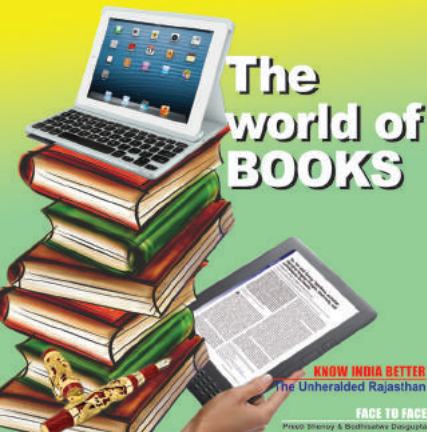


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**Preethi Shetty & Bodhisattwa Dasgupta**

**Great Indians: Dr. Veena Mazumdar / Lalgudi Jayaraman / Major Suahil Alma KC**

# MORPARIA'S PAGE

CITIZEN SURVEILLANCE

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INDIAN STYLE



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**Managing editor**  
Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde

**Editor**  
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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Let us conserve our environment

The topic of conservation (OIOP, July 2013 issue) was a timely one, especially after the Uttarakhand flood. While natural calamities cannot be stopped, what can be done is to stop exploiting nature for our selfish needs. The flood would have any how caused damage but the degree of destruction could have been definitely minimised had the government taken proper steps to check whether the so called development projects were in tune with the hilly environment. How much can you change the course of rivers, break mountains and destroy forests to fulfill the greed of a few? Hope, all of us, the citizens of India, would now learn a lesson from this tragedy and ensure that our environment is protected and conserved, so that it protects us in return, and that our children too would be able to enjoy the bounties of nature, as we could, to some extent. Kudos to OIOP for taking up such a topical issue and covering all its aspects so aptly!

– Rajiv N. Sharma, Pune

### Water, a valuable commodity – do not waste it

The OIOP July 2013 issue 'Conserve...or Perish' was a good

read. I especially liked the article 'Every drop counts' by Dr. Arvind Kumar. This year, Mumbai received good rains and reports indicate that at least three of the city's lakes which provide water to the city all year through have overflowed, because of which there might not be any water cuts this year. Reason to rejoice. But should we sit back and relax now that we do not have to worry about water shortage this year? Rains or not, what is needed today is water conservation and what better way to do it than rain water harvesting? It should be made mandatory that every building and house, not just in cities but even in villages, should harvest rain water. Considering the increase in population and the percentage of potable water available, the day will not be far when we will have to face acute water shortage or even droughts. As Dr. Kumar says, let us make the 3Rs our mantra – reduce, recycle and reuse.

– Neelima Rajan, Mumbai

Letters should be addressed to  
The Editor, 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 / oiop@vsnl.net www.oneindiaonepeople.com



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# Go ahead and write!

*Indian English writers are very much in demand as V Gangadhar finds out. After all, his lift man, dhobi, a taxi driver and even his wife have churned out best sellers.*

THE old lift in our building groaned as it started its slow journey up. The lift man, now in his 70's, having convinced himself that the lift would continue its journey up safely, sat down on his small stool, drew out a black book and began to scribble something.

"Household accounts?" I asked. "It is good to know how much one earns and how much one spends in these days of inflation."

"No, sir," the liftman replied with an embarrassed laugh. "This is the third chapter of my first novel in English and it is coming along nicely. I studied upto standard VIII and know some English. But then knowing English is not necessary these days to write a novel in that language. That is what our milkman told me. He is now onto his third novel, all in English."

"This is quite remarkable," I observed. "I thought anyone who decided to write a novel had to master the language in which they decide to write it. You are a good liftman but as for writing a novel in English....."

"Ha, you don't know the modern trends in Indian fiction writing," he sneered as the lift came to a stop. "Have a look at some of the Indian novels in English. Language....bah!"

"We will talk about this later," I told him, got off the lift, entered the flat and spotted the bundle of ironed clothes left behind by our *dhobi*. When I lifted the bundle to put it aside, a packet full of papers fell down. "Did you give the *dhobi* some papers to be ironed?" I asked my wife.

She looked up from the magazine she was reading. "Oh, there it is!" she exclaimed. "It is the first draft of the novel our *dhobi* is writing. Good theme, all about a shirt which went on an eternal search for a perfect iron. Lots of symbolism and things like that."

"Shirt, in search of a perfect iron!" I exclaimed! "What does it mean?"

"The *dhobi* tried to explain but it went over my head," my wife confessed. "He says he got the idea from the hissing sound from a shirt when he placed a hot iron over it. These creative people..... they have such peculiar ideas."

"Who wants to read such stuff?" I wanted to know. "I mean a normal novel is okay....."

"Indian modern fiction is different," my wife explained. "It had to be realistic, reflect real life, use earthy language. Our *dhobi* and liftman told me they used only the 'gali' words which they heard and used all the time. Neo-realism, they called it. Mind you, three publishers made him handsome offers for this book and he is now negotiating international rights for the same."

"Strange world," I said. "Suddenly everyone is on a writing spree."

My wife hesitated a bit. "Fiction writing brought some relief to those who did the same kind of work daily. By the way, you are in for some surprise." She extended her hand and announced, "Meet the author of 'Cutting Carrots', a crime thriller about a serial killer who develops the habit of cutting off the heads of women who cut carrots in the kitchen. It is quite gruesome. My publisher who is releasing the book next month was full of praise. Said it would make a wonderful theme for a horror movie and Vikram Bhatt has already made an offer for filming it. It will star Emran Hashmi who has developed a passion for kissing carrots."

Too stunned to speak, I went out and got into a cab for some outing but felt hungry after sometime. "*Chalo*, let us go home, *Mujhe bhook lagin hain*".

The cabbie who had been quiet till then came alive. "Thank God, you said it. I mean the word 'Bhook'. I am writing a book for the 'Booker Prize' but forgot its name. Thanks for reminding me."

"What is the book about?" I wanted to know.

The cabbie smiled. "I want to ask the Booker people to consider my book for the prize in the 'faction' category, I mean a mixture of fact and fiction. The hero is actually the taxi which recounts and exposes the misdeeds of its owner – ignoring passengers, tampering with the meter, overcharging passengers, going on strikes every other day and being rude to everyone. Oh, Mumbaikars would just love the book! Just by reading it would make them believe they were travelling in the city's cabs." ■



The writer is a well-known satirist.

# Indian English writers in great demand

*In a constantly changing and relentlessly growing literary scenario, Indian writers in English have carved a niche for themselves and are now determining their own way forward, says Debina Chattopadhyay.*

INDIAN English literature seems to have finally come to terms with its place of origin—India. Indian writers living in India are depicting India as it really is, not an exoticised version or only as a background. India itself is also ready to accept Indian writers in English. This is indeed a commendable departure from the school of thought that believed that such writers were not at par with vernacular writers or that such writings were classist or written only for an international audience. English is now a very Indian language, with there being several states and cities where locals would rather talk in English than in Hindi. Indian English Literature has come a long way from the times of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* or R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends*.

Salman Rushdie, with his *Midnight's Children*, can be largely credited with placing India on the international literary map. *Midnight's Children* not only won the Booker Prize in 1981 but also the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and the Best of Booker in 2008. This inaugurated the literature of the Indian diaspora, which gained enormous popularity in the West. Immigrant writers like Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee, who wrote about their homeland from distant shores, had recurring themes of alienation and assimilation, of roots and rootlessness. Desai also explores the theme of loneliness, which is a manifestation of both the psyche and the external circumstances of an immigrant.

## How The God of Small Things paved way for things bigger

The present interest and growth of Indian English Literature, however, can be largely attributed to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which marked a definite departure from the kind of diasporic literature that had been spawned by the likes of Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai, amongst others. Though undoubtedly masters like Salman Rushdie and VS Naipaul had paved the way for Roy's novel, yet this kind of acceptance of



Arundhati Roy

Indian English literature that was not an Indian immigrant's idea of home, but an essentially Indian story told by an Indian ushered in a new era. Thereon there has been a sustained flow of English fiction and non-fiction by Indian writers.

Arundhati Roy winning the Booker prize seemed to immediately position her novel as a noteworthy achievement in the Indian market as well. Given our post-colonial hangover, we often have an inclination to idolise anything that has been accepted by the occidental world; thus the popularity of Indian English writings abroad made our own literary circles appreciate this hitherto overlooked genre. It was a huge boost to Indian writers in English, as many of whom, till then, had been rather sceptical about whether an Indian story told in English would be accepted and appreciated, both at home and abroad.

## Remarkable demand for English Indian literature

Globalisation has also generated a great deal of global interest in India. India's position as a power to reckon with has played a vital role in drawing international attention to India. Though the West even now seems to be charmed by stories of an exotic India, they are gradually waking up to the real India. Of late, Indian English literature has seen remarkable demand and hence growth in the international market, which has led to many foreign publishers coming to India. The interest garnered by Indian writers in English in the Frankfurt Book Fair, the biggest book and media fair in the world, speaks volumes about the optimistic outlook of Indian English literature.

The West has always differentiated between a native English speaker and a non-native one. This had put many a writer at a disadvantage, irrespective of how good their knowledge of the language was. Now, with most Indians, especially those



Immigrant writers like Anita Desai explored the theme of loneliness, a manifestation of both the psyche and the external circumstances of an immigrant



**Chetan Bhagat**



**Aravind Adiga**



**Amish Tripathi**

*These young writers brought in diverse, but essentially Indian, themes in focus*

educational, including religious, spiritual, health, cookery, and self-help, are being published in English. English is no longer the language of the urban elite; it has gradually percolated to B and C towns and even rural areas, as it is now a basic means of official communication.

### Translations into English, a boost to vernacular literature

There has also been a spurt in the translation of vernacular literature to English. This is a great boon for vernacular literature as with English becoming an increasingly popular medium of communication and vernacular languages unfortunately being disregarded to an extent, these works are gaining a much bigger audience. Many, however, feel that the nuances that are fundamental to a particular language get lost in translation, but this can be assumed to be true for all languages, not just Indian languages and dialects. Translations are vital for the growth of literature as they provide book lovers the opportunity to enjoy works written in different languages from across the world. Quality, however, needs to be ensured—mere word for word translation may actually kill a text; the essence has to be communicated as well. Therein lies the triumph of a good translation.

### No more exoticising India, but stories focus on the real India

Acceptance of Indian writing in English in the home market has been greatly enhanced by factors like the kind of language used, plot, setting, style, and themes. Exoticising India has come down considerably, giving way to stories of the real India, as we know it. Diverse, but essentially Indian, themes are in focus. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* delves into the intricacies of life in India—the India that is caught between the lure of liberalisation and the shackles of poverty and caste system (besides other concerns). The issue here is not about

authenticity; it is about bringing forth this dichotomy, which is an integral part of present-day India.

Being able to identify has always been one of the yardsticks of popularity. English literate Indians often choose stories set in an Indian village or city with known customs, where the reader is more likely to be knowledgeable of an inside joke or the social milieu, over the story of a faraway land with alien allusions. Chetan Bhagat's *Five*

*Point Someone* and *One Night@the Call Centre* can be seen as cases in point. Though these have been criticised for mediocrity, yet they have been hugely popular because of the setting, plot, and style.

### Book marketing gets quirky

Indian publishing has also come a long way in terms of marketing, packaging and PR. Quirky marketing and visibility on the Internet can translate to very high numbers. Amish Tripathi, the author of *The Immortals of Meluha* (the first of the Shiva Trilogy), till then unknown, printed copies of the first chapter and had them distributed for free. This teaser campaign of sorts, along with the promotions in social media, got him the desired results. This is also a consequence of the latest of trend of young professionals taking up writing as a parallel career. These professionals make the best use of their network and every available media platform to market their book. Tripathi, however, was hardly the first to come up with a plan to promote his work—Chetan Bhagat had in fact sent a marketing plan with his manuscript.

In this constantly changing and relentlessly growing literary scenario, Indian writers in English have carved a niche for

themselves and are now determining their own way forward. ■



The writer is a seasoned writing and editing professional with extensive experience in print and digital media. Currently juggling freelance assignments and deadlines along with the demands of motherhood, this Masters in English Literature has not let go of her passion for the written word.

### Maxim

*The child who is decked with prince's robes and who has jewelled chains round his neck loses all pleasure in his play; his dress hampers him at every step.*

*In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust he keeps himself from the world, and is afraid even to move.*

*Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery, if it keep one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth, if it rob one of the right of entrance to the great fair of common human life.*

– From *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore

# Will ebooks kill the printed word?

*Books in digital formats are putting a speedy end to delivery hiccups, storage issues, insurance and all the associated publishing bugbears. **Rama Kumaraswamy Thoopal** talks about the impact of technology on book publishing and by default literature.*

**D**OES the printed page have a future? In an increasingly wired world, this sounds like a rhetorical question that hardly brooks debate.

After all, how does one weighty tome hold up against a slick device that can absorb several weighty tomes? Furthermore, nifty tools like instant annotations, synonym finders and the ability to connect digitally with other readers, all at the swipe of a screen, make your average bundled e-book a formidable contender. Try stacking that up against a printed book.

On the flipside, the printed book still has its advantages. For starters, a hard-print edition is more robust and is less likely to fall prey to the vagaries of technology. It reads well in strong sunlight, requires zero battery power and most of us still swear by its familiar contours and peculiar smell.

But to all appearances, technology is sounding the death knell of book publishing and by default literature.

Over the past few years printing, paper, and distribution costs have been steadily increasing while the march of the ages has had an inverse effect on electronic storage and communication costs. The economics of traditional publishing has not exactly held up. Distribution, transportation, warehousing, insurance, salaries and more eat into profits. Titles have to be produced in large print runs and sell its print run – there is no other way out. First time authors and new talent are treated warily, after all it is just not feasible to take a chance or indulge in trial (read: small) print runs.

Magazines have been hit just as bad. If there were any lingering doubts, they were put to rest when *Newsweek* ended its nearly 8 decade print run last year. However, the magazine hasn't downed its shutters just yet – it lives on, albeit in a wholly digital avatar.

## E-books continue to be the big daddy of digital deliveries

So how does technology affect literature beyond the obvious? To comprehend this, we first need to understand what is literature and what goes into its creation.

Words create literature. Yes, words, which when strung together create sentences and which when brought to heel under nimble fingers creates great literature. Authors, publishers, editors, copy editors, transporters, retailers and a veritable orchestra of minions work in tandem to give you a piece of literature – be it good or bad.

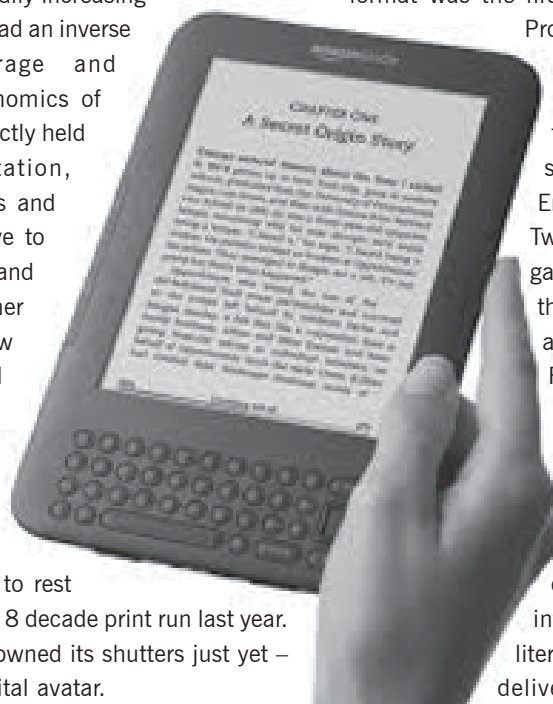
So you stumbled your way through *War and Peace* (unabridged) in high school, mused over Milton in college and now scoff at the genre of Indian mythology fiction that passes for 'good' literature. Contemporary stalwarts continue to vie for your attention everytime you cross a Crossword. That's literature for the average purist.

Transferring existing public domain print books to an online format was the first literature digitisation attempts and Project Gutenberg must indeed be lauded for setting this trend.

However there are those who feel tedious tomes can be better digested in short pithy doses and not lumpsum. Enter the SMS novella, RSS feeds and Twitterature or Twiction, all of which have gained a modicum of popularity amongst the junta who cannot take in too much at one sitting.

For the more serious minded digital literati, online book clubs abound.

These clubs send out weekly or daily chapter emailers – the choice is yours as long as you fork out the modest subscription. Blame it on fickle whims or the addiction with instant information, but there is a market for literature. It is just that the receptacle of delivery has changed radically. E-Books





continue to be the big daddy of digital deliveries, and with the advent of hand-helds, straining your back and your eyes is also a thing of the past.

New technology has always impacted the publishing business and literature as a whole. If the printing press and cheap paper put hardworking scribes out of work, easy-to-use software put manual typesetting out to dry, while cheap computers made ink go out of fashion.

### Digitised books easy prey to piracy

The ease with which one can self-publish may have resulted in a proliferation of third-rate quality works but amidst the chaos there still prevails a sense of order. There are potential authors who get discovered simply because they blog well or tweet funny. A blogger bagging a lucrative book deal is not that uncommon anymore but ultimately it is only the good stuff that gets shared online, snags positive reviews and makes literature history.

Books in digital formats are putting a speedy end to delivery hiccups, storage issues, insurance and all the associated publishing bugbears. Your favourite author's latest e-book can be delivered to you instantly, literally hot off the press - metaphorically speaking. All this has indeed brought down costs considerably (and put a lot of people out of work) but oddly enough, publishers continue to price e-books practically at par with their paperback counterparts. This alone is opening up the market to rampant piracy. While copyrights are easy to manage in print, the digital format has split the case wide open. A digitised book is easy prey unless carefully encrypted. Will these digital formats last? That is anyone's guess but you can be sure, it won't be the same as revisiting cherished, dog-eared pages.

Perhaps in the future, serious writers may create books exclusively for e-readers but somehow that is never quite as satisfying as seeing your life's work in a handsome hardbound edition. So while the print will still exist, its digitised versions will be the literature, breaking geographical constraints and putting an end to harrowing distribution issues.

Perhaps in the future, serious writers may create books exclusively for e-readers but somehow that is never quite as satisfying as seeing your life's work in a handsome hardbound edition.

Few years down the line, your local bookstore might just keep an inventory of the latest print books on the shelves merely for display purposes while a vending machine spews out a digitised version of that same book on to your handheld. Given that scenario, a retailer need no longer stock multiple copies of the same book, instead he just needs a sample copy or two purely for display purposes.

The traditional publishing business that relies on distribution, transportation, warehousing and the ilk will need to take a good, hard look at their inventory and their accounts before deciding the next steps. If they indeed embrace digital; and which they will most certainly have to, they can look at cutting costs by cutting out the retailer. Is a retailer really required other than to showcase your best-selling author behind a glass panel?

### The smart way to move forward

A flat rate all access subscription model for a particular publisher's entire digitised inventory might just be the smart way to move forward. Paying a nominal fee to download a set number of titles from the publisher's stable does indeed make sense. There is hardly any cost of distribution for a particular title and it doesn't cost much to keep forever - irrespective of the demand.

Nonetheless, pricing is what is going to be the big determiner. As long as publishers keep their digital books pricing low, they can reach out to more consumers and cut down on piracy. This in turn will see authors getting their due which will, in turn, inspire them to work just as hard on their next creation that just might be great literature. The circle is complete.

And yet at the end of it, a book, a print book is for life. Or at least until the silverfish get at it. ■



The writer is the Creative Head (Copy) at Hungama Digital Media Entertainment Pvt. Ltd where she handles digital marketing for brands. She also writes for children in her spare time. A voracious reader, she likes her Kindle but positively adores her book collection.

### Did you know?

*'Avakasikal' (Inheritors) (1980) is one of the longest Indian novels and the longest novel ever written in Malayalam language. The novel, authored by well-known Malayalam novelist M. K. Menon (1928-1993), who wrote under the pen name 'Vilasini', portrays the story of four generations of an extended Malayali family settled in Malaysia. It runs into 3,958 pages and four volumes. It is said that it took 10 years for its completion. 'Avakasikal' received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981.*

*Another novel that comes somewhat close in length is 'The Suitable Boy' by Vikram Seth with its 1349 pages. It is considered to be one of the longest novels ever published in a single volume in the English language.*

# Children's literature comes of age

**Vinitha Ramchandani** says that the break for children's fiction in India happened with the release of *Harry Potter*. And although book publishing is a hard place to be in for both writers and publishers, Indian publishers are today looking for intelligent, original Indian writing, and many heartening things are happening in the space of children's publishing.

**W**HEN I think of children's literature in India I am overwhelmed. What do I talk of? In a multi-lingual country like ours, we've been blessed with cultural heritage that is rich, diverse and imaginative and terribly, terribly beautiful. Regional folklores, the Panchatantra, the Jatakas, Akbar-Birbal, Mulla Nasruddin stories, the stories within stories from the Ramayan and the Mahabharat which have been told to children, evocative Indian mythology... we have been rich in stories that have been passed on orally as well as through the written format. Did you know that India has the greatest living oral narrative tradition in the world?

It has been reported that the Panchatantra tales—animal fables that have remained society's way to communicate moral values from one generation to another—in the oral narrative form have travelled out of India and have settled in different forms in other countries. Don't be surprised if the flavours of many folktales from other countries resemble our Indian tales for children: thus you will re-acquaint yourself with the deer who hated his feet, the clever crow, the cunning fox and vice versa in stories that you read from other regions and countries. It is unbelievable how many closely-similar versions of the Gingerbread Man exist in Indian folklore, as it does in Japanese, Irish and Russian folktales. A similar thing with the 'Milkmaid and the Pail' story.

## Children's literature no more compartmentalised

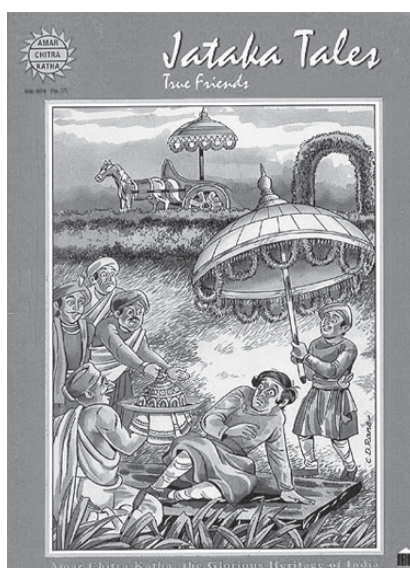
Children's literature in India, at least today, is complex. Is it what we've had from time immemorial or is it what we find today in urban bookstores? Because both constitute literature, don't they? I truly believe that children's literature in India cannot be compartmentalised. Applying any single code or criterion of judgment will be unfair. There are two levels to

take when we talk of this subject. On the one level is the traditional children's literature, which, for the most part, is oral narrative. It is a living literature that spills into various forms of the spoken and written word. On the other hand is the "modern," printed children's literature dealing with present-day styles and subjects.

Indian classical literature for children is not just the Panchatantras and the Jatakas and the mythology from the Ramayan and the Mahabharat, it is also stories by Rabindranath Tagore, RK Narayan, Satyajit Ray, Mulk Raj Anand and Ruskin Bond. Today, of course we have a whole lot of publishers and writers who write about India for children who are both Indians and non-Indians. Among the Indian writers there is Salman Rushdie, Anita Nair, Manjula Padmanabhan, Manoj Das, Shashi Deshpande, Suniti Namjoshi, Vikram Seth, Sudha Murthy and now Anushka Ravishankar contributing to this genre. The tribe of young writers and illustrators are growing and this is heartening.

The first to make a significant, concerted effort in children's literature was K. Shankar Pillai in 1957 and the Children's Book Trust (CBT) was born. Pillai saw to it that reasonably priced books were made available to children from different genres and range. Next came the Balpustakalaya, the children's publication division set up by the government-owned National Book Trust (NBT). Regional translations began to be looked into.

With this, children's publishing became a serious business and this can be seen with Indian and foreign publishers investing into it. Vikas Publishing House, India Book House, Rupa publications and soon enough Puffin India, Harper Collins etc., decided to specialise exclusively in children's literature. Figures show that though there are large numbers



**We have been rich in stories that have been passed on orally as well as through the written format**

of publishers in India, only about 50 of them publish children's books exclusively. For a country with over 125 million children and an ever increasing demand for books of good quality, this seems like a skewed number. However if you ask publishers, their version is that business in children's literature has not really picked up, except in the learning sector. The Indian parent will pick a book for their child, only if the content is connected to learning.

Consequently, the market today is full of books on general knowledge or books by

Western publishers. It was safe for the publisher to do tried and tested ABC book formats and nursery rhymes. The investment was marginal, the returns secure. No publisher wanted to invest in original stories and new writers.

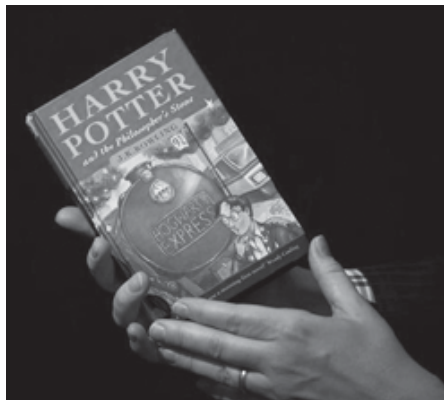
### Potter magic on children

I honestly feel the break for children's fiction happened with the release of Harry Potter.

JK Rowling's work suddenly placed peer pressure on to children and their parents to invest in a book of pure fiction. Potter changed the reading habits of children. When Potter became a bestseller for months on end, booksellers all over the world must have sat up and watched. Potter made bookstores focus on a section called Young Adult literature. Harry Potter brought in a wider reading audience, especially in India.

Without Harry Potter, there may not have been Percy Jackson and the Olympians, or Hunger Games, Twilight. It made movies for Young Adult books possible. It made children accessory-franchising a big game. Harry Potter churned up a massive crossover audience for its book, its films, transfiguring the world into a book and movie box office hit and seeing to it that the space for magic, childhood and vampires were actually cool.

For a very long time bookshelf space in India for children had everything clustered together. The Red Riding Hoods and the Enid Blytons jostled for space with the Panchatantra and the Amar Chitra Kathas and the Akbar-Birbal. Today children's literature is a more organised market. We acknowledge that there are age-wise sections that divide the levels of reading. We also recognise that there is fiction and non-fiction and each series has again many sub-divisions. We've globally evolved to realise that teen level of literature cannot be clubbed together under children's literature and so we've now got space called 'the Young Adult' section.



**Harry Potter brought in a wider reading audience, especially in India**

**I honestly feel the break for children's fiction happened with the release of Harry Potter.**

the best part is they are looking for intelligent, original Indian writing about things that matter to Indian children, relating to the Indian environment and those that are aware of the what

English-reading children are exposed to in metros as well as in small towns. I'm heartened by small initiatives by people as well as organisations to encourage reading in children. If children read and learn to love reading, there is so much that can be done to improve the space. I'm happy that big, funded children's literature festivals have started taking place in India for the last five years. Again, the focus is reading, children and making reading a four-dimensional experience for the child.

The focus is children, reading, India... not necessarily in that order. I'm heartened by the fact that vernacular literature is being nudged and that people are keen on exposing children to the rich diverse story-telling in various languages. I'm happy

that CBT, NBT and now private initiatives like Pratham are making children's literature in English affordable to every child in India. I'm happy that we're learning from foreign publishing and realise that we too need to produce beautiful books.

The market is growing and our literature is once again travelling to other countries. With literature festivals like the Asian Festival of Children's Literature, Singapore focussing on translation and regional works from Asia, the west is re-introduced to the varied textures in language, our beautiful illustrative forms and calligraphy.

Children's literature in India is growing.



The author is a children's fiction writer with over 15 books for children to her credit, available in bookstores across the country. An editor with a book publishing firm in Mumbai, she loves listening to stories and conducts creative writing workshops for children in her free time.

### Exciting times ahead

The debate about children's fiction in India growing has been debated for long. I'm an author and now that I work for a publishing house, I know the other side of the story. Book publishing is a hard place to be in—both for the writer and the publisher.

My personal opinion is that while book publishing is a difficult space to be in, there are so many heartening things happening in the space of children's publishing. A handful of publishers in India focus only on children's publishing and

# Writers turn publishers

*Print publishing is still considered the holy grail, but self publishing is catching on fast and providing an equal amount of satisfaction to writers across subjects and genres, writes Preeti Singh.*

**I**N times gone by, if you wanted to be an author this is what you would do. You would write your story, then bow down in front of your favourite god and submit the manuscript to editors at the well-known publishing houses. And realise that the aches and pains you went through while writing your books was the easiest part. The difficult part was to patiently wait your turn, while the busy editors sifted through thousands of manuscripts and decided which ones they deemed fit to publish. It was even more heartbreaking when the labour of your love was rejected. You would be depressed, and would either forget about publishing the book, or would try and reach out to smaller publishers you had never thought to approach. And the whole process would begin again – till someone agreed to publish your book – if at all.

When I worked as a Commissioning Editor for a publishing house in Mumbai, I was struck by how many people had a story to tell. And the writing might have been excellent or average, but the stories were great. I had to reject many excellent manuscripts, either because they did not fit the profile of the list I was creating for the publishing house, or because I might have completed the list for that year and could not take any more books. It used to upset me at times – that I was sitting in judgement on someone's work of passion – and rejecting it for flimsy reasons.

Let's suppose you were one of the lucky ones whose book did get selected for publishing. The editor would diligently go through your book, make suggestions and sometimes your book would end up very different from the way you had envisioned it. From start to finish, your book could take up to an year or more before it was published and put out into the market. And you had no control over the distribution and placement of your book. Unless you were a Chetan Bhagat,

Shobhaa De or an Amitav Ghosh, you would possibly also not get too much publicity or royalty for your beloved book.

When I wrote my series on Indian History for children and showcased it to many publishers, I got a variety of comments. One wanted me to fictionalise the non-fiction, another wanted me to add another 50 pages to each book, yet another wanted

me to make it exactly according to the school curriculum, so they could market it in the school system and others did not have space for such a series in their catalogue. One big publisher who wanted my series did not share my bigger vision for it, so I walked out on the contract. None of this fazed me. I was passionate about my product, I knew I had a great thing in hand, so I stopped wasting my time talking to publishers. I decided to self-publish.



## Self-publishing not looked upon with disdain anymore

The churn in the publishing and booksellers world has come at an opportune time for people who have stories to tell and want to share them with the world. Print is facing tough times - distribution and revenues are becoming an issue. The smaller independent bookstores are being forced out of business, and the bigger stores are trying to increase revenues by adding products like music, toys and stationary because of lower revenues generated by book sales. The penetration of the Internet, tablets and Kindles may not have reached a critical mass in India, but there is no doubt that more and more people, across financial strata, are using the Net for research and to study and read.

And with the digital space booming, many authors – first timers and established are taking the route of becoming self-publishers.

Just for the record, self-publishing has always been around. Bookstores abound with local authors who would publish a few



books and distribute them to their family and friends, and would place them with a few local booksellers too. Directors like Prakash Jha create lovely books of the scripts and the production process of their movies like *Rajneeti* – to record and preserve the effort, and to gift it as a souvenir to key people.

In the past, self-published books were looked upon with certain disdain – it meant that your book was not good enough to have been selected by a publishing house, or that the book was not of the right quality because an editor had not worked on it with you. It was imperative to go with a publishing house because they would provide the right platform for consumer trust.

In the recent years there have been some spectacular successes with self published authors – E.L.James was a writer on FanFiction. Net and the Fifty Shades trilogy was first posted as ebooks. Amish Tripathi's *Immortals of Meluha* was rejected by at least 20 publishers before he decided to self publish. Ashok Banker has published loads of books, but as the rights of his earlier books were reverted back to him, Banker decided to print copies only on demand and has set up a website where all his books are available as ebooks.

### Online publishers lend a helping hand

The paradigm of self-publishing has changed – now it is no longer important to go to print publishers and place books in the bookstore. Self-publishing does not necessarily mean you will write your book, print it and try and sell it in the market. You can do all that – or you can tie up with an online publisher. There are a number of online publishers who offer you the same services as the print ones. They provide editorial services, help design and illustrate your book, and help distribute and market your book too. They ensure that your books hit various ecommerce sites as an ebook, get reviewed on websites like Goodreads.com and other book blogs and also give you the option of digital printing your book on demand, incase someone wants a physical copy. And in a faster turnaround time. The upside – you retain all the copyright on the book, you get a higher royalty percentage, your book never goes out of print and is available at all times. The downside (if indeed you consider it one) – you end up paying for all these services. Traditional publishers have also recognised the trend. Penguin has launched a self-publishing site called Partridge. In India, the other players in the market are Pothi.com, Power Publishers and Cinnamon Teal. They offer editorial services, design and marketing services for their authors. Since you are the master of your own content, you will end up leading the marketing effort for the book. You are not alone in that; even authors with print publishers have to make themselves seen and heard. Amish signed up with a big publishing house after the success of the *Immortals of Meluha* but he continues

to work hard at promoting his books and develops his own marketing plan.

### Self publishing offers many options

When you self publish, there are many options – and all non-exclusive - to make your books available to a wider audience. You can create your own web page through which you promote your book. Ashok Banker has created an ecommerce site for all his books, where you can read a certain number of books for a nominal subscription fee. You can download his books on any device and read them.

Or you can register your books on Amazon, Smashwords, Flipkart, Attano.com and other ecommerce sites. If you have loads to write and publish, you can create your own account at Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing to earn a larger share of the royalty, or you can go through an aggregator like Smashwords, Lulu, Bookbaby, Inscribe and Ingram. You will pay a distributor fee to them but it is significantly lesser than the distributor fee paid for physical distribution of the book. In the past, you depended on the honesty of the publisher in telling you the exact sales of your books, and therefore the royalty you would earn. Now, thanks to the 'cloud' in the virtual world, you get weekly or monthly reports on the traffic on your book, the number of downloads and therefore what you have earned. If you are the publisher of an educational book, then sites like Attano.com also give you information on what the student/consumer preferred the most in your book – and that feedback is significant in helping you structure and plan your future books.

Print publishing is still considered the holy grail, but self publishing is catching on fast and providing an equal amount of satisfaction to writers across subjects and genres. If you have written something, submit it to a print publisher for sure, but do explore the option of self-publishing. Keep the following in mind though:

- Your product had better be good. So get family, friends and other people whose opinion you trust to review it and give you feedback.
- Create an eye-catching, arresting cover for your ebook. It should delight and engage any one browsing through.
- Don't be greedy – price your ebook cheap.
- Market, market and market - use social network sites and blogs to reach out to potential customers and reviewers.

Above all, enjoy the process!!!



The writer is passionate about books and everything to do with them!

# Waiting to be discovered

*A writer's struggle does not end with the completion of his book. In fact, that's only the beginning as he scouts for a publisher. Joygopal Podder recounts the phase of rejections he faced as a writer and shares a few lessons he learnt along the way before being recognised as a published author.*

**W**ITH thirteen published books in three years, and the fourteenth ('*Desperate Lives*') slated for release this December, you would think that publishers had been handed to me on a platter every step of the way. You could not be more wrong.

Three years ago, I wrote my first book – and then soon came to realise that I had completed only ten percent of the journey towards becoming a published author.

While that first novel was being written, it absorbed me like nothing else had in my life; well *almost* nothing else, really. The birth of my two daughters were the momentous events I can say for sure which gripped me most intensely for several months twice in my life, but authoring my first book came close. I was in heaven during the weeks I was writing it. And then I came back to earth with a thud. I soon came to realise that the publishing world had *not* been waiting with bated breath for my masterpiece. Far from it.

## Discovering a gem from the 'slush pile'

I know now what I did not know then: there are thousands of 'masterpiece' manuscripts written by first time and second-time and third-time authors stacked in, what in publishing parlance is known as, the 'slush pile', in every publisher's office. These are unsolicited works of literature and arrive at these offices by the dozens every day. Talk of demand-supply imbalance!

Sifting through the 'slush pile' is a herculean activity made more difficult by the fact that it is constantly getting replenished with more unsolicited manuscripts every day. Once in a while a gem is discovered, but more often than not several get overlooked because the weight of mediocre material accumulated with the publisher.

If there is one publisher for every hundred would-be authors (this is *not* an exaggeration) the situation is worse in the universe of literary agents.

Who are literary agents? They are agents who represent writers and their written works to publishers. They are paid a fixed percentage (usually twenty percent on foreign

sales and ten to fifteen percent for domestic sales) of the proceeds of sales they negotiate on behalf of their clients. In the West, many well-known, powerful, and lucrative publishing houses (such as the Big Six) are generally less open than smaller publishers to un-agented submissions. A knowledgeable agent knows the market, and can be a source of valuable career advice and guidance. In India, however, high-powered literary agencies have yet to evolve and those that exist are very few in number – and do not carry much clout with most publishers, who prefer to deal directly with authors.

So how do authors start dealing directly with publishers in India?

I was fifty years old, at the height of my professional life in the NGO sector, but, as an author, I began like any other novice: trawling the internet for publisher contact details. I also visited bookshops and copied down publisher contact details from the relevant initial pages of books.

**Dear first-time author, persevere, don't lose heart, keep reading and writing – and experiment with different genres and styles of writing.**

## A string of rejections...

Where possible (and requested for by the online submission guidelines on publisher websites) I sent my manuscript by e-mail. Where not possible, I made photocopies of the manuscript (a tedious process) and sent off by courier. Like every new and non-celebrity author does (I now know), I sent my manuscript to practically every

publisher in India (even those who publish only non-fiction; hope springs eternal in the human breast – as they say!).

What helped me reach where I am today is that I did not wait patiently for publisher responses but started work immediately on my second novel, for the love of writing and nothing else. I was half-way through my second book when the rejections started coming in, polite but firm. I was familiar with rejections slips and letters of regret, since I used to contribute stories and articles in magazines and newspapers as a teenager and had received many such during those freelancing writer days, but I had not expected such a universal non-acceptance of my labour of love. I still remember that it was the fourteenth publisher in my mailing list who accepted my first book and the fifteenth who accepted my second book

(the publisher of my first book was not eager to take on another manuscript from me while my first was still under production). Lesson one from this process: it takes a publisher six weeks to six months to evaluate unsolicited manuscripts and send their verdicts. Some do not even respond if there is a rejection. This long timeline is now mentioned in most websites, though it was not earlier. A big reason for all this is the huge volumes of submissions they have to deal with.

Lesson two: even when your book gets accepted, it could have happened only after a couple of reminder mails were sent to get the evaluation process speeded up and the publisher to conclude that your manuscript could perhaps be a marketable commodity. This happened in the case of several of my books.

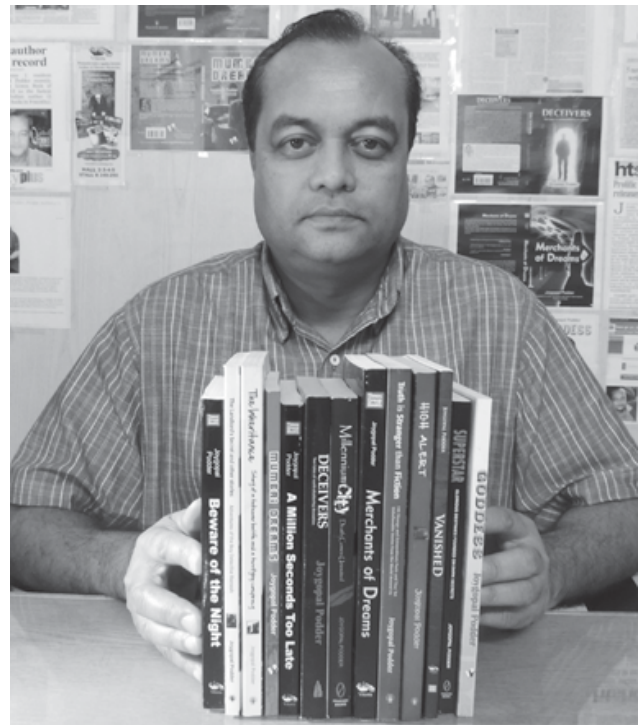
Therein lies the rub: book publishing has become a very expensive proposition and book marketing very competitive. It's a cut-throat business now and publishers need confidence that their investment in your work will bring them dividends. Can you blame them for that?

### ...to the Limca Book of World Records

My journey has been subsequently defined by one choice and one event. I chose to specialise in the genre of crime fiction and so limited my universe of possible publishers to those who liked publishing mystery novels and/or who had found it lucrative to do so. I have been fortunate that there are a sufficient number of such publishers around.

The game changing event in my own writing career was my entry into the Limca Book of World Records in 2012 and then again in the 2013 edition for "the most number of crime fiction books published in the shortest time". This record entry gave me respectability, credibility and a brand identity. The doors of publisher offices open a little more easily now.

The bottom line however is perseverance. My books have logged good sales, but not one is a runaway bestseller – yet. So I keep writing, the books are multiplying, my fan base is increasing, my dedicated readership is growing and the records are breaking. The mainstream publishers will accept me with open arms, however, only when I produce that blockbuster. Now, will that happen because of publisher backing or without, is the question.... The history of Indian English publishing, in recent years, is replete with names of first-time authors who were rejected



**Joygopal Podder with the 13 books he has authored in three years**

by numerous publishers, who went on to self-publish with small print runs, whose books slowly took off with word-of-mouth publicity, and who were then grabbed up by big publishers for their next offerings and who now command huge advances. So, dear first-time author, persevere, don't lose heart, keep reading and writing – and experiment with different genres and styles of writing. As for me, well, I'll keep writing two or three crime fiction novels a year, but my next one is a humour novel and the one after is planned as a romance. I will continue to write to please myself and my readers and fans, and I will continue to wish my publishers profitable returns from my books, for that is all that counts at the end of the day. ■

The writer has received mention, for two consecutive years, in the Limca Book of Record as the fastest crime fiction author of India. 'Desperate Lives', his fourteenth book, releases at the end of this year. A Gold Medallist in Law from Delhi University, Joygopal lives in Gurgaon with his family. He is Director, Fundraising of the INGO ActionAid India. Visit his website to know more about his works - <http://marathonauthormasterofcrime.in/>

### Aarogyam

*There is a preference for fat free food today considering the fad of staying slim. Avoiding fat completely can do harm to your body since it is also an important constituent of our body. Fats are a source of energy for our body and transport the important soluble vitamins stored in the fats we eat. Monosaturated fat (found in nuts, olive oil, peanut oil, sesame oil) and polyunsaturated fat (found in safflower oil, soyabean oil, fish, soymilk, etc) are considered to be good fats while saturated fat (found in meat, butter, cheese, ice cream, fast food, fried food, etc) are bad for health. The website of FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) has a detailed report on the importance of fats and fatty acids in our diet. So choose your food wisely and stay healthy.*

# The wind beneath a learner's wings

*Literature for the learning disabled in India is still at a nascent stage, and hence a genre with great potential. All it needs is the firm support of empathetic policies which can unlock the magical world of books for one and all, writes Mahua Guha.*

**S** EVEN-year-old Pushan was handsome for his age. Given a chance, he could wrestle his brothers to the ground. Few could match his shooting skills in video games. But ask him to add three five-digit numbers, his eyes would go blank. It did not help that his younger brother solved more complex problems twice as fast. And reading was definitely not his favourite pastime. He simply did not comprehend the words that stared up at him from the page. When people spoke to him, Pushan would mumble in reply. His sweet face masked the soul of a boy whose confidence was fast crumbling. Pushan was diagnosed with dyslexia and placed in a school which admitted children with special needs. Five years later, Pushan may be a year or two behind his peers, but his math skills have improved dramatically. And though he may be slow, he likes to read about the Greeks.

Pushan lives in New York, in a country where the learning disabled are given the opportunity to flourish and learn in ways that widen their horizons. The picture is far from rosy in India where at least 30 million children are affected by dyslexia. It took a Bollywood film, *Taare Zameen Par* to just scratch the surface of the issue. While there is greater awareness about learning disabilities today compared to twenty years ago, the going is still tough for the reading challenged. Dyslexia is a type of learning disability in which the person experiences difficulty in reading, spelling, understanding and writing words. "Dyslexia is not a visible condition," explains special educator Sunita Kamath of The Learning Curve, a study centre for Pratham. "It could be caused by genetic, neurological or emotional factors. There is no cure for it, but with the right remedial measures and therapy, the child's reading capability definitely improves."

Language is the bedrock of formal education. According to speech-language pathologist Priya Gole, delay in learning language invariably leads to a delay in reading skills, which in turn poses a problem in the regular school system. In a nation where a child's intelligence is measured in terms of academic prowess in school, a dyslexic obviously falters and is labeled a 'slow learner'.

So...how does one get a dyslexic to read? There are no books

available specially designed for children with learning disabilities in India. They are usually custom-made by special educators.

The thrust of therapy is to integrate dyslexics into the mainstream. So educators want the children to read regular books, but employ different techniques to encourage the habit, like using specific fonts, large print or audio-books. One ingenious method is placing coloured transparencies on text – it eases the reader's comfort level, enhancing his desire to read. Many programmes appeal to the tactile and kinesthetic senses of the child.

"There are so many resources available for the learning disabled available abroad, but they are expensive, which few can afford," rues Ms. Kamath. "Moreover, their stories describe a Western setting which is difficult for our children to understand," she adds.

Occupational therapist Dr. Mita Parekh points out that there is no one programme that succeeds with dyslexics. Every child is different, calling for an individualised approach. Dyslexics tend to be gifted in other areas and because reading poses such a challenge, over time, they usually find other ways to manage without having to read, lessening their dependence on books. There are many dyslexics who have achieved success in their chosen fields despite their drawback - Steven Spielberg, Beethoven, Richard Branson, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein – the list is long.

## The first steps

One would think that with the greater awareness, books designed for the learning disabled would be more readily available in stores. But in reality, buyers of these books constitute too small a market to make such products commercially viable for publishers. Kishorebhai Dadia, Head of Planning at Navneet Publications, admits, "We did come out with a storybook with syllabification few years ago, but it did not sell well. We have no plans of publishing anymore of such books in the near future."

In such a scenario, steps in ad copywriter Bodhisatwa Dasgupta of Grey Worldwide. He is attempting a pioneering





**“I did not want to limit myself to writing flyers”**

– Bodhisatwa Dasgupta

**What drew you to this project? How did you start?**

Actually the project chose me. A gentleman named Bala Narayanaswamy whose two children are learning disabled sent across an email suggesting that we set up a competition for story-writing for the learning disabled. Before then, I hardly knew much about the learning disabled or ever heard of the Dolch list. I researched the subject, met counsellors and special educators and then zeroed in on the Dolch list. I thought, ‘why not invite writers from all over the world to create stories using the Dolch list?’ That is how the Dolch Project was born.

**Did you face any challenges in setting this up?**

Not really. I set up the Facebook page and then went to my bosses at Grey with my idea. They agreed to take it up. Grey is associating with the Dyslexia Association and helping to set up a dedicated website as we speak. The response is positively great. So far we have collected 88 stories and still counting.

**Who is part of the team?**

Grey Worldwide has been extremely supportive - namely CEO Jishnu Sen, Head of Planning Dheeraj Sinha and National Creative Directors Malvika Mehra and Amit Akali. Art Director Dushyant Chopra has made wonderful illustrations for the stories.

**Any favourites?**

Each story on the website is unique and refreshing. It is not easy to compose a story with such a limited bank of words, so the effort is really amazing.

**You want to publish a book with these stories. Have you found a publisher?**

We are still in talks with a couple of publishers. It is yet to be seen if we will have one book or a series. So a book will not happen anytime soon, but it is definitely in the pipeline.

**What are your long term goals?**

The Dolch list is in English. We have so many regional languages. So the next logical step is to interact with experts to create a similar list in languages like Hindi, Bengali etc. But of course, that would be making history!

**Usually remedial therapy tries to integrate the learning disabled with the mainstream. Do you think these kind of books will limit their vocabulary?**

These stories are mainly for reading for pleasure. It is something that the child can enjoy in the comfort of his home. So it will not interfere with but instead complement their school work.

**How do you find time for all this?**

I am a creative person, a writer. I have worked on ads like Coke, Honda Jazz and National Geographic. But I did not want to limit myself to writing flyers. As a writer, I can do so much more and I want to leave something of me behind.

*(A detailed interview appears on Pg 38)*

**The Garden**

A Garden, A garden! The little girl wished,  
At the back of my house with ducks and some fish!  
I want grass and flowers - green, yellow and blue,  
And a big woody tree to play under too.

I want chickens and rabbits and squirrels and cats,  
(Five of this and seven of that)  
Sheeps and ducks, and birds in their nest,  
And a small brown box to put my feet up and rest.

Some chairs and a table under the sun,  
I can have a big party! It would be so fun!  
Warm and sunny, away from the rain,  
Who would ever go back home again?

So the little girl told her mother who said,  
At night as she laughed, and put her to bed,  
“You can do what you want, if you only can see,  
That every big garden starts with a seed.”



online project – to compile stories that can be read by such children. Entitled The Dolch Project, Facebook users contribute short stories created by using a bank of merely 220 words which are part of the Dolch List. Prepared by Edward William Dolch in 1936, the Dolch List is a collection of ‘service words’ that occur frequently in common children’s books. It is used as a teaching aid to encourage new readers to build their vocabulary.

The Dolch Project has received a tremendous response from writers and readers alike from all over the country. Not more than 1000 words long, the stories are targeted at children between 6-14 years of age. Short and sweet, the tales are refreshingly simple. Sample a poem sent by Sanaya Fernandes for the Project.

**(Continued on page 20)**

# Should there be literature in cinema?

*Literature and cinema are two different media, though the basis of both is, the story. **Sanjit Narwekar** asks if the function of cinema is merely to narrate a story on screen or to explore the essence of the story and take it to greater heights, using the grammar and potential of the medium.*

*All great filmmakers have fashioned classics out of other people's stories. I, as the interpreter through the film medium, exercised my right to select, modify and arrange. This is a right which every filmmaker, who aspires to more than doing a commercial chore – to artistic endeavour, in fact – possesses. He may borrow his material, but he must colour it with his own experience of the medium. Then, and only then will the completed film be his own.*

— Satyajit Ray

I had once asked Dev Anand why Indian filmmakers rarely based their films on existing literary works and he had replied, “That is because the needs of cinema and literature are different. The exposition of the story differs in the two media and it would be near impossible to exactly transcreate a literary work into the cinematic medium.”

What remained unspoken in our conversation – by implicit common consent – was author R.K. Narayan's diatribe following the release of the Hindi version of *Guide*. The film had become a huge hit but Narayan was unhappy about the



**'Guide' was a huge hit but R K Narayan, the author was unhappy about the way in which his story had been filmed**

way in which his story had been filmed. On the other hand, he was exceptionally happy about how the international version (co-produced by Pearl Buck and directed by Tad Danielewski) had turned out though the film did not last beyond a week in both Indian and international markets. Today, the Hindi version is an acknowledged masterpiece of Indian cinema which critics still refer to and fans still talk about while the international version is a mere curiosity. So, why could not a great storyteller like Narayan tell the difference between the media or was it merely a love for his own words?

## Cinema requires different kind of story telling

The fact remains that literary story-tellers (the world over) often fail to understand that the medium of cinema requires a very different kind of story-telling in which words – however picturesque they may be – are irrelevant. The story and the script are merely the blueprint of the final product: the film. In a sense, they just become nothing more than story sources. As the noted Italian writer Alberto Moravio so succinctly put it, “In the cinema I am no more than an idea man.” Thus



***Sujata*, starring Sunil Dutt and Nutan, was based on a short story by Subodh Ghosh**



**Duvidha (1973) and Paheli (2005) were based on the same material but the films are drastically different interpretations of the story**

most authors who have a certain literary status are unwilling to lend themselves to such “exploitation”.

In India, the first concerted attempts to create a literature-backed cinema was made by the Film Finance Corporation (later to become the National Film Development Corporation) in the early 1970s – ironically at a time when world cinema was moving away from “literary” influence and trying to create purely cinematic stories. Several contemporary authors who had never been translated on screen before came to the fore: Rajendra Yadav (*Sara Akash*), Mannu Bhandari (*Rajnigandha*), Mohan Rakesh (*Uski Roti*, *Aashad Ka Ek Din*), Ruskin Bond (*Junoon*) among others.

So much so that there was a ripple effect on the mainstream cinema and the more enlightened filmmakers turned to reputed authors for their stories: Bimal Kar (*Balika Badhu*), Ashutosh Mukherjee (*Safar*), Keshav Prasad Mishra (*Nadiya Ke Paar*). Not that contemporary authors were unknown to Hindi cinema but the examples were few and far between: Bimal Mitra (*Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*), Jarasandha aka Charuchandra Chakrabarti (*Bandini*), Phanishwarnath Renu (*Teesri Kasam*) to name a few.

Most mainstream filmmakers – if they were to bother about literature at all – traditionally turned to classical writers like Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore or Saratchandra. Or they would turn to popular novelists like Gulshan Nanda (*Kaajal*, *Kati Patang*, *Khilona*), Chandrakant Kakodkar (*Do Raaste*, *Main Tulsi Teri Aangan Ki*). This was because most popular writers (and a few of the classical writers) wrote innately humane stories with the right mix of story-line and emotional content (which is very important for Indian audiences).

### **Best films are those based on short stories than novels**

On the other hand, many of the modern writers – particularly those of the *Nai Kahini* movement – wrote primarily “slice of

life” stories which were highly internalised and often unemotional. This does not work in the cinema since for the screen to come alive the filmmaker needs constant story movement: with lots of events and incidents littered throughout the story. This is one reason why most modern writers are not too popular with Indian filmmakers.

A quick scan of the Filmfare Award for Best Story reveals that most of the “best” story awards went to stories which were written specially for the screen – which means they were written as screenplays and had no literary existence on paper before the film. Is this why the National Awards do not have a separate category for the Best Story? In fact, most international film awards do not have a separate “Story” category. The screenplay award (bifurcated into Original and Adapted) is expected to cover the story.

As an aside one may also add that there is no Best Dialogue award either. It is a strictly Indian creation. The need to trisect the Best Writing Award comes from the fact that in



**Mani Kaul did not believe in transcreating verbatim the story on to the screen because he felt that would have been dishonest and a challenge to the integrity of the cinematic medium**



Hindi cinema the dialogue is written in Hindi, the screenplay in English and the story is merely narrated and rarely put down on paper. In international cinema the scriptwriter provides the story (if it is an original screenplay) and the dialogue along with the script. In an adapted screenplay the story source is elsewhere (credited as: based on a novel by ....) but the award goes to the scriptwriter because it is believed that the base for cinema is the script.

Most filmmakers believe that it is the screenplay which is the base for cinema and not the story – primarily because it is the “movement” of the screenplay which gives the film its progression. That is why some of the best films are those based on short stories rather than novels because that gives the scriptwriter the space to create for the cinema and the shortness of the story-line lends itself for cinematic embellishments which would not be otherwise possible or would be resented. Good examples of this are: *Sujata* (based on a short story by Subodh Ghosh), *Mera Saaya* (based on a short story by Jayant Deokule).

The fact that the story is only a peg on which to hang the film is best illustrated by taking up a story which was interpreted in different ways by different filmmakers resulting in very different films: a quick example is Vijay Dan Detha's *Duvidha* made into films by both Mani Kaul (1973) and Amol Palekar (2005). Though based on the same material the films are drastically different interpretations of the story. The key to the difference of course lies in the understanding of the situation: For Palekar it is merely a *paheli* (a riddle) which can be solved while for Kaul it is an insoluble *duvidha* (dilemma). A detailed analysis of the two films from the story interpretation point of view would be illuminating.

### Function of cinema is to capture the essence of a story

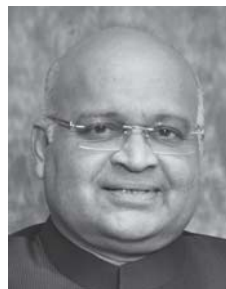
In this dichotomy of story and screenplay Mani Kaul takes an extreme position: that of eschewing both to create a “pure

cinema”. The function of cinema, he believed, was to capture and present the essence of the story in the cinematic medium with its own language and grammar. He felt that if one wanted to just enjoy the literary aspect of the story one could always read it on the printed page. Thus explaining the exaggerated slowness of his *Uski Roti*, he said the idea always was to capture the essence of the story (the interminable wait of the woman for her husband) rather than to transcreate verbatim the story on to the screen. That he felt would have been dishonest and a challenge to the integrity of the cinematic medium.

Mani Kaul's ideas of cinema separating itself from “literary-ness” are further explored in *Satahse Utha Aadmi* in which he attempts to visually capture the essence of Muktibodh's poetry rather than give a biographical sketch of the poet or merely illustrate his poetry. His films on music – in particular *Dhrupad* (on the Dagar brothers) and *Siddeshwari* (on Siddeshwari Devi) – take this concept of pure cinema miles ahead of all contemporary thinking. But then that is an extreme position and a very difficult one to sustain unless one has the genius of a Mani Kaul. Most filmmakers are content to transcreate the story to the screen as faithfully as possible.

The question we must ask ourselves is: Is it the function of cinema to merely narrate a story on the screen or is it to explore the essence of the story and, using the grammar and potential of the medium, take it to greater cinematic

heights. Must the cinema remain a handmaiden to Literature and merely transcreate literary stories or can it go towards a more heightened awareness suggested by Godard, Bresson, and yes, Mani Kaul? ■



The writer is a National award-winning film historian, scriptwriter and documentary filmmaker.

## The wind beneath a learner's wings

(Continued from page 17)

### Digitally yours

Dyslexic children are generally computer savvy. For them, bestsellers like the Harry Potter series are only a click away with Bookshare.org, a remarkable online library of over 60,000 digital books ranging from children's books, textbooks and periodicals. Subscribers with genuine learning disabilities can access and download texts that can be converted to large print or synthetic speech. Bookshare has helped many to keep up with their peers, be it news or schoolwork.

The primary focus right now is to ensure adequate educational

opportunities in school, but these children also want to read for recreation. Literature for the learning disabled in India is

still at a nascent stage, and hence a genre with great potential. All it needs is the firm support of empathetic policies which can unlock the magical world of books for one and all! ■



A writer for a children's magazine, Mahua Guha is a travel enthusiast, always seeking new destinations and challenges. She never ceases to be amazed by the wonders of India.



# Getting children hooked on books



*The lack of the reading habit is blithely blamed on the Internet, social media and television. But it is up to parents, teachers and other elders to ensure that children have access to books and good literature, says **Lina Mathias**.*

**O**F late, more and more lifestyle pages are profiling young Indian authors who are turning out “bestsellers” including self-published ones in a number of languages. This coupled with increasing popularity of websites selling books online and the glitzy bookshops in malls gives the impression that middle-class Indians have suddenly started spending generously on books. But what numbers actually constitute a “bestseller” as far as the Indian market is concerned? Between watching TV and reading newspapers and magazines (the two most popular media sources as far as Indian youth are concerned) how many actually read fiction and non-fiction that is not directly related to their education or profession? In short, how ingrained is the reading habit among Indians?

## Cultivating the reading habit

I am primarily concerned here with the habit of reading fiction and non-fiction unconnected with syllabus and work. There is no need for me here to extol the virtues of reading or the

power that books exercise over minds and lives. Like all habits, this one too starts in childhood. If one discounts the miniscule percentage of urban households where both parents are educated, like reading and encourage it among their children, a child’s first brush with books outside the curriculum usually occurs in the school library. In a national readership survey conducted under the aegis of the National Book Trust (NBT) in 2009, the surveyed youth (15 to 25) were asked to give suggestions to promote the reading habit.

Their suggestions are telling: motivation and encouragement, compulsory leisure reading in schools, and easy access to libraries. A few years ago a friend of mine who had travelled across the United States came back full of praise for the large number of local public libraries there, the free access, the prompt and cheerful service and so on. At present, there might be a debate there on handing over these libraries to the private sector following the downturn in the economy but that is not the issue here. The point is the easy access that the local community has to books and library services.

Now let us come back to the suggestions made by the youth in the NBT survey. First, is that of motivation and encouragement. This can be primarily done (though not exclusively) by parents and teachers. How many Indian parents (those who can afford to do so) genuinely consider buying books not related to school/college work as a good investment in their children? Impressionistic and anecdotal evidence says that this is not a huge number. Most parents want to know what the “educational” value of the book is (interpretation: will it help my child to score more marks?). Buying books to be read for the sheer joy of reading a wonderful story, nuanced characterisation, beautiful illustrations, inhabiting a totally different world for a little while or learning about a different culture, a different take on history, a different way of thinking than what we are accustomed to—these do not seem like valid reasons!

The irony is that students who do read widely outside their syllabus tend to do much better in their school/college work.

### The school library, an important place to begin

As far as the teachers are concerned, two conditions are needed for them to encourage and motivate their students to read. One, a breather from the class work (for both students and teachers) and a well equipped library. Do I see those among you who know how the overwhelming majority of our schools are run, smiling cynically? Reports of one-room- and one-teacher schools in rural areas are commonplace and it seems fantastical to talk of libraries in that context. But are many urban schools better off? Let alone schools, how many colleges and higher education institutions have inviting libraries for their students? A number of colleges in Mumbai which have cashed in on the craze for autonomous courses like Bachelor of Mass Media (BMM) and Bachelor of Management Studies (BMS) etc., do not have separate libraries and the main ones do not have the books recommended for these courses.

The students surveyed have also asked for compulsory leisure for reading. One assumes that they mean this should be within the school working hours. This is an excellent idea and if

**How many Indian parents (those who can afford to do so) genuinely consider buying books not related to school/college work as a good investment in their children? Impressionistic and anecdotal evidence says that this is not a huge number.**

properly designed and executed would work wonders for the students. Educationists have generally agreed that the school library is a very important place, especially in developing and poor countries, where parents may neither have the economic power to buy books nor the literacy to read to their children. Following from here, any programme that brings the child in contact with books outside her/his syllabus does the lion's share in contributing to forming the habit of reading.

In India, the government had announced last year that a national census of libraries would be conducted to look into the state of the library network along with a survey of reading habits and digitising of content to encourage the “community library” movement. The Sam Pitroda-led National Knowledge Commission had recommended the setting up of the National

Mission on Libraries. These are definitely lofty and noble aims but as in all things Indian, it is the implementation that will prove the proof of the pudding. To make this a success will need resources, trained personnel and exceptional commitment and out of the box thinking. As things stand now, this hardly seems a priority task, much less a mission. Considering the benefits that would accrue, this should definitely become a mission.

The lack of the reading habit is blithely blamed on the popularity of the Internet, social media and the tempting lure of television. I do not lay much store by these factors for they certainly cannot come in the way of those who love to read. It is up to parents, teachers and all significant elders to ensure that our children, whether in rural or urban areas and whichever economic background they come from, have access to books

and good literature. Children and youth have a natural hunger and curiosity to know, to learn, to keep their minds open and take joy in the world of imagination. It is those who are tasked with making this available to them who are answerable. ■



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

### Festive times

*Come August and the picturesque Bhutan will come alive with its annual literary festival. Aptly titled 'Mountain Echoes', the festival is an initiative of the India-Bhutan Foundation and currently in its fourth year. Some of the great and popular names in literature from both India and Bhutan will grace the festival. This year, it will be held from August 9-11 in the country's capital, Thimpu.*



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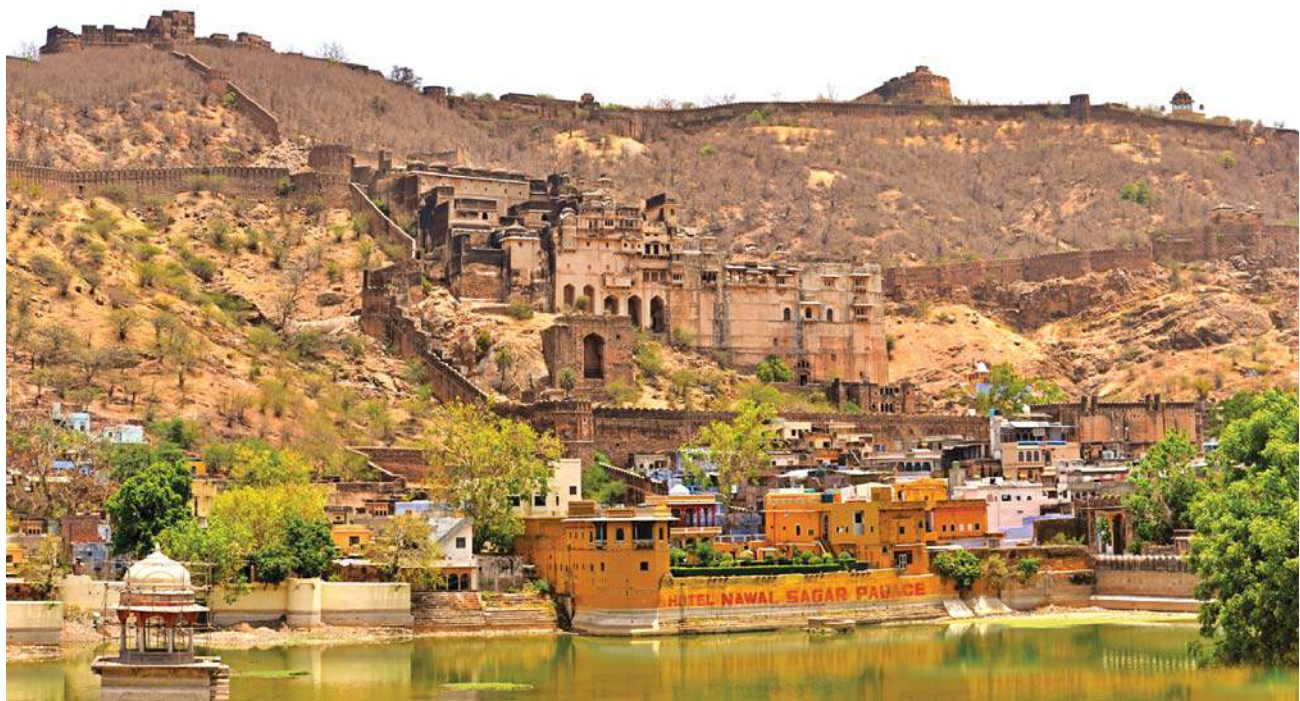
Text and photos: Akul Tripathi

# THE UNHERALDED **RAJASTHAN**

It is most commonplace to associate Rajasthan with desert, sand and camel silhouettes in the setting sun. Then come the richly adorned forts and the colourfully attired tribe folk and this forms Incredible India's heritage marketing gimmick. But there is a lot of Rajasthan, rich with lakes, rivers and forests that can bewilder those who only follow TV travel show packages, as Akul Tripathi found out.







**The palace of Bundi, the first seat of the Hadotis and home to the Bundi style of miniature painting**

I have a friend who migrated to Mumbai from Udaipur in Rajasthan. At the time I met her, my exposure of Rajasthan was restricted to that of sand dunes and camels. I remember teasing her by telling everyone I met that getting to her house in Udaipur would need directions like – “the first right after the second sand dune with the large cactus to its left. Follow the camel poop and you are home.” Over time, I have come to realise that it is the immediate instinct of the human brain to bundle things, places and even people into packages and cubbyholes with definite outlines and no chance of trespassing. Much the same is with modern geographical boundaries. While geographical features have historically separated and over time created variance between places and communities, primarily due to complete inaccessibility or the high risk in that exchange, modern borders, including state lines of India are just lines etched into maps. Unfortunately, these lines are systematically hard coded into

our minds through repeated exposure creating, among other things; phantom divides to which the mind associates certain visuals and memories. It is most commonplace to associate Rajasthan with desert, sand and camel silhouettes in the setting sun. Then come the richly adorned forts – the bigger ones with the colourfully attired tribe folk dancing in the foreground are the picture postcards for this part of Incredible India’s heritage marketing gimmick. We have as many examples of neglect of our diverse heritage as we have monuments and natural wonders. In that it was heartening that ‘Incredible India’ did begin to attract people to come and explore. The Delhi-Jaipur-Jodhpur-Bikaner-Jaisalmer corridor along with its Pushkar-Ajmer-Udaipur offshoot has become hugely lucrative and the tourism has completely changed the lives of several people here.

The touted tourist attractions at these places were already in comparatively good condition through maintenance by local







**The remains of Charkhamba or the four pillared temple**

custodians. As the volumes of tourists kept increasing, the inept planning and utter contempt we hold for skills of organisation and management became as much a part of the tourist experience as the place itself. Like a proper Bollywood masala fare, the Indian travel experience offers enough to rave and then just as much to howl about.

This sad condition is true of any state of the country as it is for Rajasthan. A lot of Rajasthan, rich with lakes, rivers and forests can bewilder those who only follow TV travel show packages. The state lines can also create mental blocks, which can make a travel plan go horribly wrong!

How wrong? The best example I can give is that of my own embarrassing oversight. When wanting to travel to a place in Rajasthan, I looked for routes through Jaipur and other prominent towns in Rajasthan. I planned my journey from here, despite the long distances. It takes a long time – sometimes too long, as it happened in my case – to fathom that it may just be nearer from a city across that tastelessly drawn imaginary state line. My destination was the town of Baran in the Baran district of Rajasthan. It is 80 kms from Kota, which in turn is about 240 kms from Jaipur, the nearest airport – or so I thought. You see I was planning like a tourist. Had I not considered state lines and planned my travel looking at a physical map instead of a political one, all I had to do was look east and realise that Bhopal was less than 300 kms from Baran with the other places I was to visit, lying even closer. Such is the

power of those lines on the map. In retrospect and as a note for the future, my zeroing in formula should not have been districts or states, but the region – that homogenous entity, sharing culture and history, formed over much time and shaped by geographical constraints and allowances rather than the hurried lines cast by the faltering hands of people who would rather have been anywhere else than drawing crooked lines on coloured paper.

In my particular case, I should have been pursuing and planning for the Hadoti region in south-eastern Rajasthan.

#### **The agnikunda legend**

As per legend, Parashurama, the sixth avatar of Vishnu, exterminated many Kshatriyas including Rajputs. As their numbers dwindled, to protect righteousness on the earth, sage Vashishta performed a *yagna*, which produced from the fire altar, a new race of Kshatriyas to add on to the existing *suryavanshi* and *chandravanshi* Rajputs. Since they emerged from the sacrificial fire – *agnikunda*— they came to be known as the *agnivanshis*. Some historians believe that constant warfare led to the numbers of the Rajputs – the warrior class – to dwindle and so, to counter this, other lesser-ranked tribes were elevated to that of the warrior class. Another school of thought reckons that the clans were formed to rid India of the spreading Buddhism that was threatening the Aryan way of life.





**Bhand Devra is touted as mini Khajuraho**



**A carving of Shiva at Bhand Devra**

The most well-known of these clans that arose from the fire sacrifice are the Chauhans, who ruled the kingdom of Ajmer and went on to rule Delhi. Prithviraj Chahuan, the last Hindu ruler of Delhi, was defeated in the second battle of Tarain by Shahabuddin Muhammad Ghori. Though this was a blow to the fortunes of the Chauhan clan, they continued on for many years in smaller but prosperous kingdoms. One of the offshoots of the Chauhans then, was the Hada Chauhan clan which established its stronghold in Bundi, to the east of their traditional capital of Ajmer in 1241. In 1265, they went on to capture nearby Kota. At the height of their power, this clan controlled the present day districts of Bundi, Kota, Jhalawar and Baran. These areas, ruled by the Hadas came to be known as the region of Hadoti.

#### **The highway to Hadoti**

My visit to Hadoti (pronounced Haadoti) was an impromptu one – made in the spur of that moment which goads you to travel and keeps you restless until you do. The picking of the location was less random as I had for some time been contemplating and planning to visit a part of Rajasthan about which precious little was readily available. The beauty of such a situation is that it almost guarantees a lot of unexpected experiences and insights.

Despite knowing this, the oodles of oddities and treasure trove of histories I was to dive into was, in retrospect, mind-boggling. With each place visited, two more rivalling ones would be discovered, but could not be fit into the itinerary. On most travels, I quite like the idea of not being able to visit some places as it leaves something to come back to. A little piece of



**A peacock spotted near Charkhamba**

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**The Lingam which is worshipped at Bhand Devra**



**Graffiti and poster on a pillar of Bhand Devra**



**A local bard at Baran**

unfinished business, which keeps the place alive in memory. However, on this travel, it now feels like there was only a little that I managed to visit while the most of it remains unexplored. An amazing part about travelling is that wrong turns can also lead to some fortunate coincidences. In keeping with my erroneous start point; it was a long drive of almost 350 kms to reach my first destination of Baran. I was cross at myself for the utter stupidity I had displayed while planning my trip and in one of those moments of rebuke while 35 kms from Kota a

bend in the road revealed a lavish palace seeming to emerge from the hills itself. It was the palace of Bundi, the first seat of the Hadotis and home to the Bundi style of miniature painting. Though there wasn't time to step out of the car and explore the palace or the *chitrashala*, those few moments grabbed on the pretext of stretching my legs remain precious. That memory of a sea of houses, painted blue. In the midst of a large brown ocean it was a small blot of blue belligerently trying to recreate the clear blue sky.



**The temple of Ramgarh Mata at Bhand Devra**





**Stairs leading up at Bhand Devra**

The road trudged onwards towards Kota and then bypassing Ranthambore, it took on the look of desolation that one would expect when leaving a country instead of heading towards its centre. The highway continued uninterrupted with flyovers marking small towns and villages, which flew past. Everything was quite plainly unremarkable. Had it not been for the pre decided destination of Baran (pronounced like the hindi number 12 but with an 'n' sound while trailing off), I am quite sure, I would have happily driven past it and woken up miles away. That little bit of planning came into effect now. My first destination was an ancient city called Bilasgarh, now reduced to ruins.

### A city in ruins

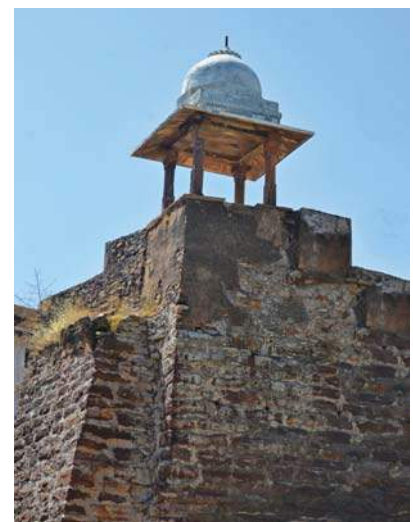
At the forgettable crossroads in Baran that houses the couple

of establishments providing lodging facilities, no one had heard of the once-a-city-but-now-a-ruin of Bilasgarh. Following the little learnt from the district website and precious few bits of information available online, I headed due east once more, enquiring with every passer-by about these ruins, the hope of anyone knowing about it was rapidly fading. Taking its place however, was a heady sense of adventure. An Indiana Jones kind of feeling where I am searching for a place visited and recorded by one or two fortunate enough to have visited it and no one else knows of its existence to the point that it starts seeming like a figment of an overactive imagination.

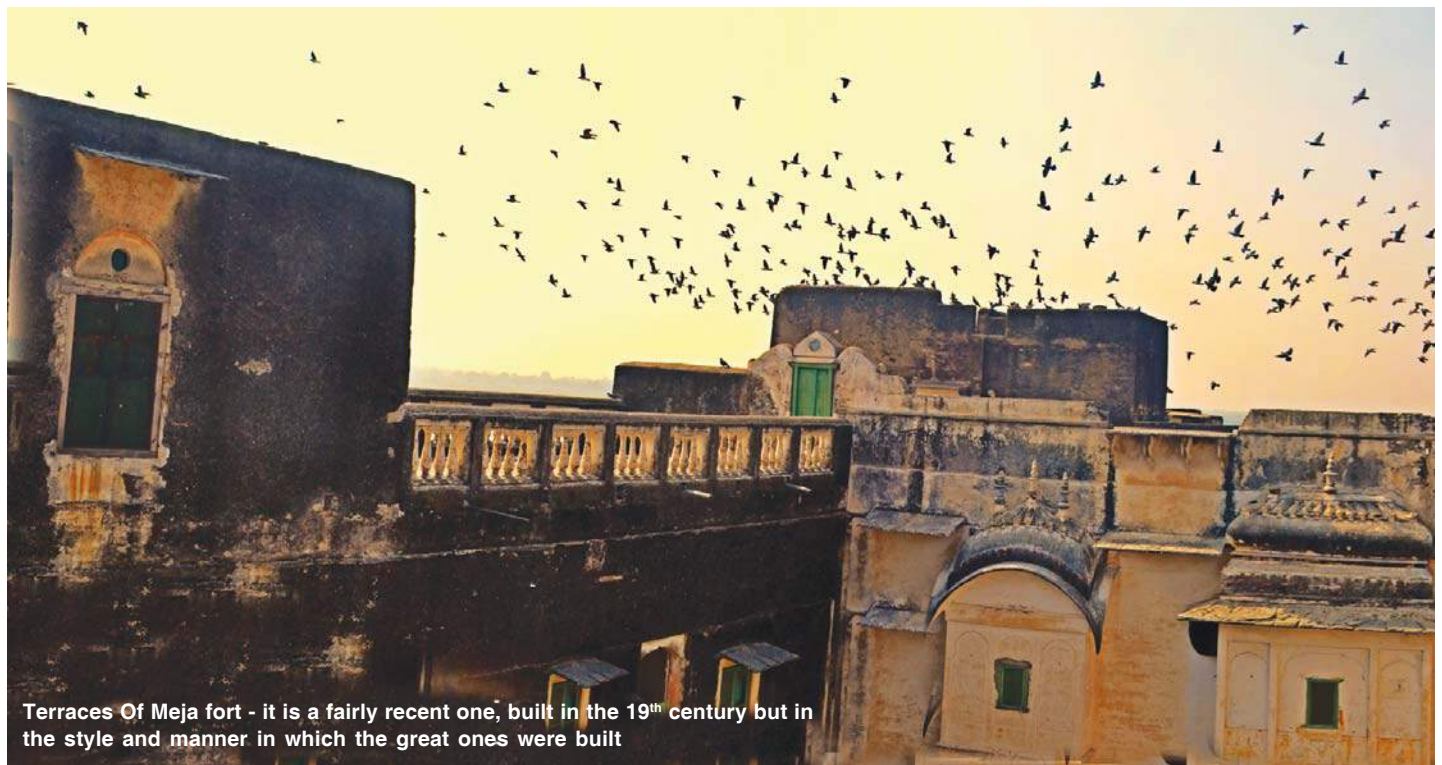
Finally at a shop, I ask for Bilasgarh and he points yonder. I confirm whether there are ruins, broken stone structures. He looks at me for a moment as I give my best crestfallen expression



**The Hunting Palace at Jhalawar town**



**A Chhatri at Gagron fort**



and then points back yonder and asks me to go beyond the village. The light in my eyes makes him laugh as I scamper off. Then began the last leg of anticipation. The one lane road refused to reach anywhere as it stretched endlessly over a flat brown expanse. Then suddenly, a chicken darted across the road and the village called Bilasgarh revealed itself.

Situated on the banks of the Vilasi River, the village of Bilasgarh is a kilometre away from the ruins that are spread over three-square kilometres. Also known as Krishnavilas and back in the day as Valisa, it was a flourishing town situated in the heart of a jungle during the ninth-tenth century. Decimated stone ruins are all that one can find in this entire ASI site. Remains of the temples of the era, most of them dedicated to Vishnu provide headways into knowing more about the era and the place. Only one free standing structure from the era remains. This Vishnu temple has become the picture postcard for the district and is locally known as the *Charkhamba* or the 'four pillared' temple.

Surrounded by the rusted barbed fencing characteristic of all Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) sites, the approach way inside the compound is littered with stone carvings and fallen sculptures. Three headed Brahmas, dancing Shivas and numerous *apsaras* stare up, unblinkingly, as you chart your way through them to the temple structure. A few steps lead up to the main platform of the temple on which stand the four pillars with lintel that give this place its name. This is the main central shrine and the pedestal on which the image was placed can still be seen while the 12<sup>th</sup> century idol has been moved away to a museum in Jaipur.

**Three headed Brahmas, dancing Shivas and numerous *apsaras* stare up, unblinkingly, as you chart your way through them to the temple structure.**

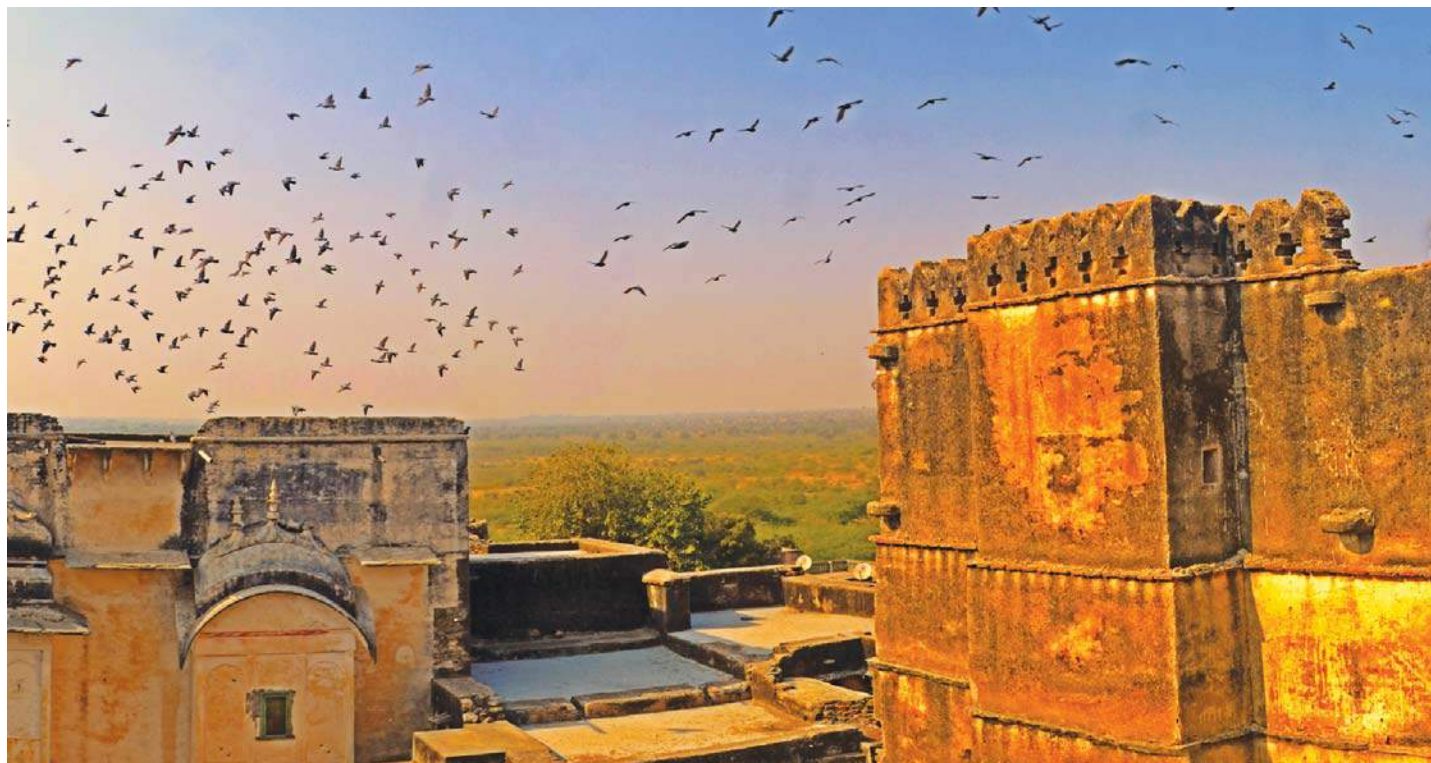
Made of red sandstone that is a trademark of this region, the platform is decorated on the outside with brilliant detailed carvings in numerous panels. These include the ten avatars of Vishnu, Krishna with flute, and also an image of reclining Vishnu.

The elevation is less than 10 feet but the slight height enables a panoramic view of the barrenness all around. Immediately within the same compound are mounds of stone dumped over each

other. Closer inspection reveals them to be remains of outpost temples on all four corners of the main temple. While one is of Shiva for certain, more research and excavation is required to know the deities once worshipped in the other three. Situated in the same area are similar but less view worthy remains of several other temples, including Jain temples, indicating that along with Vaishnavism, Jainism also held sway at Krishnavilas.

The story of how the town was laid to ruins also makes for a fascinating tale. The most popular and accepted version of the story tells of a time where the Muslim governor of nearby Ranthambore wished to marry the princess of Krishnavilas but was turned down by the King Bhima Saha. Taking offence at this, the governor attacked the fair town and brought about its complete destruction. The distraught princess drowned herself in the river Vilasi at a spot which has since then been named *Kanyadeh* (*kanya* meaning girl and *deh* in the local language is a deep pool of water in a river). The Vilasi River is less than a kilometre from the site and can be quite swift and full during the monsoon. The many crocodiles that live in the river waters also frequent it. There are no plaques or boards (yet!) assigning a spot or





commemorating the event. The quiet, tranquil spot belies the drama it must have seen on the day when the princess and according to some, several others ended their lives to escape persecution. Some online versions of the tale lay the blame of the city's destruction on Aurangzeb. There was nothing in local lore or ASI resources that I could find to support it.

Kanyadeh, I would like to imagine, is almost unchanged from over the centuries. A thick forest begins on the other side of the river and a pathway leads up to a small fort. Riverine bird life is on full display along its banks and the sounds of the peacock are omnipresent with the glorious bird often seen making rounds to and fro across the river. The villagers mentioned caves in the forest, some of which are believed sacred and local deities worshipped in them. The local ASI personnel confirmed this along with the interesting information that many caves also house pre-historic cave paintings and petroglyphs! Some are known and documented, however, they estimate there is much in the area lying buried and waiting to tell the story of human civilisation in this province over thousands of years.

Each place that etches itself in one's memory has a particular visual, smell or sequence that remains vivid and clear despite time, distance and even levels of intoxication. The Oh-My-God! moment for Bilasgarh was on entering the small compound of the ASI personnel who manned and protected the ASI site. This open roof shed is under proposal to be declared a museum. It is not much to look at from the outside, with a couple of dozen statues in various stages of ruin kept outside. Once inside the door though, it is that moment where you stand and gasp

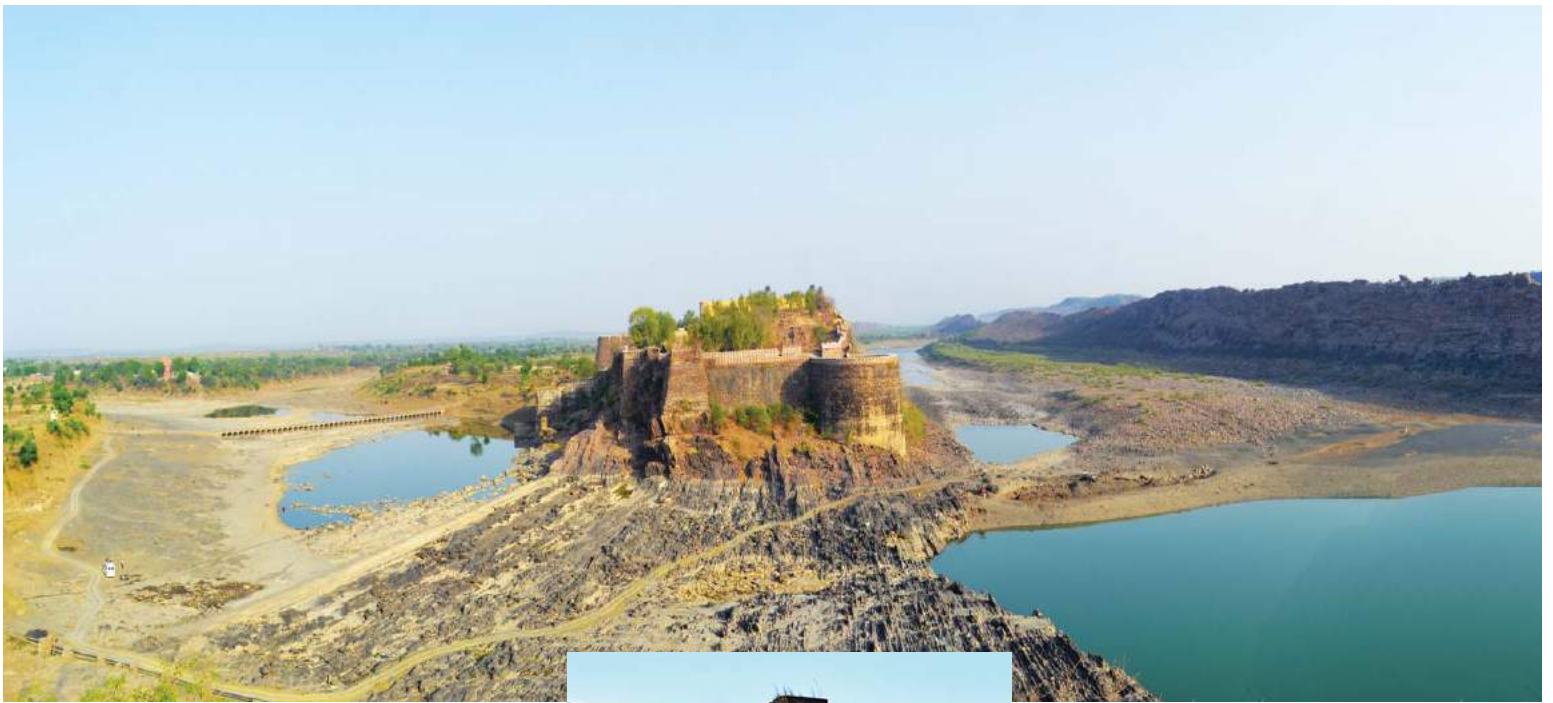
while the guards look on with proud smiles on their faces. Stashed within an area smaller than a football field are a multitude of sculptures, statues, figurines and rock carvings spanning a better part of a millennia representing times and faiths. Hindu, Buddhist and Jain sculptures lie mingled, leaning on one another and of a quality and preservation far better than housed in many museums of the country. Life sized *Tirthankars*, meditating Buddhas, reclining Vishnus and even the *Natraj* – all frozen in time and about to come alive.

**The Oh-My-God! moment for Bilasgarh was on entering the small compound of the ASI personnel who manned and protected the ASI site.**

#### **Crimes etched with stone**

The initial feeling of an Indiana Jones type adventure came back with a bang after the initial awe had settled in. Perhaps this is just how the great explorers must have felt, when on opening a door, they would discover a treasure from ages past, lost to memory. After a long, scrutinising and enchanting walk through time while the guards looked on silently, I sat down on the *charpai* cot with a table fan throwing waves of hot air at me. Over a cup of milky *chai*, throughout the course of which, I could not stop glancing around

at the many stone pieces spread in the compound, they told me how their lives are in danger because of this treasure and explained the reason for the old .303 rifle that hung on the wall and thick iron grill that locked over the museum's entrance. The smuggling of antiquities is a multi-billion dollar industry and incidents where idols and other antiquities disappeared from small villages, towns and even museums are not hard to find. Vaman Ghiya, arrested in Jaipur in 2003 is perhaps the face and biggest expose of the smuggling racket in this country. In a 'trash to



**A panoramic view of the Gagrion fort**

riches' stories where everyone from auctioneers to handicraft dealers to private collectors and even 'unknowing' international museums are clued in, Ghiya has been identified as one of the world's topmost antiques' thieves and is in custody since. The guards quoted the example of a Shiva statue from Kakoni (also in Baran) that went on auction for \$50,000 - \$60,000. Investigations had also revealed the story of a Jain *Tirthankar* statue from this very site which surfaced in an auction catalogue with a reserve price of \$25,000

- \$35,000. With such riches at stake, it is a tempting option for a lot of local youth who see it as a quick scheme to get rich. That explained to me why the first ASI person had rushed to the site just as my car had reached. They went on to give narratives of how they have had to drive off would-be thieves many times and live under the constant threat of attempted robbery. Their only advantage, as one of the people stated in a dry, matter or fact tone, "...stone is heavy." In the same conversation, came the mention of another place the epitaph for which had first gotten me researching about this region. A place known colloquially as *Bhand Devra* (old/ruined temple) and touted by the district tourism authorities as Mini Khajuraho.

### **The mini Khajuraho of Rajasthan**

About 40 kms east from the town Baran is a serene valley formed by a meteorite impact many eons ago. It is picture perfect, with chunks of greenery, a lake, small fort and a popular temple on the Ramgarh mountains that surround it. Seven hundred and fifty stairs lead up to the shrine of two female



**Inside the fort**

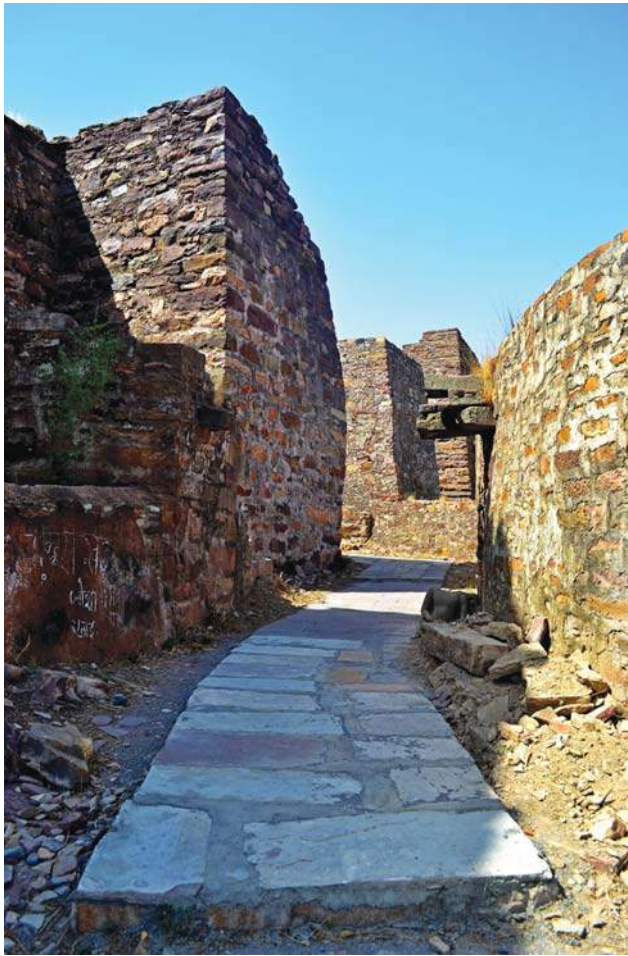
deities – Annapurna and Kisnai where one is worshipped with sweets and milk while another with meat and wine. In this hullabaloo, forgotten by all but the locals, lies an ancient dilapidating temple of Lord Shiva.

I could find no reliable or authenticated book or resource paper readily available to unravel and explain what remains of the site. My untrained eye combined with the guidelines of those of the handful of netizens who have visited this place and shared their experiences indicated a

temple complex that housed at least seven temples at one time, out of which only one stands tall. Two smaller shrines behind the main one are distinguishable amidst the rubble. If Krishnavilas had piles of stone carving, this temple complex houses mountains of stone carvings.

The main distinguisher between the two sites is that while the former Vishnu temple had instances of erotic architecture, this one, dedicated to Shiva is replete with it. There is hardly any piece of stone that is only plain polished. The entire structure is intricately carved with hundreds of different local deities, *yaksha-yakshinis*, wild animals, *gandharvas* and male-female figures in erotic moods. As is characteristic of medieval Hindu temple architecture, the temple had steps leading up to a porch. Forty pillars hold up the roof of the temple and the elegantly carved *mandapa*. Beyond this is the square *sanctum sanctorum* housing the *shivlinga*. As per one source, the temple was constructed by a Naga King Malay Verma and was renovated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by King Trishaverma.





**Narrow ascending paths were built at Gagron fort for defence**

#### **Guilty by elimination**

By this time, Hadoti had fired at me multiple options of sites to visit like Pandora's box had dispelled troubles into the world. Meanwhile, the time Gods were taking a leaf out of Usain Bolt and running multiple record breaking sprints away from me. There were still the temple complexes of Attru, Gargachch and Kakoni to visit in Baran itself – all in separate directions from the town that had become my base. Three forts vied for attention as well – Gugorto the southeast, Shahbad to the east of Baran on the Delhi road and Shergadh to the south towards the Kakoni temple complex. Also on the radar was the original plan of visiting Jhalawar district to complete the Hadoti region. The town of Jhalawar itself is 85kms from Baran town and the district had its own set of must-dos by way of the Kolvi Buddhist caves, situated a 100 kms from Jhalawar town, the majestic Gagron fort at 12 kms and the city of temple bells known as Patan, 7 kms away. All this discounting the local in-city attractions like Sita Bari and the Kshar Bagh in Baran and the Jhalawar palace and museum in Jhalawar town. Clearly I was underprepared for this region, the heritage wealth of which, I had seriously undermined. The regular tourist attractions did not hold much appeal for



**The remarkable paintings on the roof of the Gatehouse at Gagron fort**

me and were the first to be stricken from the over populated list. Kakoni, Attru and Gargachch followed soon after as two temple complexes in Baran had already been visited and these three were similar in spirit and heritage.

The Kolvi Buddhist temples were situated in a remote area and would require two days to do a passable exploration, though they are said to be one of Rajasthan's best-hidden treasures. The temples of Patan are one of the earliest dated temples in Rajasthan from the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, but visiting them, by extension of the logic used above, would have made the entire journey a temple hop.

Next in line were the forts and which one to choose from amongst those. Amongst those in Baran, Shahbad held the allure of meeting the *Sahariya* tribals– mainly found in Madhya Pradesh and in Rajasthan, only in the Baran district. Shergarh was earlier known as Kosvardhan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and houses treasures of Buddhism, Jainism and Shaivism, all of which were patronised by the Hindu rulers. Later captured by Sher Shah Suri, it drew its name from its famous master and has gradually been fortified as it changed hands several times over the centuries. Gugor stands proudly by the perennial Parwati and was built by the Doda Khinchi Rajputs in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Choosing any one in Baran would mean not visiting Jhalawar at all and somewhere that did not feel right. Letting go of the forts in Baran where each one had a unique history from early times and by all accounts fantastic views rates right on top as one of the most heart wrenching travel choices I have had to make. This left the one option and focus hence shifted to getting to the town of Jhalawar and exploring the Gagron fort which has only recently – after my visit – been declared a world heritage site.

#### **The riverine hill fort**

Gagron is a rare example of a hill and river fort and is afforded protection on three sides by the confluence of the Ahu and Kali Sindh rivers and by a dense forest on the other side. The fort



**The fort of Meja from a distance**

itself is built on a low ridge at the confluence, does not have an underground foundation to it. The Mukundarra range of hills behind it acts as a second line of defence. The construction of the fort began by many estimates in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and there were alterations and enhancements right up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Without doubt it has seen a lot of history unfold within and around it. The fort has witnessed *jauhar* when the Khinchis who controlled the fort lost a battle against Hoshanshah of Malwa. In the silent desolateness of the fort, the imagination can fire up the war cries and screams of anguish transforming the fortress into what it must have been at the peak of its glory and power. Then the wind beating on the centuries old stone takes over with its rhythmic chant. I expect the place to change quite dramatically with the fresh input of money through its newfound heritage status and the interest it will generate. I hope that through it all, it retains that grunge, rebellious almost arrogant air that makes it stand out even amongst the mightiest of forts.

### Once upon a dream

Of all the places I have visited, Hadoti remains that one place



**The Jharoka balcony was a part of the queen's residence at Gagron fort**

that definitely deserves another visit for the delightful discoveries it offers, as it remains one of the lesser-explored regions of the country. For a while now, I have quite lost hope that the ASI or any of its sister organisations have the will left in them to bring about any desired change. For a while, the future of a lot of monuments and heritage has seemed quite bleak to me. Events and examples cement my belief that bolstering of this country's heritage and culture stands a better chance through private initiative on a local and individual level which stems from pride and belonging. Greed, salaried labour and even easy bucks will come a distant second. Always. This belief was reinforced as I chose to drive back to Mumbai and on the way stopped at the highly recommended fort at Meja.

Meja is halfway between Ajmer and Udaipur, with the industrial area of Bhilwara being the closest bold letter words on a map. As far as forts in Rajasthan go, it is a fairly recent one, built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in the style and manner in which the great ones were built. The royal legacy of Meja began with Rawat Amar Singhji who was in the service of Maharana Shambhu Singhji of Mewar. Impressed by his



**Ruins of temple at Jhalawar**





**Meja fort is undergoing restoration and all possible care is being taken to stay true to the original plan and making style**

bravery, the Maharana granted a *jagir* (feudal land grant) of his choosing and Amar Singhji selected the picturesque Meja and the surrounding 23 villages. Though it enjoyed judicial powers, the fort was built primarily as a place of dwelling with 60 rooms spread over four floors.

For the first time since its completion in 1880, the fort is undergoing restoration and all possible care is being taken to stay true to the original plan and making style by using methods and processes of the day and age even though they are time consuming and slow. The fort is not being rebuilt as a hotel or guesthouse but as an authentic home stay. And the best part – the initiative and backbreaking work is not by the doyens of the household but the youngest generation who with admirable dignity are not just piecing together stone upon stone of their inheritance but stitching and strengthening the yarns that have weaved the web of time itself. What Meja succeeds in doing which the grand plans at other sites do not come close to accomplishing, is to provide an escape into history. The others merely bring the past to the present in a gory, sickening confrontation. Meja is by no means a defining or momentous feat of architecture

or history as compared to all that already exists in Rajasthan and around India. Yet, it is like the shards of pristine, virgin pottery unearthed at a dig that tells the seeker just how gorgeous the vase must have been. Once complete next year, I hope it is that spark which ignites amongst all those in possession of even small and supposedly insignificant pieces of heritage and history the will and desire to treasure it, care for it and unashamedly flaunt it. ■

**Note** – My information, access and possibly visit to Hadoti would not have been successful without the ready help of Rajasthan Government officers Mr. Sourabh Taniwal and Mr. Naveen Jain (ex District Magistrate of Baran) whose voluntary contributions populate most accurately of what is available online regarding the district.



A special mention for Mr. Raj Rishi Singh Hada, convenor of the Indian National Trust For Art & Cultural Heritage's Jhalawar chapter; who introduces his hometown with great gusto and deep affection.

The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.

## Our Last Six Issues

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# Best selling author, a good artist and a versatile individual



**Preeti Shenoy** is much more than the bestselling author of four books. Her talent and versatility make her not just a pleasure to read but also an absolute joy to talk to. Her dynamic personality and multifaceted skillsets are emulated in her Twitter bio which reads: "Author of four best-sellers, artist (portraits, mixed media, paper quilling), poet, yoga-buff, ex-basketball player, blogger, dog-owner, nature lover, TEDx speaker and a mother." Though a member of the Forbes India celebrity long list, at home Preeti is an immensely committed and protective mother.

What makes Preeti extremely likable and a great conversationalist is her genuine interest in people, her ability to keep her audience captivated and her aptitude to delve deep into the mindsets of the characters of her books.

Preeti began her writing career with her first book called '*34 Bubblegums and Candies*'. The book was about 34 real-life incidents from her life and those of her friends. Later, her book '*Life is what you make it*' was among the top selling books of 2011 and the novel '*Tea for two and a piece of cake*' featured in the top five best-selling fictions of 2012. Her latest book '*The Secret Wish List*', which released a few months ago is already making waves.

In her books, Preeti Shenoy weaves magic with her words and pictures. Her books are magnetic, engrossing and unputdownable. Preeti talks about her inspiration and her journey with **Veena Adige**.

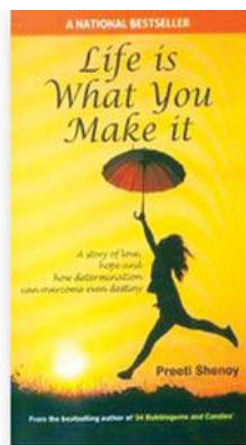
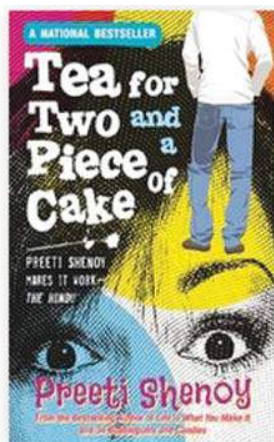
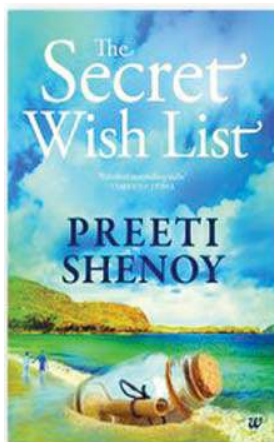
Ankita in *Life is what you make it* is so real that I feel she really exists. You have written in the first person, did you actually talk to a psychiatrist's patient and find out how s/he feels and what goes on his/her mind? Though the middle part upset me, the end was great and very positive. How did you get knowledge of such firsthand thoughts and emotions from? The book is great.

Thank you and very glad you liked it. Yes, of course, I did a lot of research to write the book. I researched for more than two years. I was living in the UK at that time and had access to several groups of artists with bipolar disorder, as well as mental health care professionals. I read up a lot about the disorder and read many case studies. The book has been on almost all the best-seller charts now. In fact, when Amazon opened in India, *Life is what you make it* was on number one. I have got lakhs of mails from people telling me how much they could relate to the book. I am glad that all my efforts have paid off.

Diksha in *The Secret Wish list* is a person next door. Most Indian women who have had arranged marriages and are traditional in their upbringing are like her, 'doormats', afraid, meek, mild. So when Indian middle class women read this book, do they get the impression that like Diksha, they too can give up everything and follow their wish list? Isn't it a wrong signal? This is not a criticism as the book is superb but these are my feelings.

Why is standing up for your beliefs a 'wrong signal'? Is it right to be used as doormats? Everybody may not have an





Ankit in their lives, but I do hope they make a wish-list after reading the book. A young man was so moved upon reading the book that he told me that he asked his mother to make a wish-list and he was going to fulfill every single thing on her list. A workaholic husband confessed that he saw a lot of himself in Sandeep, and he swore that he would change and be nicer to his wife. I really think most women are guilt-tripped into conforming and shackled by their own doubts. Even in television ads, we see families sitting around the table, while the wife runs around making food for all, and the father-in-law passes judgment as to whether the food is good enough. Honestly, such archaic and sexist notions have to change. The book does manage to send out a strong signal in that regard—not a wrong signal.

**Where or from whom do you get your inspiration from, to write and create such masterpieces?**

From my father, from the daily happenings around me, from life itself.

**Are the characters based on real life ones or are they fictitious?**

Most of them are drawn from real life (but a lot of details are changed) and that is why they feel so real. Because people exactly like my characters, do exist. In fact, most of my readers always

tell me that they see themselves or someone they know in my characters and I feel happy about that.

**A young man was so moved upon reading the book that he told me that he asked his mother to make a wish-list and he was going to fulfill every single thing on her list. A workaholic husband confessed that he saw a lot of himself in Sandeep, and he swore that he would change and be nicer to his wife.**

**Do you have disciplined writing sessions, like writing from 10 to 5 or during the night, or do you write best when you are inspired or in a mood?**

There are days when I write more than 7000 words a day (the good writing days) and there are days when I don't write even 500 words. But once I start a book, I am relentlessly working on it, till I finish. I write best when I am alone, by myself. I cannot write in a crowded café or anywhere where there is noise. I don't even play music when I write, and I need pin-drop silence.

**Your support system for your writings is your family and friends. If there is a clash (like an outing, a social event during your writing time), what do you do? Does your family wait for you, give up the programme or go without you?**

I am fortunate that I am my own boss. And my boss is very generous. She gives me an off whenever I need it. Therefore social events really haven't been a problem so far.

**How would a typical day in your life be?**

I dislike routines and am bored easily. So I really do not have a 'typical day', as such. I wake up most mornings between 6.00 am and 6.15 am. I cook for my family, pack their lunches, make breakfast. Once they are off, the day is mine.

**You have so many other interests as well. Do they clash or are they complementary/symbiotic?**

They are always complementary. I do whatever I feel like doing that day. If I feel like making a portrait that day, instead of writing, I do it!

**When and how did you start writing? Any inherited talent or is it in your genes or is it an inspiration or the environment around you?**

I have written and drawn pictures, ever since I learnt how to. The margins of my text books were always full of tiny illustrations. I wrote my first 'book' at the age of nine or ten. It was all of twelve pages, and it was an adventure story full of illustrations. I have won several prizes in school as well as in college, at University level for creative writing. For me, writing and drawing are an inherent part of my personality. If I am not able to express myself through writing or my art, I feel as though I would explode. It comes naturally to me, and of course, like most people who are passionate about what they do; I work hard at it too.

**(Continued on page 40)**

## “The Dolch Project is a crowd-sourcing exercise in itself”



**Bodhisatwa Dasgupta** is a copywriter at Grey Worldwide by profession and a writer by nature. His immense creative talent and desire to do good for society has driven him to contribute to our nation in ways that are not limited to 60cc ads. His one-year-old initiative, The Dolch Project, aims to invite people and bring them together for the purpose of writing short stories for children with learning disabilities.

With this initiative, Mr. Dasgupta is addressing an issue that often goes unnoticed and neglected in our country. His objective is to provide good literature for children with learning disabilities so that they are not alienated. Mr. Dasgupta talks about his inspiration, goals and successes with **Ashna Contractor**.

### What is The Dolch Project and what inspired you to start this initiative?

I first started reading up on and researching learning disabilities about a year ago after my friend forwarded me an email from a father who had two learning disabled children and was looking to organise a story-writing competition for other such children. As part of my research, I spoke to counselors and schools and I learnt a few things. Children with learning disabilities don't learn words like we do. We learn words phonetically (based on their sound) but children with learning disabilities use "sight words". Sight words are words that you recognise by sight. Children with learning disabilities recognise words based on how they look

rather than how they sound.

In 1936, a man named Edward Dolch read through hundreds of children's storybooks and came up with a list of words which were most common in them. This list of 220 words with 90 nouns is called the Dolch List. Children with learning disabilities are introduced to this list in their pre-primary years so that they become comfortable with the words. However, not much literature has been written using the Dolch List. The only thing that comes to mind is Dr. Seuss's 'The Cat in the Hat'. Therefore, with The Dolch Project, our aim is to get writers, from different parts of the country, together to co-author a book of stories written using the Dolch List for children with learning disabilities.

### How has the response been so far – both from writers as well as from potential readers?

The response has been great.. We have been getting lots of emails and responses on our Facebook page. We now have over a 100 stories, which is incredible because that gives us enough to make not one book but multiple volumes. We had a woman from South India write to us saying that she teaches at a school for children with learning disabilities and every time that the Dolch Project uploads a story on their Facebook page, she reads it out to her students and they have a great time listening to the stories because they can actually follow them. So overall, we have gotten good responses. Hopefully when the book

actually comes out, we will have schools wanting to use it.

**What would you wish to achieve through this project and what message would you like to send out?**

As kids, we are all exposed to literature. But children with learning disabilities are not able to read regular books. Their grasp of the English language is completely different from what is normally expected. What I would like to achieve is to give them reading material so that they are not alienated and because reading is (A) a good habit and (B) it broadens your horizons.

I think the message that I would like to send out is that when a group of people get together for a particular cause, the outcome can be really fantastic. The Dolch Project is a crowd-sourcing exercise in itself. Every person who is writing a story or contributing in some way is as much a part of the project as the person who started it.

**What are some of the major challenges that you are facing or are likely to face?**

So far we haven't faced many challenges or difficulties. However, there was one person who came through our Facebook page and expressed a different view on the Dolch List. Even with the Dolch way of education, there are many schools of thought. This man believed that the Dolch way did not work and that children with learning disabilities should be given access to normal books. There are always going to be diverse opinions. Therefore I can't take everything that people say into account. Majority of people think that Dolch does work and so this was not really a barrier but it could be considered the only possible deterrent.

**In order to get people to write stories for your project and use these books,**

**it is important that our society is made aware of the plight of children with learning disabilities. How do you think one can spread awareness about this issue?**

What we started doing on the Facebook page and what we will now do in a more organized manner is to first educate people as to what learning disabilities are and how Dolch can help. While writing stories is a major part of this project, people first need to know what they are dealing with. From whatever research I have done, it is clear to me that learning disabilities are a big monster. There are many types of learning disabilities that could slow down a child's reading process or understanding capabilities and this could hamper the way in which the child recognises words. Therefore, a big part of The Dolch Project is to first understand what these children go through and know as much about it as possible and only then write and collect stories that are tailor-made for them.

Mostly whatever that we have done so far is just online. The whole thing about doing something online is that if people see a good cause that they can relate to, they are immediately likely to share it with people who are associated with similar things or are likely to contribute. That's how things go viral and that is exactly what our online posters did.

We are also tying up with sponsors and associations as we speak. Nothing is on paper yet, but talks are happening.

**Do you think that our society tends to be insensitive or unsympathetic towards children with learning disabilities or is the problem more about a lack of awareness?**

Generally, in India, learning disabilities are not viewed as a problem. This is really scary because if a parent has a

child who is learning disabled, for the parent the child is just slow. So the parent may ridicule or punish the child without realising that there is a genuine problem with the child. In India, we have not done much to educate people about learning disabilities. So while we have special schools or programmes for children with learning disabilities, this is only for those who can afford it. What about those who can't afford it? Often parents think that their child is just dull and we as an advertising agency cannot change such attitudes. That is something that the government has to work towards.

**How do you plan to market these books? Do you have any tie-up with organisations that are working specifically with learning disabled children?**

We are in talks with publishing houses. Once all the stories come in, we will give them to the publishing house and they will make a book out of it. After that, our first priority would be to send written books to schools. We are also working on tie-ups with people who can actually accredit these stories. I would not know if these stories are appropriate for children with learning disabilities. So we would have to work with other people to get approval for our stories. These could be specific associations or even a government body that deals with dyslexia and other disabilities. We're working on it, but we are still in the nascent stage.

**How has Grey worldwide impacted or helped The Dolch Project?**

This is a Grey Worldwide initiative. Even though I initiated it, one person cannot handle a project this big. Everyone from the CEO to the planning directors at Grey is equally part of this project as I am.■



## Face to face with Preeti Shenoy

(Continued from page 37)

### Your books are best sellers. How do you react to adulation?

I am truly over-whelmed by all the adulation and fan-mails. I am humbled, taken aback, shocked and pleasantly surprised. I have been invited by many institutions (Including IITs and IIMs) and organisations to give talks (I have given a couple of Ted X talks) and I feel happy to be able to share my thoughts and learnings.

### Do you have a role model?

I would say I have role models in different fields, as my interests are varied and wide.

### Who are your favourite authors? Do you like romantic fiction, suspense-thrillers, murder-mysteries, or do you go in for heavy reading or spiritual reading?

I like all books. Period. I read a lot and my reading tends to be varied. I am not particularly fond of murder mysteries (I finished the entire Agatha Christie series when in school). I like spiritual reads too. Among my favourite writers are Roald Dahl, Audrey Niffenegger, Milan Kundera, Somia Choquette, Brian Weiss and many others too. However, I would not say that they have inspired my writing. I believe each person has his own unique style. I enjoy reading them, but will always maintain my unique style as Preeti Shenoy. I love reading. In fact thankfully everyone in my family loves reading. My house is full of books. I have to read every day before I sleep. I read all kinds of books and sometimes read two to three books at a time.

### How do your children view you? Are they proud of you (naturally) or do they resent the time you spend on writing, especially when they were too young to understand?

I started writing professionally only four years back, by which time my children were not toddlers anymore. They were fairly independent. I have always prioritised family over my career, which was the reason I gave up my corporate career to be a stay at home mother. I was always there for the children, 24x7. I have never employed a nanny or a baby-sitter, never left them with anyone, never had any in-laws or parents staying with me permanently at any point in time, to help me raise them. My husband and I have always believed in raising them ourselves, and spending a lot of time with them. It is very important to me to be able to do that. Therefore, it is only natural that my children are inordinately proud of me and my achievements. They think I am the best mother in the world. I am glad about that.

### Which is your next book? Is it ready or is it in the nascent stage? Can you give our readers a preview?

Next book is done...and will be out in a couple of months.

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### Preeti quotes:

- "Writing is pure hard work and you have to be perseverant. If I do not get time during the day due to the children's studies or for whatever reason, then I sit late in to the night and work. I also carry a journal with me all the time. If any thoughts come to me then I capture them in that journal even if I am doing something else. I do not try and force myself to do something. If I am not feeling like writing on a particular day then I would do some quilting or paint or read a book all of which energizes me and enables me to come back with renewed energy."
- "If you do not talk about something you are proud of and have worked hard for, chances are others will not too."
- "Life is short. Follow your heart and chase your dreams. And yes, they will come true." ■



Veena Adige is the Associate Editor of Bhavan's Journal, the fortnightly magazine of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. She has authored four books including *The Legacy of Baba Amte*. She has written many short and long stories and freelances for several magazines and newspapers including Woman's Era, DNA and others.

# From food insecurity to food sovereignty

*To fight insecurity of food and malnutrition, we have to adopt a sustainable farming methodology. The food security schemes are valid but not enough to take care of the chronic food insecurity in the country. Hence there is a need to go beyond these measures and to focus more on the issue of food sovereignty, asserts **Nandini Chavan**.*

**T**HE Food Security Bill is one of the most debated issues in the country today. This issue has been seen consistently from the perspective of PDS (Public Distribution System) only. The problem of Food Security, though a global phenomenon, is a more crucial issue in developing countries. Globally, 20 per cent children, under the age of five die because of hunger and 42 per cent face various forms of malnutrition. According to Micro Nutrient Initiative's global health survey to determine the mortality rate amongst children under the age of five, India's rank is 49. The worst performing states with underweight children under five years of age are Madhya Pradesh (60 per cent), Jharkhand (56.5 per cent) and Bihar (55.9 per cent). Similarly prevalence of anaemia among children (6-59 months) is more than 70 per cent in Bihar, MP, UP, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Jharkhand. Those are just the current statistics, but in a country like India, food insecurity has various hidden factors. Feudalism and patriarchy, SEZs, mining, mechanisation of farming along with food insecurity within the existing development model (neo-liberal) also perpetuates violence; especially when people are denied their rights to land, food and opportunities for self sustainability. Food insecurity is a problem that the state also recognises and therefore is urging for the



**A farmer and his family with their harvest**

implementation of the National Food Security Bill in a holistic manner. However, civil society organisations and other human rights organisations are more concerned with the right to food and food sovereignty.

PDS is not a complete solution for food insecurity; sustainable agriculture is. Even today agricultural sector is the backbone of Indian economy. Sustainability relates to many things. Sustainable agriculture may be defined as any set of agronomic practices that are economically viable, environmentally safe, and socially acceptable. Sustainable agriculture focuses on "living

soil, on optimising the use of synthetic chemicals and fertilisers. During the years sustainability got new dimensions like biodiversity, bio-safety etc."

There is a need to promote the right to food campaign which is now globally accepted. The 'Right to food' Act enshrines freedom from hunger and malnutrition as a fundamental right. It provides for and asserts the physical, economic and social right of all citizens to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with an adequate diet necessary to lead an active healthy life with dignity.

About 80 per cent of people in India are

dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Globally, hunger and malnutrition are not caused by food shortage, but by the failure of entitlements (Sen, 1981) and purchasing power of the poor. This has led to the persistence of food insecurity. Dalits, Adivasis, migrants, informal sector workers, and women are especially likely to face food insecurity.

The government has institutionalised several schemes which aim at directly expanding the access to food and the utilisation of food such as PDS, Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). More recently the government of India amended the National Food Security (NFS) Bill 2011. These initiatives, however, are not necessarily gender-sensitive or gender redistributive. Social relations of gender, caste, and class continue to mediate all three dimensions to food security: production, access and utilisation.

### Food security to food sovereignty

Food sovereignty means access to appropriate, affordable, nutritious, traditionally produced food which is sufficient to live with dignity. Food security also means sufficient food production, storage, appropriate and non-discriminatory access to consumption. Production, access, utilisation are the three basic pillars of food security. The Food Security Bill currently deals specifically only with access to food, not taking into consideration the problems of production, distribution and utilisation. There is no single universally accepted definition of food security. Most versions can stipulate secure access to sufficient, affordable and good quality food. Taking these norms into consideration, the food security situation within the states can be categorised into: extremely alarming, alarming and serious. Madhya Pradesh is extremely alarming; Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Gujarat, West

Bengal, Bihar, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan are alarming; Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Assam are serious.

The International Food Policy Research Institution (IFPRI) has formulated India State Hunger Index along the lines of Global Hunger Index taking the three criteria into consideration - inadequate consumption, underweight child, and child mortality. In India the 17 states covered by the IFPRI score worse than the “low” and “moderate” hunger categories as per the India State Hunger Index (ISHI). Food security problems are adverse particularly in backward areas and slums and mostly aggravated amongst landless, migrants, Dalits, Adivasis and minorities, women, girls and displaced communities.

The neo-liberal model of food production and distribution are failing on the measure of food justice, because that never was its objective. The model's basic objective is to generate trade and capture world economy by its means. We need a paradigm shift from chemical dependent agriculture to traditional and ecological agriculture, monocultures to diversity. The whole issue of food security - sovereignty should be discussed as an issue of Human Rights.

Pillars of food insecurity mainly from the production point of view, are aggravated by limited access of entitlement to land especially for women, climate change, secondary production of oilseeds and pulses due to heavy investment in cash crops, contract farming, bio fuel production, unsustainable practices, conversion of farm land into industrial agriculture etc.

Access in food insecurity comes mainly under the issue of food grain exports more than imports, cash replacing kind wages. Also, marginal land owning farmers, landless labourers are increasing, credit for food grain/pulse purchase poor and food entitlements through schemes are not reaching the marginalised communities such as dalits and adivasis. To add to their worries,

market access gets weak during monsoon and conflict situation. Food utilisation basically endures less diversity, unhealthy food, and time and fuel shortage.

### Gender and food security

Worldwide food sovereignty movement offers opportunities to advance women's rights within the food system. It acknowledges the historic role they have played since the invention of farming, in gathering and sowing seeds, and as protectors and guardians of biodiversity and genetic resources. In actuality, food sovereignty implies a whole agricultural reform. However, these reforms must be undertaken boldly, ensuring that women have complete entitlement regarding access and control of land, fishing areas and grazing migration routes.

These reforms include revising farmer's understanding of collective and community land ownership so that land is divided fairly between the men and women who work on it, including individual and joint titling. To understand the problems of women's food security, there is a need to see the whole issue with a gender lens. Fostering balanced participation of men and women in all stages of food production, distribution, access and utilisation are required for food security. Patriarchy has always been dominant in agricultural way of life; therefore women need to have a complete control over the right to sell at markets. This facilitates women's individual income. Food security is not just a part of their gendered role but a part of their autonomy.

There is gender inequality in the process of food security. The processes of food production like land ownership, decision making, credit, irrigation, cooperatives participation, major decision making powers are in the hands of men. On the other hand, women play a major role in production, but are voiceless in the process of access to and distribution of the produce. Food security process is a



symbolic form of the traditional patriarchal division of labour. Women in production process have small livestock and small cash crops.

Role of men and women differ in decision making processes. This means decisions about how much food is to be kept for consumption, access to income to buy grains, purchase of grains, control over ration card, etc.

Gender issues in food utilisation i.e., post harvest possession are that women are particularly engaged in cooking activities, but tend to eat less and last. Women having reproductive work – girls are pulled out of school at earlier ages and thus have lesser accesses to MDMS. Also they are likely to get married off and reproduce early, leading to nutritional deficiencies not only amongst themselves but also their offspring. In the last ten years, food security situation has become worse. It has been affecting women and girls more, than men and boys.

Good practices on gender and food security, which are, endowments for

women and girls, entitlement on their lands, collective land ownership, collective land lease, community seed banks managed by women, women-managed child care and nutrition centres, etc. helps to strengthen food security schemes in general and from a gender lens.

Contrary to general portrayal by government, food security is not solely about PDS. PDS is basically an urban phenomenon. To fight insecurity of food and malnutrition we have to adopt a sustainable farming methodology. 'Food sovereignty' as an issue needs to be discussed more in the public sphere. This also leads to take certain steps like condemning Genetically Modified crops, protest against land grabbing and land bank, and abandon the trade and agricultural liberalisation initiated by WTO of which the Government India is a signatory. Government subsidy should be primarily in the hands of farming community and not under corporate control. Corporate and agricultural institutions should not dominate and

apply pressure on the farming community on what to produce and what not to produce. That decision is in the control of the farming community. All the food security schemes, as provided by the bill, are definitely valid but not enough to take care of the chronic food insecurity in the country. Hence there is need to go beyond these measures and to focus more on the issue of food sovereignty. ■

The writer is Programme Coordinator-Research & Publication with Vikas Adhyayan Kendra (VAK), Mumbai. VAK has been working on the issue of food security since the last few years. VAK also operates as a part of 'People Alliance for Bio Regional Food Sovereignty'. The recommendations of this alliance have



been presented to the Parliamentary Forum in Dec 2012. The writer also has a book in Marathi under publication, titled 'Vaataavarnatil badal aani Shetee – Shetakaree Mahila ani annsurkshesathe kelele prayas'.



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# Health to the beat of drums- the Panchayat way

*Panchayats can play a key role in ensuring that the government health services reach the needy, as proven by some villages of Rajasthan, writes* **Swapna Majumdar**.

**T**HE day the drums start to beat, residents of Navgaon in Anandpuri block of Banswara district in the desert state of Rajasthan, immediately know it is a Thursday. And it is no ordinary Thursday; it is that one day in the month earmarked as Mother and Child Health Nutrition (MCHN) Day. Women start queuing up at the *anganwadi* centre, waiting patiently to access health services provided by the government. Whether it is for ante- or post-natal care, routine immunisation, distribution of vitamins and folic acid tablets, or for dispensing information on reproductive health, the village *anganwadi* centre is buzzing with activity. While this may not seem like an extraordinary occurrence elsewhere, in Banswara district this intervention to increase access to health services is making the difference between life and death for scores of women and children. The district recorded the highest number of deaths of children in the age group 0-5 years and second highest in the number of maternal deaths in Rajasthan in 2011-12.

One of Rajasthan's most backward districts, Banswara's predominantly tribal population is dependent on agriculture as their main source of income. In Anandpuri block, villages are scattered across the hilly and remote terrain and often fall off the government's developmental radar. Female literacy is a mere 27.9 per cent, a big reason for the low awareness of health schemes among women and their right to access them.

Of course, sustained efforts of panchayat (local government) members, who have

been working closely with local civil society organisations, have had a positive impact on the health seeking behaviour of the people of the region and the Navgaon experience only underlines this.

It was as late as 2010 that villages in Anandpuri block started to hear more about their health rights when an initiative to address the lack of communication about the various services available under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was launched by the Ahmedabad-based Centre for Health, Education Training and Nutrition Awareness (Chetna) as a part of its work with the Communication for Health India Network (CHIN), a group of NGOs working on health.

The initiative has been implemented in 794 villages of select blocks in Alwar, Banswara, Churu, Karauli and Udaipur districts that were chosen on the basis of their poor health indicators – high infant and maternal mortality, low rate of immunisation, poor antenatal care (ANC) and institutional deliveries.

Meenakshi Shukla, Deputy Director, Chetna, explains that a needs assessment carried out in 2009 – at the start of the three-year initiative – revealed that 1,800 pregnant and nursing mothers wanted information on public health services and entitlements, particularly that relating to the Janani Suraksha Yojana, Balsakha Yojana, Chiranjeevi Yojana, and MCHN Day. They were unaware about whom to contact at the village level for such information. It also became clear that frontline health workers like the accredited social health activist (ASHA) and members of



**The day the drums start to beat, residents of Navgaon in Anandpuri block of Banswara district in Rajasthan, immediately know it is a Thursday - the Mother and Child Health Nutrition Day. Use of traditional tools like the drums was initiated by the local panchayat.**

(Courtesy: Chetna)

the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as well as Village Health and Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs) lacked clarity about their role in facilitating access to maternal and child health entitlements provided on MCHN Day. Around 148 VHSNC/PRI members and 227 ASHAs in the five blocks expressed ignorance regarding their roles and responsibilities.

To overcome this hurdle Chetna undertook some steps. "Our local partner in Banswara, the Association for Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA) interacted closely with panchayat members to explain to them the importance of their role in improving awareness of the health programmes, including MCHN Day," states Shukla.

But after Vijender Dosi, block in charge, ASSEFA, held several meetings with the panchayat members, he realised that none of them had accurate information about the funds available for propagating health schemes. Recalls Dosi, "The



**A meeting being held by PRI members in on the importance of MCHN Day.**  
(Courtesy: Chetna)

untied funds allocated to the VHSNCs under the NRHM for the promotion of MCHN Day remained unutilised because the panchayats did not know how to use it. We told the panchayat members, many of whom were also part of the health committees, that they could use this annual sum of Rs 1,200 to spread awareness on health schemes and that this would have a positive impact.”

From this sustained interaction emerged an unusual champion of women and child health – Devilal Masar, a member of Navgaon panchayat. Realising that many of the local women would be unable to read the government’s communication materials on health services, he hit upon a culturally appropriate strategy. He decided to use drums – traditionally done as part of religious functions – to promote MCHN Day in four villages.

Initially, the response was poor. The few women who did come out of curiosity were disappointed on being told that the drums were not beating to invite them to a village celebration but to avail of health services. But Masar was not deterred. He continued to beat the drum on MCHN Day every month. Slowly, the

number of women who responded to the drumbeats began to grow. As word spread, attendance also increased dramatically.

The success of approach led the sarpanchs of six more villages to adopt this strategy where, according to Dosi, the beating of drums has pushed up the numbers of women accessing health services on MCHN Day.

Another impact of the participatory communications strategy evolved to mobilise panchayats was seen in Churu district. Just how important health services are for the women and children of Churu is evident from the fact that the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) here is a very high 343, while Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is a grim 55. Clearly, ignorance about existing government health schemes was having a tellingly negative impact.

In addition to the lack of knowledge, what Shikshit Rojgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti (SRKPS), Chetna’s local NGO partner in Churu district, found was that poor sanitation was clearly a serious concern. The broken-down bathroom at the *anganwadi* centre in Sirsili village of Churu block had

become a cause of worry for the parents of the children enrolled there. They were afraid that their children would get hurt or fall ill if they used the bathroom. Even the number of women who visited the centre during MCHN Day started declining because of the lack of access to functioning toilets.

Some vocal community members did raise the issue before sarpanch Ramniwas Saran but their words fell on deaf ears. When an SRKPS activist spoke to panchayat members about the declining attendance on MCHN Day, they were told that there was no money to get the *anganwadi*’s bathroom repaired. “We realised then that in Churu, too, panchayats were unaware of the importance of untied funds provided under the NRHM,” says Shishir Kumar, block coordinator, SRKPS.

After identifying the gaps in information, SRKPS block link worker, Saroj Devi, not only spoke with the sarpanch and panchayat members about the significance of the MCHN Day but also explained how funds could be used to get the toilet rebuilt. Armed with this information the sarpanch swung into action. The toilet was functional within a month. As expected, attendance at the *anganwadi* increased dramatically – by almost 80 per cent – leading Saran and panchayat members to accept the principle that health care delivery was an important part of their responsibilities.

In fact, so inspired was Saran that he shared his experience in the monthly meeting of the panchayat samiti at the block level. The block development officer who was present at this meeting asked all sarpanchs and Panchayat Samiti members as well as Zilla Parishad members to participate in MCHN Day proceedings and fully utilise the untied funds available, just as the sarpanch of Sirsili had done. Moral of the story: health is central to the welfare of the community and panchayats have a key role to play in delivering it.■

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# Congregating notes

*Concerts bring artistes and music aficionados on a common platform and help build a mutual bond. These concerts are where an artiste receives the immediate applause of audience. Prof. Rajiv Trivedi charts the journey of musical concerts, which has been instrumental in shaping Indian classical music.*

**C**ONSIDER this scenario. In the rural environ, a singer sits on a temple platform and begins singing for himself (*Swantah Sukhaya*). His friends may accompany him on string, percussion. A housewife on her way back from temple might confide to friends and relatives about the music-makers. In a short time, the interested and the curious and those with time on hands surround the performers. The singer might not take offence on realising the presence of an audience and would begin to sing, both for himself and the audience. In another scenario, the audience gets familiar with the singer and presses him to present songs of their choice. The singing of the artiste, gathering of people, and their mutual bond through music – all takes place naturally. The whole happening is unique and without any external order. Yet, it is a concert; unintended, still a concert.

## A concert in progress

It rests upon us how we define a concert. In essence, it is a congregation of listeners who devote full attention to the musical presentation. When one envisages 'musical concert' today, the image that emerges is of artistes sitting under glittering lights on well-arranged chairs, or standing on stage in dazzling outfits holding instruments in their hands, performing music. In the West, classical concerts, which present basically orchestral compositions, have the same arrangement except for decorous discipline as that of popular musicians. In India, 'classical music



**Ustad Zakir Hussain and Pandit Ravi Shankar engrossed in enthralling audience at a musical concert**

concerts' are very different in terms of presentation simply because of different nature of the two music styles.

The modern concert essentially has visual elements. The placement of artiste is intended for both — visual impact and ensuring desirable sound. The seating of audience too has bearing on receptivity and thus a concert hall is designed and built after study. The history of public performance of Indian classical music is less than hundred years old. Earlier, it was confined to the royal courts and private sittings in the homes of rich people, because they could support the artistes, and create appreciation amongst a class of people. With the decline of feudal system, these patrons disappeared. Musicians were forced to turn vagrant or seek shelter in dance-houses. Gradual political and social changes had eroded the original acceptance of music and other

performing arts in an open, appreciative manner. Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (18 August 1872 – 21 August 1931) endeavoured to restore regard and esteem of music, with the result public concerts started taking place. He infused awareness in public, by composing, performing and singing good lyrics in classical forms that enthralled audience all over India. In several places 'Prarthana Sabhas' were organised where Mahatma Gandhi himself, was a regular visitor. With the rising awareness of national pride and changes in political system, young artistes came out to adopt music as their career.

## Concerts – then and now

Still, most of these gatherings differed from strict definition of concert in that they were held in open spaces instead of concert halls. Yet, there were several, organised by connoisseur patrons, that

were held in closed halls. These gatherings came to be recognised after the patrons – like Lala Babu conference in Kolkata, Dhakku Babu conference in Kanpur etc. – and gained national repute. In several places like Mumbai, Lahore, Kolkata, Allahabad, Varanasi, Agra, Gwalior, Brindavan-Mathura, Baroda etc., musicians par-excellence, performed and popularised Indian classical music that changed the perception and taste of Indian audience, forever. It was a beginning of a new era.

Indian concerts were unique on account of accessibility that was provided to everyone by arranging them open-air. Passers-by would listen, hesitate, sit down and join the audience. Gradually, this instilled a love and appreciation for classical music. With efforts of Pt. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (10 August 101860 – 19 September 19 1936), Pt. Paluskar and their disciples, several music institutions were established which provided a definite place and adequate training to lovers of Indian classical music. With several experimentations and creative geniuses, a new wave of demonstration in the field of music and dance gripped the entire nation.

The performance in closed or open-air gathering largely follows a simple scheme. The main singer sits in the centre; on his left are instrumental accompanists and right, percussionists. Close behind him *tanpura* players take their positions holding the instruments, so the *shadja* is always audible to the vocalist and other players. The variations may be in type of instruments and percussion. The vocalist sometimes plays the *surmandal* or harmonium. Vocalists of medieval temple tradition play *jhanjh* or *manjira* instead. *Ghan-vadya* (struck idiophones) were often used for rhythm. *Sarangi* has long been a choice instrument as it produces human-like tone. Violin and harmonium are next preferred. Traditionally, the accompaniment was on *veena* (generic term for string instruments), which is still the staple choice in form of *tambura*

or *tanpura*. *Dhruv*-pad invariably required *pakhawaj* (also called *mridang*) but later *tabla* became the ubiquitous percussion.

Development of instruments, changes in style of singing along with regard for music in society gradually brought the recital to present shape. If we categorise Indian classical concerts, it may show three stages of change.

**Indian concerts were unique on account of accessibility that was provided to everyone by arranging them open-air. Passers-by would listen, hesitate, sit down and join the audience. Gradually, this instilled a love and appreciation for classical music.**

1. Pre-Bhatkhande - Vishnu Digambar era (1820 - 1900)
2. Bhatkhande Impact (till 1980)
3. Modern/ Post-modern era (1980-1990 - till date)

Pre-Bhatkhande-Vishnu Digambar era  
Evolution in Indian music had already taken a new turn with concretisation of *Gharana* or music-schools that developed in a particular court. Curiosity of the British – their questions about the origin of instruments, forms of classical singing, grammar of Indian *raga* music etc. (see Capt. N. Augustus Willard's extensive work, *Music of Hindustan*) affected Indian thinkers and practitioners as well. They realised the power of institutionalisation and this gave an absolutely novel dimension to Indian classical music.

As mentioned before, it was the time when most of the musicians were either

living under the patronage of kings (these kings were only called kings because they represented the old dynasty of their ancestors without having any political power as such) or had taken refuge in dancer's *Kothas*. Public performances were not in vogue. This was the time when percussion like *tabla* was gradually becoming popular. *Tabla* had acquired new shape by pasting of black '*masala*' on '*dagga*'. Due to this new-found resonance, sweetness and sound-flexibility were enhanced by including '*bols*' of *dholak* and *pakhawaj*, *tabla* gained rapid popularity. In response to varied sounds of *tabla*, string instruments like *sitar* and *surbahar*, through development in structure, too began to gain popularity. With opening up of the listening class – limited earlier to courtiers and wealthy connoisseurs – new forms in singing like *Khayal*, *Thumari*, *Tappa* etc., began to surface. These lighter styles that allowed greater creative freedom than *Dhruva-pada*, attracted youth and things started changing by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Bhatkhande Impact

After establishment of institutions for music education Pt. Paluskar and Pt. Bhatkhande launched awareness programmes. These modern saints of Indian music aided by enthusiasts from affluent background, arranged open air public concerts all over India. Their main purpose was to bring classical forms close to masses so they could listen to and understand the divine living heritage of India. To reach this goal Pt. Paluskar had taken in several talented young students (which itself was difficult) trained them for eight to ten years and then sent them to different parts of the country to spread music among young Indians. On request of Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya, Pt. Omkarnath Thakur was sent to Banaras Hindu University to start the Music College. Pt. Bhatkhande also started music colleges in Lucknow, Baroda, Gwalior etc. Indian scholars



too, started studying Indian music bringing to light purity of its scales and guiding mathematical principles. Pt. Uday Shankar exposed Indian music to the world taking his dance ballet troupe along with Indian orchestra and giving performances all over world. It is said that people in several countries recognised India more for Uday Shankar than for Mahatma Gandhi. After 1920s concerts of Indian classical music had gained popularity. *Gharanas* were getting identified in a different manner. Concerts which brought their representatives on a common platform, clarified their distinct manner of performing a particular *raga*. Performance graduated from being appreciated aesthetically to being evaluated critically. This perhaps is the greatest contribution of public concerts to Indian classical music.

On the other hand, these *sammelans* were also engaged in nation-building by providing platform to people of a caste-bound rigid society to loosen up and act as free individuals. While today, eateries or snack-vendors surround a theatre, the organisers arranged for eatables as ‘*prasad*’ which people would willingly accept forgetting all differences. Till recently Sankat-Mochan festival in Varanasi would provide all listeners with *malpuas* and *rabri* in the morning just as it comes to close. Concerts of Indian music are unique due the length of performance. They often start in the evening between seven to nine, and continue till dawn. Each artiste in the early days, was granted three to four hours and they would give recitals one after other. The senior-most would present the final performance, ending it all with a morning *raga* – often, Bhairavi. Even today this unstated rule is followed that the senior performer performs after a younger artiste. The performance time, in an all-night concert has come down to two hours. The artiste during his creative life-time grows from being first performer to final one. And thus, all artistes first perfect *Raga Yaman* – suitable for early evening performance –

and progress to *Kalyan*, *Kanhada*, *Malkauns* and finally *Bhairavi* and other morning *ragas*. In a way, public concerts helped in establishing the *raga*-time relationship.

### Postmodern era

By 1980s gramophone records had been replaced by cassette tapes. The far-east countries – Japan, China, Korea etc., made available the new Western technology at affordable cost to Indian listeners. Recitals broadcast regularly from *Akashvani* had disciplined the presentation to uncomfortable packaging of 28 minutes. It peeved the artistes to compress their presentation to still smaller slots of 14 minutes. Several of these stalwarts had refused to record on gramophone. The early records allowed just three minutes, which was less than warm-up time for *alap*. The transition from cassette to compact disk was smoother, as it allowed a total time of 72 minutes.

The real change came with Television going national, followed by Digital Video Disk. Open-air gatherings were now being covered on radio and television. Corporate houses discovered classical music an attractive channel to highlight their social responsibility. Gradually, the classical concert edged towards glamour. Now the appearance of artiste and the ensemble became important. As if his talent qualifies only to bring him to stage and now it is the appearance that would grant acceptance to his recital. In urban centres today the number of classical recitals has increased manifold. Numerous auditoriums and theatres have come up – from small capacity halls of about 60 to massive ones to seat thousands – in cities and towns across India.

Not all of these changes have fared well for music. In a way, the essence of Indian art – art as worship, the artiste as nameless worshipper – has been put to sleep. Instead of art-form, it is the individual in limelight. Organisers experiment with new ideas for making

concerts a hit. The never-ending quest for novelty pays little heed to the need of integrity and continuance of tradition in art. Events are no longer governed by art, they are controlled by money. Senior (read, expensive) artistes belonging to various traditions are invited to perform together in a session as short as 30 minutes. The six or eight stalwarts roughly get two or three minutes for their individual piece. Yet, they do not refuse, because the concert-event is too prestigious to be turned down. These strategic performances are geared more towards making classical music exciting than mesmerising. Creativity has yielded to experimentation.

The instruments too have responded to innovation. Often, the direction taken tends to lower their innate quality. Too many pseudo-veenas opt for tinny tonal quality shunning their original depth. The result of such commercialisation is that Indian classical artistes instead of focusing on music have begun to pay attention to sound. This reflects in the style of performance where instead of integrity of notes, it is the skill that has become important. The young artiste today devotes his time only to a few *raga* compositions. After all, to an artiste on stage for countable minutes of glory, it is the immediate applause of audience that counts, not the muttered, restrained commendation of a senior musician or connoisseur.

The concert, thus has been instrumental in shaping Indian classical music. As of now, it has driven many earlier Indian instruments like *esraj*, *dilruba*, *surbahar*, *rudra* and *vichitra veena* to name a few, away from the stage and accepted Western and equally-tempered-scale instruments like piano, cello into consonance-based Indian music. So, in the postmodern era of globalisation, the notes ready themselves for a congregation where they may end in faceless amalgamation. ■

After three decades of teaching, Prof. Rajiv Trivedi is devoted to safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

## Why are we so obsessed with fairness?

**Ashna Contractor** is a fourth year undergraduate student studying Political and Social Thought and Psychology at the University of Virginia. She loves to travel, go trekking and eat different foods. She has a keen interest in international relations and socio-political issues in India. She is currently doing a two month internship with One India One People.

**W**HETHER it's while I ride home by BEST bus every day after work, or sit at home watching TV or even flip through the newspaper every morning, I am constantly struck by the overbearingly large number of ads and commercials on fairness products that are almost impossible to miss. "Become 3 tones fairer in just one week", "India's only cream that guarantees complete fairness", "fairness cream for men", "fairness cream not just for your face but your entire body" and the list goes on and on. The message that these products give out to the Indian people – fair is pretty and dark is ugly, women only look professional and capable of success if they are fair, women will only seem attractive to the male sex and worthy of marriage if they are fair, men too must strive to be fair in order to succeed and seem desirable.

With this kind of propaganda surrounding us at all times, I can't help but ask the question: why are we so obsessed with fairness? Is it because we want to seem more like white Americans and Europeans? Is it because we are ashamed of the brown colour we have been naturally endowed with? Is it because somehow, in our society, fairness has become a sign of wealth and well-being? Or is it because this standard and expectation of fairness has gotten so entrenched into our society that now it is just too difficult to escape? I get amused, confused and even frustrated when I hear some of my



Ashna Contractor

friends in the US complain about how they feel they are "too white and pale" or how they would like to "go out in the sun, get a nice tan and add some colour to their skin". The cliché that "the grass is always greener on the other side" has never seemed truer. We never seem to appreciate what we have. We always strive to be something else or like someone else and in the bargain we end up discriminating against and disadvantaging people for who they are and how they look.

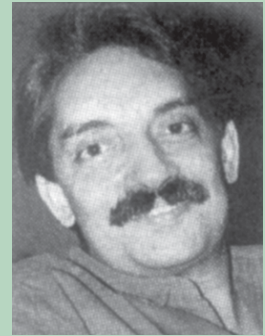
This fairness benchmark that our society has created for itself hampers people's self-confidence making them under-appreciate themselves for who they are. It also puts the idea in people's minds that they have the right to feel or be

superior to someone who is darker skinned than they are. We live in a society that already has enough social divisions. We really don't need an additional dimension of dark versus fair. Being dark does not mean that one is dirty. It does not mean that one is poor or backward and it does not mean that one is ugly and incapable of love or professional success. Yet somehow, those are the associations that our society has grown to make and these constant endorsements of fairness products by some of our country's most influential celebrities and personalities only make the problem worse.

This desperation to be fair began with women but in recent times it has extended even to men. Everyone wants to have good and healthy skin but what does that have to do with fairness is something that I have never understood. Why are we encouraging people to pull down those who have darker skin? Why are we encouraging people to doubt and question their beauty? As a society we need to be a little more conscious about the social messages we send out to our people in the name of business and commercialisation. Impressing such standards of beauty can be extremely detrimental to our people. The fact that skin colour does not and should not determine an individual's social, economic or political standing is an internationally accepted human right. Therefore it is high time that we in India bring an end to our obsession with fairness. ■

# Throttling a forest

Overuse of plastic is profiting corporates, while poisoning our kids. The use of plastic can be curbed only with persistent effort, heavy fines and searches at the gate to get the message across. Let our environment breathe free.



**Bittu Sahgal**

Editor, *Sanctuary* magazine

**E**ARLY one Sunday morning when much of the city was asleep, a GreenKarbon team from Deutsche Bank and *Sanctuary Asia*, undertook a study trek in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) where the Director of the Park, Mr. Limaye, began by explaining that along with the scores of other problems, this city forest was being choked by plastic being thrown by careless visitors. The group, including children, eventually picked up over 25 kg of plastic litter within a four hour trek to the Kanheri Caves.

Naturally, this trip got us thinking about several issues. In my view, plastic manufacture has to be made uneconomical and the largest manufacturers must be made liable for damages. We dump 100 million tons of plastic into our oceans. This is killing marine organisms and shoving toxics back into our own bodies. There is no earthly reason why plastic bags, gutka pouches, or even detergents and shampoos should be packed in plastic. My grandmother knew just one thermoset plastic at best, Bakelite, which is what her phone was made out of. And she lived a fantastic, high quality life without this scourge.

A recent trip I made to Rwanda revealed how plastics can be curbed. Heavy fines. Huge taxes. Plus, at Kigali airport customs officials confiscated the plastic bag in which my bottle of duty free single malt was delivered to me inside the plane. "You can keep the whiskey Sir... but in Rwanda no plastics are allowed." I trekked, walked, drove through the length and breadth of Rwanda and... found no plastic bags in their markets, none on their roads, none fluttering on trees. But it looks like all those plastics are now migrating to India where big business and government have combined to make plastics even more popular than our national anthem. Plastics,

pesticides, oil, and coal, endocrine disrupting chemicals... all these are profiting corporates, while poisoning our kids.

It's going to take persistence. The process of letting people know that plastics are forbidden in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park is now on. I would imagine it will take a year of persistent effort, heavy fines and searches at the gate to get the message across. Right now, frankly, Mumbai does not even deserve entry into the park. This is the only city forest in the world that is host to leopards. It is treated as just a picnic spot for people who neither respect its wildlife nor care that its forests

are the source of the city's purest water. Tadoba in Vidarbha used to be like this... a picnic spot for the people of Nagpur and Chandrapur. It took just one sensible government order, one really tough official (Shree Bhagwan) and a bunch of credible people with a public profile (including noted tiger conservationist Valmik Thapar) to convey to all and sundry that Tadoba was not a picnic spot. There were howls of protest. They were ignored. Today, Tadoba rivals Kanha as a premier tiger reserve.

Only if we do something similar for the Sanjay Gandhi National Park will this problem get solved. And then not only will SGNP be saved from being throttled, but Mumbai will also be assured of pure water, but the leopard-human problem too will be reduced, Mumbai will be acting to protect against climate change, and 100 per cent of the visitors will come away "educated" about nature, instead of the tiny five per cent who today pick up litter, document

wild species and fight to protect this miracle forest.

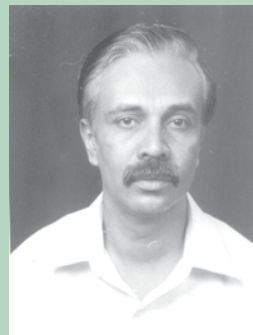
Plastic is a scourge not just for this forest or for Mumbai alone, but across India. It is not that difficult to put a stop to it. Just say 'NO'! ■

**Mumbai does not even deserve entry into the park. This is the only city forest in the world that is host to leopards. It is treated as just a picnic spot for people who neither respect its wildlife nor care that its forests are the source of the city's purest water.**



# Playing politics in tragic times

While thousands were trapped in agony in Uttarakhand, it was shocking to see how Indian politics sunk to such a low with politicians not willing to let go of any opportunity to grab the limelight and present themselves as true saviours when all that they were engaged is an unabashed and brazen display of brinkmanship.



**C. V. ARAVIND**  
is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.

ONE of the biggest natural disasters the country encountered recently was the flood in Uttarakhand which resulted in huge loss of life and property. In a tragedy of this magnitude one would have expected our political netas to close ranks and rush unitedly to provide succour and relief to the victims and endeavour to save as many lives as possible. However as the whole country watched with disbelief, what was unleashed by the political class was an all out effort to score brownie points and steal a march over one another by a shameful show of one-upmanship and petty politics. While the opposition BJP never spared any effort to run down the Congress administration headed by Vijay Bahaguna, picking holes in the government's actions and criticising the unpreparedness to meet such eventualities, the Congress equally unfazed hit back at the opposition leader Narendra Modi's tall and wholly unsubstantiated claim of having rescued 15000 Gujaratis who were stranded in Uttarakhand deeming it a Rambo-like operation.

The parochial attitude of politicians from different states was appalling to say the least. While the Gujarat CM's aim was to rescue people from his state other political leaders too jumped into the fray by sending top leaders to cater to their own people, totally oblivious to the plight of those from other states who too were in dire straits and in urgent need of help. It was an extremely disgraceful show and capping it was the on-camera fisticuffs engaged in by two Andhra MPs one belonging to the Telugu Desam and the other, the Congress. The issue was the right to repatriate Andhraites who had been rescued and each party was vying for the credit. And to top it all even these operations were not undertaken with any degree of

sincerity and purpose for the aim was to seize the opportunity to publicise the rescue efforts and garner electoral advantage. While the politicians and their parties were busy locking horns attacking each other in mindless television debates and in the print media the ones who really sweated it out and covered

**Even after the entire operation was over the squabbles are yet to cease and the political adversaries continue to take potshots at each other.**

themselves in glory were the jawans of the Indian army who at great risk to life and limb worked tirelessly to save hundreds of lives. One would have expected the politicians to hang their heads in shame at their pettiness in the face of a natural calamity but that was not to be. Even after the entire operation was over the squabbles are yet to cease and the political adversaries continue to take potshots at each other. It has never occurred to any of these politicians that they have been playing politics over dead bodies, and that in times of natural disaster what is really necessary is to sink all differences and work unitedly towards the common goal, that of providing relief to those affected and saving as many lives as possible.

This of course is not the first time that politicians have revealed their true colours and it will certainly not be the last either.

It is indeed tragic that Indian politics has sunk to such a low with politicians not willing to let go of any opportunity to grab the limelight and present themselves as true saviours when all that they are engaged is an unabashed and brazen display of brinkmanship. The major political parties who have a national identity should have set an example to the regional parties but they have cut a sorry figure themselves. It is time the electorate shuns such politicians who have no compunctions about gaining political mileage in every event of national significance, including natural calamities of the worst kind. ■

# COOL CHAMP



Try to answer the questions below and send your answers along with your name, address, date of birth, school and photograph to: **“YOUNG INDIA QUIZ”** One India One People Foundation, Mahalaxmi Chambers, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, 22, Bhulabhai Desai Road, Mumbai - 26. You can also log on to our website and answer our quiz online at [www.oneindiaonepeople.com](http://www.oneindiaonepeople.com). We will choose two winners (the Cool Champs) from all the correct entries and publish his/her photograph and name along with the answers in our next issue. **(Last date for entries: August 20, 2013)**

## Quiz No: 115

1. What is Vishnu Waman Shirwadkar better known as?

- a. Dinkar ☐
- b. Kusumagraj ☐
- c. Pu. La ☐
- d. Nirala ☐

2. Who was the first ever recipient of the Jnanpith Award, considered to be India's highest literary award?

- a. Mahadevi Varma ☐
- b. Pu. La. Deshpande ☐
- c. G. Shankara Kurup ☐
- d. Amrita Pritam ☐

3. In which famous novel will you find the characters of Rahel and Estha?

- a. *Midnight's Children* ☐
- b. *The God of Small Things* ☐
- c. *The Inheritance of Loss* ☐
- d. *A Suitable Boy* ☐

4. In which language is the epic *Manimekalai* written?

- a. Marathi ☐
- b. Malayalam ☐
- c. Telugu ☐
- d. Tamil ☐

5. Identify the personality.

(Clue: OIOP, July 2013 issue)

- a. Pandit Bhimsen Joshi ☐
- b. Pandit Omkarnath Thakur ☐
- c. Pandit Jasraj ☐
- d. Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar ☐



## Answers to Quiz # 114

### QUESTION 1

Answer: (c) Tamil Nadu

'Jallikattu' or bull taming is a sport held in Tamil Nadu. Men run along with bulls and whoever manages to move along with the bull holding its hump and remain there without falling wins the game. Though dangerous, a large number of enthusiasts actively participate in the sport.

### QUESTION 2

Answer: (b) Kaziranga National Park

Kaziranga National Park in Assam is renowned for the Great Indian one horned rhinoceros. Covering an area of about 430 sq kms, Kaziranga is inhabited by the world's largest population of one-horned rhinoceroses, many mammals, including tigers, elephants, bears and thousands of bird species.

### QUESTION 3

Answer: (c) Gujarat

It was on the southern coast of the Gulf of Kutch, along the northern coast of Jamnagar district in Gujarat, that the first Marine Wildlife Sanctuary and first Marine National Park was created in 1982. A haven for birdwatchers and marine life enthusiasts, the Park is a treasure trove of marine species and exotic coral reefs.

### QUESTION 4

Answer: (b) Uttarakhand

Joshimath, located in Chamoli district of Garhwal region in Uttarakhand, is a famous pilgrimage centre. It also houses one of the four maths established by Adi Guru Sri

Shankaracharya. Joshimath, unfortunately, this year, has been reeling under one of the worst floods in recent times.

### QUESTION 5

Answer: (a) terracotta temples

Bishnupur, located in Bankura district of West Bengal, is a cultural centre but it is the terracotta temples that give Bishnupur its unique identity. (For more information, read OIOP, June 2013 issue)



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## Quiz No. 114

No winner



## Do Or Die

### Matangini Hazra

MATANGINI Hazra was a widow. She lived in a village near Tamluk in District Midnapur, Bengal. To her, Gandhiji was next only to god. During the Quit India movement, it was decided to capture the government offices at Tamluk. A huge procession advanced towards the town. Matangini Hazra was at the head of the women's batch. It was certain that there would be firing, so women were kept in the middle. But as the procession neared the sub-divisional office, there was a sudden commotion and men in the vanguard started running away. A combined army and police contingent was standing there ready to shoot at the processionists.

Matangini Hazra shouted to the men to stop running and snatching a tricolour from a youth's hand, forged ahead. She was ordered to halt, but she ignored the order. She was warned that if she did not stop, she would be shot dead. But

### A TRIBUTE TO UNSUNG HEROES OF OUR FREEDOM STRUGGLE

## Happy Independence Day!

the intrepid old woman replied, "All right, shoot me down. I have come to face death." Shouting "Bande Mataram" she advanced with steady steps.

A shot was fired and it broke her left hand in which she was holding the flag. She shifted the flag to her right and carried on. The second bullet shattered her right wrist. She clasped the flag to her chest with her broken hands and tried to advance. The third bullet pierced her forehead. She fell down dead but still holding onto the flag.

She was 73 years old at the time.

### Kanaklata

ON 18 September 1942, a few weeks after the 'Quit India' resolution had been passed, a leader in Tejpur in Assam gave instructions to hoist the tricolour on all police stations and government buildings in the district. Sixteen-year-old Kanaklata was determined to participate in the hoisting of the flag on Gohpur Police Station near which she lived. The people had been asked to gather at a place some distance away from the police station on the morning of 20 September. Kanaklata quickly finished her household chores. Then she said to her younger sister, "Let us have breakfast together. God alone knows whether we shall meet again."

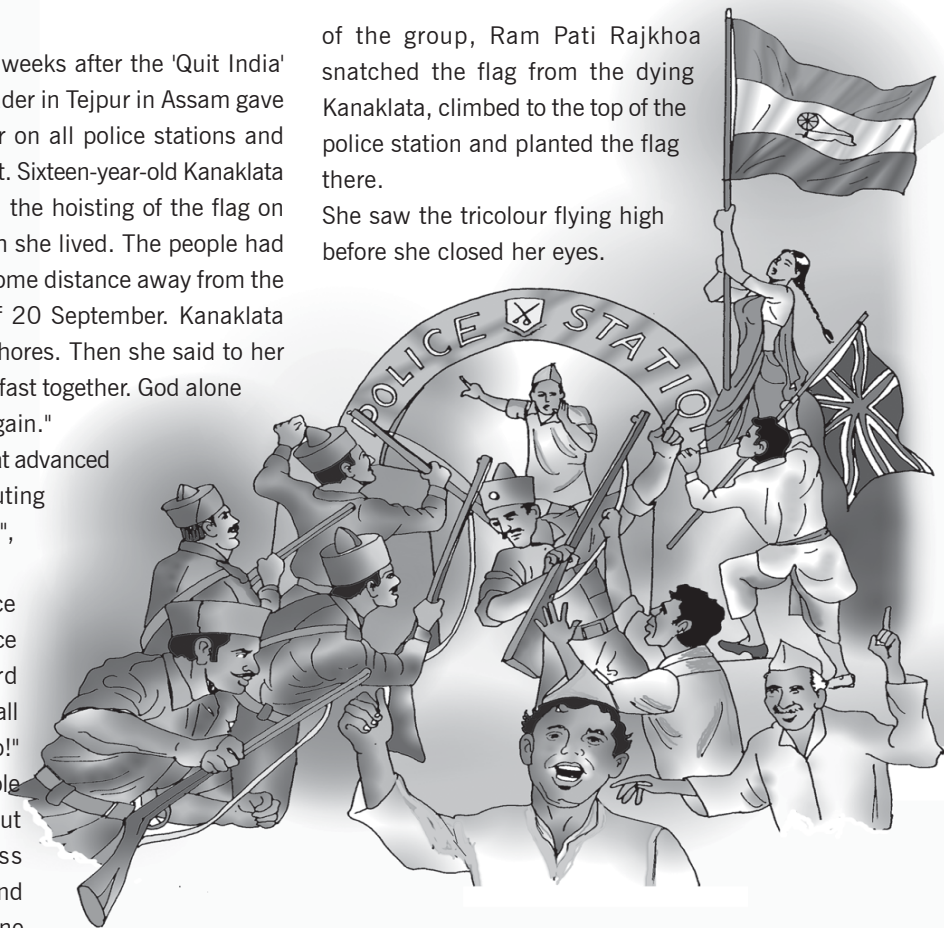
Kanaklata led one of the groups that advanced towards the police station shouting slogans like "Glory to Mother India", "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai."

The officer in charge of the police station warned them not to advance but Kanaklata pressed forward saying, "Don't try to stop us! We shall leave only after putting the flag up!"

The police opened fire. Some people from the group turned and fled but Kanaklata continued to press forward. The police fired again and Kanaklata was hit in the chest. One

of the group, Ram Pati Rajkhoa snatched the flag from the dying Kanaklata, climbed to the top of the police station and planted the flag there.

She saw the tricolour flying high before she closed her eyes.







## Art Beat

### Black Beauty



ANCIENT Persians perfected the art of creating elegant black metalware inlaid with delicate silver motifs. The art made its way to South India with its craftsmen settling down in Bidar, Andhra Pradesh, from where it got its name: bidri. Every bidri object is crafted from an alloy of zinc and copper. Intricate designs are etched on its smooth, blackened metal surface. Pure silver wires or sheets are hammered into the grooves. The object is heated gently and treated with a chemical solution mixed with soil taken from the walls of the old fort buildings of Bidar. This deepens the jet-black colour and the contrast with the bright silver. A final coating of oil adds even more lustre. Bidri was originally used to decorate royal swords and other weapons. Today one can find all kinds of exquisite bidri showpieces, boxes, vases and even jewellery.

## Amazing Living World

### Courtship Finery

ALL through the baking hot summer, the Indian bullfrog buries itself deep inside the cooling mud of a pond or a soaking paddy field. Then dark monsoon clouds appear in the sky and with the first heavy downpour, a transformation takes place. It starts raining bullfrogs!

Normally, male bullfrogs are dull green or brown. However, the rains herald the mating season. So each bullfrog dons a bright yellow 'courtship coat'. They emerge in huge numbers, drowning the surrounding countryside in a cacophony of croaks. Then the females arrive and pick their mates. As they lay their eggs in big batches enclosed in lacy foam, the males fertilize them. The successful males have to fight off rejected suitors even as they are engaged in this ritual. Once the mating season is over, the males lose the bright yellow colouring, otherwise they'd become an easy meal for predators.



### Devidhura Fair

Devidhura, in Uttaranchal, is situated at the junction of Almora, Pithoragarh and Nainital. The town celebrates a fair every Raksha Bandhan in the compound of the Varahi Devi's temple. The day before the festival, the idol of the goddess is kept in a locked brass casket and taken out on a procession to a nearby mountain spring. There, it is taken out of the casket and bathed and then put back by a blindfolded priest. The goddess is worshipped the whole night. The next day, the town divides itself into two teams that engage in stone-throwing. The 'fun' rivalry ends when the priest arrives on the scene. While the significance of the stone throwing is not known, more than a thousand people visit Devidhura to watch the spectacle.



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## DR. VEENA MAZUMDAR

The doyen of Women's Studies Movement in India (1927-2013)

**W**ITH the passing away of Dr. Veena Mazumdar, the Indian women's movement has experienced an irreparable loss. Veenadee, as she was known, personified a far sighted and strong willed thinker and forceful speaker and convincing debater who had faith in human goodness. She always remained warm at heart, kind and accessible and magnanimous in sharing her knowledge and institutional resources.

Her charm lay in her electrifying persona, down to earth approach, quick wit and most importantly courage of conviction combined with honesty of purpose. This is what explained her commanding of agenda setting power whether she was in the decision making bodies of UGC, ICSSR, Planning Commission of India and several ministries or outside of them. She could galvanize students, teachers, researchers, women's organisations, trade unionists, bureaucrats, politicians and law makers into action as she was one of the best 'argumentative Indians' produced by 'women's studies movement'. She was very good at coining catchy terms such as 'women's studies movement' 'The Indian psyche defined by binary 'Ma' versus 'Maal', dichotomy that worships motherhood and dehumanises/commodifies the rest of women. Her contemporary - powerful men in the universities, research institutions and ministries - called her 'bulldozer' while women scholars and practitioners found her the most trustworthy friend and mentor. Veenadee was born in 1927 and completed her schooling in Calcutta.

She did her honours course from Benaras Hindu University as well as Ashutosh College, Calcutta University and completed D.Phil. from Oxford University. Veenadee taught Political Science at Patna University and Berhampur University for couple of years before joining UGC. As an Officer in the UGC Secretariat she made a mark as an energetic officer. In 1972, when the Indian government agreed to honour UN mandate to prepare a status report on women, Veenadee was appointed as Member Secretary of Committee on the Status of Women in India. Her unique contribution

while preparing the landmark report "Towards Equality" as a researcher and analytical rigour to explain material and ideological conditions that determined women's predicament in India made her most sought after scholar-activist during 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the millennium era.

Veenadee lent her expertise and guidance to several institutions dedicated to women's studies, some of which include Centre for Women's Development Studies of which she was the Founder Director and Indian Association of Women's Studies.

In 1974, when All India Institute of Medical Science began conducting a sample survey of amniocentesis to find out about foetal genetic conditions and easily managed to enroll 11000 pregnant women as volunteers for its research, the main interest of these volunteer pregnant women was to know the sex of the foetus. Once the results were out, those women who were told that they were carrying female fetuses, demanded abortion. When a young researcher of AIIMS shared this observation with Veenadee, she mobilised women's delegation to meet the health minister to stop abuse of amniocentesis for sex selective abortions. Veenadee was a great champion of participatory action research. Her writings

provided road map for developmental initiatives. Her memoir, *Memories of a Rolling Stone* published in 2010 provides vivid description of her principles, programmes, policy initiatives in collaboration with her team of 'movers and shakers'.

Some of her insightful publications are *Education & Social Change: Three Studies on Nineteenth Century India*, *Role of Rural Women in Development*, *Symbols of Power: Studies on the Political Status of Women in India*, *Emergence of the Women's Question in India* and *the Role of Women's Studies and Peasant Women Organise for Empowerment: The Bankura Experiment* among others. ■

– Dr. Vibhuti Patel is the Professor and Head, Dept. of Economics, SNDT Women's University, Churchgate.



# LALGUDI JAYARAMAN

## The complete musician (1930-2013)

**H**E was a complete musician in the truest sense of the term. Violinist and composer, Lalgudi Jayaraman, who passed away in April this year, straddled every aspect of a musician's life.

He was not only an excellent violinist as a solo player but also extremely efficient as an accompanist. He was a versatile and prolific composer and a great guru for his numerous disciples around the world. He was a hugely popular musician attracting crowds wherever he performed and yet adhered to the grammar of music in its entirety.

Jayaraman started his music career as an accompanying violinist at the age of 12.

He is known to have accompanied some of the greats in the world of Carnatic classical music. These include Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, G. N. Balasubramaniam, Madurai Mani Iyer, Voleti Venkateswarulu, Nedunuri Krishnamurthy, K.V. Narayanaswamy, Maharajapuram Santhanam, D. K. Jayaraman, M. Balamuralikrishna, T. V. Sankaranarayanan, T. N. Seshagopalan, and flute maestro N. Ramani.

Jayaraman comes from the lineage of a disciple of Saint Thyagaraja, one of the greatest composers of Carnatic music. His father V.R. Gopala Iyer was a musician himself and music was an integral part of his growing up years.

He learnt both vocal music as well as violin from his father, his first guru. His first concert was a vocal recital. But subsequently he moved on to the violin.

His expansive approach to music was evidenced by the fact that he started composing quite early in his career as a musician. At the age of 26 he composed a *tillana* in *Raga Vasantha*. A *tillana* is a rhythmic piece that is usually performed at the end of a vocal concert and widely used in Bharata Natyam performances.

Jayaraman went on to create several compositions – *varnams*, *kritis* and several *tillanas* many of which are used in dance performances. Over time he developed a unique style that earned the moniker of 'Lalgudibani'. His concerts were much awaited as connoisseurs of music appreciated

his creative interpretation of the age-old tradition. The beauty of sound is what Jayaraman attempted to unravel through his performances. In the 1960s, he introduced the concept of musical ensemble of violin, veena and the flute.

In 2001, Jayaraman was conferred the Padma Bhushan Award and in 2010 he was nominated as a Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. He also won a national award for the best music director for composing music for Tamil film *Sringaram*.

In 2008, Chennai-based Music Academy, one of the earliest academies to be set up to promote and nurture classical music, honoured him with a Lifetime Achievement Award. He has won numerous awards from government and private organisations, music *sabhas* across the country.

A hugely popular musician need not be always a great teacher. But Jayaraman was not only an accomplished musician drawing crowds to his concerts but also an excellent guru. He has numerous disciples including his son Lalgudi G.J.R. Krishnan and daughter Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi. Other famous disciples include Bombay Jayashri.

He was said to be a tough and demanding guru never letting his students take a complacent path. And yet was compassionate in his dealings with his disciples. The aesthetic and creative discussions about music never ceased. They went well beyond the training hours, his students vouch.

Jayaraman travelled extensively both in India as well as overseas as music lovers started to throng his concerts. He was part of the Indian Cultural Delegation to Russia. At the Edinburgh festival in 1965, Yehudi Menuhin, the world renowned violinist, presented him with his Italian violin. Many musicians have made their mark in the field of Carnatic classical music but Jayaraman was able to cast a spell well beyond the initiated listener of classical music and draw in audiences who would otherwise keep away from this genre of music. ■

– **Latha Venkatraman is an independent journalist and a student of music.**





## MAJOR SUSHIL AIMA KC

The daring officer (1966-1999)

**S**USHIL was born on 15 July 1966 in a gifted family of Kashmiri pandits. His uncle, Mohan Lal, was the moving spirit of post 1947 revival of Kashmiri music. His father, Makhan Lal was an insurance executive. While in class twelve, he appeared for the National Defence Academy exam and was selected. He had not informed his family about it earlier lest his father may not approve of it. He told his father that joining the army had been his dream and assured him that he would make a good soldier. His father was surprised but did not object.

Sushil was commissioned in 1988. He soon made his mark in the unit for his leadership and bravery in Doda district. He was promoted to the rank of major in 1997.

After the end of Kargil War, infiltration by the Pakistani militants had shifted towards south. Sushil was posted to 17 Rashtriya Rifles (17RR) located in Thana Mandi near Poonch. On 1 August 1999, as he made preparations to go on leave to Delhi to celebrate his wedding anniversary he received information about the presence of a group of 50 Pakistani militants on a nearby hill.

Sushil was detailed to attack the militants and he readily led his team to the site. Contact was established with them and a fire fight ensued which lasted for seven hours. Some of the intruders managed to escape into the fields of maize crop. One of the militants threw a grenade which Sushil managed to dodge but splinters injured a soldier. Sushil nabbed the militant and shot him.

Another militant met the same fate but Sushil received a bullet in his left temple. Nevertheless, he killed the enemy who had fired the shot and then gave cover to a comrade injured by a grenade blast to help him to crawl to safety. He succumbed to his injuries. Subedar Bhorade of his company was in tears and described

him as a giant killer who could scare a hardcore militant to death merely by his presence. His commanding officer, Colonel Chamola, recalls him as a soft spoken daring officer ever keen to engage the militants. He lived upto the army dictum “eye for the militant and heart for the innocent.” His family, like other pandits, was driven out of Srinagar ten years ago by the terrorists. No wonder that he was keen to

rid his motherland of these intruders. In this operation, five militants were killed and four AK rifles besides ammunition and explosives were recovered. He was awarded Kirti Chakra for his bravery.

At 5.45 pm on 1 August, his sister, Savitri, received a telephone call at their home that Major Sushil Aima had made the supreme sacrifice in an encounter with Pakistan-backed militants. It took some time for the family to absorb the shock. The family was looking forward to his leave on the occasion of his wedding anniversary. Instead, his body was received on that day. A large crowd had gathered to be with the family in their grief. The route was lined up by thousands of people for the last rites. All

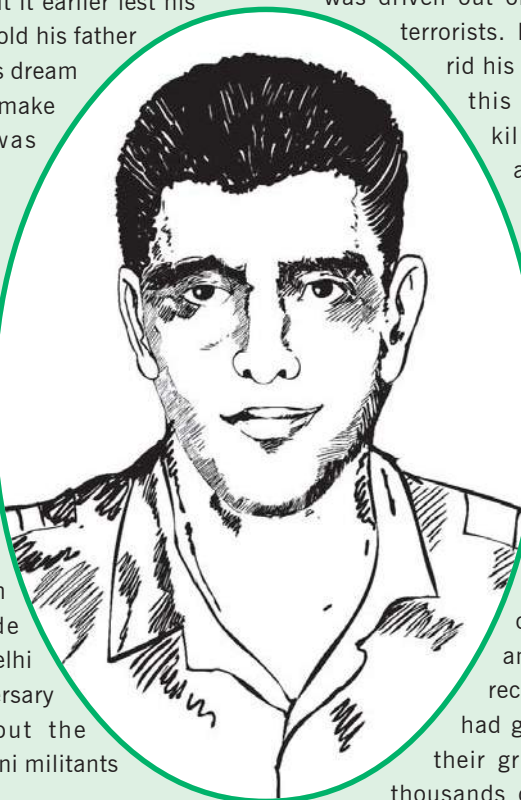
shops, business establishments and schools had closed that day. Makhan Lal held the ten-month-old son of Sushil in his arms to lit the pyre.

A few days later, a cheque of ₹10 lacs was presented to his wife Archana by the Chief Minister of Haryana, O P Chautala. Brijwas-Dundhera Road in Gurgaon has been named after Sushil.

A gnawing feeling did rankle that the Government of Kashmir did not convey any condolence to the family even though Sushil was from Kashmir and martyred himself on the soil of Kashmir.

*He knew not what fear is, undaunted by bullets and gore — Savitri Aima, sister of Major Aima. ■*

— Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd)



# PLANTING TREES. NURTURING TOMORROW.



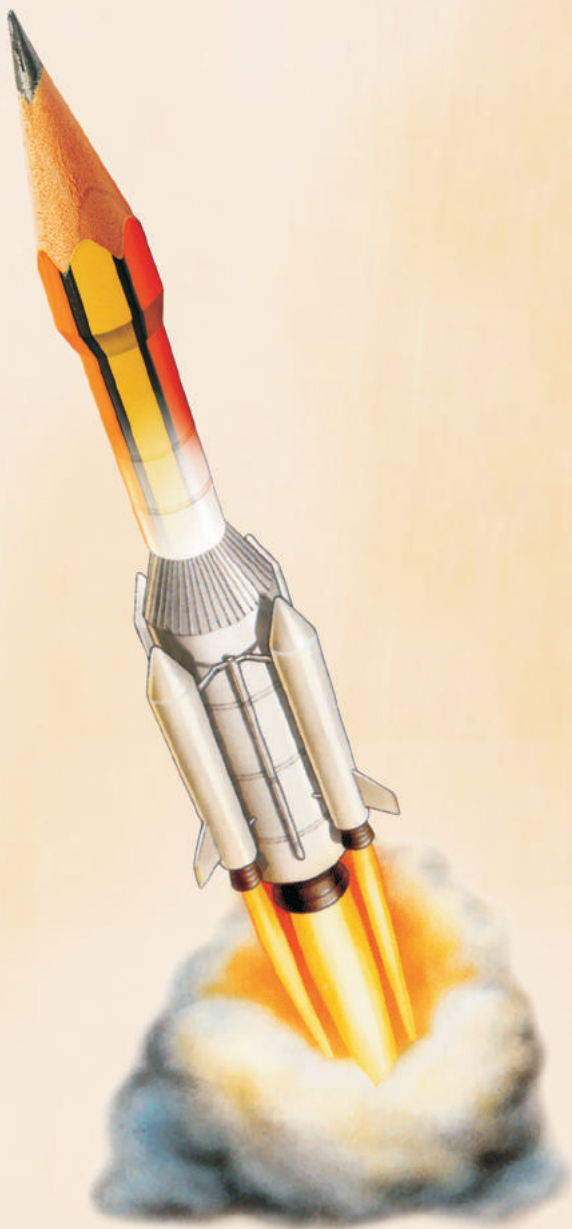
Manugraph has partnered with Grow-trees.com for the project - 'Trees for Rural Communities'. The project involves planting 2,000 trees in Karnataka. Through this, Manugraph will plant trees in common lands of villages to provide the rural communities fruit, fodder, fuel and forest produce. This project is testimony to Manugraph's complete and whole-hearted commitment towards social and environmental welfare. It is an effort aimed at improving the natural resources.



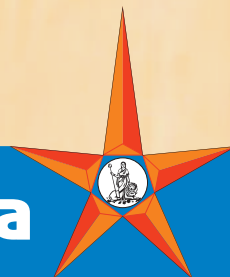
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