judgments and blame, which you might often unconsciously share." I believe that if we can share our deeper honesty and our own needs too while looking at our children's needs, we can create a world of collaboration, self-responsibility and shared power with them. ■

The writer has been a film maker who studied at the Film and Television Institute of India. He began to associate with communities working on sustainable life practices, and has been on organic farms and with home schooling communities all over the country. Lately, he is working on Nonviolent Communication (NVC), restorative justice practices like Restorative Circles and consent decision making processes like Sociocracy. To know more about NVC see [www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org) and to know about Shammi and his work, see his blog at [www.courageouscommunication.wordpress.com](http://www.courageouscommunication.wordpress.com)



# Quantity v/s Quality

*In the last couple of decades, school enrollment has gone up in India thanks to various measures taken by the central government. But has the quality of education improved? Dr. Madhav Chavan does a succinct review of the primary education scenario in India.*

**T**HE problem of education in India was always one of quantity and quality. It is easy to see that as the population grew nearly three-fold since Independence, the quantitative challenge grew that much or more. The education system in different states responded at various speeds to keep up with the increasing child population. Bihar (and Jharkhand), Madhya Pradesh (and Chhattisgarh), Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh (UP) were the slowest to respond but by 2010-11, when the Right to Education (RTE) Act came into force, most states showed above 95% enrollment among children in the 6-10 age group, and above 90% enrollment rates in the 11-14 age group. This success of enrollment was largely achieved through a simple expansion of the traditional school system with a mechanical addition of so called academic support structures. Although enrollment in schools went up quickly in the BIMARU states listed above, the daily attendance rates leave a lot to be desired. In states such as UP and Bihar the attendance of children is around 55-60% of the number on the school roster. In other states such as Kerala, Himachal and Maharashtra, the attendance rates are around 90% and the national average is at about 75%.

Perhaps we should say that the real enrollment in schools is around 75%? But the undeniable fact is that there is a government primary school (Stds. I-V) within 1 km of almost every habitation in India, and an upper primary school (Stds. VI-VIII) within 2 km.

## The boom in private schools

The story is a little more interesting than this. Over the last decade, as the government school system expanded to accommodate more children, the number of private schools has been rapidly increasing too. The result is that while in 2007 about 21% children went to private schools, the proportion has jumped up to near 39% by 2013, according to government figures. In fact, between 2007 and 2013, as the total enrollment went up from 18.5 crore to 19.3 crore, enrollment in government schools declined from 13.4 crore to 12.2 crore, and the enrollment in private schools went up



## Access to education has improved, but has quality kept pace?

by two crore from 5.1 crore to 7.1 crore.

In many urbanised states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, the overall proportion of children going to private schools is approaching 60-70%. In many districts of India too, private schools are catering to over 50% population. In states such as Bihar and West Bengal where less than 10% children go to private schools, the proportion of children who go to private tutors right from the primary stage exceeds 60%.

In short, no matter where you go, as wealth in India grows, even the relatively poor parents are finding ways of getting private inputs for their children. Does this mean that private schools, which cater to this not-privileged population, provide 'quality' education? Our data shows that private school children are today 20 percentage points ahead in basic reading and arithmetic levels. However, this difference is largely due to parental background and cannot be attributed to the school. Yet, by general definitions based on curricula and examination criteria, it is hard to say that the so-called affordable private schools provide quality education to their students. In fact, a well-known study by 'Education Initiatives' has shown that even in so-called elite schools in Indian metros, the quality is

about the same as an average public school in the United States. In 2009, when the two states of Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, hand-picked by the Government of India, participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), these states stood 72<sup>nd</sup> and 73<sup>rd</sup> out of 74 nations, just ahead of Kyrgyzstan. The sample of 15 year-old students tested included private school children as well.

So, it is not just that the underprivileged do not have access to quality education, but very few children seem to have access to what could be nationally or globally acknowledged as good quality education.

If we combine the problem of quantity and quality, the picture that emerges is very grim, if not scary.

### The RTE Act and school enrollment

Over the last two decades most state governments started following a no-detention policy and it became a part of the Right to Education Act in 2009. The positive impact of this policy is that the dropout rates of children reduced and the proportion of children completing 8 years of schooling began to increase. Unfortunately, nothing serious has been done to overcome the deficiencies in basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic that led to examination failure in the first place. ASER results year after year show that nearly 50% of all children in Std. V cannot read a simple Std. II level text, and even more cannot solve simple arithmetic problems. As a result, although millions more who would have dropped out continue in schools without acquiring skills or knowledge that the school is expected to teach. It is evident that as more children started entering Std. IX and X in schools that had inadequate numbers and quality of teachers, the pressure to ensure that more children passed their Std. X began to rise. Now we have ever larger numbers of students completing 10 years of schooling without an education worthy of 10 years or even half of that. The same story continues, as more children join Std XI and XII and then go on to colleges. The number of young people going to colleges is growing too, although it is still a small number.

Notwithstanding the no-detention policy and the dilution of examination standards, about 70% of the children who start at Std. I will not enter Std. XI one way or another. Their learning skills are so poor that any curriculum set by any board is still too high for them. While the education establishment would like to have them learn more and more, most of the stuff in the traditional mode of learning is out of reach for them. And yet, increasing numbers of this generation have growing aspirations without the knowledge or the skills to realise them. There is a time bomb ticking.

There is little doubt that even the most marginalised want

good education for their children. But what is good education? And more importantly, how can children access it?

### Improving access to quality education

The most obvious and popular approach to the problem lies in improving schools through training of teachers and administrators. Attempts have been made by designing curricula and redesigning textbooks. The government focuses on improvement of civil works. All these are basics of the current system and the assumption is that if all these are improved, good education can happen. It certainly could work out that way.

But, what if the model of the school itself is broken? Or, if it is completely outdated? It definitely does not serve those who are not going to continue beyond Std VIII or X. Everything the school teaches is really a preparation for higher studies and not to prepare children for life. The main pillar of the school system is the curriculum that is translated into age-grade syllabi and then into textbooks that are taught in a sequential, linear manner. In contradiction, non-linearity of access to information and knowledge seems to have become dominant in the modern world of information technology. Even the digital divide that we were looking at before mobile technology and smart phones showed up has to be re-thought, because within a decade most people will have access to this technology, which opens up non-linear, random access to information. Today's children are already exposed to huge amounts of random information that is not in their textbooks. But that information is not processed into knowledge. Yes, there is also a huge problem of availability of digital 'knowledge' content in Indian languages and it will have to be solved. But with automatic text to text and voice to text and such other translation programmes growing and improving continuously, the possibilities are immense. This technology can become a great leveler although it may take time. It appears that in the not too distant future, a school based on a centralised curriculum will be replaced by a more decentralised learning not confined to classrooms.

There is a lot to be done to improve the current education system so that children who otherwise would not have access to skills and knowledge can learn them. However, we have to be prepared to usher in a revolution in learning where the deprived truly have equal access to all the knowledge stored by humanity, as they also construct their own understanding of the world around them. ■



The writer is CEO-President, Pratham Education Foundation.



# Pappu eighth class pass hai!

The promotion policy outlined in the Right to Education (RTE) Act has many detractors, and a few supporters. Are we bringing up a generation of 'lazy' students who may never know what it is to be competent or are we holding out a helping hand to weak students who will benefit from it? **E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan** peeks into this Pandora's box.

**T**HE Indian primary education system is at a crossroads today. Ever since the seminal Right to Education (RTE) Bill was passed by the Parliament in 2009 and came into effect from April 1, 2010, there has been a raging debate about its pros and cons. The Bill is monumental and a path-breaker in many respects. But five years hence, the debate is mostly about the policy of no detention of students till Std. VIII. Academicians and parents are asking this: are we bringing up a generation of students who are not up to the mark?

## The history of RTE

We have many reasons to be proud of our education system, especially the institutions of higher learning like the IITs and the IIMs. Indian students also go on to do very well in universities abroad. Often, the rigour of primary and secondary school years in India is cited as the reason for this success. It doesn't matter that the traditional boards place too much emphasis on rote learning, but Indian students have accepted unconditionally, the need to put in tremendous amounts of hard work.

In the year 2009, things changed. The Right to Education (RTE) Act was passed by the Parliament, and it came into effect in 2010. Under this, the government made education free and compulsory from the ages 6-14. About 25% of the seats in each school were also reserved for students of economically backward classes living in proximity to the

school. (see box) The then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh had said, "We are committed to ensuring that all children, irrespective of gender and social category, have access to education".

This Act is the first legislation in the world that puts the responsibility of ensuring enrollment, attendance and completion on the Government, unlike other countries where responsibility rests with parents. In the Indian Constitution, education comes under the purview of the States, and the Act has made state and local bodies accountable for the

implementation, with a good chunk of financial support coming from the Centre. A committee set up to study the funds requirement estimated that over ₹171,000 crores or 1.71 trillion (US\$38.2 billion) would be required in the first five years to implement the Act.

But was 'access to education' confused with quality of education? The promotion till Std. VIII policy was to understandably take

away the pressure of exams and also prevent school dropouts due to failure, especially seen in rural areas of India. But in quest of that, have we been promoting students who are simply not ready for the next level?

## Is there a Fundamental Right to Pass?

The RTE Act provides that a child in the primary section should not be tested in the traditional sense of examinations

Do you know why we are expected to attempt this Exam if we are sure to pass ?



No idea buddy, I've not studied for it anyway



Farzana



### Will these children really benefit from RTE?

and annual policy of promotion to the higher class. The new policy replacing it was the Continuous Comprehensive Assessment (CCA). For the first time ever, the onus for bringing the child up to standard was put on the school and the teacher. But does this work practically? Says P.M. Kamath, former Professor of Politics, University of Bombay, "This dictum is fine for the first four classes - I to IV or even up to V. But the child ought to know there is an intellectual gradation of the humans in society, some performing better than the other. Parents have to know in the early stage of education that Right to Education is Fundamental; there is no Fundamental Right to Pass!" A sentiment echoed by most teachers and academicians we spoke to.

In an ICSE school in Mumbai, for instance, students are needed to get a minimum of C2 grade to pass. If they get less, than that the teachers are required to continue administering the tests to ensure that they improve, something most teachers don't do. They simply give students additional oral marks to bring them to the minimum C2 grade.

"Since the process of continuous evaluation is a time consuming one, many teachers do not complete it properly", admits the Vice-Principal of the school. Most schools still face a severe shortage of teachers and infrastructure.

### The bright side of RTE

The RTE Act was enacted with good intentions. The motive for discouraging detention is to allow children to develop at their pace. There are some who take a little longer to learn but will catch up with others. For instance, there are kids

with learning difficulties who may be weak in a couple of areas like math or language, but average in other subjects. What such children need is assessment to determine their exact areas of difficulties and remedial classes in school to bring them up to par. Said a senior special education teacher from a prominent ICSE school in the Mumbai suburbs, who is in favour of the no-detention policy, "I don't think the earlier system of exam ever assessed the reading and math skills of students. What they tested was the rote learning ability of children. I prefer competency tests after which a proper remedial approach is taken to help students to improve their skill level."

Parents of children with learning and other difficulties feel that when the fear and stress of being failed or detained is taken away, their children will fare better. "In any case, if the child is poor in subjects like math, the ICSE board gives them the option of dropping math and science and opting for other subjects after Std. VIII. So, wouldn't it have been a gross injustice to the child if he or she had been made to repeat a year earlier on account of failing these very subjects", asks one mother, whose son studies in Std. IX in a prominent boys' school in South Mumbai and has dropped maths and science in Std. IX.

**But there should be a clause to make some exceptions. There are children who may have inherent disabilities. If these students are promoted without any support, the gap will increase and lead to their dropping out of mainstream education.**

But there should be a clause to make some exceptions. There are children who may have inherent disabilities. If these students are promoted without any support, the gap will increase and lead to their dropping out of mainstream education. "You can very well imagine a child's frustration at not making any sense of what is going on in the class", says the special education teacher. Increasingly, schools are suggesting options to parents like transferring to a less demanding State Board school or asking them to opt to hold back their child in the same class.

### First generation learners

But the question we need to ask is this: Isn't it the school and teachers' responsibility to ensure 'weak' students are given extra coaching in the school? The RTE Act thinks yes.

Agrees the special education teacher, "It is definitely the teacher and the school's responsibility to help the child in need. They can seek parents' co-operation. However, in a country like ours where there are many first generation learners and with many children studying in English medium which is alien to them, is it possible for parents to provide the right kind of help?" She also feels that there must be provision for constructive discussions

between parents and teachers and school administration, so that each stakeholder understands the other person's point of view. This might lead to a decision which may be beneficial to the child in the long run.

Many schools monitor their teachers closely and provide enough counsellors and remedial teachers in case of children with difficulties or extra coaching in case of children who are weak in some subjects. But it's not done with great alacrity or sincerity, feel many parents. And therein lies the fundamental problem with the 'promotion policy'.

### Testing by the backdoor

Amidst this came the directive from the Maharashtra State Council for Education Research and Training Education department asking all schools in Maharashtra belonging to all boards, to conduct baseline tests of Math and first language of students in Stds. II-VIII. Actually this should have been a corollary to the 'promotion policy' as it seeks to test the student's competency of the previous standard. But as things often work in India, the manner of implementation has been haphazard.

Says Kamath, "The previous government created the mess of promotion policy and the present government has tried to introduce the system of examination from the backdoor to test the acquired knowledge of the pupils in the most regressive bureaucratic procedure of competency test". According to him, "some Babus" have devised the exact test to be administered from class II to VIII, without leaving any discretion to the teacher or the head of the school. "A careful study of the test booklet reminds me of a circular sent by the Inspector of Education, prescribing the size of chalk that could be purchased under monetary peanuts given to the schools as aid under *Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan* (as the government has stopped giving any non salary grant to schools), as though schools do not have any idea of administration! That way, the competency test booklet has given one freedom to the teacher; testing material can be taken to the class either in a bag or in a basket!"

He feels that if these tests are administered, the next step would be for the government to take over the conduct of examinations from class II to VIII! "When that happens, what remains with the school is to conduct of examinations for IX and XI. The current trend shows that it will not be too far away from the reality!" he exclaims. Given the fact that the Maharashtra government is centralising all data it collects under the centralised SARAL (Systematic Administrative Reforms for Achieving Learning), an online system to keep track of student and school information and reduce discrepancies in adherence to RTE, we are talking of more control, rather than less.

### What exactly is the Right to Education Act?

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE) describes the modalities of the provision of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 in India under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child when the Act came into force on 1 April 2010.

The Act also specifies minimum norms in elementary schools as follows:

- It requires all private schools to reserve 25% of seats to children from poor families (to be reimbursed by the State as part of the public-private partnership plan).
- It also prohibits all unrecognised schools from practice, and makes provisions for no donation or capitation fees and no interview of the child or parent for admission.
- The Act also provides that no child shall be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board examination until the completion of elementary education.
- There is also a provision for special training of school drop-outs to bring them up to par with students of the same age.
- The RTE act requires surveys that will monitor all neighborhoods, identify children requiring education, and set up facilities for providing it.

### Conclusion

In the final reckoning, is the RTE Act beneficial to students and primary education in India? If followed to the dot, perhaps it is. The government has definitely made education 'accessible' to all with primary schools located in close proximity to most habitations, even in the remotest areas. But a school is not just brick and mortar – teachers and administrators play a very important role. Educating a child and make him/her a contributing member of the society should be the objective of every school. Does the RTE Act put us on track for that? Only time will tell. ■



The writer is Assistant Editor, One India One People.



# To flip or to click

*Do today's kids read story books? Or are they completely lost to the world of screens? Do you yourself think that book reading is obsolete? **Vinitha Ramchandani** makes a case for picking a book and reading. A habit you must cultivate in your kids and yourself, pronto!*

It's something we had to contend with when I worked with a book publishing house - the debate 'Is book reading getting severely endangered?' We often argued fiercely about it; old timers citing that the same was said when television became the norm, while young blood maintained that *this time* the digital platform was going to take over. Books would soon be redundant.

I would hate to think so, but the fact is, there are so many mind-easier, eye-easier ways to entertain and keep a person occupied than a book, for all of us, more so for kids. And children need colour, visuals and something to work their hands with - not all books provide all the combinations. And there is this devil-distractor called cellphone. The other devil-distractor - which has been challenging the 24-hour entertainment channel-filled box called television - is new-kid-on-the-block, the iPad. When friends confess that they now download and read books, I shrug my shoulders nonchalantly, while my heart sinks. It's a slow take over. And it's showing by the shrinking shelf-space that bookshops assign for books. Flipkart which started with books now sells everything.

With so much available at the fingertips, more colourful, more attention-seeking, more slick...why would a child read? What does a book do?

## Why read a book?

The answer is almost clichéd. A book is a time travel machine. When you flip through its pages and pore over the words, a book has the power to pull you along with it. Today is a world of information. And because it is so accessible, information is no longer valued. So if we no longer go to books to access information why do we read books indeed? It is because books are vaults of emotions. Books carry decades of experience. Books are stimulators. When you pick a book, it's not the same as reading something on a device.

Books perform the basic word-building magic in a child. A child who reads is definitely someone who has better than average vocabulary, has better honed communication skills, and will probably be able to solve problems faster than a non-reading child.

Books are great nurturers of character traits in children.



## Book reading will never go out of fashion

Books have been used from time immemorial to teach values - such as honesty, kindness, sharing, consideration to others, bravery, generosity - to children. Children who read are individuals who will understand another person's point of view. Author/writers after all, are those who have seen 'the other side' and thus make us sympathetic to ideas and feelings that are of deep importance.

It looks like a waste of time but reading is actually the ultimate time-saver. When you read, you store small nuggets of information, flutter through a range of emotions and events that would take you years, decades, millennia to try to experience directly. Literature is the greatest reality simulator - a machine that puts you through infinitely more than the world allows us to assimilate.

In a world where we are all battling with deficit attention spans and borderline ADHD, a child who gravitates to a book is a child who is calmer and has larger attention span than those who play on an app or who read/create online. When you are online there is simply so much more available to distract you than a story or even a fantastic game.

Writers open our hearts and minds, and give us maps to our own selves, so that we can travel in them more reliably and with less of a feeling of paranoia or persecution. Children

who read books usually do not judge others. In today's world where winning is so important, where media dwells on stories of failure, literature talks of failure but also largely deals with multiple dimensions of failing. Great books don't judge as harshly or as one-dimensionally as the media.

Yes, it is the world of downloadable books. But reading is a skill that is invaluable. A book reader-child is one who you can guarantee has:

**Great vocabulary:** The more you read, the more words you gain exposure to and it's simply not possible that they won't weave their way into your life. Children who read are articulate. My kids can spell effortlessly not because I take up spellings with them. It's because they read. I never have to take up grammar and synonyms with them also for the same reason.

E-books make reading as easy. In fact it is so easy that meanings are provided for difficult words at the touch of a screen. Very cool. However figuring out the meaning of the word as you read, especially in context to what you are reading, helps to root the word in your brain for life.

**Good in one = Good in others:** A child who reads well in one language will also be able to pick up new languages with ease. Reading books is vital for learning new languages.

**Strong memory and better cognitive skills:** The great part about the brain is that more you put in, the more it can absorb. Every new memory you create forges new synapses and strengthens existing brain pathways. When you read a book, you have to remember an assortment of characters, their backgrounds, ambitions, history, and nuances, as well as the various plots and sub-plots that weave their way through every story. Children who read have stronger analytical and problem-solving skills: Have you read a book and fathomed the end? If so, you were able to put critical and analytical thinking to work by taking note of all the details provided and sorting them out to determine "whodunit". That same ability to analyse details also comes in handy when it comes to critiquing the plot; determining whether it was a well-written piece, if the characters were properly developed, if the storyline ran smoothly, etc.

**Better communication skills:** If you read, you usually can communicate better - you can read better, write better and you are more articulate than those who don't.

### How does one cultivate this habit in children?

Now that we've established the benefits of being a reader the thing parents ask me is, "How do you get kids to read!?" I usually ask one question: Do YOU read?

Children who read usually have an older role model - parent or an older sibling - who also reads. If you do not yourself read, please forgive your kids. It's too much to expect them

to do an activity that is alien to them. My kids, devourers-of-book, library-stalkers, finish at least one book a day. Friends who hear this look at me in utter fascination. My kids have seen me reading EVERYWHERE. Seriously. I take a book with me wherever I go and you'll probably find me reading in a dentist chair with my jaws wide open and the dentist peering right in. My small pokey space is FILLED with books. When we eat, we all prop a book against our plate and we enjoy a meal. You don't have to get into such a mental state of book-love. However, simply having books, magazines, and newspapers around your home will help children view them as part of daily life.

Reading to children when they are babies is a great way to get them to themselves want to decode language. While buying books, look for books that are – if the kids are small – hardy. Hardback, well-bound books that are easy to flip through and extra durable for a toddler's investigative fingers is a good idea. Allow children to touch, smell and yes, even taste books.

When you read aloud together, choose books that you both like. If you have bought a book and you find that it is boring – yes, books that receive glowing reviews, can be boring, too - place the book down and find one that is more fascinating. If you find your child preferring one kind of books then go find more of those. Once you've covered that genre, look for the next. Another good way to pick books for kids is buying award-winning books. If the book has a Caldecott Medal tag, you can bet the book has great illustration; while a book with the Newbery Medal will mean super storyline.

Yes, the world of books and book publishing may be feeling threatened. But books will not go out of fashion. Book soldiers out there are making literature festivals happen and book reading is being cultivated by small groups of people who understand the benefits of devouring a book. If you look at the number of literature festivals that have burgeoned in the last decade and the parents who take their kids for them, you'll know a book is not just words put together on paper. It's simply more, way more than that.

For the people who tell me that they have downloaded 100 books and that is now their preferred mode of reading, I have only this to say: Bet you haven't completely read even ONE digital book. Hah. ■



An editor and storyteller, Vinita Ramchandani has to her credit over 20 children books, 15 of which are published and are available in book stores across the country. Three of her stories are part of English school curriculum, while two are being made into films. Her recent book, 'Subhas Chandra Bose: What He Did What He Said', has been listed as one of the books young adults need to have in their book shelf.

# A television-free life!

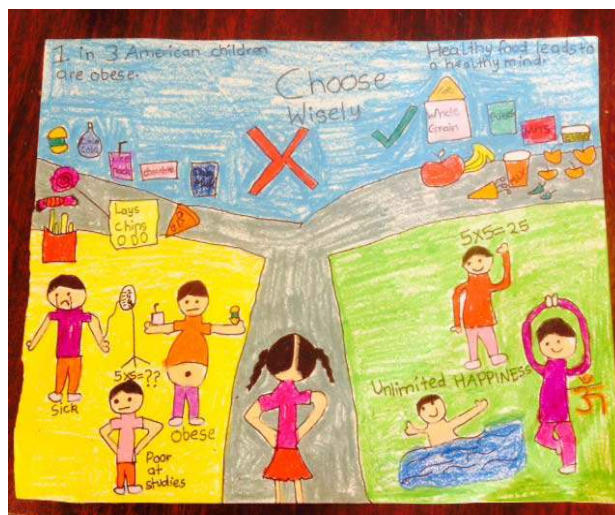
*In this day of HD TV and hundred plus channels, here is a mother who has chosen to have no TV in her house. Her children are also not exposed to Bollywood movies or violent cartoons, even in others' homes. How does she work this miracle? "It was not a conscious decision, but is today the best thing to happen to my children", says **Nidhi Jamwal**. A peek into their unique childhood.*

**M**Y earliest memory of broadcast media is waking up to a painfully slow music on Akashvani (radio), which was followed by the Sunday morning English news: "This is All India Radio and the news is read by..." I must have been four-years-old then, and absolutely disliked that music as it signalled an end to my sleep, especially during the cold winter of Jammu and Kashmir where I grew up. But, life was good. It was simple. We had plenty of time to spend with our friends in the playground playing *kanche* (marbles), on trees picking *shahtoot* (mulberries), on a jungle trail to spot a ghost, in an impromptu picnic to a nearby water tank, or organise our all time favourite *gudiya-ki-shaadi* (marriage of dolls) My father used to make *tarazus* (equal-arm beam scales) out of old Cherry Blossom shoe polish boxes, which my sister and I used to flaunt proudly. There was no television or telephone in our lives. The daily newspaper used to arrive only at 5 in the evening and had to be collected from the market. Each newspaper was marked with a house number and there were no extra copies. No free home delivery as well. Life was all about getting out of homes, connecting with different people and forging bonds.

## Entry of TV

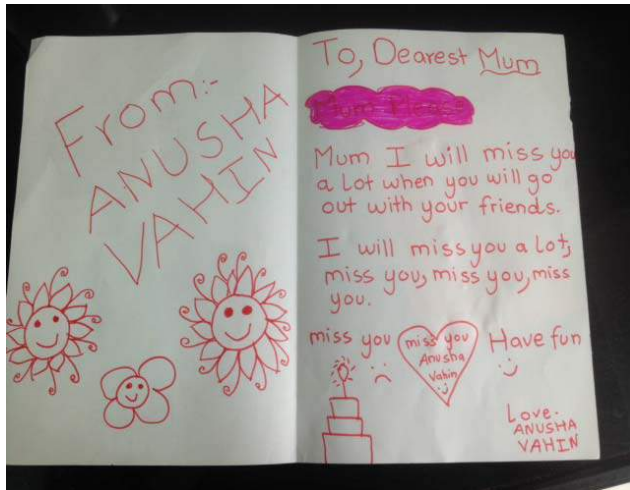
I don't remember the exact year when television (TV) entered our home and our lives, but it must have been while I was still in primary school. My earliest memory of TV is my father watching India-Pakistan cricket match in a super-energetic environment at home. Kapil Dev, Ravi Shastri, Vengsarkar moving around in the cricket field in their white uniforms! Ours was a Texla brand TV, dark brown in colour whose screen could be closed with a foldable sideways shutter. It was mounted on four legs and channels could be changed by rotating a knob, which made a *tik-tik* sound. To be honest, there weren't too many channels to be changed. It was either Doordarshan or PTV (Pakistan Television Corporation). Latter was any day better as it used to telecast some very good serials (*Bakra Qistoin Pe*, *Samundar*, etc.) and I grew up watching them. Slowly but surely, TV made inroads into our lives through twice a week *Chitrahaar*, Sunday morning Duck Tales cartoon followed by Sunday evening movie bonanza, and much more.

By the time I finished schooling and joined a college in Delhi University, TV had become an integral part of my life. I don't remember what I used to watch on TV, but I definitely



Cards and drawings made by the writer's children who have no access to a screen, yet are never bored





A screen-free life ensures the writer receives such delightful cards as these (left and right) from her children

used to sit in front of the 'idiot box' every day. Things started to change when I picked up a job with New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in January 1999. There was a lot of interesting work to be done, including late nights at office, leaving me with not enough free time to watch TV. Also, what was telecast during those years, including the much celebrated Indian soap opera *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, bored me to death. My TV watching reduced greatly though I could never kick it out of my life.

### The exit of the 'idiot box'

The dissociation with TV happened many years later, towards the end of 2012, when I was already a mother of two small children aged five years and 10 months. Leading a TV-free life was never a planned or a conscious decision. It was more of a temporary arrangement. In 2012, I was trying to do too many things. I had just had a second baby. I had to give additional time to my older kid, all of five, so that she did not feel neglected post arrival of her brother. To top it all, I was trying to establish myself in the new role of a freelance journalist after quitting my full-time job of 12 years. It was a crazy year.

The same year, the Indian government came out with a law and made it mandatory for TV viewers to access their signals through a set-top box in an effort to convert cable networks throughout the country from analogue to digital. Even free-to-air channels such as DD1 and DD2 – the Doordarshan channels of Prasar Bharti – had to be accessed through the set-top box. The deadline for switching over to the set-top box was midnight of October 31, 2012.

Since I had lost interest in TV, I had never bothered to install a set-top box and had only a basic cable TV connection from our local cable operator in Andheri (West), Mumbai. I did read about the new government regulation of set-top box, but never got enough time (and interest) to read up offers



being made by various set-top box companies, such as Tata Sky and Airtel. Incidentally, in October 2012, we had planned a family trip to Rajasthan and Delhi. We left for Jodhpur in mid-October, without settling the set-top box issue, and missed the October 31 deadline. When we returned home, we found our TV screen had gone blank. It was a weird feeling, but I let it pass thinking I will soon figure out and buy a set-top box.

The initial few days without the 'noise' of TV at home were uncomfortable. Suddenly, there was too much silence at home. Suddenly, we found ourselves with too much 'free' time. Suddenly, we realised that we needed to speak *with* each other rather than just gaze at the TV and go off to sleep. My 10-months-old son was too young to miss TV, but my five-year-old daughter started asking me why our TV was not working. Realising she was too small to understand set-top box, I just told her that there was a problem and TV uncle was fixing it. Every day she asked me the same question and every day I gave her the same answer. After two or three weeks, she stopped asking or bothering about TV. A battle had been won.

### Benefits of a TV-less home

It would, however, be incorrect to say that I never missed TV. I did miss it initially, but at the same time, I also started to enjoy a TV-free life. A month without TV and I was sure



**Free time at home triggers imagination and creativity in kids, as evident here**

that I didn't want it back in my house. Why? Let me list a few benefits, which I am experiencing for the last three years.

Firstly, no TV at home ensures both my children, now eight and three, play for longer time in the evenings with their friends. They run, chase friends, play hopscotch and hide and seek, and return home only past 8 pm. Their paediatrician is very happy, as childhood obesity is a growing concern in India and doctors now recommend physical activity of at least two hours a day for urban children.

Secondly, my daughter has picked up interesting hobby classes. She loves sports, so she has joined roller skating and gymnastics. She also cycles and swims. Rather than spending her evenings watching violent cartoon shows or cheap Bollywood dance numbers, she keeps herself busy with sport activities and has won a few medals.

Thirdly, rather than depending on gadgets and TV to keep themselves busy, both my children play with each other and devise their own games. I am a mother for more than eight years, but I have never heard my kids say, "Mamma, I am getting bored". They don't get bored. If they have free time, which they have plenty, they take a scissor and paper, and start making some art work - a lantern, a hanging bird, nameplate for our main door, etc. My daughter loves making greeting cards and some of the best cards I have received in life have come from her. I undertake long train journeys with my children, but unlike most urban children these days, my kids do not use smart phones or iPads to pass their time. No, I never let them play games on my phone (And, I don't play them either).

Fourthly, a TV-free life, I feel, has ensured that my children are not violent. They do not watch violent cartoons. I do not

take them for movies, unless it is an animation movie meant only for small children. Often, my daughter is invited for birthday parties where the children are taken for movies like Barfi, P.K, Gunday, etc. I refuse to send her, and she joins her friends only later (post movie) for cake-cutting. My daughter has protested a few times, as I feel her friends make fun of her; but, then I have sat down to explain to her why she should be watching shows/serials and movies meant only for children. And, believe it or not, she does understand. This also means that as soon as *Shaun The Sheep* movie comes to a theatre, I have to set aside all my work and take both my kids for the movie. And, I do. It is a happy arrangement.

**Often, my daughter is invited for birthday parties where the children are taken for movies like Barfi, P.K, Gunday, etc. I refuse to send her, and she joins her friends only later (post movie) for cake-cutting.**

I often come across friends who feel that by not exposing my children to TV, video games and gadgets, such as iPads (I don't own an iPad and my children don't get to play with any), I am depriving them of 'knowledge' and making them 'duds'. But, I beg to disagree.

My son is too young, but my daughter, who studies in grade three, is an all-rounder. She participates in debate competitions and has won certificates for neat handwriting. She also participates in athletic events organised by Mumbai Schools Sports Association (MSSA). Her grades in school are

A+ and her teachers have always praised her during the Open House sessions. TV, iPad, Tablets and smart phones can definitely wait. ■



The writer is a Mumbai-based independent environment journalist. She recently won first prize in the All India Environmental Journalism Competition, 2015. Her Twitter handle is @JamwalNidhi





KNOW INDIA **BETTER**

*The unsung monuments of*  
**MEHRAULI**

*The Mehrauli region of Delhi is a fascinating warren of tombs, mosques, palaces, step wells and of course, the Qutb Minar. While many visit the Qutb Minar, not many are aware or are inquisitive enough to explore the rest of the monuments of Mehrauli, which take us back to a time in history when various dynasties, by turn, held sway over Delhi. These monuments are also a priceless record of the socio-political events of those times. They tell us stories of an era when valour, intrigue, passion and deceit dominated regional politics.*

**Text and Photos: Rangan Datta**





The famous Qutb Minar

**M**EHRAULI, a locality in southern Delhi, is home to Delhi's most well-known landmark - the Qutb Minar. The Qutb Minar, along with the other structures of the complex, forms one of Delhi's prime tourist attractions. The area surrounding the Qutb Complex, which projects into the rocky outspur of the Delhi Ridge, is scattered with ruins of more than a hundred monuments, consisting of tombs, pleasure palaces, mosques, *dargahs* and step wells.

A few of the ruins of Mehrauli date back to the oldest of Delhi's many cities, and the area has remained permanently inhabited since the days of the Delhi Sultanate. Although thousands of tourists make it to the Qutb Minar complex, only a handful make it through the undulating terrain to the numerous scattered monuments of Mehrauli.

The monuments of Mehrauli are spread over a large area and can be classified under two categories - Mehrauli Archaeological Park and Mehrauli Village. The monuments of the Mehrauli Archaeological Park are spread over a smaller and compact area, and are maintained by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). These monuments are well-maintained and are connected by pathways through landscape gardens, with proper signage.

Most of the monuments of the Mehrauli Village are maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and are scattered over a large area. There are no road signs and the monuments are difficult to locate, but the locals are extremely helpful and provide necessary directions for locating the monuments.

### The Mehrauli Archaeological Park

To explore Mehrauli, it is best to start with the Mehrauli Archaeological Park, which is located in the shadows of the towering Qutb Minar. The entrance of the park is located next to the Qutb Complex and is through strange pyramid-like structures. These structures are known as 'ziggurats' or Mesopotamian pyramids. They look totally out of place and strangely, these were not constructed in the Sultanate or Mughal period, but were erected during the British rule.

Apart from the ziggurats, a small pillar welcomes visitors to the Mehrauli Archaeological Park. The pillar contains modern day inscriptions, directing visitors to the different monuments within the park, and also informs tourists that the park alone contains over 70 monuments.

Straight ahead of the pillar lies the octagonal structure, which finds mention in William Dalrymple's famous novel *The Last Mughal*. The octagonal tomb of Mohammad Quli Khan was converted into a garden house in the 1830s, by Sir Thomas Theophilus Metcalf, civil servant and agent of the Governor General of India at the imperial court of the last Mughal Emperor – Bahadur Shah Zafar. Metcalf called it the 'Dilkhusha' meaning "delight of the heart", and used it as a pleasure retreat. Located in the shadows of Qutb Minar, it was surrounded by gardens and follies.

Metcalf used to lease out the house to honeymooning couples. But the history of Dilkhusha dates back far beyond the days of Metcalf or of the British. The tomb belongs to Mohammad Quli Khan, a general of Akbar's army.

Nothing much is known about Quli Khan or the battles he won. He was the son of Maham Anga, who was often considered as the foster mother of Akbar. Quli Khan was also the brother of the notorious Adham Khan, whose tomb stands next to the Mehrauli bus stop. In the 1830s, Metcalf transformed the tomb into a country house, which served as a pleasure retreat till his death in 1853. During the revolt of 1857, Metcalf's Dilkhusha was vandalised and left in ruins. For the next century and a half, Quli Khan's tomb, along



**Metcalf's Folly or domed structure is found in the Mehrauli Archaeological Park**

with the other monuments of Mehrauli, were forgotten and left in utter neglect.

It was only during the beginning of the new millennium that INTACH took up the initiative of restoring the tombs of Mehrauli, leading to the formation of the Mehrauli Archaeological Park. Since then, the tomb of Quli Khan has been restored to its former glory, and can be considered as one of the most stunning tombs of Delhi. The tomb stands on a high plinth and is approached by a flight of stairs. It is octagonal on the outside and square on the inside. The paintings on the inner walls have been redone and look spectacular. The exterior has designs of stucco plasters consisting of calligraphy, floral



**Ziggurats or Mesopotamian Pyramids found in the Mehrauli Archaeological Park**



**A signage at the Mehrauli Archaeological Park**





**Quli Khan's Tomb, with the Qutb Minar as a backdrop**

and geometric designs. A few traces of coloured glazed tiles can also be seen. The interiors are exquisitely ornamented with intricate and painted plaster work.

Bidding farewell to Dilkhusha, walk past Metcalf's pigeon house, small fort, and finally the boating pond with its ornamented flight of stairs. Follow the zigzag trail across the



**The beautiful Jamali-Kamali Mosque**





**Every child has the right to education.  
Let's work towards a brighter India.**



**MANUGRAPH**

Technology in Print

Sidhwa House, N.A.Sawant Marg, Colaba, Mumbai 400 005.  
Mumbai : 022 - 22874815 | Delhi : 011 - 23314768 | Chennai : 044 - 28410679  
Ahemdabad : 079 - 26441830 | Kolkata : 033 - 22834041 | Hyderabad : 040 - 23202668  
For further details : [www.manugraph.com](http://www.manugraph.com) | [sales@manugraph.com](mailto:sales@manugraph.com)

MATCHSTICK

DIMENSIONS - 20cms x 27cms



**Tomb of Ghiyasuddin Balban, the last ruler of the Slave Dynasty, which contains the first true arch constructed in India**

undulating landscape to a beautiful, sandstone structure known as the Jamali–Kamali Mosque. The mosque doubles up as a *dargah* and contains the twin burial chambers of Jamali and Kamali. Jamali was a saint and poet in the court of Sikander Lodhi, but nothing is known about Kamali. There are also several other graves in the complex. Next, it's time for Balban's tomb, for which one has to walk past the scattered ruins of

the public courtyard and residential units, a part of a flourishing settlement of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century. At the end of the ruins lies a more or less intact structure made of rubble masonry, housing the mortal remains of Ghiyasuddin Balban, the last Slave Dynasty ruler. Although nothing spectacular, Balban's tomb is of great architectural importance as it contains the first true arch (a true arch is constructed by circular arrangement of stones)



**Azim Khan's Tomb dates back to the days of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar**





**Mosque and *chhatri* at Rajon ki baoli**

to be constructed in India. The tomb also has an entrance gateway with a black pyramidal roof, but the roof of the tomb has long collapsed, leaving the grave of Ghiyasuddin Balban exposed to the sky. In the side chambers of his tomb exists a large rectangular solitary grave, constructed out of bright red sandstone, containing intricate calligraphy. It contains the mortal remains of Balban's son, popularly known as Khan Shahid.

From Balban's tomb it is best to make a detour out of the Mehrauli Archaeological Park and cross the Mehrauli–Gurgaon road and head for Azim Khan's (also known as Akbar Khan) tomb, located on a small hillock, overlooking the Delhi–Mehrauli road. The square tomb, crowned with a dome, dates back to the days of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar. The strategically built tomb is extremely prominent and is visible from the entire neighbourhood, including the Qutb Complex and the Mehrauli Archaeological Park. Although a prominent landmark of South Delhi, the tomb has been an example of utter neglect and nothing much is known about its historical background. There are no proper historic records about Azim Khan and according to some, he was a general in Akbar's army and was awarded the title "Akbar" (meaning magnificent) by Akbar himself. It was probably the horrors of war that converted Azim Khan into a pious and religious man. He

became a follower of the famous Sufi saint Hazarat Nizamuddin, who is said to have appeared in his dreams and advised him to give up the path of war and violence. Azim Khan adopted the path of spirituality and soon his spiritual advices were much in demand. This attracted a large number of people from far and near. In search of isolation, Azim Khan built himself a tomb on a hillock located on the barren lands south of Delhi. The hillock had vertical walls preventing access to his residence. No wonder, Azim Khan and a few followers who had access to him had mastered the art of rock climbing! It was built somewhere in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but historians are still in the dark about the exact date of construction. Centuries later, during the British rule, several of the monuments of Mehrauli were converted into outhouses of British officers. The British soldiers tested their physical strength and their climbing skills by scaling the near vertical walls of the hillock.

After Independence, the tomb of Azim Khan was left in neglect. It was only during the Commonwealth Games's (Delhi 2010) beautification drive, that the neglected tomb finally got its much needed attention. During the process of restoration, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) decided to build a staircase leading up to the tomb, thus making the century old inaccessible tomb accessible. However, the tomb is hardly





**The interior of Rajon ki baoli - truly a step back in time**

visited by people, and the approach road is extremely difficult to spot.

### The step wells or *baolis* of Mehrauli

From Azim Khan's tomb retrace your steps back to the Jamali-Kamali mosque, past Balban's tomb, and it's time to head for Mehrauli's famous step wells. The step wells are an integral part of North and West India landscape. They are known



**The plaque dedicated to the soldiers from Mehrauli and Badarpur, who lost their lives fighting for the British in World War I**

as *baoli* in Delhi, *vaav* in Gujarat and *barab* in Maharashtra, and are a unique form of architecture built around the gigantic shaft of a well.

The construction is simple and consists of a well with a huge diameter and depth. Just on the opposite side of the shaft is a broad staircase leading down to the water level. The face adjoining the shaft is provided with shallow arched passageways descending several levels below the ground level. Delhi, although located on the banks of Yamuna River, suffers from severe water shortage. No wonder Delhi houses a number of step wells, which the Delhi people call *baoli*. Built by Daulat Khan during the reign of Sikandar Lodhi (1489–1517), the Rajon ki baoli descended down to four levels. The *baoli* served as a residence of the mason during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and hence the name Rajon ki baoli.

Sadly, the water in the Rajon ki baoli has long dried up and has come to be known as the *sukha baoli* or the dry well. Even in the height of monsoon, one can only find traces of black greasy water at the very bottom. But in spite of its dryness, Rajon ki baoli still maintains its graceful charm and architectural beauty. Small, narrow staircases lead to the terrace of the *baoli*, which offers a spectacular view of the Mehrauli region and houses a small mosque on the western side. In front of the mosque stands a domed pavilion supported by 12 pillars. The





**The sulphur step well called Gandhak ki baoli, also referred to as the ‘jumping well’**

dome is crowned with a floral motif finial and only traces of blue ceramic tiles can be seen to this day.

A similar narrow staircase leads on to the subterranean levels of the *baoli*, where sadly, the arches on the frontal part of the step well are only decorative. Those on the side are simple and devoid of any ornamentation. However, the side walls contain shallow alcoves, where earthen lamps were lit during the medieval period to light up the *baoli* at night. The experience of descending the narrow staircases leading to the deep inside of the well, is an experience akin to travelling back in time!

After Rajon ki baoli, one makes one’s way past several unknown and unmarked structures, to the main road. If you take a right turn and before you reach the Mehrauli bus terminus, you will reach Gandhak ki baoli, Mehrauli’s second step well on your right. Unlike the Rajon ki baoli, Gandhak ki baoli contains water for a majority part of the year. During the monsoon, local boys perform stunts by jumping into the sulphur rich water of the well, so it is often referred as the jumping well.

Gandhak ki baoli was constructed during the reign of Sultan Samshuddin Iltutmish (1296– 1316), and legend has it that during a visit to sufi saint Hazarat Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Iltutmish found that the Mehrauli area suffered from acute water shortage and the saint was not able to have regular

baths. This led to the construction of the step well, which came to be known as Gandhak ki baoli. The name originated from the presence of sulphur (*gandhak*) in the water, which is said to be beneficial in curing skin diseases. Although the sparkling waters of Gandhak ki baoli is a welcome sight in the heavily congested Mehrauli neighborhood of South Delhi, it lacks ornamentation and looks very simple compared to Rajon ki baoli.

Head towards the Mehrauli bus stop and on the left is an old Sultanate period tomb converted into a public health centre. For obvious reasons, the tomb has lost its beauty and grace, but the real surprise lies on its outer walls. It’s a plaque dedicated to the soldiers from Mehrauli and Badarpur, who lost their lives fighting for the British in World War I (WW I).

Finally, as you reach the Mehrauli bus stop, you will be greeted by the gigantic tomb of Adham Khan towering over the bus terminus. Adham Khan was a general in Akbar’s army and son of his wet nurse Maham Anga. Adham Khan was notorious for his barbaric cruelty to defeated soldiers and subjects, even women and children were not spared. In 1561, Adham Khan led the Mughal army against the Sultan of Malwa, Baz Bahadur. The two forces locked horns at the battle of Sarangpur. Baz Bahadur was no match for the mighty Mughal army and was soon defeated. Inhumane plunder and torture





**The notorious Adham Khan's tomb**

followed as women were raped and children were massacred. Adham Khan was prompted to conquer Malwa because of the beauty of Rani Roopmati, Baz Bahadur's favourite wife and well known singer. Although Adam Khan took possession of

Baz Bhadur's harem, Rani Roopmati committed suicide by consuming poison. Akbar was not happy with Adham Khan's behaviour and himself marched to Sarangpur, where Adham Khan surrendered. He was later recalled from Malwa.



**Frescoes on Adham Khan's tomb**

In 1561, Ataga Khan was appointed *Wakil* (Prime Minister) by Akbar, much to the displeasure of Adham Khan and his mother Maham Anga. Ataga Khan, who was the husband of another of Akbar's wet nurses, Jiji Anga, was murdered by Adham Khan. A furious Akbar ordered that Adham Khan be thrown from the ramparts of the Agra Fort. Strangely, Adham Khan survived the fall of 12 meters, so Akbar ordered him to be thrown again, and this time Adham Khan was not lucky.

Maham Anga died four days later and both their bodies were transferred to Delhi and strangely, Akbar commissioned a grand tomb for him. And just like Adham Khan's life, the tomb also had its share of ups and downs. In 1830, a British officer Blake, of Bengal Civil Service, converted the tomb into a pleasure house and had his grave removed. Very similar to the Quli Khan Tomb which was converted into a pleasure house by Thomas Metcalfe. Later on, Lord Curzon had the tomb restored and the grave replaced.

Today, the massive octagonal tomb of Adham Khan overlooks the crowded streets of Mehrauli in South Delhi. Although the frescoes have long faded away, it still looks impressive.





**The Jahaz Mahal**

The tomb consists of an octagonal domed chamber in Lodhi style. The corners are marked with low towers. It is commonly known as *bhul bhulaiya* (labyrinth) as visitors are said to lose their way amidst the several passageways. The walls, both exterior and interior, have a handful of floral motifs and the lone fresco, on the inside of the dome, has almost faded away. The interiors still serve as a sleeping place for the homeless.

### The Mehrauli Village

Now it is time to retrace your steps past the WW I plaque and Gandhak ki baoli and head for the monuments of Mehrauli Village. The *dargah* of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, after whom the Qutb Minar is named, is the first stop. There is no signage and asking the locals is the only option to visit the *dargah*. It is an active *dargah* and consists of several other *dargahs* and graves along with a mosque. The huge but simple complex attracts people of all faiths.

Adjoining the *dargah* is the Zafar Mahal and the Moti Masjid (Pearl Mosque). Zafar Mahal, named after the last Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah II and constructed by the second last Mughal ruler Akbar II, happens to be the last major structure to be constructed by the Mughals in India. The Zafar Mahal served as a summer palace for the royals and also served as a resting place for the royals during their visit to the *dargah*. Bahadur Shah II added

the gigantic Hati Gate (Elephant Gate) to the summer palace, which allowed elephants to pass through it. The huge three-storeyed sandstone gateway, with marble relief work, still towers above the crowded neighbourhood of Mehrauli.

Today the entrance is through a small opening in the gigantic Hati Gate. Collapsed roofs, broken walls and cracked arches are all that remains of the summer retreat of the later Mughal rulers. The place is deserted and a lone security guard stands as a custodian of the century old palace. Although in ruins, the gigantic arches, through which the elephants once passed, reminds one of the glorious days of the Zafar Mahal.

Passages through the giant archways lead to an open



**The scattered ruins of Zafar Mahal**





**The Moti Masjid-Zafar Mahal complex**

courtyard. At the far corner of the courtyard stands the Moti Masjid (Pearl Mosque). Built in 1709, it has three domes and a recessed *Miharba* on the western wall. Impressive parapets and tapering minarets add a new dimension to the mosque. On the south-eastern and north-eastern corners of the small

complex, stand two *azan minars*. The Moti Masjid was once approached from both the Zafar Mahal and from the *dargah* of Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, but today the entrance of the *dargah* is kept under lock and key by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which has also declared Zafar Mahal and Moti Masjid as protected monuments.



**The Hati Darwaza, Zafar Mahal**

Next to the Moti Masjid is a small enclosed place surrounded by beautiful marble *jali* work, it contains the grave of Akbar II and a vacant place lies next to it, probably meant for Bahadur Shah Zafar or Bahadur Shah II. Sadly, history had a different tale to tell. After the revolt of 1857, Bahadur Shah II was deported to Burma (Myanmar). He died there and was buried unceremoniously without a grave, while his proposed place of burial remains vacant to this day. A few rickety steep staircases lead to the first floor of the Zafar Mahal, where a lone stone pavilion and a *chhatri* still stand, reminding one of the last days of the mighty Mughals.

Now it is time to move deeper inside Mehrauli and head for the Jahaz Mahal. Although in ruins, the Jahaz Mahal towers like a ship over the congested and overcrowded Mehrauli neighbourhood. Located next to it is a huge lake called Hauz-i-Shamsi, dug by Sultan Iltutmish in 1230. Jahaz Mahal was



**An ancient wall at the Mehrauli Archaeological Park**

constructed almost 200 years later during the Lodhi period and because of its reflection in the huge lake, it gets a ship like appearance and hence the name Jahaz Mahal. The U-shaped Jahaz Mahal was probably surrounded by a moat, sadly the moat has long dried up. A flight of stairs on the southern end probably leads to Jahaz Mahal via a wooden draw bridge.

The wooden plank of the draw bridge has long vanished, and presently the entrance is through the eastern side, where a part of the moat is covered up to give access to the Jahaz Mahal. Historians have doubts about the exact usage of the Jahaz Mahal. Some believe it to be a *Sarai* (inn) for pilgrims, while others believe it to be a pleasure house of the royal family. The presence of a *Miharba* on the western wall of Jahaz Mahal indicates that this part of the building was indeed a mosque. The U-shaped courtyard is lined with several anti-chambers, each crowned with a dome with decorative squinches.

But the star attractions of the Jahaz Mahal are its *chhatris* decorated with glazed blue tiles. Five out of the six *chhatris* have survived the test of time and only traces of the glazed tile work remain to this day. The corner *chhatris* are square and smaller in size and are supported by four pillars each, the *chhatris* at the south west corner have long toppled. The *chhatri* on the middle of the western side, crowning the *Miharba* is octagonal, but the grandest of the *chhatris* lies in the middle of the eastern side above the entrance gate. The massive square *chhatri* is supported by twelve highly decorated pillars and dominates the surrounding skyline.

Hardly visited by tourists otherwise, the Jahaz Mahal becomes the centre of attraction during the festival of *Phool walon ki sair*, celebrated in the month of August. The origin of this festival dates back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the son of the Mughal Emperor Akbar II, Mirza Jahangir, was imprisoned by the British. Mirza Jahangir taunted the British Resident Archibald Seton. The young prince also took a shot at Seton



**An archway of the Moti Masjid**

at the Red Fort, but missed his target and killed his orderly instead. His mother Mumtaz Mahal (not to be confused with the wife of Shah Jahan), vowed to offer *chadars* at the *dargah* of Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki and the Hindu Jogamaya Mandir

#### **Quick Facts:**

- The monuments listed in this article are not exhaustive as Mehrauli contains hundreds of such monuments, and it can take days to explore all of them.
- The above mentioned route can be covered in a single day, excluding the Qutb Complex.
- Walking is the only option, so comfortable shoes are a must.
- There are hardly any places to eat apart from the Qutb Complex area and the Mehrauli bus terminus, which has very basic eateries. So carry water and dry food.

Qutb Metro stations and Mehrauli bus terminus are the access points.





The *dargah* of the sufi saint Hazarat Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki

on the release of her son. Ever since, the festival is celebrated with devotees, irrespective of religion, with offers of colourful *chadars* and decorated floral fans to the *dargah* and the temple. The festival continues with kite flying, wrestling bouts and *qawwali* and the neglected monuments of Mehrauli, like the Jahaz Mahal, get the much needed attention.

The huge Hauz-i-Shamsi Lake, located next to the Jahaz Mahal is an interesting mix of history and legend. It is believed that the Prophet arrived in Ilutmish's dream and mentioned about the suggestible site of the tank. Next day Ilutmish visited the place and found the hoof marks of the Prophet's horse. Ilutmish had the tank dug and in the centre of the tank he made a pavilion housing the stone with the hoof marks of the Prophet's horse. The Moorish traveller Ibn Batuta was struck by the vastness of the tank. Today, the tank is a shadow of its

past and probably it has also shrunk in size and the water looks dirty. A lone domed pavilion stands on the southwest corner of the lake. The domed pavilion approached by a concrete passage is probably a recreated version of the original one created by Ilutmish.

If you are still hungry for more, you can head for the tomb of Sultan of Ghori at the edge of Mehrauli. The more adventurous can even explore the ruins of Delhi's first citadel, the Lal Kot. ■



A mathematics teacher by profession, the writer is a regular contributor in the travel columns of leading newspapers. To know more, visit his website [www.rangan-datta.info](http://www.rangan-datta.info) and blog [www.rangandatta.wordpress.com](http://www.rangandatta.wordpress.com)

## Our Last Six Issues

To order copies Call: 022-23534400 / E-mail: [oiopfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:oiopfoundation@gmail.com) / [oiop@vsnl.net](mailto:oiop@vsnl.net)

Relevance of Gandhi	Pollution	Alternative Tourism	The Innovative Indian	Oceans	Prison

*“My intentions are not at all romantic, so I see no problem in what I’m doing”*



**Sunder Ramu** of Chennai is on a mission to date 365 women this year. He has dated 176 women already. Outrageous idea? A publicity gimmick? But his intentions are noble. He meets the women, has a conversation with them, and they pay for the meal. These dates are not romantic, he assures. The women have the option of cooking him a meal too. In return, he sponsors and shares a meal every month at an orphanage or any other NGO which works for the underprivileged. Ramu has dated celebrities as also fruit vendors and garbage collectors. He says he has had beautiful conversations with each.

In his daily life, he is a professional photographer doing fashion, editorial, advertising and fine art photography for nearly 20 years and has spent an equal number of years doing theatre. He started acting in films 5 years ago and has now completed 7 films in all. His fondest wish is to run his fine art photography gallery called Arkanaza and spend the rest of his life travelling and exploring the world. Ramu is an alumnus of The Valley School,

Bangalore. In an email interview, Sunder Ramu tells **E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan** more about his ‘dating’ journey.

**How did this idea of dating 365 women come to you? What triggered it?**

I had been trying to figure out a way in which I can take up something everyday to make a difference in a small way towards any particular cause. It was inspired by the likes of the mountain man Dashrath Manjhi and Jadav Payeng who single handedly planted a forest. I believe we can’t afford to not get involved with solving social and environmental issues because in so many ways we are spiraling out of control. In recent years there have been so many reports of violence against women that I thought this might be a good way to bring attention towards the wonderful qualities of women, and in some way hope to bring about gender equality from the 365 conversations with women from all walks of life.

**What was the initial reaction when you mentioned this concept to friends and family?**

They didn’t get it initially, but were very supportive because they know that I have been involved with various social awareness activities for a very long time, and that this might actually work.

**Who was the first woman you dated? Where did you go on the first date?**

The first woman was a social activist friend of mine who runs an NGO for Sri Lankan refugees, Poongothai Chandrahaasan. She saw my post on Facebook about the journey I wanted to undertake and called me over to her new flat. We had a delicious home cooked meal and spent time with her adopted Indian dogs.



**When you go on a date, what do you hope to get out of this personally?**

Just to have a good conversation and get to know the lady. Everyone has so much to offer when they are condensing their lives into a meal session, and it's fascinating to hear their stories. I'm an avid backpacker and travel a lot around the country and the world. It's about fresh perspectives and being able to connect with people's lives. It's amazing how much you can learn and grow by listening.

**If you find "a significant other" this year, will you still continue with this dating?**

For sure. My intentions are not at all romantic, so I see no problem in what I'm doing. In fact, a lot of the people that I have been on dates with are married, are in relationships, are mothers. So I see no problem at all about continuing the journey regardless of if I find a partner or remain single.

**Which date have you enjoyed the most? How many dates have you been on, so far?**

I have finished 176 dates. I slowed down in between because some friends lost their parents in quick succession, so I took a break. Then I resumed and have now started going on two a day sometimes. While I have genuinely enjoyed every date I've been on, an overnight fishing date with a lovely girl called Preethi Thomas who I was meeting for the first time, going sailing with my childhood friend Rupali Mehra, following a food trail through six restaurants with Jyoti Agarwal, driving through a quaint village with 105-year old Alamelu are some of the dates that were different.

**Have you visited anyone's house for a date? How was the experience?**

Yes, I have been to quite a few people's homes on dates. As I said, my first one too was at a friend's home. It is very relaxing and you get more of an insight into their personality when you go home. It's very personal because you are in their private space, they cook for you, and they tend to open a lot more and seem a lot more relaxed in their own space and there's no time limit.

**What has been your most unconventional date so far?**

Chandra, the garbage collector at my apartment. We sat on a sewage tank and shared her home cooked meal.

**Has anyone refused to go on a date with you? How have you convinced them?**

Some people have been a little wary of the part of being

written about, but they agree once they read a couple of the write ups and understand the concept and the intentions.

**What would you like to do if you were out on a 'real' date?**

Exactly the same as these. I would like it to be organic and real without any pretensions, pressure or agenda. To me a date of any sort is people meeting to get to know each other better and enjoy each other's company.

**Is there a particular NGO you patronise? How much does it cost you to host a meal for them?**

I don't patronise any particular NGO. It's more about bringing people's attention to as many NGOs as possible, so we visit different ones each month. The meal sponsorship can vary anywhere from ₹1,500 to ₹ 15,000.

**Your critics say this is just a publicity stunt or gimmick. Comment.**

I started posting my meal dates on Facebook among my friends circle and only started a public page after a deluge of requests from various people. The media, readers and the ladies participating in the dates found the attempt unique and genuine. I have no PR team promoting this and I don't intend to become a professional dater, so I don't see how this can be misconstrued to be a publicity gimmick. It's been a wonderful experience and a very positive one so far.

**Have your views about women undergone a change after these dates?**

I actually have always had very positive views about women. I have been spoiled by access to some amazing women from my childhood itself, including my Mum and my friends from school. Of course, each meeting and story opened me up even more.

**After the year and the 365 dates are over, what next?**

I intend to go to schools and colleges and hold discussions on gender sensitisation. Get a larger group involved with gender equality. Take a homeless person out every weekend and sponsor them any meal that they ask for, and write their stories so we can find a way to help them.

I also want to start a global, month-long social awareness festival called 'March for Change', that will help bring attention to various issues and ways in which people can contribute towards change. I have tremendous faith in humanity despite how much things are deteriorating, and I believe that everyone will help and that we can still turn things around. ■

# A 360° look at India's foreign policy

*India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has notched up many air miles in furtherance of India's foreign policy. These trips to countries as varied as the US to Ireland, promise to bring a lot of investment and goodwill India's way. V. Pramod gives us a round-up.*

**A**NY analysis of India's foreign policy would necessitate a somewhat detailed look at Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's recent visits to countries from Ireland to the United States (US).

## The G4 meet

When PM Modi hosted the G4 meet at the United Nations (UN), he sent out a very powerful message to the world that India meant business regarding its attempt to secure permanent membership of the Security Council. The country heads, comprising German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, apart from Modi himself, who were meeting after 11 long years, went on to declare themselves "legitimate"

candidates for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Modi also called for the task to be achieved immediately. The G4 countries had in my opinion, blundered by keeping away from meeting for so long. It's quite possible that more ideas could have emerged if they had met on more occasions. It's hoped at least now, that the countries will meet more frequently, to evolve strategies towards making the organisation more representative. According to the joint statement, the leaders also pledged to cooperate with the UN General Assembly President. This is certainly a move in the right direction, as it indicates that the countries would not apply undue pressure to push their

objectives. Any move by the group to exert excessive pressure like refusing to contribute troops to UN missions unless the demand is positively addressed or boycotting conferences, can entail negative consequences for the whole world. Such steps may also be counterproductive.

Modi also struck the right note by pointing out that countries contributing to the UN peacekeeping operations lacked the power to arrive at decisions.



This came about after his announcement that the nation would contribute an additional battalion of 850 troops and three police units with more representation of female peacekeepers. Those complaining of inadequate recognition for Indian peacekeepers would also be happy, as the Prime Minister sought a memorial for those who had lost their lives while on duty, also offering to financially contribute toward the project.

Apart from steps to secure more recognition for Indian efforts towards international peacekeeping operations, the Prime Minister also took the opportunity to interact with Silicon Valley executives, exploring possibilities

of investments in India. (See box) This move, besides indicating the proactive nature of the government in securing business for India, also reminds us of Modi's trip to the US last year, when he took steps to showcase India as an attractive investment destination.

## Indo-Pak ties

Though PM Modi could not meet Pakistan's PM Nawaz Sharif at the UN, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj has been very firm in refuting Pakistan's four-point plan. It may be recalled that Nawaz Sharif had proposed that both the countries formalise and respect the 2003 ceasefire understanding on the Line of Control in Kashmir, apart from eschewing the use of force and demilitarising Kashmir. He also called for unconditional mutual

withdrawal of troops from the Siachen Glacier. Swaraj replied that Pakistan had to stop sending terrorists to Kashmir, if it wanted talks. India has also done well to insist that withdrawing from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) is the only pending issue before both the countries. With this, India has indicated that it would be firm in dealing with Pakistan. Let us hope that it would continue in the same spirit. Any dialogue between the two countries will have meaning only if terrorism is firmly crushed. It should also be recalled that PM Modi did not make any mention of Pakistan in his speech at the summit. Modi also pressed for President Obama's assistance for India's membership of the international export



control regimes. He insisted that it had to be done within a time limit.

### Modi's Ireland visit and other initiatives

Narendra Modi's short visit to Ireland, undertaken before his US visit, was certainly significant, as it was the first one by an Indian Prime Minister after 1956. While critics may call the visit as only symbolic, it helps in making a beginning towards a long-term relationship.

Now, it would be worthwhile to take a look at India's foreign policy measures nearer home.

Notable steps have been taken, especially regarding ties with Bangladesh. Exchange of the enclaves is an important step in this process. Bangladesh hosts an aspirational middle class which would certainly back friendly ties with India, being fully aware of its benefits. The country also has a vibrant civil society. Both the countries can benefit economically with better ties. India is also now making efforts to improve ties with North Korea. Cynics who may wonder whether the country would be of any use to India would be advised to bear in mind that it is rich in minerals. All this began when North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong visited India sometime before Modi flew to Seoul to meet South Korean President Park Geun Hye. North Korea's economy is very much dependent on raw materials, especially iron ore and coal. The ties had weakened in recent years, as it felt India was getting closer to South Korea.

### Climate change

Modi spoke in a balanced manner about climate change. He observed that countries required freedom to frame policies with regard to climate change and called for a global public partnership for harnessing technology, innovation and finance for bringing clean and renewable energy for

### 'Likes' all the way!

The ability to secure useful projects for one's country is the trait of a successful leader. It's in this context that we look at PM Modi's visit to Silicon Valley and Google offices in the US. On his visit to San Jose, he met more than 350 business leaders. Before this, he met Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella and Google CEO Sundar Pichai. Microsoft announced that it would partner with the Government of India to provide broadband Internet connectivity for 500,000 villages. The move would help in overall development of these villages, besides equipping farmers with access to information and markets. Chip manufacturer Qualcomm announced that \$ 150 million would be invested for Indian start-ups in the mobile and Internet-of-Everything ecosystem. An innovation lab would come up in Bengaluru to provide technical and engineering support to Indian companies. Modi's visit to the Google office was also significant. Google announced that it would partner India in offering free wifi services at 500 railway stations in India. In an interesting aside, Modi wanted Khagaul near Patna to be pinpointed on Google Earth. The famous ancient astronomer Aryabhatta had his observatory at Khagaul.

A note about Modi's visit to the Facebook Headquarters (called a Townhall meeting), which was undertaken before he went to the Google Headquarters, would be in place here. CEO Mark Zuckerberg changed his profile picture to reflect India's tricolours as a gesture of support to Digital India. Zuckerberg, uncharacteristically, opened up about his parents, as did Modi, who also cried, when he spoke about his mother's sacrifices to bring him up. Zuckerberg further narrated an incident, previously unshared on a public platform. He revealed that his mentor Steve Jobs had urged him to undertake a spiritual visit to India, to a certain temple, when Facebook was going through a tough phase at its inception. The trip, he told an appreciative Modi, enabled him to reaffirm his firm's mission to connect billions of people around the world.

everybody. At present, it's believed that developed countries apply pressure on the developing world to take steps for reducing pollution, without understanding their capacity in this regard. Another step suggested is also quite practical – that people should look for lifestyle changes that would make them less dependent on energy and more sustainable in its consumption. If lifestyle changes were initiated in people from childhood, the world would be taking a step towards clean energy.

India, by submitting its climate action plan to the United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bonn, has demonstrated its willingness to be a part of the climate change plan. Under the plan, the country will combat climate change with energy efficiency, and by slashing its 'emission intensity' (carbon emission per unit of GDP) significantly, and enhance the share of clean energy by 40 per cent in its total energy mix by 2030. It has also clarified that the

plan could be successfully implemented only with cooperation from developed countries.

### Conclusion

Analysing India's foreign policy scenario, we can state with certainty that dramatic changes have been witnessed. We cannot say that everything is hunky dory, but it can be stated that a decisive beginning has been made, especially with regard to Bangladesh and North Korea. Let us hope that India takes giant strides in the future, going on to secure a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. ■

The writer has worked with daily



newspapers and prefers writing opinion pieces on issues of general and national interest, especially international and strategic topics with special reference to India.

# Building a smart India?

Given the increasing load on existing cities, the concept of Smart Cities has gained a lot of currency. So, what is a Smart City? How will Smart Cities foster inclusive development? **Avani Jain** attempts to answer some questions.

**P**ICTURE this. Every minute for the next 20 years, 30 Indians will migrate to cities. By 2050, 70 per cent of Indians will live in cities. Nearly 500 cities will be needed in the next 20 years. Well, these are some true hard-hitting facts or rather, results of growing urbanisation.

Whatever one may feel, happy for the growing urbanisation or dubious about supporting this growth, these developments undoubtedly require comprehensive growth of physical, institutional, social and economic infrastructure. All these things are important for improving the quality of life, attracting people and investment, and setting in motion a virtuous cycle of inclusive growth and development. Smart Cities are just a step in this direction.

## The origin

The concept of a Smart City originated at the time when the entire world was facing one of the worst economic crises. That was in 2008, when IBM started working on a 'Smarter City' concept as part of its smarter planet initiative. Gradually, by the beginning of 2009, the concept garnered attention of various nations across the globe. Today, there are a number of excellent precedents that India can emulate for its own Smart Cities.

A Smart City can be regarded as one which infuses 'intelligence' into the urban infrastructure and systems of a city, so that authorities can anticipate problems and deploy resources adequately to solve them. A Smart City is



**A Smart City prototype**

always efficient and faster in identifying and solving basic essential city issues. It also enables optimum savings in energy, transportation costs, efficient governance etc. It creates a sustainable habitat with wiser use of natural resources, reduced pollution levels and low carbon footprint. It thus provides high quality of life, better economic opportunities, safety and good health. It is one wherein, economic development and activity is sustainable and rationally incremental. Above all, the main focus of Smart City is on sustainable and inclusive development.

Keeping in mind the benefits of Smart City, Government of India has recently finalised the list of 98 to-be-developed Smart Cities.

## Towards inclusive development

It goes without saying that Smart Cities have the potential to make urbanisation more inclusive, bringing together all the sectors including formal

and informal, connecting urban centres with the peripheries, delivering services for the rich and the poor alike, and integrating the migrants and the poor into the city. In fact, developing Smart Cities is all about rethinking cities as integrated, liveable and of course inclusive. Smart Cities always put people first.

## Key elements

Elements responsible for inclusive development are precisely the key elements of Smart City as well. They include:

- Assured electricity supply
- Adequate water supply
- Sanitation, including waste management
- Infrastructure development
- Affordable housing, especially for the poor
- Safety of public
- Healthcare facilities



## A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of Smart Cities:

### Strengths

- India's demographic dividend and increasing urbanisation
- Creation of new business destinations
- Huge land parcels available on the outskirts of most cities
- Mixed land use in area-based developments
- Inclusive development of society and city
- Housing opportunities for all
- Assured electricity and water supply
- Infrastructure development
- Healthcare and educational institutes

### Weaknesses

- Major parts of lands identified for Smart City development have rural influence and acquisition of land can be a major hurdle
- Moderate success of Private Public Partnership (PPP) model
- Poor connectivity and absence of job opportunities

### Opportunities

- Global experience suggests Smart Cities can bring a good economic turnaround
- Better quality of life than existing cities
- India's increasing adaptability towards technology
- Awareness about sustainability and green buildings

### Threats

- Slow approvals and execution on ground
- Activism and judicial interventions

- Educational institutes
- Sustainable environment and green buildings
- Efficient urban mobility and public transport
- Robust IT connectivity and digitalisation
- Good governance, especially e-governance and citizen services

### Smart Cities equals smart development

Apart from the key elements, some typical features responsible for comprehensive development are also included in the Smart City mission:

- Expanding housing opportunities for all, thereby leading to inclusive development
- Reducing congestion, air pollution

- and resource depletion
- Establishing efficient road network not only for vehicles and public transport, but also for pedestrians and cyclists
- Enhancing the quality of life of citizens by reducing the urban heat effects and promoting eco-balance
- Making governance citizen-friendly and cost effective
- Providing a boost to the local economy and ensuring security
- Giving an identity to the city based on its main economic activity such as local cuisine, health, education, arts and crafts, culture, sports goods, furniture, hosiery, textile, dairy etc.
- Applying smart solutions to infrastructure and services in area-based development in order to make

them better. Like making areas less vulnerable to disasters, using fewer resources and providing cheaper services.

- Promoting mixed land use in area-based developments

### A futuristic vision of urbanisation in India

With the allotment of ₹ 6,000 crores (\$962 million), India has clearly shown all, the will to build Smart Cities and transform existing cities into high-class urban areas. However, the key question and debate is that despite all the features and elements defined, whether Smart Cities will be all-inclusive so that all classes, irrespective of their financial status will be able to afford to stay there and enjoy quality services.

Well, we don't know what the Government is thinking on that front, but experts opine, they should develop customised inclusive development plans that can be later integrated with the mainstream urban planning process. Further, in order to live up to the concept of inclusiveness in the Smart City project, the Government should ensure that such cities get proper sanitation facilities and its people breathe clean air and get clean drinking water with 24/7 power supply at an affordable price.

In a nutshell, inclusive development is one wherein, people sans their class, get all the amenities and participate in the growth process, well-being of the planet is ensured, environment is protected and the carbon footprint is in control. So, if Smart Cities are developed as per plan, then inclusive development is very much possible. ■



The writer is presently doing Master of Mass Communication (Journalism) from Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication, Pune.

# Wart a problem!

*How often have you been troubled by what you think is a corn on the foot? Only on consulting a doctor do you understand if it is a harmless corn or a viral infection called warts. So what is the difference? Dr. T.D. Rajan helps to unravel this mysterious skin infection.*

**W**ARTS are dirty looking growths on the skin which multiply without causing any pain or itching. They seem harmless over most parts of the body except when it appears on pressure-bearing areas of the feet or the fingers.

These are caused by Human Papillomavirus (HPV) which enters the skin through tiny nicks and cuts. Once it gains entry into the upper layers of the skin (epidermis), it hijacks the cell to multiply more rapidly than the surrounding cells, leading to a tiny bump with a rough surface.

Warts can occur at any age and on any part of the body. However, they are commonly seen on the fingers, hands, forearms, legs, face and neck. In housewives and canteen workers they are very common due to repeated injuries and cuts during work. Likewise, they are often seen in embroidery workers, hairdressers and butchers. On the feet, warts commonly occur among farmers and people who walk bare feet.

## Types of warts

Here are the types of warts which occur in human beings.

- The classical type, common warts (medically termed *Verruca vulgaris*) are cauliflower-like growths that can occur on any part of the body, but the commonest areas are the forearms, hands and feet. By themselves, warts cause no itching or pain. However, when the wart is located on the weight-bearing areas of the feet, pressure point of the hands or around the nail, pain is common.
- Being contagious, they spread not only on one's own body by contact; they also spread rapidly to others. Children get warts on their body from parents who have unknowingly transferred it from their fingers! School-going children may get warts on the elbows and knees due to injuries from the playground.
- On the face, warts give an unclean appearance. There are different varieties of warts on the face. The commonest types are plane warts which look flat, rough and gray, thread-like projections called Filiform warts and multiple threads arising from a common base, called Digitate warts.
- Unlike in women, in men warts are known to cause havoc on the face by rapidly multiplying into large numbers. By repeated cuts during shaving, a man with a couple of neglected warts may find over twenty or thirty warts all over the cheeks and chin, in a few months.
- Warts can occur around the nail and may sometimes grow beneath the nail causing distortion of the nail itself. These often are painful and could interfere with day to day activities. Children may find it difficult to hold the pencil in such cases.
- Warts arising on the feet (plantar warts) do not get elevated but get compressed by the weight of the body. Thus it forms a compressed mass, which looks like a corn (see box) with a dirty surface. Warts located on the heel and along the ball of the great toe cause intense pain, interfering with walking or sports activities.
- Warts can also occur on the genital areas. Being transmissible, they can spread to the partner through sexual intercourse.



**Warts can occur at any age and on any part of the body**





**Warts around the nails can often be very painful**

- In extremely rare situations, some types of HPV causing genital warts have been implicated to cause cancer of the cervix (the lower part of the uterus).

### How are warts treated?

Although warts are generally harmless and could even disappear spontaneously when left alone, once they are noticed they need to be quickly removed as they are liable to spread and multiply. Treatment of viral warts is a challenge as they sometimes tend to reappear at newer places. Even after all warts are treated, one should be alert to the appearance of newer warts, as there is no internal medication against HPV.

**Local medications:** Local medications containing fluorouracil, imiquimod and cantharidin are applied to the wart to allow them to shrivel and fall off. Unfortunately, these applications have to be repeated at intervals to ensure successful treatment.

**Chemical treatment:** Application of a combination of acids (Salicylic acid-lactic acid in an alcoholic film) to the wart every night after soaking the wart, helps to dry up the superficial layers. By

gently scraping with a file and repeating this application over a couple of weeks the wart gets shed off. The process must be continued till the doctor confirms that the entire mass has come off. These acids must be applied with caution to avoid spilling on to eyes and other sensitive areas. On the face, these acids are not usually recommended. It is best to ask your doctor to demonstrate the actual method of application so that no harm is caused to the surrounding skin.

**Electrocautery/Lase:** The wart is removed by burning it through CO<sub>2</sub> laser or electrocautery after numbing it with local anesthetic agents. The entire mass of the wart thus gets expelled and the wound thus created heals over a few days with a neat scar.

**Freezing:** A cryotherapy tip freezes the wart through a flow of Nitrous oxide gas. Alternatively, 'liquid nitrogen' tipped applicator is used to destroy the wart. Over the next few days a bubble develops at the spot which ruptures and heals with normal skin. In some locations, the process needs to be repeated after a couple of weeks to clear the wart.

**Surgical removal:** In some cases, the wart is too large to be treated by other methods and needs to be operated and removed. When warts occur under the nail or close to the nail bed, surgery to remove the nail may be necessary before removing the wart.

**Oral medications:** There are no specific oral medicines to treat warts. However, nutritional supplements are often given to boost immunity. Tablets containing zinc are given as they work as immunomodulators and help the body to expel the wart virus.

### Conclusion

Warts are thus one of the most harmless of viral infections, but they

### Corn or wart?



**Plantar wart under the foot**

People think that corns and warts are the same. It is not. While warts are caused by viruses, corns are not. Corns are simple thickening of the skin, particularly on the palms and soles due to repeated friction over a small area. It could be due to the pressure of holding an instrument at work or a knife while cutting vegetables.

On the foot, an ill-fitting shoe could cause repeated friction at one point leading to a thick, hard, mass of skin. When the skin is soaked and then scraped, powdery skin is obtained till the entire corn is scraped off. So, in short, it is nothing but thickened layers of dead cells of the skin.

Pain occurs in both cases due to its mass compressing the deeper tissues. However, warts cause severe pain when the pressure falls on it at an angle, like when one steps on an uneven surface.

need to be completely eradicated to prevent it becoming a social nuisance. Left alone, it is bound to multiply on the skin and become contagious to others who mingle together at home, school or at work. It is important to comply with the doctor's instructions to keep treating it till the last wart is eradicated to avoid the risk of recurrence. ■

**The writer is a senior skin and sexually transmitted diseases specialist, practising in Mumbai. He advises pharmaceutical companies on drug branding, promotion and marketing. He is a writer on social top-**



**ics in the print and electronic media, as well as in pharmaceutical magazines. Dr. Rajan is also an Hon. consultant to ONGC, Larsen & Toubro and Air India.**

# Mallika's tryst with child labour

*Bonded labour still exists in "free" India, where young girls under 15 work in textile mills in exchange for a monetary package that goes towards meeting their dowry. Deprived of their childhood, education and even wages, these girls who slog for 16 to 18 hours a day in challenging conditions, land up with crippling ailments at a young age, writes Kirthi Jayakumar.*

**M**ALLIKA is 34-years-old and spends her days taking care of her home and three boys, who keep her on her toes. They run around her all day vying for her attention and she tries her best to get them to listen to her, even though it's virtually impossible to get a word in edgeways. To an outsider, Mallika and her little ones may make for an endearing image, but the young mother's desperately sad eyes and her subsequent confession make it hard not to feel that life has indeed short-changed her. Like most teenage girls, Mallika had many hopes for her future. "I wanted to study in a good school and college, dress up in colourful clothes and have fancy bags like the glamorous city girls, work in an office with the latest computers, earn lots of money and save so that my family and I would lead a comfortable life. None of that has happened – or will ever happen," she rues.

Reality hit her hard the day a broker approached her parents in their little village near Srirangam in Tamil Nadu, to convince them to send her off to work for a textile mill in the nearby town of Dindigul under the *Sumangali Thittam* arrangement. As part of this widely followed practice in the countryside, girls between 13 and 18 years are hired to work as bonded labour in textile factories in exchange for a monetary package that goes towards meeting their marriage expenses.

Although bonded labour was

legally abolished in India in 1976 and was also declared a gross human rights violation in 1984 after the Supreme Court's landmark decision in the 'Bandhua Mukti Morcha' case, the practice continues to this day, particularly in rural areas, mainly due to weak or non-existent law enforcement. *Sumangali Thittam* is effectively a modern version of the extreme exploitation and abuse that bonded labourers traditionally faced. The system pivots around the perception that a girl child is essentially a liability and that she can 'redeem' herself by working to earn her own dowry. So much so, that most impoverished families would rather have their girls toil long hours in airless factories to make a tidy sum that is simply handed over to her prospective in-laws, than undertake the expense of educating her in the hope that she would one day get a proper job and contribute to the household income.

The scheme unfolds thus: brokers or employment contractors hired by local spinning mills go into the remote villages to entice parents into signing a three to four year contract with them at the assurance that not only will their girls be taken care of – 'perks' such as daily wages along with free boarding, lodging and meals are guaranteed as



**The practice of bonded labour continues, especially in the rural areas, with many young girls finding themselves trapped in exploitative work places. (Photo credit: Bernard Gagnon)**

part of the deal – but that at the end of said time they would also receive a lump sum of ₹30,000 or so, which they can use as they deem fit.

Unfortunately, the treatment meted out to them as well as their working conditions on the ground are quite the opposite. For starters, the youngsters are defined as "apprentices" and not as "employees", which instantly deprives them of their rights. Besides, they are forced to slog for a gruelling 16 to 18 hours daily and are seldom given any wages. On their feet for hours on end lands them with crippling ailments - from several allergies to chronic back pain and stomach disorders - very early in life. In fact, research reveals that many girls in such set ups have complained of developing severe physical illnesses apart from enduring mental trauma and sexual abuse. **(Continued on page 51)**



# Partition, once again

India's Partition may have happened almost 70 years ago, but it still looms large in our collective conscience. It also continues to spawn stories of grief and grit. Like the movie *Rajkahini*, which is a uniquely told story set in what was once East Pakistan and is now Bangladesh. **Shoma A. Chatterji** reviews the film and its premise

“WHEN Sir Cyril Radcliffe drew the line dividing the country, he had no freaking idea of the topography, demographics or socioeconomic divisions. The only driving principle was the ratio of majority versus minority on the basis of religion. The division was random and clumsy. The line passed through jungles, hills, rivers - sometimes through villages and even houses. The idea of this line struck me the most and I decided that this had to be the central narrative of *Rajkahini*. Here, the house becomes a metaphor for the country - in a brothel, there is no discrimination between high caste and low caste, Hindu and Muslim. Everyone works and the unifying factor is money. My story explores what happens when this line divides this house, just as it also divides India”, Srijit Mukherjee,

eminent director of contemporary Bengali cinema, describes the core of the story of his new film *Rajkahini* that throws the Partition story in a completely unique perspective.

## Radcliffe's Line or a hasty act of division?

Radcliffe and the other commissioners, with solid backgrounds in law, did not have the specialised knowledge this job demanded. They had no advisers to inform them of the well-established procedures and information needed to draw a boundary. Nor was there time to gather the survey and regional information. The absence of experts and advisers, such as the United Nations was deliberate, to avoid delay. The film is in Bengali, but its subject spans the entire country and even Bangladesh, which was once a part of India and then became a part of Pakistan, to become an independent nation in 1971.

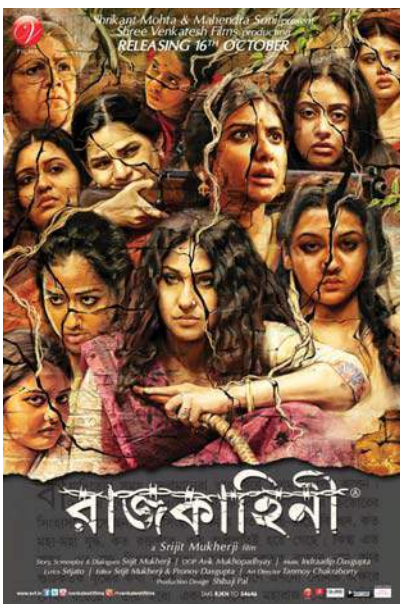
Pakistan was created as the homeland for Muslims while the (new) India was secular and comprised a majority of Hindus. Part of this Line dividing India and East Pakistan (that later became Bangladesh) went through a mansion in Rajshahi which was once the house of a Zamindar (landlord) and



Rituparna Sengupta (on the cot) as Begum Jaan in the movie

had later evolved into a brothel housing eleven sex workers from different backgrounds, coming from different communities, yet living and working together to eke out a living.

When they are commanded to evacuate the house they have lived and worked in all these years, they voice a collective protest because they consider this their home and they have no option to live elsewhere. Which part of the dividing line will they be allowed to move into – India or East Pakistan? Why should the line pass through their house? But their questions keep hanging in the air because as sex workers, they live in the margins of society that considers them social outcasts - so whether they live or die or where they live and how they live is of no concern to the powers-that-be that includes the local Muslim and Hindu fraternity, alongside the British officers, who are vested with the authority of evacuating



The poster of the film *Rajkahini*

them. "For me, the brothel stands as a metaphor for the country, because within a brothel and those who inhabit it, the man-made discriminations do not exist and the sole unifying factor is money. My story explores what happens when this line divides this house, just as it also divides India. There have been many films made on the impact of the Partition and the leading name is that of Ritwik Ghatak. This is while the Partition is about to take place, does take place and what happens during the drawing of the Radcliffe Line," Srijit elaborates.

While exploring a new subject for a novel film, Srijit began researching literature on and about the Partition. By the end of 2013, he began reading the works of Sadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Urvashi Butalia, Suvir Kaul, Mushirul Hasan, Haimanti Roy and Jaya Chatterjee. "What struck me was the way women on either side of the imaginary Radcliffe Line were treated irrespective of caste, class, age and social status. The worst affected were the women in the margins. In this film, the lead is taken by Begum Jaan portrayed by National Award winning actress Rituparna Sengupta. Along with her girls, she forms a group and trains them in combat with *lathis* and guns. The name Begum Jaan has been inspired from a character from Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf* and the other character Rubina in the film played by Parno Mitra is also named after the other character in the same story. You can say



**Actress Parno Mitra acts as one of the women in the brothel**

that these women are my personal tribute to Ismat Chughtai," says Srijit. He has also named a male character Salim Mirza after the protagonist in Sayeed Mirza's film *Garam Hawa*. The women underwent tough training in wielding the *lathi* and guns in preparation for the battle they wage against the people who come to evacuate them.

The 11 women are portrayed by some of the most talented and committed artistes in Bengali cinema led by Lily Chakraborty who plays the old and retired sex worker who is a maternal figure for the women. The other actresses are Jaya Hassan (Bangladesh), Parno Mitra, Sudipta Chakraborty, Priyanka Sarkar, Shayoni Ghosh, Ena Saha, Ditipriya Ghosh, Riddhima Ghosh and Sohini Sarkar. Rituparna Sengupta who is a top lead actress of Bengali cinema, needed to strip herself of all her previous heroine portrayals to imbibe the toughness the character of Begum Jaan demanded. She turned her voice into a coarse and rough grind with intensive rehearsals in the dubbing theatre to make it realistic and rough and hoarse. She considers it one of the most outstanding performances of her career.

There are nine male characters who represent other forms of torture, inspiration and leadership in different manifestations. Rudranil Ghosh plays the 'man' in the woman's world of the brothel while Abir Chatterjee plays an inspirational leader Master-*da*, "not to be confused with the legendary Master-*da* (Surya Sen) of the *Chattagram Astragar Lunthan*," says Abir. Kanchan Mullick plays a diabolic



**Actress Sohini Sarkar and Shayoni Ghosh in the film**

officer of the British government and Rajatava Dutta plays an arch villain in a Muslim garb. Saswata Chatterjee and Koushik Sen play childhood friends, Hindi and Muslim respectively, whose friendship is threatened by the events prior to the Partition which however, fails to break their bonding. Others are Nigel Akkara, Jisshu Sengupta and Biswajit Chakraborty.

Another attraction of *Rajkahini* is the rendering of the song *Bharata Bhagya Bidhata* picked from the remaining four stanzas from Tagore's poem composed in 1911, of which the first two were officially recognised as the National Anthem of the country in 1950 - *Jana gana mana*. The best singers in West Bengal, irrespective of caste, class, creed and regional factions, have contributed to this number without accepting any payment. What more could Srijit Mukherjee, his production banner Shree Venkatesh Films and his entire team and crew want? ■

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



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



# Bangles for the bride

*The practice of wearing bangles is an age-old one in India. Each region has its own speciality and traditional designs. Some of these practices are being discontinued in the name of modernity though, rues **Shoma A. Chatterji**. Hopefully, some traditions will endure.*

**M**ERE haathon mein nau nau choodiyan hai is only one of the many refrains picked from songs in Hindi films that are very popular among the masses. Another famous number is *Bindiya chamkegi, choodi khankegi* from another film. Bangles (*choodiyan*) are an integral part of the Indian woman's wear, especially after she gets married. Bangles are traditionally a part of the *solah shringar* of Indian brides. It is mandatory for newly wed brides and would-be-brides to wear bangles made of glass, gold or other metals, as they signify the long life of the husband. They signify good fortune and prosperity. Traditionally, breaking of the bridal glass or lac bangles was once considered inauspicious. Different coloured bangles traditionally signify different things. Red signifies energy and prosperity, while green denotes good luck and fertility. Yellow bangles are meant for happiness, white is for new beginnings and orange is for success. Silver bangles denote strength and gold bangles are the ultimate symbol of fortune and prosperity.

## The unique *shankha-paula* bangle

Among the several varieties of bangles worn by married women of different regional cultures, a rare presence is defined by the *shankha* and *paula* worn by married women in Bengal. It is now *infra dig* for young women, married or

not, to sport these two bangles with any kind of wear – Western or Indian or any other. It originated in what is now Bangladesh. Few people however, including Bengali women who wear it, know about the history and origins of the *shankha* and the *paula*.

The beautiful sound of the conch shell blowing rhythmically in a Bengali home infuses the mood of a beautiful celebration of life – the wedding of two souls bound in matrimony for all time to come. The

nuptials and after a turmeric bath. A brief religious ceremony is traditionally performed on the morning of the wedding to welcome Goddess Shakti. In some families, the father or guardian of the bride gives her a pair of conch bangles during the chanting of wedding hymns. The groom also brings a pair for her. The bangle set the bride wears is called *shankha-paula*, comprising one bracelet in white conch shell and one in red.

A Bengali wife also traditionally

wears a plain iron bangle next to the skin, usually on the left wrist, in order to protect her husband from the evil eye. Traditionally, a married woman avoids buying a second pair unless the existing ones break because the breaking of these bangles is said to be inauspicious and considered to be a bad omen. In case a bangle cracks or breaks, it must



A Bengali bride wearing the *shankha-paula* bangle set

conch shell is considered auspicious among the Hindu community in India. The general whiteness of the conch shell – though it is also in off-white and patterned streaks, is a symbol of purity. Banabhatt's *Kadambari* mentions Goddess Saraswati wearing a thick bangle (*kangan*) crafted out of a conch shell.

White bangles crafted out of conch shells called the *shankha*, and red bangles made out of coral simply called *paula*, are mandatory marriage symbols for the Bengali wife which she first wears on the day of her marriage before

be replaced without the husband being aware of it. No wife is supposed to say, 'my *shankha* broke' or 'my *paula* cracked.' When a Bengali wife finds that a *shankha* or a *paula* bangle has cracked or has broken – they are very fragile – she uses euphemisms like 'my *shankha* has increased' or 'my *paula* is jingling.' The same euphemism is used when the stock of rice in the family larder is finished. The parallel drawn between the two points out the auspiciousness of rice and the red and white bangle on the one hand, and the nurturing qualities inherent

in the wife who feeds the whole family, on the other. Rice is symbolic of Goddess Annapurna, “anna” meaning food or rice in Bengali and ‘poorna’ meaning ‘full of.’ The ideal Bengali wife is often compared to the Goddess Annapurna, as a compliment. Hindu women, who are not well-off, nowadays, wear white, plastic bangles, which look like *shankhas*, as they cannot afford the real *shankhas*.

The *paula* is traditionally, a plain gold bangle without designs except for gold ornamentations. But the *shankha* is purely a work of art practiced by skilled and creative artisans who go under the professional umbrella of ‘*shankharis*’ – craftsmen specialising in making artifacts out of conch shells with the *shankha* commanding the highest demand. Conch bangles or *shankhas* are decorated with about 25 types of engravings.

Lotus bud, lily petal, buds of wild flowers, sheaf of paddy and shape of jasmine are among the common designs. The joints of the bangles are neatly done and covered with engravings to make them invisible.

Habiba Khatun, who has done considerable research on the famous *shankhari-pada* in Dhaka, Bangladesh, writes that designs of fish, Capricorn, butterfly, pitcher, *chillum*, lotus bud, paddy sheaf; leaf of marigold, parakeet and bamboo line are crafted on these bangles. The *shankhas* have names to identify the designs such as *banshrekhi* (bamboo-lined), *karnishdar* (arched), *khayesha* (desired), *bachhadar* (select), *phultaranga* (waving flower), diamond *karya* (diamond work), *makarchehara* (Capricorn face), *rangeela* (colored), Ram-Lakshman (holy brothers), paddy sheaf and *padmakali* (lotus bud). Families who cannot afford these very expensive *shankhas* usually buy the low-priced variety decorated with water flowers like the lily. If gold is used for lacings and decorations, the price will rise according to the quantity of gold used and the degree of craftsmanship

### The Dhaka connection

Dhaka was once renowned for *shankha shilpa*, the art of making bangles and other kinds of ornamental adornments from conch shells. Originally centered in Shankari Bazaar in the Old Town, the area had been home to these artisans for centuries. It was an affluent, vibrant locality in old Dhaka, until the Pakistani army destroyed most of it in 1971. The artisans have rebuilt their houses and businesses since, but the rich lustre of the bygone days is missing. This delicate art, *shankha shilpa*, is so time-old that archaeologists suggest images of the conch shell bangles and the like are evident in terracotta art, much earlier than the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The *karigars* or workers of *shankha shilpa*, are traditionally called *shankha banik*. James Wise (1883) had written about the *shankharis* and recorded in his journal that of the total 11,453 artisans, 835 used to live in old Dhaka. According to the *Shankhari Bazaar Shankha Shilpa Karigar Samity*, the organisation for the dwellers of *Shankhari Bazaar*, there are at present 36 proprietors, owning 15 shops, with a total number of 104 workers employed by them.

that it demands. Handicrafts and jewels crafted out of the conch shell is an ancient cottage craft among Bengalis.

Though the modern Bengali bride dispenses with the *shankha* and the *paula* about a week after the wedding, she retains the *loha* mostly laced or decorated in gold. Bengali cinema, but for a few exceptions, has remained loyal to its screen depiction of the Bengali bride and the Bengali wife. She continues to sport the *shankha* and the *paula* along with the *loha* on the Bengali screen even when the film is made in Hindi. From Bimal Roy’s *Devdas* (1959) to Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Devdas* (2002), through Rituparno Ghosh’s *Chokher Bali* (2003), the Bengali bride is enriched and visually enhanced as the duet of the *shankha* and the *paula* embraces her graceful wrists.

Bangles of green glass are signs of the *akhand soubhagyavati* in Maharashtra, Konkan districts and so on. In Maharashtra, the bridal *chooda* is significantly different. The brides wear green glass bangles in odd numbers. The green signifies creativity, new life and fertility. They wear these along with solid gold bangles called *paatlya* and carved *kadas* called *tode*. The gold bangles are usually gifted by the groom’s family. Married women of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Kutch wear

bangles made of bones which also double up as a caste sign depicting the *banjara* communities they belong to. Punjabi brides are easily recognisable from the *chooda* they wear when newly married. A *chooda* is a set of bangles usually worn alternating red with white or any other colour, but mainly confined to two colours. Traditionally made of ivory, since ivory is banned now, they must have located cheaper substitutes like plastic. Both Hindu and Sikh Punjabi brides wear the *chooda* and it is common among brides in the North. The bride wears the *chooda* for 40 days from the day she puts them on and on the 40<sup>th</sup> day, no one other than her husband can remove them. If she wishes, she can wear them as long as she wishes to and till her husband is alive. ■

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.



# Not just Tamasha!

*Tamasha and Lavani are two very easily identifiable dramas of rural Maharashtra. Very popular, and with some risqué elements, these theatrical art forms are sometimes looked down upon by the elite, says Dr. Kanak Rele. But the rest enjoy them to the hilt.*

ONCE the night falls, the atmosphere of rural Maharashtra throbs to the beat of the *dholki* (percussion instrument), *ghunghroos* (ankle bells), *tuntune* (a string instrument), *halgi* (a large daff) and *manjeeraa* (little cymbals). Soon is heard the singing – the main singer accompanied by another singer called *surtyaa* (the provider of the *sur* or drone, whose singing is in a higher pitch than the main singer. A spirited playing of the entire orchestra announces the coming forth of a performance called ‘Tamasha’ in Marathi.

## Origin of Tamasha

Tamasha is actually a theatrical form whose origin and development are traced to the towering personality of Ram Joshi (1762 A.D. to 1812 A.D.) His literary prowess was equal in Sanskrit and Marathi. His association with the gigantic personality of Moropanta, whose name is outstanding in contemporary Marathi writing, resulted in a new metrical type of singing today popularly called Lavani. Ram Joshi endeavoured to channelise this singing for moral purposes.

Some historians have traced this style of singing to the Gondhal in which a form of religious discourse is conducted, and the Lavani which provided mass entertainment in the



A Lavani performance

form of ‘question’ (*savaa*) and ‘answer’ (*jawaab*). Gondhal is associated chiefly with the ‘Shakti’ worship offered in Maharashtra to Ambaa-*aai* (roughly translated as *Ambaa-mata*). The Lavani on the other hand, though following the question-answer format, is romantic and mundane in character.

The Tamasha is performed purely as an earthy dance drama, which many a times degenerated to a vulgar level, and thus was looked down upon by the educated and sophisticated strata of the Maharashtrian society.

## The performance

The performance of Tamasha can be held anywhere in the village square or the courtyard of a house or even in an open field or the modern stage. Once the entire orchestra together with the singers enters the stage and renders an invocation to Ganapati – the favourite deity of Maharashtra, the entire group moves forward and backwards with their back to the audience.

The principal singer who acts as the *Suthradhar* sings the invocation which is called *gaana* and is then joined by another important character called the *songadya* (the *Vidushaka* or jester). The *gaana* is followed by the *gavalana* or *gavalanee*. Here the devotional mood is almost dispensed with and is replaced by an atmosphere of mundane love, teasing and titillation. The *gavalana* is not a male actor in female garb, but is actually a woman who starts a dialogue with the *Suthradhar*.

The entry of this woman actor-cum-dancer is what sends a thrill of anticipation in the spectators. The main female artiste enters the stage with her



A Tamasha performance underway

back to the audience, both her hands stretched above her head, holding the *pallu* of her sari. This increases the eagerness of the audience, which is predominantly male, to see the face of the dancer. She is followed all over the stage by the musicians. The female dance’s refrain *aaika ho!aika* (listen, all of you) has made Lavani presentation very popular all over Maharashtra state.

She now starts her dialogue with the *songadya* (*Vidushaka* or jester). Some members of the orchestra also join in this conversation. In these passages there is ample scope for both pure dance (*nritta*) by the female character (*gavalanee*) as also witty, erotic dialogue. A very popular theme in this connection is that of Krishna demanding toll on the main road from the *gavalanees* (shepherdesses). The *songadya* assumes the character of Krishna and indulges in blatant eve-teasing, accompanied with tomfoolery and, many a times, starkly mundane repartee. This is the secularisation of a religious theme which reminds the audience that even the gods and their play-things are not entities from the other world; rather, they are akin to our own worldly existence and can be full of fun and frolic.

## The risqué element

Today the entry of the female character/characters itself is highly titillating. The entry with their back to the audience, with their bodies draped very tightly in the nine yards (*nav-vaaree*) saris, their entire demeanour is risqué, rather than philosophical. Now the actual play begins. The principal singer lays bare the foibles of the central character and is supported by the other actors by singing the refrain *jee-jee*. The male characters adopt certain stylised walk on the stage; it is the woman who is the chief exponent of dancing. Their dancing reminds one of Kathak since they wear layers of *ghungroos* on their ankles like the Kathak dancers, but their foot work is different. They also perform intricate rhythmic patterns, but there are

hardly any *chakkars* (spins or whirling movements). There is no discernible system of *hastas* (hand gestures) which can interpret words into a definitely etched vocabulary.

The musical system is a blend of classical Hindustani *raagas* and many folk and indigenous melodies. All this rich fare of rituals, farce, sarcasm, dance and music concludes with an *aarti* – something which is the core of the Maharashtrian system. The costumes are representative of those designated for different castes. The most eye-catching part of the costume is the *pheta* (turban) that each type of musician or character sports. The women are dressed in the traditional *nav-vaaree* saris.

In the mid-1800s there occurred a sort of revolution in the method of

performing the Tamasha, ushered by Vishnu Bhave and his talented successor Annasaheb Kirloskar – both of whom changed the presentation qualitatively and also made music an integral part of the performance, which started displaying a certain level of sophistication. This most welcome change has resulted in the *sangeet-naataka* – so very dear to Maharashtrians, resulting in a very distinct genre of music, which is today called 'Naatya Sangeet'. ■



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

## Mallika's tryst with child labour (Continued from page 45)

As Mallika's children get busy playing, she takes a breather to recall the horrific years she spent as a bonded labourer. She takes her time to tell her story. "I was recruited along with a bunch of other girls from my village when I turned 14. From then on, I worked non-stop for four years. I had to spin yarn standing all day long and was soon suffering from acute pain in my lower back and knees. Then I developed a condition wherein I heard a constant buzzing in my ear even when I was not working. It was eventually diagnosed as low blood pressure and tinnitus. Later on, marriage, which was my escape route, came with its own set of problems and challenges. When I was expecting my first child, I was so weak physically that I was sure I wouldn't survive the pregnancy. It was just too much to bear. My entire body and nervous system had gone for a toss with the back-breaking labour I had been forced to do for years," she shares.

Whereas her physical injuries have slowly healed, the mental scars and the pain of broken dreams is something Mallika is still struggling to come to terms with. And it's heartrending to know that there are hundreds of



**Under the widespread practice of Sumangali Thittam in the countryside in Tamil Nadu, adolescent girls are brought into the textile factories to work for extensive hours every day in exchange for a monetary package that goes towards meeting their marriage expenses. (Photo credit: Bernard Gagnon)**

thousands of Mallikas across the state, grappling with the agony of compromise they have been forced to make. Of course, what is even worse is that the elders still do not see the injustice in this situation.

Gnanashekar, one of the older men living on the outskirts of Srirangam, sent both his daughters to work in a mill under the *Sumangali Thittam* arrangement and does not regret his decision in any way. "What

is wrong with what I did?" he retorts vehemently. "I am a daily wage worker and I make just enough to feed myself and my wife and pay for my son's education. I couldn't have afforded the upkeep of my daughters, leave alone their weddings. So I let them go to work in the textile mills when they were 14 and 16, respectively. Now they are settled and have their own families. There is nothing wrong in making such a choice. When you are poor, it doesn't matter where your money comes from, particularly if you are not doing anything illegal," he adds.

Ironically enough, Gnanashekar doesn't see the illegality in this form of bonded labour. "What is illegal in this? Nothing! The girls go there, work, and instead of a monthly wage, they get a meal or two a day, and when they get married, they are given a dowry. What else do girls need money for if not for their dowry? And that is something this system enables them to have."

As infuriating and unfair as this may sound to a feminist or a rights activist, this is the reality on the ground. Patriarchy has many manifestations and this is just another one that needs to be challenged. ■

(© Women's Feature Service)



# Living in hope

*There are many small, vulnerable, forest communities in India, which are facing threat to their very existence because of depletion of forests and their livelihoods based on these natural resources. How can we help them?*



**Bharat Dogra**

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

**I**N 1982, when three youngsters motivated with high ideals but having nil resources settled down in a village inhabited by the weakest and the most vulnerable community of their area, they could hardly have imagined that their small hesitant step would one day become the biggest hope for this community. But yes, this is exactly the reality after 33 years of dedicated work. Now 'Sankalp', the organisation founded by the three inexperienced youth - Mahesh Bindal, Motilal and Neelu - has become a source of strength for the badly exploited Sahariya tribe, the only officially recognised primitive tribe in Rajasthan, which is concentrated in Shahbad and Kishanganj *tehsils* of Baran district.

Till just a few decades back, when there was abundant vacant lands, the Sahariyas were masters of all that they surveyed, and practised shifting cultivation. But with changing times, they had to give it up and due to their lack of understanding of the formal/legal system (as well as the land-grab tactics pursued by influential persons and groups), the Sahariyas lost most of their land. Their forest rights were also curtailed, and in any case, with the depletion of forests, the prospects of livelihood based on collecting forest produce dwindled rapidly.

In this dismal situation, Sankalp is making efforts (including taking legal action), to ensure that Sahariyas' land rights are better protected and they don't have to face frequent eviction drives. In addition, Sankalp has played a leading role in the acceptance of a 'forest enclosures' scheme in which forest protection committees of Sahariyas get access to minor forest produce and grass of enclosed forest areas. They were paid legal wages for soil and water conservation work, digging trenches and constructing boundary wall, while at the same time they contributed voluntary work for planting and protecting trees. Sankalp's campaign for livelihood rights of Sahariyas has been helped by a project supported by UNDP for natural resource management, which enabled the organisation to try several innovative ideas in organic farming, medicinal plants, afforestation and related issues.

An acute drought situation in the year 2002 accentuated hunger and malnutrition among the Sahariyas and other vulnerable groups to such an extent that many hunger deaths were reported. This was the time when Sankalp assembled all its reserves of strength, and all its human and material resources to campaign for the food rights of the most vulnerable people. The need for stepping up relief work, improving the public distribution system, making available concessional and free grain to the poorest families, improving the functioning of nutrition and health programmes like ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) were emphasised in this campaign. The government responded quite well and in the span of a few months, a discernible change could be seen in many hamlets of Sahariyas and other vulnerable groups which now had reasonable stocks of grain. Sankalp also started nutrition centres at about 40 places. These centres made an important contribution to meeting the nutrition needs of some of the most vulnerable families at a very difficult time.

This campaign also helped to widen the horizons of Sankalp activists and prepared them for the important supportive role they played later in the national campaigns for right to information and rural employment guarantee laws. This phase of Sankalp work also saw increasing mobilisation of Sahariya women and the formation of the *Jagrat Mahila Sangathan*. An activist of Sankalp, Charumitra, played a very important role in this. She worked day and night for the growing unity and strength of Sahariya women in overcoming many problems. This unity was badly needed when Sankalp took up its most difficult but successful task of release and rehabilitation of a large number of bonded labourers.

Recently, Sankalp suffered from two big tragedies. Motilal, the founder member and secretary of Sankalp, died suddenly on September 23. Earlier, Charumitra had died at a young age, creating a void which is hard to fill. It is time now for other activists to contribute more to continue this work which brought new hope to Sahariya tribals. ■

# Beyond inflation

*Food constitutes more than 40% of an Indian household's budget. Can inflation be lower if food is more expensive? A look at the economics of agricultural growth and food consumption in India.*



**Anuradha Kalhan**  
is a Fellow at Teen Murti, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).

THE cue for this column was a comment overheard at the grocery store. A loud cantankerous voice wanted to know how the Governor of the Reserve Bank had decided that inflation had fallen. The old gentleman was paying for edibles, fruits and vegetables. He said, loudly again, that almost everything was more expensive than 6 months ago. I leaned over to help him with his bag and mentioned that the Governor said that the prices were still going up, only the rate at which the price of everything was going up had fallen. That seemed to infuriate more than edify. He wanted to know whether the Governor thought that “after crossing ₹ 100 per kg, should lentils gallop to overtake meat?” I abandoned him rather quickly on that hazardous topic.

But the truth is that food inflation has been close to double digits for almost a decade. That does take the base price up pretty high and even a small increase on that high base is bound to hurt in a country where food is more than 40% of household consumption (unlike a developed country where it is about 10%). Effective inflation rates will rise as we go down the socio-economic pyramid. At present, the government in power does not seem to have a stated policy on it. The basic reason for endemic food inflation is overall supply shortages compared to demand. Agricultural growth has been much slower than the overall per capita income growth for two decades. These domestic supply shortages are made good by imports. That also exposes domestic prices to external shock. Augmenting domestic production, subsidising expensive agricultural inputs and distribution should be the pillar of food policy, and indeed some rescue efforts were made in the past few years, but policy seems to have become indifferent to farmers again.

The second reason is widespread difference between the wholesale and retail prices, in other words, the food distribution system. Organised retail was peddled as the final solution. Organised retail in the grocery segment has grown

fastest as food prices have soared. Traditional agricultural produce whole sale markets (Agricultural Produce Marketing Corporations or APMCs) were also spoilers. They were said to be controlled by large grain traders, biased against the majority i.e., small farmers. Commodity exchanges were created to balance the value chains. Multi Commodity Exchange of India has been around since 2003, long enough to suggest that it does not help to reduce food prices either. On 29 September 2015, SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) and FMC (Forward Markets Commission) were merged – apparently, this move to merge two regulatory bodies, one of the stock exchange and the other of the commodity exchange, will help the government in managing inflation from the wholesale *mandi*/APMC onwards, correct wild speculation and illegal activities. It is also expected to pave the way for foreign institutional investors (FIIs) to speculate in food prices in India.

The third reason is definitely as old as Vedic time, irregular monsoon. In July, fears for the current year's agricultural produce were already being voiced. Cost of food increased by almost 4% in September, over the same month in 2014. Irrigation inadequacy was and is the main reason for over dependence on monsoon. Regrettably, no private sector company is announcing major irrigation projects across rural India (on the other hand, ports, roads and bridges projects are in the news). Only drip irrigation ideas from Israel are being discussed. (Opinion is divided, with some saying that it consumes more power and is too expensive to lay out.) The irrigation projects will not be profitable till either farm land is corporatised or the irrigation company can charge distribution charges, which more than recover costs. Such charges will both increase food inflation and bankrupt the farmers.

Since there is no other plan in the news, the default plan is more food inflation veiled by lower overall inflation. And the default plan is going to hurt. ■





## Mela Magic

*The Indian calendar is dotted with fairs and festivals. As the winter season slips in, the country gears up for its biggest fairs.*

### FESTIVAL

**F**AIRS have been held all over the world from time immemorial. They offered a great opportunity to merchants from distant lands to trade their wares.

Fairs continue to play an important role in promoting trade. A wide range of products may be marketed at fairs — from animals and automobiles to books and art. And when a funfair with rides and stalls is added to the proceedings, it becomes an exciting place for families to have a day of fun.

Clear blue skies and cool climates see people coming out in large numbers to attend fairs in different parts of India. The most famous of them all is the **Pushkar Mela** of Rajasthan.

Home to one of the rare Brahma temples in India, Pushkar hosts an annual camel and livestock fair during Kartik Purnima (around November). While pilgrims throng the venue to take a dip in the holy Pushkar Lake, others eagerly witness a spectacle of village India at its colourful best.

Camels are not just bought and sold — they are also dressed, paraded and entered into beauty and dance competitions and races. Quirky competitions like 'longest moustache', turban-tying, *matka-phod* etc. handicraft bazaars and traditional cultural shows heighten the carnival atmosphere.

Bikaner also hosts a similar cattle fair at the same time, the **Kolayat Fair** or the **Kapil Muni Fair**, named after the great sage.

The **Harihar Kshetra Mela**, also known as the **Sonepur Mela**



held in Bihar draws more than 6 lakh visitors every year. Touted as the biggest animal fair in India, it trades in a variety of animals like elephants, dogs, cats, monkeys, fish and poultry apart from livestock.

The annual **Gangasagar Mela** draws large crowds on the island of Sagardwip in West Bengal where the Hooghly flows into the Bay of Bengal. It is believed to be the spot where Prince Bhagirath brought River Ganga down to earth with the help of Lord Shiva. On the day of Makar Sankranti in January, thousands of pilgrims take a holy dip in the ice-cold waters of the sea. Stalls sell myriad items like household utensils, clothes, conch shells, toys and foodstuffs, enthralling pilgrims and tourists alike.

### AMAZING LIVING WORLD



## Kiss squeaks

Orangutans in Indonesia's Borneo island have devised an ingenious technique to lower the frequency of their alarm calls called kiss squeaks.

The apes use leaves to alter the frequency of the kiss squeaks and make the calls sound deeper. As deeper calls are usually associated with larger animals, predators like leopards, snakes and tigers are fooled into thinking the ape is larger than it actually is and hesitate to attack it. According to Madeleine Hardus, a primatologist from the University of Utrecht, Netherlands, orangutans are the only non-human primates that have been found using tools to manipulate sound.



## Jai Vilas Palace

THE Jai Vilas Palace in Gwalior is a grand example of the opulence and elegance that were the hallmarks of the erstwhile princely abodes. It was built in 1875 by Jayajirao Scindia, the Maharaja of Gwalior. A part of the palace (35 rooms) has now been converted into a museum while the remaining area continues to be occupied by the Scindia family. The palace is a unique blend of various European architectural styles, drawing inspiration from Buckingham Palace, Palace of Versailles and the Greek ruins. Even the interiors reflect a distinct European influence as most of the furniture, tapestries and artifacts are from France and Italy. The Durbar Hall is undoubtedly the most impressive with walls adorned with gold leaves and an ornate gilded ceiling. A pair of Belgian style chandeliers weighing several tonnes is said to be among the largest in the world. The story goes that ten elephants were taken on to the roof to test the strength of the building before the chandeliers were hung! Fine Persian carpets, ornate mirrors, heavy draperies and antique French furniture — all make for a true royal experience. But the crowning glory is certainly the electric silver train with cut-glass wagons. The elegant train would chug around



on miniature silver rails serving guests seated around a massive dining table.

The queen Chinoo Rani's chambers are unique. Chinoo Rani was particularly short and the king had everything customised to her height! Among her personal memorabilia, her bejewelled mini-slippers are indeed fascinating!

A beautifully crafted Venetian cut-glass cradle is used for Lord Krishna on the occasion of Janmashtami.

STORY

## Willow wife

HEITARO the farmer had built his house near a giant willow tree – a tree that was as old as the hills. Perhaps because he lived so near it, Heitaro loved the tree passionately. So deep was his attachment, that when the villagers wanted to cut it down and use its wood to build a bridge over the river, Heitaro was indignant.

“Take the trees that grow on my farm,” he said. “I cannot bear my willow to be soiled by hundreds of feet!”

One night, when Heitaro was sitting under the tree, he felt a presence beside him. It was a beautiful woman. He assumed that she had come to meet her beloved and made as if to go.

“Oh, I am not meeting anyone,” said the woman, reading his mind. “He will not come.”

Seeing his puzzled look, the woman continued, “He is here right now - his heart has always been in this willow tree.”

With that she disappeared. Heitaro saw Higo (her name meant ‘willow’) every evening in the same spot and he slowly



grew to love her. When he asked her to marry him, she agreed. A year later, they had a son and their cup of joy was full.

Then the king sent word that he was building a temple to Kwannon the goddess of mercy.

He required all the good timber that could be had. The villagers wanted to cut down the great willow tree and this time, Heitaro's arguments and pleading cut no ice with them. That night, Heitaro was jolted awake by a scream. It was Higo.

“Heitaro, they are cutting down the willow tree. Look at its shadow, how it trembles in the moonlight. I can feel its pain in every fibre of my being. Oh, how they tear and cut me to pieces! The pain, the pain!” she wailed. “My willow wife! Please don't weep!” begged Heitaro, taking her in his arms.

Outside there was a thunderous crash. Heitaro looked down. He found that he was holding not Higo, but a bunch of slender golden willow leaves.

— A tale from Japan

© 2015 Amrita Bharati, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan



# TENALI RAMAKRISHNA

Court poet and wise jester (early 16<sup>th</sup> century)

**T**HE story of Tenali Ramakrishna, the court poet-jester of Emperor Krishnadevaraya, is a unique one. From a poor boy who lost his father early in life, he rose to be a well-known historical figure.

Born in present Andhra state during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, he grew up in his uncle's town Tenali and thus the moniker 'Tenali' Ramakrishna. In those days, education meant the study of the Vedas, the Upanishads and religious texts. The powerful Vaishnavites, however, did not accept him as a disciple because Tenali was a Shaivite. Even Shaivite scholars, fearing the Vaishnavites, refused to teach him, asking him instead, to beg for a living. Finally he met, according to folklore, a *sadhu* (sage) who advised him to chant the mantra "Jai Mahakali! Jai Jai Kalika Matha" eleven crore times with great devotion at the temple of Kalika Devi (Kali).

So, it is said, Ramakrishna sat motionless in *padmasana* (lotus-legged) posture, closed his eyes and began to chant in the dilapidated ruined temple. Happy with his devotion, Kali manifested on the 11<sup>th</sup> day and asked him what he wanted. Ramakrishna, instead, started laughing and when questioned, explained, "Divine Mother! When we catch cold, we feel that two hands are insufficient to wipe our only nose. If you catch cold will your two hands be enough to wipe your thousand noses? The thought made me laugh", he said and sought her forgiveness.

The boy's smile and sense of humour is said to have pleased Kalika Devi. She blessed him and told him to go to the famous Vijayanagar Empire in the South, where the king would appoint him as court poet. "You will be famous as the great humourist, the comic poet Ramakrishna".

Folklore has it that Ramakrishna managed to surreptitiously become part of a famous 'Bhagavatha Mela' troupe (actors in a folk-play) from Tanjore who were performing a play called 'Krishna Leela' before the king. He dressed himself as a cowherd and carrying a big churning stick on his

shoulder, bribed the two guards at the gate, who insisted he share with them half of whatever the king gave him. Raja Krishnadevaraya and the courtiers enjoyed the play, but the Raja was upset when he got to know Ramakrishna was an imposter, and he ordered him to be given a hundred lashes as reward! Ramakrishna begged of the king to have the palace guards summoned. When they were ushered in, Ramakrishna asked them: "Did I not promise to give each of you half of

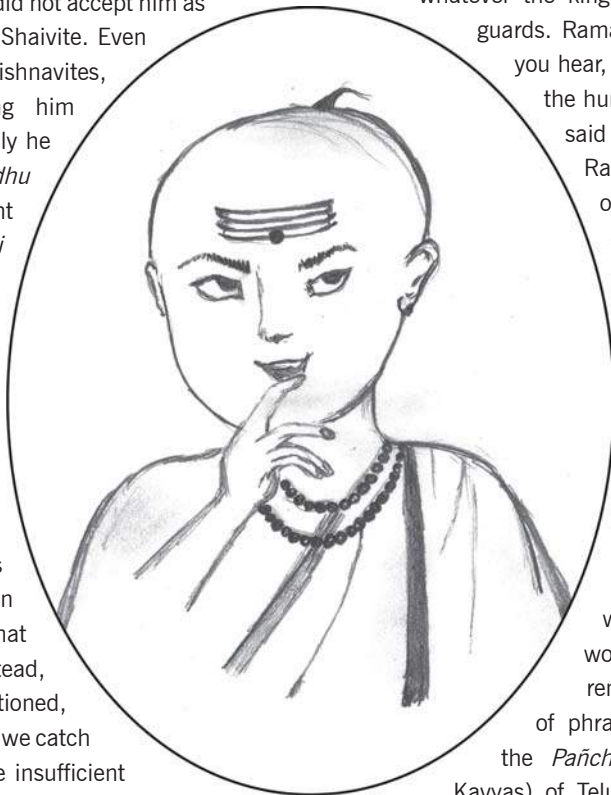
whatever the king gave me?" "Yes," said the two guards. Ramakrishna turned to the king: "Did you hear, Your Highness? They are to share the hundred lashes!" Krishnadevaraya is said to have decided on the spot that Ramakrishna would be the 8<sup>th</sup> scholar of his court. Tenali Ramakrishna came to be known as 'Vikatakavi' (jester poet), and was one of the *Ashtadiggajas* (eight poets) at the court of Krishnadevaraya, the Vijayanagara emperor who reigned from 1509–1529. He was an advisor and was instrumental in protecting the king many times, coming to his rescue in critical situations with his wit and strategy. He composed works on Hinduism. His great work *Panduranga Mahatmyam* is remarkable for its sonorous dignity of phrasing, and is counted as one of the *Pañcha Mahākāvya*s (the Five Great Kavyas) of Telugu literature. He was conferred the title 'Kumara Bharathi', for his works. The famous *Mahishasura Mardini stotram*, the Sanskrit poem of adoration of the Mother Goddess is attributed to him. He also authored *Ghatikachala Mahathme* and the *Linga Purana*.

But by nature Ramakrishna was a jester. He knew that laughter was a powerful weapon and could be used to expose foolish pride and stupidity. Many stories which highlight his love of humour have gained currency and have been passed down through generations. ■

the title 'Kumara Bharathi', for his works. The famous *Mahishasura Mardini stotram*, the Sanskrit poem of adoration of the Mother Goddess is attributed to him. He also authored *Ghatikachala Mahathme* and the *Linga Purana*.

But by nature Ramakrishna was a jester. He knew that laughter was a powerful weapon and could be used to expose foolish pride and stupidity. Many stories which highlight his love of humour have gained currency and have been passed down through generations. ■

– A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, poet and short story writer.



## AIR COMMODORE NARAYANRAO KHANDERAO SHITOLEY, DFC

Valiant soldier (1923-2006)

**N**ARAYANRAO Shitoley (popularly called Nanu by friends) was born in December 1923. His father had served in the Gwalior State Army and had taken part in World War I. He studied at the Royal Indian Military College (RIMC), Dehradun, from 1935 to 1941. The Indian Air Force (IAF) had not been getting good officers and an Air Force officer visited the RIMC in 1941 to recruit suitable cadets. Nanu was selected and after passing the medical tests at Royal Air Force (RAF) station at Lahore, carried out his military training at Lahore and Pune. One year's training at Hyderabad included navigation, radio telegraphy, gunnery and artillery spotting techniques. He was now entitled as an Observer to wear a badge of half wing with the letter 'O'. He was posted to No. 5 CDF at Cochin.

A great shortage of pilots was felt in 1942 and Observers were given the option to re-muster as pilots. Nanu took the opportunity. Flying training was imparted at Hyderabad and Ambala. He flew about 150 hours on Harvard and 40 hours on Hurricane aircrafts. His first posting was to No. 1 Squadron where the commanding officer was Squadron Leader (later Martial of the Air Force) Arjan Singh. The airfield was shared with No. 28 Squadron of the RAF and a Squadron of U.S. Air Force (USAF). There was hardly any interaction with the Americans as they had their own mess and technical area. The squadron was given tasks for photo-reconnaissance and ground attack support, which had often to be carried out at tree top level, demanding zero margin for error. The Hurricane aircrafts of the IAF were highly vulnerable to Japanese superior planes and their anti-aircraft guns. They were provided escort by RAF Spitfire aircrafts of the RAF for deep reconnaissance missions. Keen to fly, only a month after joining the squadron, he could make it to the airfield in bad weather. The unit successfully completed photo-reconnaissance of the target area in October 1944. A total of 9,555 copies of the photographs were printed and dropped to forward troops, a task for which the squadron received congratulatory messages from the GOC XXXIII Corps.

The British launched a major offensive in December and the

Japanese forces fell back. In the rapid advance achieved by the British, aerial reconnaissance to determine the position of own troops was critical. This information had to be conveyed to the forces in marked maps. Imphal was too far from the area of operations and the Squadron moved to Kan airfield, about 175 miles south of Imphal. Crossing of River Irrawady was planned for February and accurate information of the enemy positions and preparations was a high priority task allotted to the Squadron. Nanu along with other pilots was busy in photo-reconnaissance and hitting opportunity targets.

As the ground forces approached Meiktila, No.1 Squadron moved to Sinthe. The Army was under great pressure to take Meiktila, which had strong anti-aircraft defences. Four planes of the squadron were hit seriously. The Japanese reacted vigorously and taking off from Rangoon airfield, 300 miles away, bombed the Sinthe airfield. This feat showed their superb airmanship. There followed a see-saw battle with counter-attacks by the Japanese forces. Finally, Meiktila was taken on 3 April, which was a great blow to Japan. The Squadron had been in intense action for 14 months during which it had flown 4,813 sorties over 7,219 hours, an enviable record. It was relieved by No. 9 Squadron on 26 March.

The Squadron was complimented for reliable photo-reconnaissance and high serviceability of the aircrafts by Air Vice-Marshal Stanley Vincent. Nanu was awarded DFC for outstanding work.

He commanded the newly formed Communication Squadron from 1949 to 1951 after Independence. He had once flown Nehru from Delhi to Mumbai. On the return flight, he noticed that air speed was not showing as the crew had put the pilot cover on. Returning to Mumbai would have reflected poorly on the IAF. He continued on to Delhi relying on his flying skills. He attended a flight safety course at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1961, and was Station Commander at Palam. He retired in April 1975 and settled in Mumbai. He passed away on 1 December 2006. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd)  
(Sketch by C.D. Rane)





# 'AACHI' MANORAMA

Versatile actor and performer (1937-2015)

ONE of the most prolific and versatile actors of Tamil cinema, the legendary Manorama passed away at the age of 78, as she succumbed to a multiple organ failure on 10 October 2015, casting a pall of gloom over the entire South Indian film fraternity. Affectionately called 'Aachi', the 78-year-old is survived by her only son, actor/singer Bhoopathy. A powerhouse performer, Manorama was a household name in Tamil Nadu.

Born as Gopishantha, the youngster's passion for theatre led her to S.S. Rajendran, a noted drama artist of the 1950s. Impressed by her flawless dialogue delivery, Rajendran offered her a job in his drama company, the 'SSR Nataka Mandram'.

Thus began her long and illustrious career that spanned six decades with over 5000 stage performances, 1500 films and several TV serials. Some of her earlier plays were penned by stalwarts like C. N. Annadurai (*Sivaji Kanda Hindu Samrajyam*) and M. Karunanidhi (*Manimagudam*), who later became influential political leaders. Manorama holds the distinction of having worked with five chief ministers - C. N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran, J. Jayalalitha, and N. T. Rama Rao, who served as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh for three terms.

Raised in poverty, Manorama started her acting career as a drama artist when she was just 12 years old. Her first stage production was titled *Yaar Maghan*. It was during those days that she was rechristened Manorama by one of her directors, Thiruvengadam.

In the year 1958, under the guidance of renowned poet and lyricist, Kavignar Kannadasan, Manorama made her first appearance in films. It was for a small comical role in the film, *Maalayitta Mangai* starring T.R. Mahalingam and Pandari Bai.

In an interview in her later years, the actress is said to have credited Kannadasan with not only introducing her to films, but also convincing her to take up the role of a comedy artist, which he said would help her survive far longer than the traditional heroines of the time.

Though she did work as a lead heroine in a few films, it was her innate sense of humour and perfect comic timing

that made her a phenomenal success. Her exceptional on-screen chemistry with the legendary Nagesh, made them one of the most sought after pairs of Tamil cinema. They worked together in more than 50 films, *Kanni Thai*, *Anbe Vaa*, *Padagotti*, *Anubhavi Raja Anubhavi*, *Saraswathi Sabadham*, *Panjavarnakilli*, *Navarathiri* and *Puthiya Paravai*, to name a few.

While she kept the audience in splits with a straight face and clever dialogue delivery, she could just as effortlessly move them to tears with her heartrending performances.

One of her most memorable characters is the bubbly Karuppai alias "Jil Jil" Ramamani from the super hit film *Thillana Mohanambal*. The film

featured legends, Sivaji and Padmini, but a young Manorama with her non-stop chatter and exuberance won the hearts of many. She may have played the quintessential sister, mother and grandmother innumerable times, but the ingenious variation she brought to the character each time was her biggest strength. Her seemingly effortless performance was further complemented by her mastery of the different dialects of the Tamil language. She was last seen in director Hari's *Singam 2* in 2013.

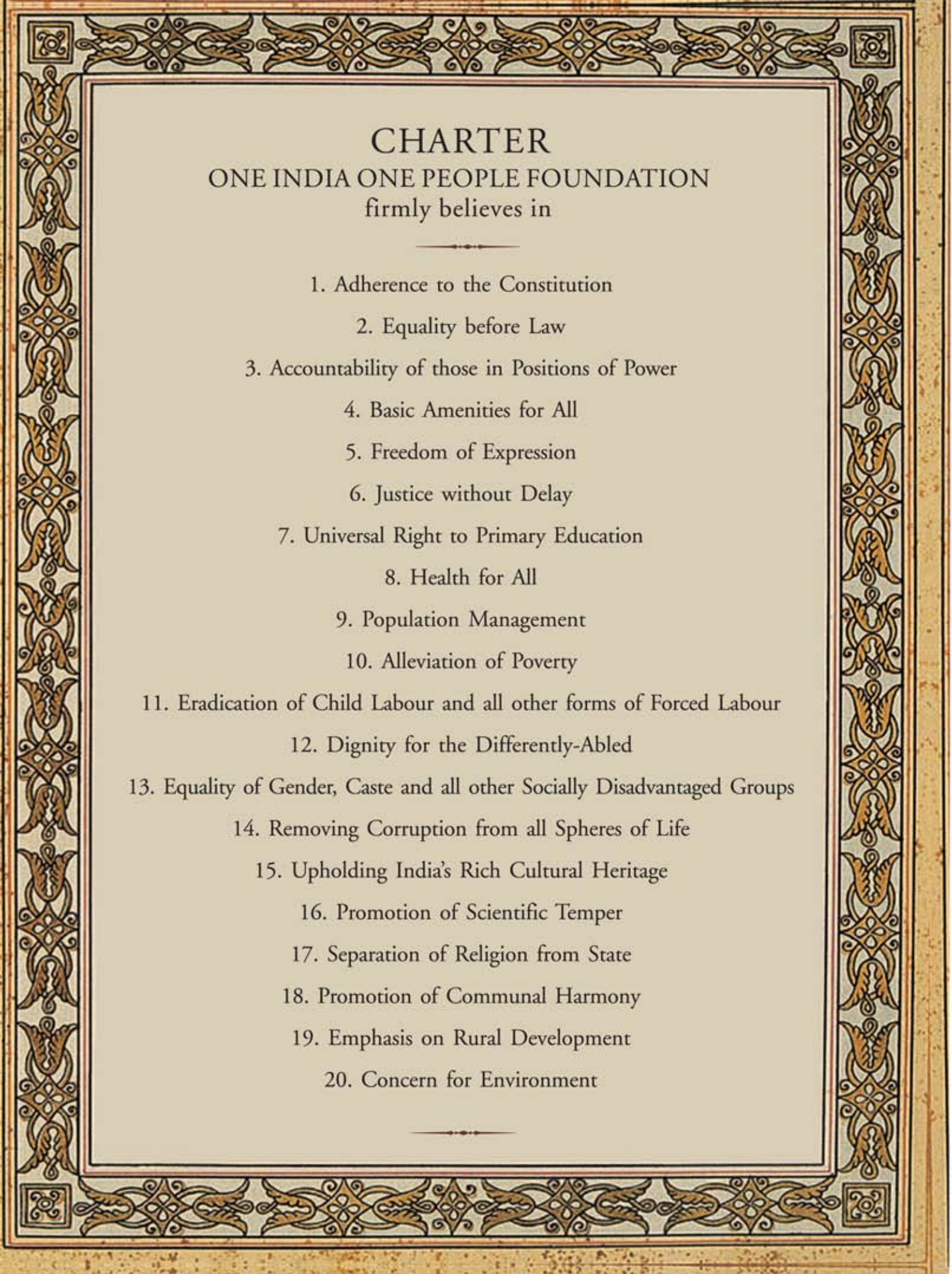
Manorama was also an accomplished singer, with over 100 songs to her credit. She has worked with composers like M. S. Viswanathan, Ilayaraja, and A. R. Rahman. One of her biggest hits was the *Vaa Vaathiyaare Uttaande* number composed by music director V. Kumar for the film *Bommalattam*. The song was picturised on Manorama and Cho Ramaswamy, with whom she had acted in over 20 films. Manorama was once referred to as the female version of actor Sivaji Ganesan by Cho at a popular Tamil talk show, *Koffee with Anu*.

The multitasking actress was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2002 and is also the recipient of the Kalaimamani Award by the government of Tamil Nadu. She also won the National Film Award for Best Supporting Actress for her brilliant performance in the film *Pudhiya Padhai* in 1989. ■

– S. Saraswathi is a freelance journalist residing in Chennai and specialises in features and human interest stories.

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

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE