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A Rural Report

An irreparable loss

The urban farmers

A project called Mandya 2020

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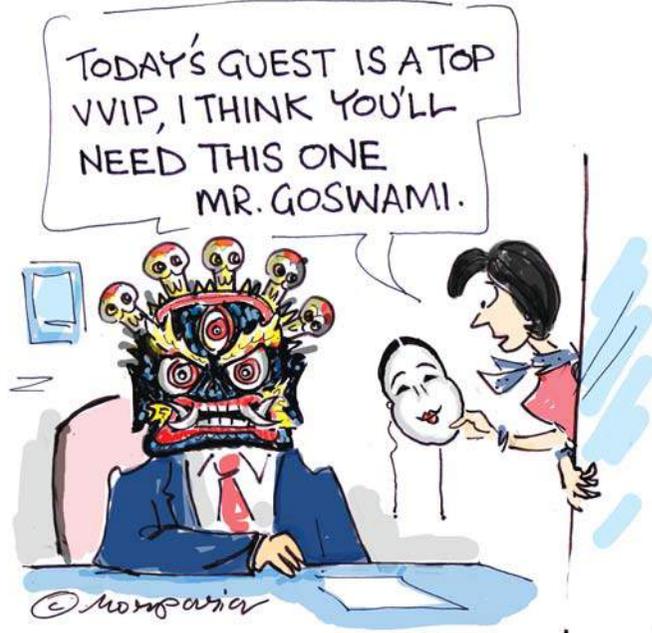
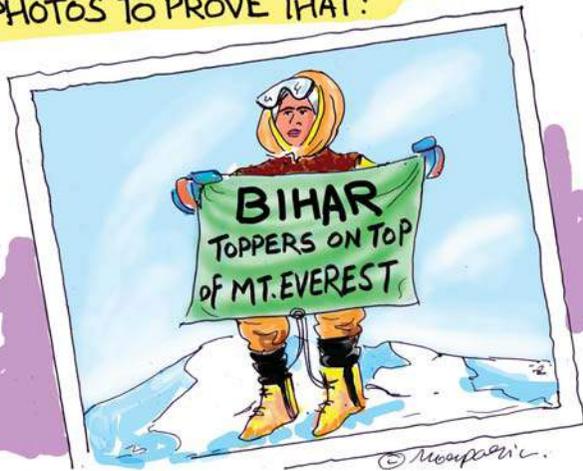
The holy time warp

FACE TO FACE

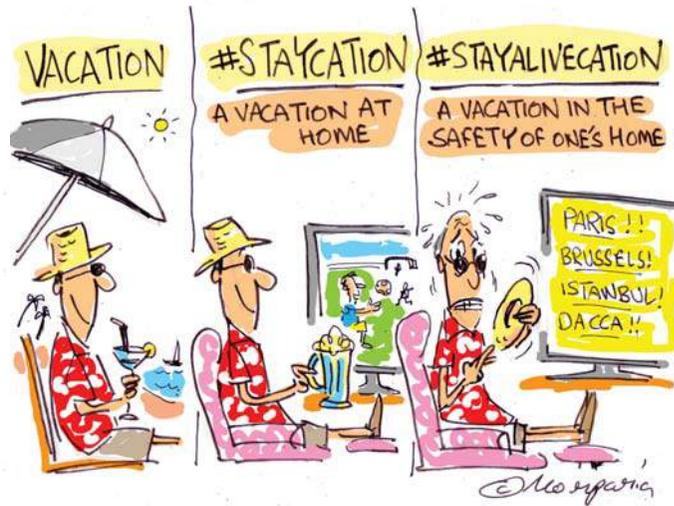
Jaya Jaitly

MORPARIA'S PAGE

POOR BIHAR TOPPERS-THEY HAVE GOT SUCH A RAW DEAL, BEING SUCH TOP-NOTCH SPORTSPERSONS AND ALL, AND HERE ARE THE PHOTOS TO PROVE THAT:



SORRY, YOUR HEALTH'S BEEN DAMAGED IRREPARABLY, BY FREE RADICALS!



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Rural India



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Jaya Jaitly

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

“Well-written article”

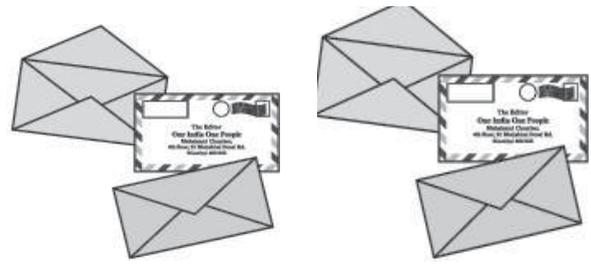
I refer to your July 2015 issue (*The Indian Monsoon*) and the Know India Better feature. I really enjoyed reading it. I came across your magazine at someone's house and I would like to say that the colour pages are really very interesting. Writer Akul Tripathi has visited the forests in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh and because of that we are also able to get a glimpse of that remote part of India. It's a very well-written and interesting article. India is indeed a vast and fathomless land, many of its parts still unexplored. I hope to subscribe to your magazine.

— R.R. Pitale, Mumbai

Errata

The concluding paragraph in the article ‘...*And the rains came dancing down!*’ by Bidyut Kotoky in the July 2016 issue (page 19) should read thus:

“What's more, the unbelievably pleasant weather during those two weeks in that region, with surplus supply of fresh



oxygen, ensured that we had that much of extra energy to put in the extra hours required for playing the catch up... To cut a long story short, the last day before the shoot we not only managed to catch up, but actually move ahead of schedule – without a single compromise forced on us by the weather (read ‘rain’). Today, sitting in my editing studio in humid Mumbai waiting for the monsoon to attack us, when I find people associated with the post production of the film comment on how fresh and amazing the outdoor scenes of the film look, thanks to the rain enforced ambience, I can't help but remember the first few days of the shoot... And pray that once the film is ready to welcome you as viewers, you will also find the film fresh and amazing...er, dare I say, not just the outdoor scenes, but in its myriad colours...the *Rainbow fields!*

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The 'country' calls...

Our villages have kept pace with towns and cities in most aspects. But it wasn't always so. Nivedita Louis is happy to recall her childhood and those idyllic days.

M.K. Gandhi said – “India’s soul is in her villages”. The small piece of land where these days we find more mobile towers than trees isn’t what Gandhi might have foreseen. No one is a stranger in a village. Simple crimes as a fag in a discreet street corner could land us in a soup. Forget watching a movie, bunking college. You might step on the naked foot of your neighbour or your distant cousin’s distant wife’s distant uncle’s very distant wife, who will promptly blow the whistle at your home.

There are still villages where houses are devoid of toilets. How much ever Vidya Balan may sternly advice on TV, wearing her teacher spectacles, that ‘toilets are essential’, there are villages where human poop is the only manure to grace the fields. We love ‘open to sky’, ‘ventilated’ poop coops. The ‘feel’ of cool air and tiny shrubs scratching the back is a ‘once in a lifetime experience’! The proverbial *paan* and *gutka* – how can we talk of our villages and not about the mountains of betel leaves and *gutka* chewed and rivers of saliva spit on the streets? There seems to be no end to the ‘pan-chewing’ mafia and their ‘spitsville’, and you are hereby advised to visit a village donning boots!

The village water body – a pond, river, well or canal being the ‘meeting venue’ for the people is the favourite haunt to propose one’s love. How many movies have we seen where the hero/heroine jump in the well or pond to prove their love? Can we imagine a village-themed movie without a scene where the hero saves the heroine in distress by ahem...‘stressing’ her posterior? Dudes of the village flaunting their work-worn abs can give a run to the couch potatoes of the city, who can’t seem to wag a swollen finger for their lady love.

Development – has it touched the villages? Hell, yeah! Everyone starting from the farmer to the fisherman uses a mobile. You can hear their ‘yell’os...even miles away. Every household owns a bike - a pulsar with the luckier ones, and overloaded TVS XLs, squeaking and creaking under the weight of the lesser mortals. Each street boasts of a car – an

Ambassador classic that serves as the public transport for women in labour or to track down the eloping couple. What is a village without an episode of an elopement a month, with the guy and girl running around the fields in complete wedding attire and the whole village chasing with sickles. The favourite pastime of caste Panchayats would be playing fetch with the newly-weds!

In these days of nuclear families, villages still boast of closely-knit communities. It is the ‘nosey’ neighbour that takes our sick grandmother stuck in the village, to hospital. It is the local *dhoodhwallah* and his omnipotent, omnipresent cow and its dung that greets us with gusto every time we set foot in our village. The ‘service’ of the local grocer and his *ghee* has seen us go from a circumference of 40 to 56 inches in no time. The village quack must have emptied half a litre of *neem* juice and castor oil down your throat every time he felt you had a stomach ailment.

The coconut trees we climbed, the guavas we ate, the ponds where we fished, the dusty lanes where we cycled, shall always remain etched in our memories. I shudder to think how my city *dhoodhwallah* who throws (he would give a stiff fight to all pace bowlers put together!) the milk sachets down the gate would welcome me after a long absence. Or the billing clerk at the big mart or Spar supermarket chains where I used to shop. The neighbours – the lesser said about them, the better. The area beyond my neighbour’s door is probably Mars to me and vice-versa.

We have sold our body to the urban devils and our hearts still lie etched in those crumbling houses back in our villages.



Some day – we shall go back, either to touch our roots or to lay in eternal rest. ■

Nivedita Louis is a writer, blogger and social activist by choice. Bitten by the travel bug, and smitten by nature, she loves travelling and cooking. She blogs at www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com.

I shudder to think how my city *dhoodhwallah* who throws (he would give a stiff fight to all pace bowlers put together!) the milk sachets down the gate would welcome me after a long absence.

RURAL INDIA

An irreparable loss

*India's biggest loss could be the loss of her traditional farming knowledge. If not arrested now, this could be lost forever. **Bharat Dogra** explains why and how this traditional wisdom evolved, and why we must do our utmost to preserve it.*

VARIOUS rural societies accumulate very valuable knowledge of agriculture, irrigation, water conservation, forests, health and other related issues, which are most appropriate for local environmental conditions. Such knowledge cannot be readily obtained from elsewhere. Even in the absence of any detailed documentation, this could be preserved over the centuries, because the knowledge was based on very careful observation of local conditions as well as resources and experimentation based on these. All this work was carried out by people very familiar with local conditions and the problems and needs of people, and were deeply committed to the improvement of local capabilities and prosperity. All this knowledge was deeply rooted in the welfare of communities and could be passed on from one generation to another in more and more enriched ways. Thus one can say, even more so in areas of ancient civilisations, that this traditional knowledge base represented the accumulation of the traditional wisdom of many generations of farmers and villagers, often going back to several centuries.

Thus clearly, this is an invaluable heritage which should never be discarded, as it will always remain a most important source of learning for any region. This is not to say that all was well with our past or with our traditions. It is well known that injustice and inequalities have long been a part of most ancient societies, leading to many unjust practices. Vested interests who dominated these unjust systems used their excessive power to codify several unjust practices, and these took the form of rituals and superstitions which were harmful and often directly or indirectly helped to perpetuate injustice at various levels. Clearly, such unjust practices and superstitions should be resisted strongly and discarded. But this should not lead to the rejection of all that is traditional – as stated earlier, the knowledge related to livelihoods, natural resources and environment inherited from many generations of observation and experimentation, is invaluable.

Traditional wisdom and agriculture

In the case of agriculture, for example, traditional farming systems evolved over several centuries, keeping in view the necessity of balancing food, nutrition and raw material needs,



Johads are small earthen check dams that capture and conserve rainwater, improving percolation and groundwater recharge. The last few years have seen a revival of the traditional check dams in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

with those of conservation of water and soil. Now scientists tell us on the basis of their latest knowledge that the simple diet of rice with pulses (*dal-bhaat* or just *khichdi*) is very healthy from a nutrition point of view, as their proteins complement each other, while at the same time, for its growth, rice needs nitrogen and pulse or the legume crop, as it has the potential to fix it from the atmosphere. Thus, traditional systems evolved on the basis of careful observation and experimentation to match needs of people with the basic resource base such as soil and water. It is only because of this that such farming systems could continue for several centuries without destroying the basic resource base, while modern systems which displaced time-honoured mixed cropping systems and rotations, began to create serious problems for soil and water within three decades or so.

A very important part of the ever-evolving, ever-enriching traditional farming system was that a rich diversity of seed varieties were available for various topographical and weather conditions, and also to meet the needs of various kinds of cooking and flavour. Hence, it was common to have different varieties of rice like for *biryani* type of preparation, for *khichdi*, for *kheer*, for making puffed rice, and for making *poha*. What

was much more important was that, different varieties were available for meeting the conditions of excessive rain or deficit rain as well as other diverse weather conditions. Hence, rural communities were much more capable of responding to adverse weather situations on the basis of their own resources and knowledge. Similarly, traditional knowledge of water conservation as well as irrigation has been found of great value in making the best possible use of local conditions, so that civilisations could survive with continuity for centuries or thousands of years, even in conditions of low rainfall. On the other hand, careless use of water in modern times has created severe shortages within just a few decades.

Why famines?

A question is sometimes raised that if the traditional farming and related systems were so well evolved, then why did famines cause millions of deaths in colonial times? In fact, some European experts who were invited by the British rulers of India, also wrote in great detail about the wisdom of the traditional farming and water systems. The reason why famines occurred despite this was that rural India had been plundered on a vast scale by colonial rulers and their local agents. Thus, at a time when existing inequalities should have been corrected, instead, the colonial plunder worsened the exploitation of farmers and other villagers.

In post-Independence India, there should have been better appreciation and understanding of the strengths of traditional farming and water systems, including the systems of various tribal communities. Indeed, some efforts were made in this direction. For example, the work of a very senior farm scientist Dr. R.H. Richaria and his colleagues brought out the tremendous richness of tribal farming systems of Chattisgarh, even though these were widely dismissed as backward by others. However, such efforts were rudely pushed aside as there were powerful pressures to implement a new farm strategy based on new plant varieties and new cropping patterns that were heavily dependent on chemical fertilisers and pesticides, as well as other expensive inputs.

Due to these powerful pressures, all the resources of the government were pushed into promoting the new strategy, and any voices which were raised against this were effectively silenced. A high power propaganda was launched, which



Paddy cultivation – how many indigenous seed varieties have we lost?

equated traditional farming systems with backwardness, and the new farming strategy called the Green Revolution, with progress. All the media were pressed into service to convince the village youth and the new generation of farmers that what is old and traditional should be discarded as backward.

It was in this situation that the time-honoured system of passing invaluable knowledge of farming, water and other related issues from one generation to another began to break down, and this tendency grew stronger from year to year as the government, instead of checking this breakdown, was all too happy to promote it and to celebrate this breakdown as progress. As a result, there has been very harmful erosion of invaluable traditional knowledge in recent decades along with the loss of thousands of diverse varieties of seeds in our rural areas and farming communities. If this continues unabated, then the loss will be complete and unrecoverable in the near future. Therefore, urgent efforts are badly needed to correct



the past mistakes, and instead initiate efforts to preserve traditional knowledge of farming and irrigation, and save the vast diversity of traditional seeds in field conditions. ■

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

For the girl child

Chappar village in Haryana is perhaps the only village to celebrate the birth of girls in Haryana, a state known for its unfavourable culture and mindset towards the girl child. This is all thanks to the female Sarpanch of the Panchayat in Chappar village, Neelam, who has worked hard to ensure that there is a shift in perception towards women here. Today, sweets are distributed when a girl child is born. Women here have even stopped wearing the ghunghat (veil), and all efforts are made to see that each girl child attends school.

The urban farmers

This is a new, pleasing trend – that of city folk, tired of eating chemical-laden food, turning to farming and growing their own food. Hiren Kumar Bose profiles some of these ‘farmer converts’ and deciphers their motive and zeal. It is hoped that this will have the potential to become more popular, inspire more citizens to turn to organic farming. Meanwhile, read their stories and get inspired!

Leaving ecological footprints, not carbon

FOR webmaster Anoop Rajan (31), taking to farming was doing the politically correct thing, doing one’s bit for the blighted planet. “I tried many life-changing approaches. I began with abstaining from taking meat, alcohol, cigarette and even looking at girls, and even bicycled to work so that I left less carbon footprints. I completed a biodiversity course at BNHS (Bombay Natural History Society) to understand the soil, plants and all other things connected with it, attended weekend urban farming course at Mumbai’s Nature Park, but it was my encounter with Deepak Suchde, the man who has pioneered organic techniques of regenerating the soil, that made me leave my job and go headlong into farming.”

When recession was at its peak, Anoop’s father lost his job and the family decided to move to its ancestral property in Kannur, Kerala, where the family had a 2.5 acre plot. “Once here I realised the horrific condition of cows in Kerala, as I was unable to get hold of good quality cowdung and urine, the main ingredients needed for soil regeneration. I bought a couple of Kasargod cows in order to put into practice what I had learnt,” says Anoop.

Being a farmer meant learning to become a coconut tree climber and harvesting the coconuts in order to avoid paying huge wages to labour, planting black pepper, milking the cows and even making *ghee*. “It took me three months to master the technique of climbing a coconut tree. The risks, fun and benefits, and pleasure are unimaginable. Just three to four hours of work, and I earn equivalent to what a gazetted officer earns,” says Anoop in jest.

A follower of traditional farming practices, Anoop who maintains a blog on an ecom portal (<https://www.naturalfarmerskerala.com/shop/>) says, “I feel we are the luckiest age group as most farmers are in their 60s and 70s. Once they are gone we are likely to lose all the traditional knowledge they had. I have been trying to document traditional practices related to crop pattern, soil conservation, animal husbandry, food preservation etc.”



Anoop Rajan at his farm in Kerala

From garment business to *chikoo* cultivation

THE love for nature and the desire to live-off the land is inspiring scores of urbanites to become farmers. Thirty-seven-year old Prashant Brahme, a South Mumbai resident who runs a family-owned garment shop in Napean Sea Road, is one of them. “I have been wanting to grow my vegetables and fruits, free of chemical fertiliser and pesticides, since I realised the horrors of chemical farming, and thanks to the support from my family I acquired an orchard,” says Brahme who zeroed in on a ten and a half acre orchard in Gholvad,

Maharashtra’s *chikoo* belt, in 2014, after hunting for a farm land for nearly four years.

A Commerce graduate, Brahme, who did a week-long course at Talegaon’s Horticulture Training Centre, sells his *chikoo*s at Vashi’s APMC market, and also caters to orders received on his Facebook page. “Working alone late nights, I select the fruits and put them in boxes to keep them ready for the delivery boy next morning,” says Brahme, whose immediate plans include growing vegetables and settling in the farm, rather than do the four-hour-long train commutes on weekends to reach the farm.

The call of the land

OF late, India has become a hot destination for agri investments, as several foreign companies are looking to be a part of it. Additionally NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) are returning to become agripreneurs. In 2013, James Joseph, Director, Executive Engagement at Microsoft India, returned to his native town Aluva in Kerala to popularise jackfruits by setting up food processing factories in Kerala and Bangalore. He procures jackfruit and processes and sells the freeze-dried fruits in packets of his brand, Jackfruit 365. "Jackfruit can be mouth-watering, irrespective of cuisine type," says Joseph, who has designed signature dining experiences for his clients with several internationally renowned chefs. His Facebook page has links to YouTube videos of interesting and unique jackfruit-infused recipes, namely, *galouti kabab*, *biryani*, *masala dosa*, *kathi roll*, *panna cotta*, and *payasam*, all made from dehydrated jackfruit! Like Joseph, another NRI, Madhuchandran S.C, a US-based software engineer returned to Mandya in Karnataka, in 2014, to become a farmer. (Read about Madhuchandan in the article in this issue titled *A project called Mandya 2020*)

WhatsApping away to a sustainable future

IN recent years, agriculture has become a field vibrant with effective innovations, thanks to a growing number of young techie minds that make it happen. Across India, WhatsApp groups are not only connecting farmers to their customers in the virtual market; they're creating a network of resources and support for the country's farmers who need it the most. Like the farmer duo Santhosh Kittur and Abhijit Kamath of Karnataka's Belagavi district who through their WhatsApp group created in August 2015, post updates from their farms, including photographs, as well as what produce is available. The group's 80 members in Gokak town lap up their pesticide-free vegetables like bitter melon, cucumbers, beans, cabbage, tomatoes, green chillies, red peppers, onions, and garlic every Thursday and Sunday of the week.

These WhatsApp groups not only include farmers and buyers, but experts too, who are a great help to farmers when addressing issues related to pest attack, deciding on companion planting or selecting hybrid fruit varieties suited to a region. Entomologist Shekhar Mehendale of Dapoli-based Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth often receives queries from farmers about pest attacks and its remedies. "Each region is unique due to its agro-climatic parameters, and at times I have received queries from farmers in Vidarbha and have had to consult the local experts to address the queries," says Dr. Mehendale.

Fruit orchards, millet farming and mango plantations



Madhu Reddy at her farm near Hyderabad

which according to her, "Helped me understand land and resource management from a very holistic viewpoint, about caring for the Earth, thinking about people and sharing the surplus."

The business consultant veteran, elaborates: "After I took over, I converted about two acres into a multi-fruit orchard, and another two acres for growing millets, while leaving the rest for the mango orchard, which mom and dad had planted about two decades back." Asked how difficult was the transition, from being a business consultant to becoming a farmer, Madhu says, "I found one has to work to understand the principles of what is good farming. The rest I think is more of listening and experimenting. It's a tough sphere of work where the variables are sometimes not in your hand. The satisfaction is there, but then the struggle too."

HYDERABAD-based Madhu Reddy, who after having done an undergraduate in Business Management in California, worked for 16 years, returned to India and "travelled for five years, mainly discovered photography, wrote travel pieces and during the farm stays, developed an interest in farming." Having convinced her parents to let her convert the family's ancestral farm, 60 km from Hyderabad, into a non-chemical one, she prepared herself for her new venture by volunteering at Auroville's Solitude Farm, undertook a course in Sustainable Management at Bhoomi College, met farmers who were walking the path of non-chemical farming, and topped it up with a 12-day-long Permaculture Design Course from Hyderabad-based Aranya Agricultural Alternatives,

The weekend farmers

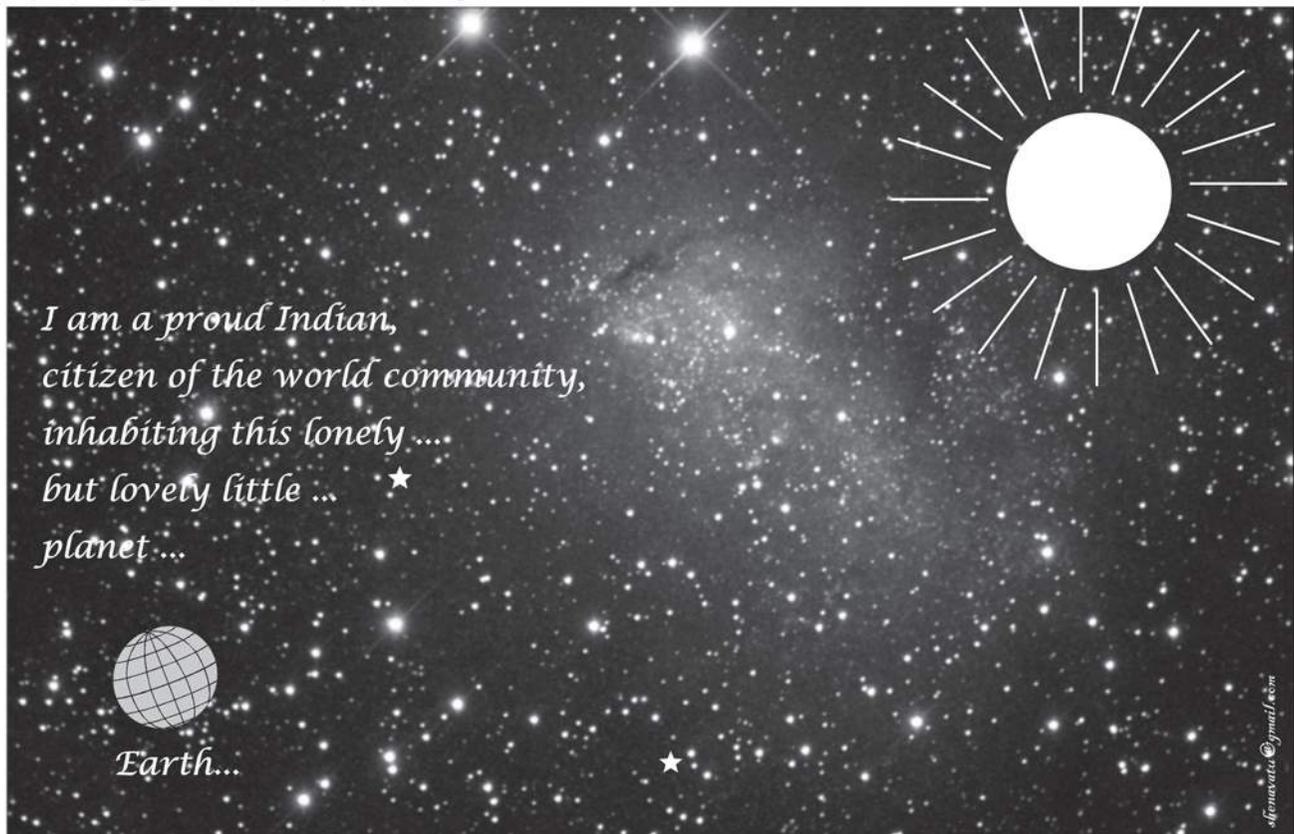
CONCERNED by increasing incidences of pesticide-laden vegetables and chemically ripened fruits, many are turning to farming as a hobby. They include people who want to balance farming with their professional lives. Then there are those who are not willing to be 24/7 farmers, but want to be weekend farmers and still enjoy the benefit of farm fresh products. For them help is at hand with start-ups like Hosachiguru – an agricultural asset management company based in Bengaluru. The trio behind Hosachiguru (meaning tender sprouts in Kannada), Ashok Jayanthi, Sriram Chitlur and Srinath Setty, all engineers, address the need of “individuals, especially urbanites who not only crave to re-live those wonderful moments of childhood, but wish their children to have similar experiences of yesteryears in their home towns.” Having already attracted a pilot project of about ₹ 4 crore of funding for protected cultivation, Hosachiguru presently manages around 500 acres in horticulture, timberland, protected cultivation and nursery, and hopes to expand to 1000 acres over the next couple of years. Sreevathsava Reddy of Hosachiguru says, “We wish to acquire technology through these partnerships and explore hi-tech and precision farming methods to produce yields that are at least 10 times more per square meter than that is being produced currently.”



Till very recently, Hiren Kumar Bose was the editor of several luxury magazines, and was prolific on and about watches. (check www.watchworld.co.in) He has co-authored a privately published but widely circulated book on fine watchmaking. He considers himself 'at home' when tending the soil, as turmeric shoots thrust from the earth; playing *malhar* to his amrapalli mangoes during late summer evenings so that they fruit well; and marvelling at the team work of the honey bees while farming on weekends at his riverside plot in Badlapur.

You can read more about his antics on his blog: <http://sundayfarmer.wordpress.com>.

WHO AM I?



A project called Mandya 2020

Meet a man who left a lucrative career in the US to literally become a son of the soil. **E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan** writes about Madhuchandan S.C. who is spearheading an organic farming movement in Mandya, Karnataka, and dreams of a chemical free Mandya district by 2020!

ABOUT 50 km from Mysore in the southern Indian state of Karnataka is a district called Mandya. It holds the dubious distinction of being the 'farmer suicide capital' of Karnataka. A dubious distinction and a sad testimony to the farmer woes that continue to beset India, almost seven decades after Independence. But slowly, there is a change taking place in Mandya. A revolution of sorts – an organic one at that – promises to bring some cheer to Mandya's beleaguered tillers.

Meet Madhuchandan S.C, the man behind the Mandya Organic Farmers Co-operative Society, which was set up in 2015, and has as members about 1,200 farmers. It's the first such society in Karnataka, which is open only to farmers adopting organic or natural farming methods. The vision of this society is to make Mandya a chemical-free district by 2020. An ambitious goal, you wonder? "There are 300,000 farmers in Mandya whom we have to convince", says Madhuchandan, whose own story is in fact similar to the Hindi movie *Swades*. In *Swades*, actor Shahrukh Khan's character, moved by the plight in Indian villages, gives up a successful NASA job in the US to return to serve his country.

His story

Madhuchandan did his Engineering degree in Electronics & Communications from the University of Mysore, and had a successful career in several IT companies abroad. He also founded Verifaya Studio, an automated testing software which is used by many firms across the world. He had worked in several countries like Israel, UK, the Philippines, South Africa and the US for 15 years, before he was struck by an epiphany in 2014. He was deeply affected by news of farmer suicides in his native Mandya and decided to return to his land.

Madhuchandan's father was once Vice-Chancellor of GKVK (University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore), and I ask him if that was also the background that had him interested in farming? "He was with GKVK, but there they focused on farming with fertilisers and pesticides. I primarily came back because I wanted to get our youngsters back into farming. I noticed that many of our youngsters – children of famers from



Madhuchandan S.C, whose dream is to make Mandya district chemical-free by 2020

Mandya and other places were employed in Bangalore in restaurants as waiters etc. They thought it was better to do menial work elsewhere than become farmers." This thought spurred him to diagnose his native district's woes.

"You need to understand the history. For many centuries, our farmers were true producers, and not consumers. Even till 30-35 years ago, my grandparents never bought anything but salt from outside. They grew everything and sold whatever was surplus when they needed money, during a wedding or any other event. This is how we have lived. But we have turned these very farmers into consumers. For instance, earlier, the farmers used to use *neem* to clean their teeth. We introduced them to toothpaste, making them a consumer. Eventually, today we have come a full circle, advertising salt and *neem* toothpastes! The farmers used to multi-crop, and we introduced them to sugarcane and pesticides, we introduced Jersey cows. Today, out of a farmer's income, 60-80 percent is earmarked for his own consumption needs", he explains.

In Mandya, as mentioned, the lifestyle of the farmers had changed. They grew mostly commercial crops like sugarcane, which takes 14-15 months to harvest. After 14 months they



The Mandya Organic Farmers Co-operative Society

would send the sugarcane to the factories, which would pay them after a year. This meant that it would take about two to three years for them to realise an income, making them fall prey to debts. Since the government didn't provide free education to the farmers, they enrolled their children in private schools which cost them ₹ 30,000 annually, further fueling their living costs. Also, farmers who grew only paddy, have to buy everything else, except rice. "All in all, we found that they needed an income of at least ₹ 10,000 per month per family", says Madhuchandan.

So, he founded the Mandya Organic Farmers Co-operative Society (www.organicmandya.com), as a first step. The Society today has 1,200 farmer members grouped into 55 village-level Organic Clubs. These are all farmers who multi-crop and only practice organic farming. Why organic, one may wonder. "Earlier, farmers had all the farming knowledge they needed. But they were misguided into using fertilisers and pesticides, which have destroyed the soil and affected crop yields", he explains.

"When I started out, there were just a handful of farmers who practiced organic farming in Mandya. And they were disparate and disorganised." Once the Co-operative Society was formed, one of the main issues that needed to be addressed was of marketing. Thus, 'Organic Mandya' was set up as the retail arm to market and sell the organic products produced by the Co-operative Society, both in a supermarket and online. The turnover is currently about ₹ 2 crore, which they hope to scale up soon. "By the end of 2016, we hope to increase the Organic Clubs to 130 clubs", says Madhuchandan. Currently, the online portal home delivers products listed on the website, in Mandya and Bangalore. The supermarket is part of an 'integrated organic zone' which also has a restaurant selling organic food. This zone is on the Mysore-Bangalore highway, and next to organic farmland, making it easy for farmers to sell their produce.



The royal Rajamudi rice, which is much in demand today

Popular products

The supermarket offers more than 1,800 organic products. The most popular ones are jaggery, honey and *desi* cow ghee and varieties of rice like the diabetic rice. A very unique rice also sold here is the Rajamudi rice, which was earlier grown for the consumption of the Mysore royalty. It was the farmer's offering to them. "It's a very tasty *desi* variety of rice and very healthy. But even I had not heard of it earlier. It's only when I came here that I got to know about it and its uniqueness. Surprisingly, even my daughter loves it! But it had almost ceased to be cultivated. Today, we have re-introduced it and many of our farmers cultivate it", says Madhuchandan. The supermarket sells about 1500-2000 kg per month of this rice. "We have people coming in wanting to buy 25 kg at a time! It's almost like a revolution, so many people are addicted to it. Another such unique *desi* variety is the Gandha sale", he says. He laments the fact that only rice varieties like the Sona masuri were popular till now. He appreciates the efforts of people like Gani Khan, who has managed to conserve 750 varieties of native rice and is to open a paddy museum soon in Mandya.

Madhuchandan sees opportunities everywhere. He describes a village Keelara, which has 4,000 families, spending about ₹ 500 per month per family on vegetables and greens. "They spend together about ₹ 2-2.5 crores on this every year, which means they have a potential to earn ₹ 2.5 crore from their own village! That's how we have now inaugurated our 'Poison free food stall' in Keelara, where Keelara's Organic Club will supply these vegetables. So the money stays in the village and everyone consumes organic food", explains Madhuchandan.

The other benefit he is hoping for is to inspire the village women to go back to cultivating kitchen gardens. "I hope that seeing the 'poison free' board everyday will psychologically influence them to get back to nurturing kitchen gardens which will bring down their overall food costs." Madhuchandan says

that as per a survey conducted by them, each village today spends about ₹ 20,000 per family per year on medicines. He hopes consuming chemical free food and using herbs from the kitchen garden will bring this cost down.

Sweat donation?

Another of Madhuchandan's ideas is 'sweat donation'. The premise is simple. City folk or anyone else, can volunteer to help a farmer in his field and the rewards are both physical, and an opportunity to learn about how our food is grown. In exchange, farmers, short of manual labour, get farm labour, and they also get to interact with consumers and determine trends.

"This idea occurred to me one day when I was at the gym. I felt what we lack is actual sweating in the field. That's when the idea came that people from cities will come to villages and work for a month. Your bare feet on the soil, and helping a farmer is the best possible workout for you. We started this about five months back, and till now, about 2,000 people have come from various parts of India and the world. We have conducted about 12-13 sweat donation programmes so far. This is for a cause. The most important thing is, the volunteers understand the value of food, condition of farmers and will connect to farmers and nature. On the other hand, the farmers too benefit. I have found farmers very disconnected from the consumers and the two have grown apart. When they meet their consumers, they get ideas about what kind of rice to grow, for instance. Earlier, we used to import Burma rice (black rice), but now based on consumer demand, we produce them", explains Madhuchandan.

Such zeal and passion is bound to have a domino effect. Many people have written in asking how they can join this movement. Many have left lucrative jobs to come to Mandya. "A director in a US software firm, earning ₹ 60 lakh per



Urbanites work in the fields to connect with farmers and earth

annum has left that job and joined us!" exclaims Madhuchandan.

He has also given a fillip to agro-tourism with programmes like 'Farm day' where visitors and tourists can join the farmers at work, eat fresh, organic food, go for bullock cart rides, play native games and in general, take in the village life. If you want to go a step further, you can even lease out land for upto a year and till it, all with help from the Co-operative.

Madhu has his family's support in all these ventures. "My daughter goes to school in Bangalore, so my wife stays there. I am based out of Mandya and go to Bangalore every week. They understand that this is for a greater cause", he says. His daughter has learnt to like organic food and even prefers ragi malt to Bournvita or Horlicks, he says appreciatively.

Q & A with Madhuchandan

Your favourite organic product?

Multi-millet mix

Your favourite food?

Ragi mudde

Do you miss the U.S. life?

Sometimes I do. Just the ease of life there.

Any plans of expanding?

We are planning to open one more retail outlet of 'Organic Mandya' in Bangalore, apart from the first one in Bangalore's HSR Layout.

Your favourite place to spend time in India?

The Western Ghats! Though I don't get much time these days to be away from Mandya.

Conclusion

Madhu believes firmly that organic is the only way ahead. He hopes to see more districts in India turning organic and becoming a citizens' initiative. I bring up Sikkim with him which has become 100% organic. "Yes, that is a good movement. But the government led the movement there, while in Mandya it's coming from the farmers". A citizens' movement is more sustainable, isn't it? Let's hope a chemical-free Mandya indeed becomes a reality by 2020. ■



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RURAL INDIA

How rural is Hindi cinema?

Hindi cinema may seem to be a slave to urban folklore, culture and plots, but it has definitely covered rural India too, quite substantially, avers Shoma A. Chatterji. She cites examples from the past fifty years to point out that issues of rural India have been an integral part of 'Bollywood' storytelling.

In a country with 600 million farmers, of which 40 percent are willing to quit farming for various reasons, mass migration from rural to urban areas has increased rapidly. Between 1991 and 2001, 73 million people have migrated from the rural areas to elsewhere. Mass migration is a phenomenon that is a consequence of various problems in rural India," writes Tejaswini Pagadala in her well-researched paper, *From Bharat to India: Understanding Rural-Urban Migration* in Research Society (January 30, 2011). The reasons she puts forward are known to us such as absence of health facilities, and lack of public health services, poverty, hunger, lack of sanitation, education, employment avenues and so on.

The question is, has Indian cinema in general, and Hindi cinema in particular, been able to reflect this migration and reverse migration, where a protagonist may have come back to the village and stayed back for good as an agency of social change? Yes, Hindi cinema has consciously or not quite so consciously, dealt with issues like migration from the villages to the cities, and in some rare cases, vice versa too, or stayed within the village scenario.

Globalisation, the increased focus on the diaspora and all that it stands for, urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation have been predominant features of big budget commercial films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Dhoom 2*. This indicates that at least in mainstream cinema, the rural-urban divide is fading, and so are elements of forced migration. But this is not correct, because films like *Lagaan* and *Swades*, thumping commercial hits, are signs that all is

not lost, and rural people still find place in the minds of filmmakers in Bollywood. These films are rooted entirely in a village setting, but they are not sad, tear-jerkers that will make the audience rush to bring out their handkerchiefs. They are very positive films that show what villagers are capable of, and what an NRI can do to bring electricity to a village without it for six decades after India gained Independence.



Balraj Sahni and Nirupa Roy in *Do Bigha Zamin*

An old, evergreen plot

The story of the rural-urban divide and forced migration or just the struggle for survival goes back to more than 50 years. One of the two major films that deal with the sad face of rural India is Bimal Roy's all-time classic *Do Bigha Zamin*. Shambhu, the poor farmer in *Do Bigha Zamin*, had gone to the city with the sole intention of coming back one day with enough

money to release the land from the grasp of the landlord. But the fertile land fit for agriculture, has already been turned over to industry.

This spells out the beginning of industrialisation at the cost of agricultural land, not really for the benefit of the peasants, but in the name of development and for cushioning the pockets of those with land. The film defines a powerful, scathing but restrained social comment on the destiny of the forced migrant farmers and small land-owners that create the capital, but are deprived of their rightful share in the contribution. The film tries to create a politically conscious milieu and an ethical awareness for social activism that are imperative to the proper functioning of a democratic nation. The melodrama and realism thus accentuate the same national temperament. Small vignettes of the city capturing the



Posters of films *Mother India*, *Lagaan* and *Swades*; they depicted various facets of rural India

downtrodden, the marginalised and the poor living in a slum, mostly from outside the city and the state, show the regular quarrels around the public tap.

Do Bigha Zamin is a brilliant cinematic exposition of the atrocities faced by poor people in rural as well as urban India. Moreover, the film highlights the conflict between urban and rural India. It portrays the expansion of industrialisation and urbanisation at the cost of rural agricultural India. Mehboob's *Mother India*, one of the biggest hits of the 20th century, fleshes out a different kind of conflict within the village – between a young mother with two little sons, pitted against the village moneylender Sukhilal, who is prepared to shell out foodgrains to her in exchange for her ‘services’, which she staunchly refuses, and yet manages to bring up one of the two sons as a very good farmer, while the other becomes a dacoit. Radha's story is of one, long unending struggle, not only against poverty, but also against Nature, with floods sweeping away one son, and the other dying of starvation. In the ultimate analysis, she is forced to choose between the dignity and honour of a beautiful village girl her younger son kidnaps, and the son himself. She shoots the son down and becomes the metaphorical mother to the entire village.

Some earlier films of K.A. Abbas (1914-1987) such as *Dharti ke Lal*, made under the IPTA banner and drawing on Bijon Bhattacharya's famous classic *Nabanna* (1944) dealing with the Bengal Famine of 1943, was described as being influenced by neo-realism, other than Satyajit Ray's milestone and all-time classic *Pather Panchali*, which came after *Do Bigha Zamin*.

Other outstanding examples are B.R. Chopra's *Naya Daur*

which uses the man versus machine metaphor to outline the victory of the former over the latter and Nitin Bose's *Ganga Jamuna*. Both were brazenly commercial films, featured big stars like Dilip Kumar and Vyjayantimala and were filled with songs, dances and lots of action. But they represented the village scenario, endangered by industrialisation, but not being cowed down by the temptation of the city.

Ehtesham Shahid of *Khaleej Times* writes: “As industries were built in metropolitan cities and thousands of labourers moved to the urban workplace, the Indian hero also moved away from the countryside. Thereafter, rural India became either a symbol of uncouth manners or slapstick comedy. A string of David Dhawan-Govinda ventures, despite their share of entertainment value, reduced rural India to a farce. The country's IT-friendly image has come to symbolise the success of urban India. The countryside, where the vast majority lives, has either been lurking in the background or has been conspicuous by its absence. Bollywood, the country's film industry considered the largest in the world, has also got caught in the same image warp.” (January 17, 2005). Shahid attacks films like *Viraasat* which depicted the reverse migration of the character played by Anil Kapoor and Subhash Ghai's *Pardes*, for projecting an India that is the product of pure fantasy the audience would love to see, and not a real village in the true sense of the term. The same would apply to Kalpana Lajmi's film *Rudaali* though it is adapted from a famous short story by Mahasweta Devi.

(Continued on page 20)

RURAL INDIA

Decentralise now!

More than two decades after India amended its Constitution to devolve powers to Panchayats and urban elected bodies, there is still much to be implemented on the ground. Prof. G. Palanithurai writes about the status of Panchayati Raj and the state governments' inertia in implementing some of the key policies earmarked for the local bodies. Who will bell this cat?

DECENTRALISATION is a new governance mechanism initiated not only in India, but also in more than 60 countries in the world through different ways, from amending the Constitution of the country, to passing an executive order to create an institution of governance at the grassroots.

Among the major aspects, decentralisation draws the attention of the bilateral and multilateral development agencies, as it raises hope of addressing many of the development issues, which have not been effectively addressed by the federal and regional governments, not only in India, but also globally. The perceived potential of decentralisation prompts development agencies to incentivise the federal and state governments to promote decentralisation in the developing countries.

The India story

In India at present, democratic decentralisation has come through a process of constitutionalisation. It has raised hope among different stakeholders that it would deepen democracy, achieve economic development and social justice at the grassroots, and ultimately, it would result in empowering the people, mostly the poor, through their participation in governance and development. India is a vast country and the total number of representatives involved in the decision making process and in governance, is in the order of three million. It surpasses the total population of some of the developed countries. If these representatives are totally engaged in governance, the expected change and transformation could be phenomenal. With this expectation, donor agencies have evinced keen interest in decentralisation in India. Twenty years after the decentralisation process began, the moot question we need to ask is, has it created the expected impact in governance, society and the lives of the people at the grassroots, and if not, why?

Democratic decentralisation as a major governance reform initiative was undertaken by the Government of India (GoI) for a larger purpose. It is the result of a major reform initiative



A Gram Sabha meeting in progress in Tamil Nadu

taken up in the world in the beginning of 1970's, as many of the countries in the world witnessed the failure of centralised governance mechanism introduced after World War II. When the leaders of the countries were looking for an alternative mechanism to the existing governance, decentralisation came handy to handle many of the problems of the people at the community level, by involving the people who are affected. Thus, it gained prominence and acceptance from all sections of the society, barring those who were in power both in the central and state governments. In India, decentralisation came along with globalisation of the economy. This process is a fairly complex story in India. It holds out many promises and to fulfill these promises, sufficient enabling conditions have to be created on the ground. To enable the masses to make use of decentralisation, state governments have to take an array of steps sequentially, systematically and organically.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj, GoI, has made earnest efforts to evaluate annually the devolution process of the states and incentivising them according to their level of devolution of powers. This has not created any impact in the devolution process of the states. People who are in the state government

are not evincing keen interest in transferring power down to the local bodies. Essentially, they look at it as a ploy to weaken the state. The reality is, however weak it may be, local governments exist and function and they bring changes and transformation.

The challenges

As per studies conducted for this purpose, there is no doubt that corruption has been reduced in the development sector considerably after decentralisation of power. Yet, the number of people involved in corruption has increased. Many of the core principles of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India have not been put into practice. The state governments, barring a few, are reluctant to give powers to local governments. Constituting District Planning Committees is a core initiative, but it has not been done. Constituting State Finance Commissions and acting on the recommendations of the Finance Commission are the essential responsibilities of the state governments, but they have not been taken seriously. They are actually in violation of the Constitution of India. Neither the central government, the judiciary or the civil society have taken note of it and acted on it. The Centre appears to be sympathetic, as the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been acting proactively towards Panchayats and yet, the other ministries of the central government are bypassing the Panchayats, while implementing their schemes and programmes on the ground. From the research studies it is inferred that most of the state governments have refused to devolve funds, functionaries and functions to the Panchayats. The devolution process has been made much more complicated.

The Panchayat representatives face a plethora of problems in governance and administration. Their capacity has to be enhanced through a process of capacity building. But it does not take place effectively and professionally. Training infrastructure has been developed, but quality training is lacking. Despite some progress in the delivery of service and deepening of democracy, the states are unwilling to share power with the local governments. As a result, many donor agencies have moved away from decentralisation activities, as have academic scholars. Panchayati Raj is a state subject which has to be looked at from the perspective of states in the context of cooperative federalism. Realistically speaking, decentralisation has to be implemented only by the state governments. The Justice Venkatachala report has recommended certain constitutional reforms pertinent to the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India. Later, the centre-state relations committee has made certain recommendations on the same subject. Following the above, the Second Administrative Reform Commission has made more realistic

What I gained through Gram Sabha? (a woman member's perspective)

A Gram Sabha member, Mariamma, 62, of Karisalpatti Gram Panchayat in Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, made an observation to my students during their field work, which is reproduced here:

"Many of the government schemes are implemented by various departments and agencies in our village. Who is in which office and implementing which scheme of the government, is not known to us. So, I used the Gram Sabha to track this information. This was possible because the government observer visited the Gram Sabha to explain to us. One of my close relatives had not received the old age pension for several months, and she was not able to move out from her house. When I raised this issue in the Sabha, the Gram Panchayat President took responsibility to get details from the concerned office. As a result, she got the pension.

I am a wage earner in MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), and I was not sure of getting my wages on time. Hence, I raised this issue in the Gram Sabha meeting and I got a reply. Another problem I, an unskilled labourer working on a farm faced, was that the Panchayat operated drinking water supply when I and many other women would be away at work. I raised this issue in the Gram Sabha and the timing of drinking water supply was changed to suit our requirement. To me it is a Parliament." ●

and actionable recommendations based on the performance of the institutions. It is a pity that none of the secretaries from GOI have put out a road map to implement the recommendations of this commission in their respective ministries. When the central government is not able to consider its own recommendations, how can one expect the state governments to implement the recommendation of the committee?

The very character of democracy has been changed because of the creation of Gram Sabha for participation of citizens in the process of governance and development, but it has not been supported by creating ground rules for the conduct of the Gram Sabha. Rules for participation, structure for participation have to be created for enabling the poor to participate in Gram Sabha meetings. The deliberative aspect of this democracy is missing. To tap the full potential of Gram Sabha, a few ground rules and enabling conditions have to be created. These steps have to be taken by the state governments.

Governance and administration are always of a complex nature in India, and they need to be simplified to enable citizens to participate in the process, as stakeholders. Barring a few states, there is no administrative manual for Panchayat administration. The absence of an administrative manual will pave way for corruption and domination of officials over elected representatives. It is also important that the elected representatives have to be trained in governance and administration. Sadly, there is no training policy to build the capacity of the elected representatives in India. It is also important to study how elected women representatives have performed at the grassroots and if they haven't, then why? It has been demonstrated unequivocally that there is a significant impact of reservation of seats for women in local governance and despite several barriers and limitations, they have performed well.

The way forward

Even after 20 years of the new experiment, there is no platform for proper policy advocacy for decentralisation at grassroots. The research conducted so far on decentralisation, development at grassroots and democratisation of the communities is scanty, sporadic and region specific. Pan Indian studies are rare. No worthwhile academy has been established in India to conduct studies on the above subjects.

By mobilising the masses for participation in governance at grassroots, a new polity could be evolved. To perform the above task, an academy has to be started and it has to work on the issues of decentralised governance, development, administration and their implications in the transformation of the rural communities and societies. A new training policy has to be evolved for preparing leaders to head local bodies. The existing training institutions have to be converted into new leadership schools. They should be kept out of state government control and should be autonomous. They can even be attached to universities. In every state, an administrative manual for local governance must be prepared in the respective regional language. This is very essential for ensuring accountability at the Panchayat level. In the absence of a planning machinery at the ground, a detailed guideline can

What I gained through Gram Sabha? (a male member's perspective)

Muniasamy, a Gram Sabha member of Alamarathupatti Gram Panchayat in Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, made an observation when our students went for field work:

"Gram Sabha is a best place to demonstrate equality in an unequal society. Caste hierarchy is a reality in rural areas. Untouchability is yet another reality that operates in different forms in the villages. The Gram Sabha is an instrument to change the mindset of the people. A dalit cannot sit along with the higher caste persons at any social function in the village settings.

But in the Gram Sabha, I find that equality at least in sitting along with them. I regularly attend the Gram Sabha meeting only to enjoy that equality in the village by sitting with higher caste men and women. Everybody has to sit only on the floor. Further, I can ask questions in the Gram Sabha. Questioning a higher caste person in a village is unacceptable. But in Gram Sabha, being a President, he or she has to respond to everyone's questions. I raise many questions and I get answers to all. I enjoy sitting with a higher caste person. It gives me joy and happiness. Being a dalit, I really value this". ●

be prepared either by the state government or central government, as to how educational and research institutions can help the Panchayats to prepare a development plan. For rural development policy making and planning, a reliable data base is the need of the hour. ■



Prof. G. Palanithurai teaches at the Gandhigram Rural Institute, a Deemed University of the central government, and coordinates the activities of the Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayati Raj Studies. He has written extensively on grassroots governance. He was a visiting professor in Cologne University. He is a member of many committees of the Government of India and Government of Tamil Nadu. He is an academic activist, working with communities through outreach activities.

Anna Hazare's model village

Ralegan Siddhi, a village in Parner taluk of Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra, is today considered a model village in many respects. Located at a distance of about 90 km from Pune, this village has carried out programmes like tree planting and terracing to reduce soil erosion, use of solar power and biogas, and the establishment of a windmill. The village's biggest accomplishment is in its use of non-conventional energy. For example, all the village street lights each have separate solar panels. And the man behind it all is Anna Hazare – a Gandhian and peace activist, who has turned Ralegan Siddhi into a model village of environmental conservation. This transformation started in the late 1970s when Anna Hazare returned to his village from the army, and slowly inspired the villagers to start regenerating their environment. Anna Hazare is a recipient of the central government's Padma Bhushan award.

RURAL INDIA

Not charged!

*The Centre claims to be fulfilling the Prime Minister's plan for full rural electrification. But a close check of its own real-time data shows that the gap between official claims and ground reality is stark, writes **Samarth Bansal**.*

HALDU Khata, a village in Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh, is one of the 7,008 villages that the government claims to have “electrified” in the last year, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi government's flagship scheme of rural electrification, ‘Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana’. However, according to the government's own field engineers, there is no electrical infrastructure in the village. Similarly, Dimatala in Assam, Kadam Jheriya in Chhattisgarh, Buknari in Bihar and Sunwara in Madhya Pradesh are misclassified as electrified villages in government books. These are not exceptional cases. The writer's analysis of rural electrification data shows that the number of villages said to be electrified in the last year is exaggerated.

Prime Minister Modi, in his Independence Day speech of 2015, had announced that all remaining villages would be electrified within 1,000 days. As of April 1, 2015, according to government numbers, 18,452 Indian villages were still un-electrified. Note that a village is considered electrified if public places in the village and 10 per cent of its households have access to electricity.

To make the process transparent, real-time data on villages being electrified has been made available to the public through a mobile app and a Web dashboard called GARV. The platform was launched in October 2015. Alongside, 309 Gram Vidyut Abhiyantas (GVAs) were deployed by the government to monitor the electrification process and enter the data on the GARV application.

Discrepancies galore

One major source of discrepancy is regarding those villages where the GVA has noted that the village is un-electrified, yet it is counted as electrified on the app. The writer was able to spot over 30 such villages on the app after scanning through GVAs' comments. When this discrepancy was pointed out, a senior official of the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC), the nodal agency for rural electrification which functions under the aegis of the Ministry of Power, said: “We put a lot of emphasis on photos. If there is a pole and distribution line visible in the photos, we call it electrified.” This perhaps could be one of the reasons leading to the inflated number, as the presence of electrical infrastructure



Is full electrification a pipe dream?

doesn't automatically translate into electrification.

A GVA from Pagara Buzurg village in Neemuch district of Madhya Pradesh told this writer that the contractor did set up power lines in the village but they were stolen before they could be charged, and now there is no electricity in the village. Neither does a conductor exist there. For Birni village in Giridih, Jharkhand, the GVA remarks: “Work not started. Village located in remote location. No roads to reach. Situated on mountains...naxalite affected area (sic).” Both villages are counted as electrified villages.

Conversations with GVAs reflect the gap between official data and ground realities. We found 342 villages where the status marked by the GVA was ‘e0’, which means un-electrified (‘ee’ and ‘en’ mean electrified). And yet, in the ‘overall’ category, all of these villages have been marked as electrified.

Further, as of March 10, 2016, for around 300 villages, the status said: “Village declared electrified by DISCOM (power distribution company). GVA yet to visit the village for verification.” This indicates that villages have been declared as electrified without waiting for the government's own representative's verification, rendering the monitoring system redundant. For many others, a pattern is observed where the date of electrification is way before the first visit made by GVA. And further, if the GVA marks it as un-electrified after

visiting, the status is not updated from 'electrified' to 'un-electrified'.

Another concern is that uninhabited villages have been marked as electrified. The villages Panalomali, Kusadangar, Patyetapali in Odisha and Sunwara in Madhya Pradesh — all counted as electrified villages — have no people residing there. Reading comments in the application, more such villages were found by us, such as Akbarpur in Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh, which is a forest area.

Statistical jugglery

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his Budget speech of 2016 said that the number of villages electrified in the last year was more than the combined number in the past three years. This claim may not be true, as *it was* found that of the 7,000-plus villages said to be electrified last year, 3,604 villages were assigned the status, "Village found electrified during the survey." This means that these villages were found electrified when GVAs first visited there. The REC official explained, "It is difficult to say when the work was done as the GVA visits started in October 2015. It could have happened after April 2015 (when the list of un-electrified villages was

prepared in consultation with State governments), maybe two years ago or even earlier." Conversations with GVAs and comments from the dashboard indicate that perhaps even the list of un-electrified villages was an overestimate. For instance, Changlang (Arunachal Pradesh) was electrified in 2001, Farbandhia Kahar (Assam) in 2012, and Mahdaili (Bihar) in 2013. But they were shown as un-electrified on the April 2015 list. It is also worth noting that work is ongoing even in villages declared as electrified; called "intensive electrification", this aims to cover all households and not just 10 per cent.

A detailed questionnaire mailed to the REC on March 19 seeking its official response went unanswered.

The count of villages being electrified, ticking upward every day in the GARV application — extensively shared by Union Power Minister Piyush Goyal on social media and cited by Prime Minister Modi in his speeches — is thus not a guarantee that all villages being claimed as electrified are actually so. ■

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How rural is Hindi cinema?

(Continued from page 15)

A milestone called *Swades*

Swades is a milestone. It gives India's rural-urban divide a new dimension. It narrates the constant struggle within the village community between what they understand by progress and how much is their level of endurance – to live without electricity in a post-Independent, globalised India, where the NASA scientist communicates through his laptop from his well-equipped office, and the same India where the entire village is devoid of electricity and therefore, a constant supply of water. When Mohan Bhargava returns to base from his NASA post, he is shocked to find a young impoverished boy selling a glass of water for 25 paise. He throws away his own mineral water bottle to build a water reservoir to generate electricity for the village.

Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* is a period film that shows how a young and beautiful wife is left alone to fend for herself when her husband takes up a job in the city. But when threatened by the lusty Subedar, she draws strength from her co-workers in the village's red chilli factory and triumphs over evil with collective strength. Prakash Jha's *Mrityudand* is again a story of reverse migration of a young and beautiful girl into a village through marriage. When her husband is murdered diabolically by the village contractor, she wreaks

revenge even in an advanced stage of pregnancy by killing the man and strengthening the morals and the courage of the other women in the village.

Amir Ullah Khan and Bibek Deb Roy in their brilliant study, *Indian Economic Transition through Bollywood Eyes – Hindi films and how they have reflected changes in India's political economy*, (Working Paper, August 2002), have chosen a list of Hindi films and tried to discover their connect with the country's economic policies. They argue that "Bollywood after all is not just a dream factory that belts out trashy material in the fashion of assembly line production." This list of films taken for discussion, analysis and exploration of how economic issues and policies intercut into the themes of these films, includes Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin* which according to Roy and Khan is one of the most realistic portraits of its times. "One of the issues that the film talks in the first half of the film is the issue of property, a shadow of the *Requisition and Acquisition of Immovable Property Act, 1952*. ■



Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for 'commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues' among many awards. She is currently Senior Research Fellow, ICSSR, Delhi, researching the politics of presentation of working women in post-colonial Bengali cinema 1950 to 2003.

RURAL INDIA

Subsidies that hurt

*Rural subsidies provided by the government are vital, but they have to be better implemented, says **Bharat Dogra**. Subsidies should be need-based and not be politically motivated sops, which eventually do more harm than good, he argues.*

WHILE farmers and weaker sections in our rural areas need and deserve subsidies at some levels, a big question is whether subsidies promote their sustainable livelihood or not. Unfortunately, the bulk of subsidies have not gone into the promotion and protection of sustainable livelihoods of farmers.

The story of food and farm subsidies

However, there are also a few examples of rural subsidies which are highly justified and welcome. For example, in this year's Union Budget, the government has announced a scheme for providing highly subsidised cooking gas to a significant number of rural households from the weaker sections, with the stated objective of protecting rural poor women from indoor pollution and excessive exposure to smoke. This is a good example of a well-justified subsidy. On the other hand, if the same objective is to be achieved by a subsidy for cooking without using any fossil fuel, this would be even more welcome.

The most substantial component of subsidies in India relates to food subsidy and its benefits are shared by rural people along with urban people. In a nutshell, India has a system of paying a fixed procurement price to farmers for foodgrains, and then selling this in ration shops at a cheaper price to deserving consumers. The difference between the procurement price plus handling and storage charges on the one hand, and the selling price on the other hand, is made up by the food subsidy. This is beneficial for farmers as well as consumers.

However, the benefits come down significantly because of poor implementation and corruption. As a result, many farmers particularly small farmers, do not get the proper procurement price, or else have to wait too long and face many avoidable problems. At the other end, genuinely deserving poor households face many difficulties in getting subsidised grain, and several of them simply do not get it.



A woman in the village using LPG cylinder

Yet another problem is that the procurement of foodgrains has been rather heavily concentrated in some areas, itself a result of regional imbalances in agricultural development. This results in huge expenses in storage and transport of foodgrains, which can be reduced to a considerable extent if efforts are made to make all regions self-reliant in producing adequate quantities of staple foods. Then it should be possible to procure not just foodgrains for ration shops, but also all other foods needed for the various nutrition programmes, locally. This will lead to more benefits for farmers, and at the same time, more fresh and better quality food in nutrition programmes as well as in ration shops, without increasing the subsidy.

Another aspect of this subsidy is that some objections have been raised at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). These objections are entirely unjustified, as the sovereign issue of protecting the livelihood of farmers and taking steps to reduce hunger should be strictly kept outside the trade related issues. There has been a lot of debate on fertiliser subsidies as well, and one point emphasised time and again has been that while these

For example, some state governments have taken highly populist decisions from time to time to provide electricity for agricultural work, either free or almost free, at a highly subsidised rate. This often leads to a tendency of over-extraction of water using tubewells.

subsidies are given in the name of helping farmers, they are actually given to the corporate sector, and it is never known for certainty how much benefit actually reaches the farmers. Apprehensions have been expressed that only a very small part of the benefit may have been passed to farmers, and so alternative means of more directly providing the subsidy to some farmers have been considered.

However, it will be much better both for the sustainable livelihood of farmers as well as for the protection of environment and health if the subsidies given at present for chemical fertilisers, pesticides and other agri-chemicals are used instead in helping the spread of organic farming and providing direct help to organic farmers. If this is done properly, then this can show the path towards significantly reducing the costs, debts and economic stress of farmers, while also protecting soil health and protecting water sources from pollution.

Similarly, in assessing and reforming other subsidies also, the important aspects of sustainability and environment protection should be kept in mind. For example, some state governments have taken highly populist decisions from time to time to provide electricity for agricultural work, either free or almost free, at a highly subsidised rate. This often leads to a tendency of over-extraction of water using tubewells. However, after some time, a very high price is paid by the people and farmers of this region in the form of a sharp decline in the water table. Ill thought-out subsidies which accentuate ecological ruin, and promote non-sustainable use of natural resources, should be avoided.

One very important aspect of rural development is the need to protect traditional water sources and to improve water conservation efforts at various levels. Wherever good efforts in these areas are taken up, the central and state governments should provide significant subsidies to those Panchayats and other local self government institutions who take up this work.

The creation and setting up as well as actual operation and maintenance of decentralised rural mixed renewable energy systems is another area of very creative and useful work, which deserves to be significantly subsidised by the government at least in the initial stages; apart from its many sided benefits for remote rural areas, this work will help significantly in



A fair price shop, part of the Public Distribution System, which is riddled with corruption

mitigation of effects of climate change, by reducing the dependence of many villages on fossil fuels.

In such cases, where work helpful for farmers is also very promising from the point of view of climate change adaptation and mitigation, then subsidies can become available not just from the government's own resources, but also from the substantial international funding that is likely to become available under the plans for tackling climate change. Of course, this funding will also be substantially administered by the government, but the funds will be in addition to the government's own funds and the routine aid funds.

Hence, it is clear that subsidies can play an important role in guiding rural and farm development along desirable lines, as well as for providing genuine relief to needy and deserving sections, but only if adequate caution is exercised. In the past, often exactly the opposite results were achieved due to misguided



government decisions, often taken under undue pressure or influence of powerful interests. One can only hope that more caution and better policies will be able to use subsidies in more beneficial ways. ■

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

Number cruncher

As per the 2011 Census, 70% of India's population lives in villages. Of the 121 crore Indians, 83.3 crore live in rural areas, while 37.7 crore stay in urban areas. The level of urbanisation increased from 27.81 per cent in the 2001 Census to 31.16 per cent in the 2011 Census, while the proportion of rural population declined from 72.19 per cent to 68.84 per cent. The data also reflects that 18.62 per cent of the country's rural population lives in Uttar Pradesh, and 13.48 per cent urban population lives in Maharashtra.

KNOW INDIA **BETTER**

HARIDWAR

The holy time warp



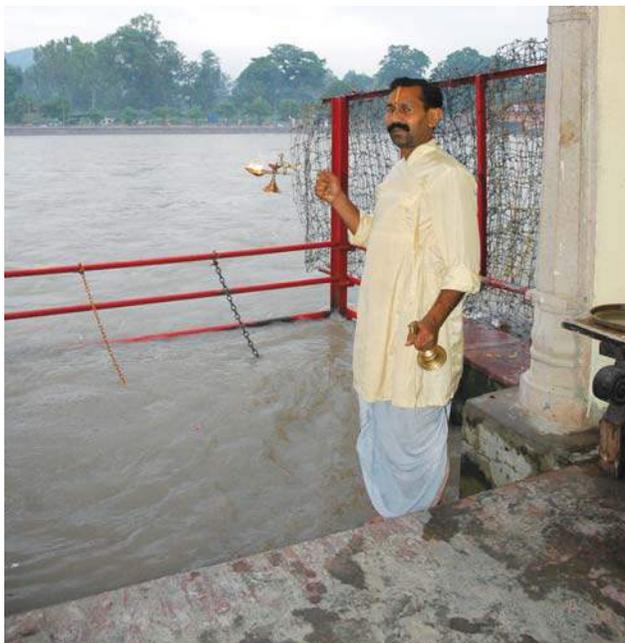
Every story about Haridwar rests on the majesty of the mighty Ganga. The Ganga's birth and journey through the mountains and plains of India, have given rise to many rituals, legends and customs. Most of these legends owe their provenance to cosmic fables, which get narrated and celebrated with great vigour. Time seems to have virtually come to a halt in the city of Haridwar, which celebrates its uniqueness every day along with pilgrims and tourists who flock to its holy ghats for a myriad reasons, but with one end in mind: salvation and peace.

Text & Photos: Gustasp & Jeroo Irani



Haridwar's famous Ganga *aarti* at Har ki Pauri

WE awoke to the tinkle of temple bells. The *pundit* at the luxe Haveli Hari Ganga hotel in Haridwar was waking the gods that resided in the little shrine located within the hotel premises. We tumbled out of bed, splashed water on our faces and hurried down to partake in the morning *aarti*. The ceremony had moved to the waterfront by the time we arrived. The *pundit* swirled a brass lamp with flaming oil wicks over the sacred river Ganga that lapped against the steps of the *haveli* hotel as it flowed urgently



The *pundit* swirling the brass oil lamp in homage to the holy river

onwards to shower the Gangetic plains with the benediction of its life-giving waters.

The *pundit* then invited us and the other guests to participate in the ceremony by taking turns swirling the brass oil lamp in homage to the holy river. The thin veil of mist that danced over the surging waters seemed to receive our entreaties, before offering them gently to the river.

We dipped our feet into the river and splashed our faces with its waters. Other more devout guests gritted their teeth and took a dip in its freezing waters. They emerged shivering from the purifying bath, with their faces glowing with bliss. It was enough to make us shake off our inhibitions, strip down to our shorts and plunge into the ice-cold glacier-fed water. Ma Ganga welcomed us in her all-encompassing embrace, and just to make sure that she did not sweep us away in her surging currents, we held on to the chains placed there for just that purpose. Indeed, there were chains placed on almost all the banks as well as under the archways of bridges, so that pilgrims could hold on to keep their balance, or cling to, should they be swept way in the undercurrent.

Still wet, we climbed up one level of the *haveli* to the open balcony cantilevered over the river, and looked over its filigreed railing. The waterfront was buzzing with activity: *aartis* not unlike the one we had participated in, were being performed in all the *havelis*, temples and shrines that lined the banks of the river: the ringing of bells, swirling of oil lamps, chanting of *mantras*, call of the conch shells and the splashing of devotees taking a spiritually purifying dip...

The riverfront promenade below us was alive with colour



The Haveli overlooking the holy river

and endless activity. A *sadhu* in a wheelchair; a group of weary pilgrims sitting down to share a simple meal; *pujaris* invoking the blessing of the river on behalf of couples and families; city slickers posing for selfies...The anguished cry of a child drew our attention to a family clustered around a young toddler whose head was being shaved. After the ordeal, the wailing lad was given a good dip in the river, and then rewarded with a bottle of milk on which he sucked contentedly.

Shops and pavement stalls peddled everything that a pilgrim or even a tourist might need: flower boats made of leaves, coconuts, old coins and plastic containers to collect *Gangajal*, mountains of red *kumkum*, souvenirs, and fake copies of luxury watches at knock-down prices...Rich aromas of deep-fried savoury snacks, emanating from restaurants and food stalls, filled the air.

Later that morning, we crossed over to the other bank of the river and marvelled at the similarity between this stretch of the waterfront and the canals of Venice: the difference being that instead of opulent mansions and ornate churches, the skyline here was etched with grand *havelis* and the spires of temples and shrines.

A propitious city

Our awe was in sharp contrast to the sense of despair we felt when we had rolled into the town the previous evening. An unseasonal thunder shower greeted us as we stepped off the train. Since it was the sunset *arti* time and most of the roads were closed to motorised vehicles, we huddled into a cycle rickshaw whose flimsy hood offered little protection from the

downpour, as it crawled through narrow flooded streets towards our hotel. Indeed, there were sections where it seemed as though the Ganga had spilled over its banks and invaded the town. However, the sight of shopkeepers and local residents carrying on with their everyday lives as though this was perfectly normal, stayed our hand from hitting the panic button.

Seeing our concern, our cycle rickshaw driver turned around and reassured us that we were blessed. “Don’t let a little rain upset you. Not everyone has the good fortune of coming to



A mountain of *kumkum* in a sidewalk stall at Haridwar

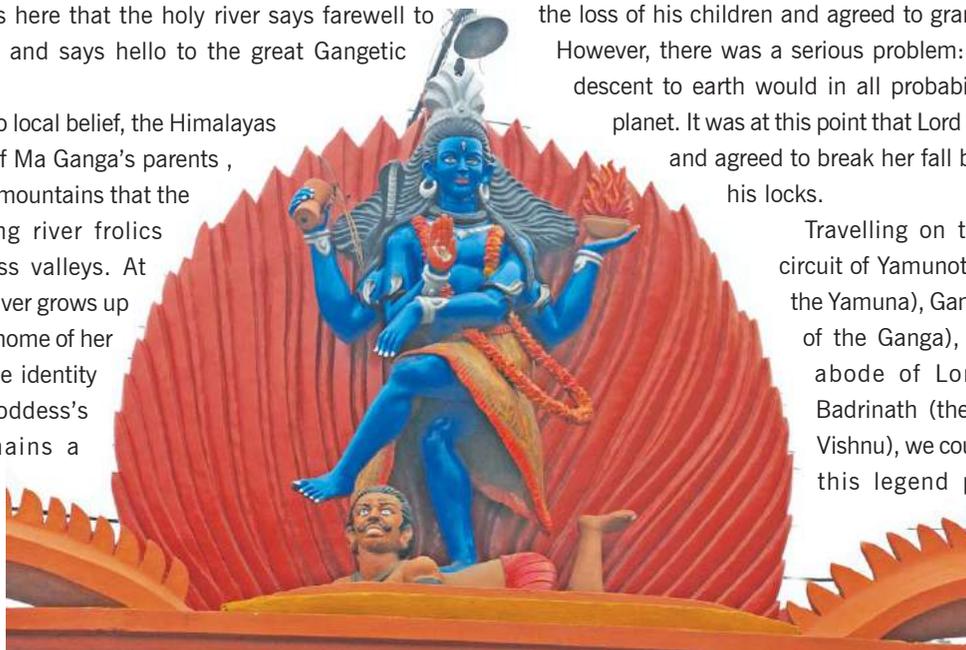


The bathing *ghats* and in the distance, the Clock Tower, at Har ki Pauri

Haridwar. Only a chosen few are blessed with a *darshan* of the holy city. You may think that you have come to Haridwar, but no, it is Haridwar that has called you to her," the old man, his face drenched with rain and perspiration, made his grand pronouncement.

His ad-libbed lines may have been well rehearsed but the truth was that they were shared by many who believe that Haridwar holds a very special place in the heart of Goddess Ganga. From all the villages, towns and cities that grace her banks, Haridwar is the one she considered to be her true home. For, it is here that the holy river says farewell to the Himalayas and says hello to the great Gangetic plains of India.

According to local belief, the Himalayas are the home of Ma Ganga's parents, and it is in the mountains that the sprightly young river frolics through endless valleys. At Haridwar, the river grows up and enters the home of her in-laws. But the identity of the river goddess's husband remains a mystery. Lord Shiva? No. However, her legend is eternally



Lord Shiva dances on top of a city temple at Haridwar

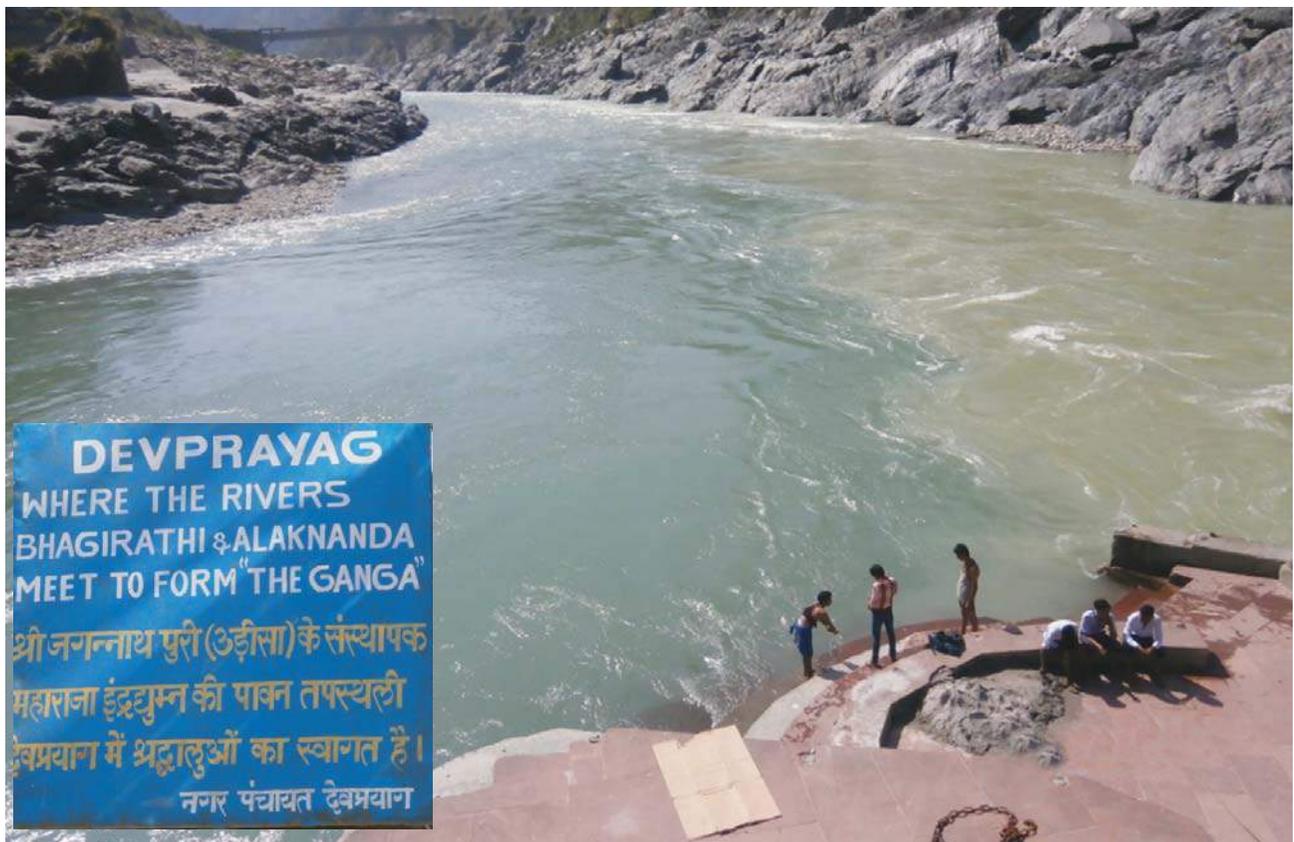
entwined in his matted locks.

Goddess Ganga was happy in the heavens and saw no need to grace earth with her presence. That was till King Sagar of Ayodhya had given Lord Indra reason to be threatened by his power and good fortune. In a fit of jealous rage, the prince of the heavens contrived to reduce Sagar's 60,000 sons to ashes. A grieving king committed himself to protracted penance and appealed to Ganga to resurrect his progeny by washing their remains with the divine power of her waters. The river goddess took pity on the man whose heart bled for the loss of his children and agreed to grant him his wish.

However, there was a serious problem: her thunderous descent to earth would in all probability fracture the planet. It was at this point that Lord Shiva intervened and agreed to break her fall by fielding her in his locks.

Travelling on the Char Dham circuit of Yamunotri (the source of the Yamuna), Gangotri (the source of the Ganga), Kedarnath (the abode of Lord Shiva) and Badrinath (the abode of Lord Vishnu), we could visualise how this legend panned out in

physical terms. Shiva's locks are manifested in



Devprayag, where the Alaknanda merges with the Bhagirathi to become the Ganga (photo: H.V.Shiv Shankar)

the river's many tributaries that form confluences at different *prayags* to eventually become the Ganga; at Devprayag, for instance, the Alaknanda merges with the Bhagirathi to become the Ganga. We stood on a hillock overlooking the *sangam*: two streams of distinct shades – one clear green-blue and the other murky brown – briefly retaining their identities before merging into each other. At Gangotri, there is a rocky cavern where Lord Shiva is supposed to receive the Ganga in his matted locks. Indeed, Haridwar is the launching pad of this spiritually uplifting and physically demanding Char Dham pilgrim circuit.

And the beloved cosmic tales

Back in cosmic time, Haridwar was also the stage where the tragic love story between Sati and Lord Shiva played out. Sati, the daughter of King Daksha, had married Lord Shiva much against her father's wishes, as he was revolted by the idea of having a son-in-law who, among other things, smeared his body with the ash of the dead and wore a necklace of skulls. The vengeful king decided to register his protest and humiliate his *damaad* by performing a sacred *yajna* or sacrifice to which he invited all the Gods and sages except Lord Shiva. Sati, outraged by her father's pettiness and obvious attempt to insult her husband, threw herself into the sacrificial fire.

When Lord Shiva, who till then was indifferent to the shafts of spite that fell harmlessly at his feet, learned of Sati's death, he was devastated. Overcome with grief and anger, he hoisted the charred remains of his beloved wife on his shoulders and



The Sati Kund at Haridwar



The main temple at Sati Kund

started to dance the *Tandava* or the dance of destruction. Tremors of dread and despair raked the assembly of the kings and gods who had come to attend the *yajna*; if Lord Shiva continued to dance it would be the end of the world as they knew it. For a brief eternity all life forms on the planet froze with fear.

Only Lord Vishnu had the presence of mind to react to this grave predicament. He unsheathed his *Sudarshan Chakra* or cosmic wheel weapon and hurled it at the lifeless body of Sati and sliced it into 52 pieces (there are different takes on exactly how many pieces there were: some say 72; others 108). This debate aside, Lord Vishnu's drastic action jarred Lord Shiva out of his stupor. He stopped his devastating dance mid-stride. The universe was saved from total annihilation.

The residue of this tragic love story is still evident across the country as various parts of Sati's body were scattered across the land, and as they fell, they turned to



The Chandi Devi temple at Haridwar

stone. They are referred to as *Shaktipeethas*. (One eye fell in Nainital and turned into a lake but that is another story). A happy footnote to the story is that Sati was reincarnated as Goddess Parvati, and the rest is legend.

In Haridwar, however, the Daksha Mahadev Temple on the banks of the Ganga stands on the spot where the traumatic cosmic drama had been enacted. We joined the river of pilgrims who streamed through the complex and stopped briefly at the altar of fire that Sati is said to have leapt into. The memory of her sacrifice still festers like an open wound that just will not heal in the minds of her devotees.

The temple grounds were studded with innumerable shrines, big and small. One altar caught our eye: it had the painting of a goddess who had cut off her own head so that her disciples could quench their thirst by drinking her blood. The young *pujari* attending to the shrine seemed



The entrance to the Mansa Devi temple (Photo: H.V. Shiv Shankar)

confused when we quizzed him about its spiritual significance and sought its reference to context in the scriptures. Confronted with a blank look, we settled for what we thought was the obvious: that gods and goddesses are not indifferent to the pleas of beseeching mortals; they too perform sacrifices at the altar of their devotees.

Staying on the pilgrims' trail, we hopped into a cabin of a ropeway that soared over the forested slopes of Neel Parvat (Blue Mountain), which deposited us at the foot of Chandi Devi temple that rides the crest of a ridge. From up there, we looked down at the grey-blue slash of river Ganga as it coiled out of the surrounding mountains, meandered through Haridwar and eventually eased itself into the great plains of India. Earlier, pilgrims had to trek three kilometres through thick forests (still populated with elephants and other wild animals), to reach the summit.

According to legend, Goddess Parvati took the form of the beautiful maiden Chandi to defeat and oust the demon kings Shumbha and Nishumbha from heaven, after they had captured it briefly from Lord Indra. The existing temple was built in 1929 by the Maharajah of Kashmir, while the main idol of Chandi Devi was installed by the sage Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century.

Chandi, Mansa and Maya

Chandi Devi is one apex of a trinity of shrines that grant boons to devotees who complete the temple-hopping circuit. The other two are Mansa Devi, perched on the summit of Bilwa Parvat, and Maya Devi at the bathing *ghats* around Har ki Pauri.

According to legend, Goddess Parvati took the form of the beautiful maiden Chandi to defeat and oust the demon kings Shumbha and Nishumbha from heaven, after they had captured it briefly from Lord Indra.



The Chandi Devi temple shrine at Haridwar

Mansa Devi is the physical manifestation of the energy emanating from the mind of Lord Shiva. (Another version is that

Mansa Devi emerged from the mind of the great sage Kashyapa.) Here, pilgrims make a wish by tying a thread to the branch of a tree, knowing full well that when and if it is granted (and only the righteous ones are), they will have to return and thank the goddess by untying any one of the threads on the tree. Here too, a ropeway ferried us up to the summit of a forested mountain that is home to a number of wild animals that have the instinctive good sense to stay clear of the 2-km long trekking trail that snakes up the slopes.

The Maya Devi temple is linked to the sad and dramatic demise of Sati, for it is built on the spot where the heart and navel of the goddess (after Lord Vishnu saved the universe from total annihilation by slicing her charred body with his cosmic chakra), is believed to have fallen. Enshrined in the holy sanctum are the three-headed and four-armed idol of Goddess Maya, one of the many incarnations of Shakti.



Pretty flower boats on the river promenade



The Ganga aarti at Har ki Pauri – the ghats on both sides of the river were packed with people

We returned to our cosy hotel room at Haveli Hari Ganga with a jumble of legends and myths swirling in our heads. An evening of *bhajans* at the hotel deepened our sense of the past and the present telescoping into each other, even as the voice of the singer seemed to soar to the heavens along with our prayers and thanksgiving for bringing us to the amazing holy city. We could not help but marvel at the fact that Haridwar juggled time so deftly. Soon we were pumped up and eager to set off for the Ganga *aarti*, which is the high point of the day for any pilgrim or curious tourist visiting the holy city.

The *pujari* attached to the hotel – he played the dual role of being both a spiritual and tourist guide – seemed to be overly eager to get us, along with other hotel guests,

The *pujari* attached to the hotel – he played the dual role of being both a spiritual and tourist guide – seemed to be overly eager to get us, along with other hotel guests, moving. Later we would discover that he had cause to be concerned.

moving. Later we would discover that he had cause to be concerned. We were surrounded by photo ops for there was so much happening along the promenade leading to the site of the *aarti*. Glittering bangles and garments of startling hues winked at us from sidewalk stalls. Patches of pavement were chequered with flowers, incense sticks and camphor cradled in boats made of leaves...The faces of elderly pilgrims lined with the untold stories of their lives. Mountains of food on the hotplates of aromatic food stalls and restaurants...

Our *pujari*-guide had to prompt us to hurry when we stopped to photograph a man with a painted face ringing a bell. It turned out he was advertising the merits of the Chotiwalla restaurant. It was only when we reached the



The giant Shiva statue at Haridwar

arti venue did we finally appreciate our escort's concern: it was to ensure that we got to a strategic spot from which we would get a clear view of the ceremony. The *ghats* on both sides of the river were already packed to overflowing, and yet there was space for the tributaries of pilgrims pouring in.

A crescent moon smiled down on the arena dominated by a clock tower on one bank, and a cluster of temples on the other. Flaming flower boats released by pilgrims floated down the river. The water was speckled with people of all denominations – young and old, potbellied and frail, men in their underwear and women in dripping saris...cleansing their souls by taking a dip in the holy river. *Pujaris* blessed newly-wed couples and families. Bearded *sadhus* with elaborate caste marks across their

A young man washed the feet of his stooped, grey-whiskered *guru*. People scooped the water of the sacred river in plastic containers. Urchins used glass slivers to scan the gurgling expanse for coins tossed into it as offerings...

foreheads and hooded eyelids pulled on *chillums*. A young man washed the feet of his stooped, grey-whiskered *guru*. People scooped the water of the sacred river in plastic containers. Urchins used glass slivers to scan the gurgling expanse for coins tossed into it as offerings...A torrent of unadulterated devotion poured into the holy river as it surged past Har ki Pauri.

Har ki Pauri and the Maha Kumbh Mela

Indeed, Har ki Pauri is the stage for one of Hinduism's greatest festivals: the Maha Kumbh Mela. This epic event which sees the world's largest congregation of people at a single venue, occurs once every 12 years. (The next Kumbh Mela is slated to take place in Haridwar in the year 2022.)



A sadhu stands guard at Har ki Pauri

The origin of the Kumbh Mela goes back to Vedic times when the *devas* (gods) and the *asuras* (demons) were locked in perpetual conflict. Separately, they attempted to retrieve the *kumbh* (pot) of immortal nectar from the deep oceans, but their efforts were foiled by the sheer magnitude of the task. In their desperation to get their hands on this prize, they set aside their eternal differences and decided to work together towards a common goal. Using Mount Parvat as a churning rod, they convinced Vasuki, the king of serpents, to be the



Holy men stride down the streets of Haridwar



A sadhu's feet being washed at the bathing ghats of Har ki Pauri

churning rope. With the *devas* lined up along the tail of the giant snake and the *asuras* on the other side, they started to churn the ocean.

But the ocean was not ready to surrender her treasure willingly, and as the churning continued, a number of things emerged from its depths, including a cloud of poisonous gas that threatened to envelop the earth and kill all living things, including the *devas* and *asuras*. Seeing the danger, Lord Shiva stepped in and swallowed the poison and held it in his throat, which immediately turned blue. (Hence the Lord is also known as Neelkanth or blue neck.)

Finally, the ocean relented and the celestial physician Dhanvantari emerged from its depths, holding a pot brimming with the nectar of immortality. The fragile truce that had held the warring parties together fractured, and a great fight broke between the two sides, each one trying to wrest the pitcher for themselves. In the ensuing battle, the *devas* managed to get hold of the prize and were given chase by the *asuras* across the sky. In the process, a few drops of the immortal elixir fell at four different places in India: Prayag (Allahabad), Nasik, Ujjain and Haridwar. Ever since, this festival is held once every three years in rotation between the four cities.



Pujaris perform the 'fire dance' at Har ki Pauri

The holy aarti

Meanwhile, the tolling of temple bells sent a thrill of anticipation through the crowd that had gathered at Har ki Pauri. A row of *pujaris* in white *dhotis* descended down the *ghats* to the edge of the waterfront. People were urged over the public announcement system to get out of the water as the *aarti* was about to commence.

Suddenly, activity around the *ghats* come to a grinding halt. Did we imagine it or did the crescent moon glow a little brighter? Our attention was then drawn to an idol of the Ganga, draped in a bright red cloth and carried in a palanquin from the inner sanctum of a temple, down to the waterfront. The next moment, the air reverberated with the clanging of bells and chanting of *mantras*. Priests who had till then primed their many-layered lamps with oil wicks, set them alight and started to swirl the flames in unison across the *ghats*. Dancing tongues of flame leapt out of all the shrines, big and small, that peppered the *ghats*. It was a festival of light that celebrated the life-giving bounty of the holy river Ganga, as it surged by.

Yes, the Ganga *aarti* – a ballet of fire – was a spontaneous happening, sustained by the flames of pure, untainted devotion. Indeed, it captured the essence of Haridwar - raw and brilliant like an uncut diamond.

Fact File

Dehradun's Jolly Grant airport is the closest airstrip to Haridwar (38 km).

Haridwar is connected by rail and road to Rishikesh (23 km) and Dehradun (52 km) to the north, and Delhi (171 km) to the south. The Shatabdi, in addition to other trains, runs between Haridwar and Delhi.

The temple town has a number of hotels including one run by the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam, an arm of Uttarakhand



A close-up of the Ganga aarti



Havelis line the banks of river Ganga

Tourism, in the city. The city also has a number of ashrams, yoga centres and heritage haveli hotels like the Haveli Hari Ganga and the Hotel Ganga Lahari.

Haridwar and the neighbouring city of Rishikesh are the launching and terminating pads for the Char Dham pilgrim circuit of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.

One may use Haridwar as a base to go on a safari drive through neighbouring Rajaji National Park or maybe even spend a night there in the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam lodge or The Forrest, a luxury tented camp located on the fringe of the park.

The hill station of Mussoorie is 84 km from Haridwar. One can also go river rafting with adventure sports tour operators located in Rishikesh. Or check into the award winning spa resort, Ananda in the Himalayas (42 km) (www.anandaspa.com)

For more information, visit Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam, an arm of Uttarakhand Tourism at <http://gmvn.gov.in> or Leisure

Hotels at www.leisurehotels.co.in which has a number of heritage hotels in and around Haridwar, including luxury tented camps on the Char Dham circuit. ■

Gustasp and Jeroo Irani are travel companions for whom life is a never-ending journey. Over the last 25 years they have travelled extensively across India and the globe, taking the rough with the smooth; sampling different cultures and cuisines. In the process they have trekked in the Australian Outback, slurped snake soup in Hong Kong, have danced with the Samburus in Africa, stayed with a local family in a Malay village, cracked the Da Vinci Code in Paris... For them, writing and photography are more than just freezing moments of that journey; it's a passion.



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The Indian Monsoon	Police Reforms	Health	Parliament	Women	GM Crops

“Funnily enough, despite the success of Dilli Haat and everyone knowing it was my concept and effort that made it happen, no one has come and asked me to guide them on how to set up a haat and run it successfully!”



Her love for India's traditional handicrafts began as a child and grew to be a passion later. Politician and activist **Jaya Jaitly** has been a true cultural ambassador of Indian handicrafts for over 40 years, helping poor craftsmen from various Indian states find a direct market for selling their wares in a vibrant atmosphere of a *mela*. She has authored several books and documented stories surrounding the various art and craft, so as to give it a cultural identity. The extremely popular Dilli Haat which was replicated in other states was her brainchild, and came as a shot in the arm for India's dying handicrafts and artisans. In an email interview, founder president of the Dastakari Haat Samiti, Jaya Jaitly, spoke to OIOP Editor **Anuradha Dhareshwar** about her work, and her dream project the Hastakala Academi.

What drew you to Indian handicrafts and what have your efforts been at promoting it all these years? Is there a particular state or area of art that you have focused on?

Since the age of eight I have responded to artistic things which surrounded me in Japan, where I lived at that time. I was always excited when I saw creative works and my aesthetic senses kept being sharpened by arts, crafts and textiles of a heritage nature. My roots are in South India, so those influences are strong, but then I became closely associated, first with the crafts of Jammu & Kashmir for many years, and then Gujarat. After intensive work in these states, it gave me a sound understanding that helped me work with crafts people in many skills from all over the country.

Some of the cultural ambassadors in India have shown great concern about our dying art and neglect of Indian artisans. Has this concern translated into concerted effort in promoting our artisans?

Those who have been sincerely involved have become

ambassadors because they have propagated their knowledge and concerns across the country and the world. I do not believe someone is a true ambassador if they keep harping on the neglect angle alone. Many negatives can be turned into positives if one works closely with people and skills, being inspired by them, as well as developing their potential and providing a good platform for them.

How are our rural arts doing today? Due to lack of support, the second and third generation artisans are abandoning it and switching over to other professions which will give them a stable income. Will we not lose out on our traditional art? Are there enough artisans to take it forward?

Every class of society has more options for mobility today, so it should not surprise us that artisans too are part of this flux. However, wherever they have been given or seized opportunities to excel and earn with greater recognition and respect, they not only continue with their traditional occupations, but they innovate and do very well. Who

has a stable income today, except government servants? Everything else seems to depend on that inevitable word “market” these days.

Are the states and the Centre doing enough to promote art and artisans? What can be done further to preserve our traditional art and support the artisans to reach the end user by eliminating the middlemen?

The states do less unless large sections of crafts persons can influence votes, put pressure with demands or the state has always been dependent or sensitive to their concerns. Issues like cultural heritage and craft livelihoods have mattered in Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. In other states it is sporadic or almost nil in terms of effectiveness, no matter how many schemes and statistics exist on paper.

The centre formulates a variety of schemes to encourage design, training, marketing etc., but somehow their implementation usually leaves much to be desired. Once there is a proper assessment of the capability and credibility of NGOs and other institutions, they should be more proactive in making them partners in implementing projects and programmes, insisting on transparency and outside evaluation, but making the work more people friendly, rather than creating endless paper work and red tape.

Urgent areas are facilitating access to raw material and



Jaya Jaitly interacting with a craftsperson

wider markets. Once processes of production are simplified and opportunities for sales and orders increase, design, training, finance and quality improvement fall into place automatically.

Not all middlemen are exploiters and the more direct access to markets or online sales can be achieved by artisans, the role of middlemen will reduce. After all, online marketing websites often mark up craft products from the artisan considerably. In

this day and age, would we call them middlemen?

We have many talented designers in India who have launched their apparel brands. Do we have enough designers who recognise the need to work with rural artisans and promote them?

There are many more designers doing so, now that they have been sensitised and have realised the value of “Indianness” which is delving into India’s craft skills and resources, and not just being “ethnic”, which limits its outreach. The term “ethnic” itself has more colonial than contemporary connotations.

Has there been a replication of successful concepts like the Delhi Haat? What are the success areas and success stories? Can you narrate a few?

Inspite of Dilli Haat’s standards and aspirations having fallen over the years through bad administration, it is still successful and popular among both crafts people and visitors. Other *haats*, both in Delhi and other cities like Jaipur, Bhopal, Ahmedabad, Bhubaneshwar among

others, came up as imitators of the concept, without the effort or ability to manage them in a manner that served its true purpose.

Government always has good intentions, but bad implementation, since most projects get bogged down in red tape, initially to create system

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and prevent misuse, but ends up being unimaginative and bureaucratic.

Any haat can be perked up if good crafts persons are brought there and a vibrant *mela*-like atmosphere created to provide the ambience. Funnily enough, despite the success of Dilli *Haat* and everyone knowing it was my concept and effort that made it happen, no one has come and asked me to guide them on how to set up a haat and run it successfully! Private

bodies and governments of other countries have, but not our own.

The Government of Maharashtra has recently announced its plan to set up a Mumbai Haat, exclusively to market products made by women self-help groups. This would include handicrafts, jewellery, clothes, eatables and households items at Metro Cinema subway, Dhobi Talao. What do you think about this initiative?

I am happy to hear this from you, and support any initiative to provide a decent space for small creative livelihoods to prosper. The agencies involved should first decide whether the occupants will be small traders

or producers. If the latter, they must ensure that traders do not take over posing as producers. There should be inclusive and rotational systems of occupancy. Also, it cannot just become another messy marketplace, but must have an upgraded ambience through attractive décor, greenery, cultural performances, clean street food etc., so that it becomes a contemporary version of a heritage activity, reinventing the traditional *haat* of villages.

Can you tell us about your project – The Hastakala Akademi and its objectives? When will it start functioning? How will this initiative help our artisans?

The proposal I gave for a Hastkala Akademi is very close to my heart as it is meant to gather information and be a resource centre for all cultural aspects that surround and give rise to every craft, art and textile practice and object. In India, each craft has a meaning and a use. We are tending to lose this which makes it become just a commercial product without a story that adds cultural and economic value to it. Our traditional heritage, skills, techniques and expressions are amazing and so varied. Unless we collect, document, digitise, exhibit and disseminate these, we will lose ourselves to the underside of globalisation, which eliminates our own cultural identity.

The Indian traditional wear – the sari is going out of fashion. The younger generation seems to find the jeans more convenient. What has been the impact of # 100 Saripact? Has it helped in luring our young women to this wonderful garment?

I do not think the sari is going out of fashion for the majority of



Jaya Jaitly has single-handedly revived Indian handicrafts

Indian women who wear it as their basic form of dress, rather than as a fashion statement. Let's not only talk about women in cosmopolitan cities. We all wore jeans, *salwar kurtas* and *lehengas* in the South when we were young and in our teens. In adulthood and with motherhood, most culturally rooted Indian women wear saris on a regular basis. The younger generation follow a herd mentality and prefer skinny fit jeans in the heat with impossibly high heels. They may look nice, but they can hardly call it convenient or comfortable. The #100 sari pact certainly put the focus on saris and encouraged many city women and those abroad to take note and enjoy wearing them. Some of us are working together on following up the #100 sari pact with special events in spreading awareness about handlooms, infinite design possibilities, the sheer beauty of a sari and the grace we feel when wearing them, and getting support from these sari converts so that we can do more work among weavers to ensure continuation of livelihoods. I love this field of work because there is always so much new stuff to do. One is constantly being inspired.

Are you happy with the response you got for your book *Woven textiles of Varanasi*? Are there any new books on handicrafts in the pipeline?

I have written so many books on handicrafts and textiles that I have called a halt! I hope many have seen my book on the *Woven Textiles of Varanasi*. Actually, I am keen on visitors to Varanasi reading it so that they get another facet of the charm and fame of Varanasi, along with the Ganga and temples. ■

New OIOP Clubs in Mumbai

Ramkrishna High School, Om Jaganath Nagar, Kaju Pada, Borivili (E), Mumbai



Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde, Trustee and Managing Editor, OIOP, Ms. Anuradha Dhadeshwar, Editor, OIOP, and Mrs. Sharada Tukaram Patil, Principal, lit the inaugural lamp



Mrs. Hegde presented the OIOP Club membership certificate to the Principal Mrs. Patil



Students presented a cultural programme on the occasion

Cosmos High School (English Medium), Ganesh Chowk, Kaju Pada, Borivili (E), Mumbai



Mrs. Hegde presented the OIOP Club membership certificate to the Principal Mrs. Sudha S. Surve



Mrs. Hegde addressed the students of the school



Students sang a prayer on the occasion

Cosmos High School (Marthi Medium), Ganesh Chowk, Kaju Pada, Borivili (E), Mumbai



Mrs. Hegde presented the OIOP Club membership certificate to the Principal Mrs. Swapnali Ramesh Thakre



A group photo with the Principal and students



A section of the audience

Renewable, but is it sustainable?

*A clean and green source of energy is hydropower. Nothing burns, and no fumes are emitted to the atmosphere. But is it really sustainable in the holistic sense of the term? asks **G. Venkatesh**.*

I stay in a country which generates over 40% of its electricity needs from hydropower. Its neighbour, a country I stayed in for the previous eight years or so, generates almost all its needs from hydropower and at times, has surplus to export to what is called the Nordic Grid up here in Europe. It is Sweden and Norway I am referring to, respectively. Browsing through a textbook of renewable energy, I note that over 85% of Brazil's electricity needs are fulfilled by hydropower (about 400 TWh per year).

The India story

I then am curious to find out about our country. I gather that about 15% of the total electricity needs of Indians is fulfilled by hydroelectricity. The current installed capacity is a little over 42 GW, and the plants operate at an average capacity factor of around 32% (in other words, the electricity supplied by them is 32% of the maximum they could supply). Can the percentage share be increased further? The difference between 15% on the one hand and '40+%, 85% and almost 100%' on the other, makes me think that India must strive to increase the share of its electricity coming from hydropower plants – clean and green, to power homes, factories, schools, hospitals and commercial complexes.

I gather, on further investigation, that while the technical generation potential is around 660 TWh per year, the economically exploitable (as-yet-

unharnessed) potential is close to 445 TWh per year as far as large-scale hydropower plants are concerned. Add on the mini, small and micro-hydro capacity (in the kW range), and pumped storage schemes (wherein excess hydroelectricity is used to pump water upto reservoirs at a higher level, thus transforming the electrical energy to

potential energy to be reconverted later on when the need arises), some more potential can possibly be brought on-stream. All this of course, is just on paper. From paper to plant to power is an arduous journey...at times. While I gather all this information, I also happen to read about the Mekong River and the dams being built on it (or on the anvil for the near future) in China, Laos and Cambodia. On the Chinese side, six hydropower plants with capacities ranging between 100 MW and 5000 MW are operational, eight are planned and five are under construction (between 100 MW and 1000 MW each). Laos has eight projects planned (100 MW to 1000 MW each), of which four are on international borders (with Thailand and Cambodia). A medium-sized one – 100 MW-plus capacity – is being built, at the time of writing. Not to be left behind, Cambodia, on the downstream of the Mekong, has planned two hydropower



The Xiaowan Dam in Yunnan Province, China, is one of the upstream dams along the upper reaches of the Mekong River

projects. While Laos intends to benefit by the sale of hydroelectricity to its neighbours (Thailand and Cambodia), China plans to bring on-stream several hydropower schemes (alongside nuclear power plants), in order to reduce its carbon footprint in the years to come.

But it is not totally good news here. Power production is fine, but one cannot survive on electricity alone! There are downsides – affecting farmers and fishermen primarily (social impacts, and by extension economic as well), and the environment as well, by threatening the biodiverse spots in South East Asia. Vietnam, where the Mekong ends and drains itself into the ocean, unfortunately, cannot utilise the waters of this giant river-system for hydropower, and perhaps stands to just bear the brunt of such projects upstream. Then the thought occurs – what is it that matters the most in this century? Climate change mitigation?

Food security? Biodiversity? Reliable sources of income for the lower strata of societies? Electricity to light up homes and increase industrial production? In a way, don't we need all this? But how must one prioritise? And who decides? Sample these lines borrowed from *Water for All and other poems*, a book by this writer published in December 2014 – ‘*Big brother west of the border/built four hydropower plants/checking the free flow of the rivers/into the neighbouring lands./Electrify, my dear friends/buy some power from us/Keep in step with changing times/Embrace the wave of progress./That is fine, dear big bro/but our fish are dying in shoals/Less water to irrigate our crops/we are becoming dust bowls./No worries, my little brothers/no worries at all, you see/We can also sell you fish and food/they are already en route, by sea.*’ This sums up grave concerns in a lighter vein... with a dose of sarcasm.

The expert view

I was drawn to write to the International Hydropower Association (IHA) based in the UK to seek their expert viewpoints on the right and the wrong, so to say. Alex Trembath of IHA had this to convey, “*India ranks fourth in the world, behind Russia, China and Canada, in undeveloped hydropower potential in absolute terms. On the basis of proportional use of hydropower potential, India has developed far less than the norm for the developed world. On this basis, it would not be unrealistic for India to at least double its current level of deployment. Much of the undeveloped potential is in the northern and north-eastern states along the southern Himalayas, which calls for more coherent national and inter-state policies in sync with today's capital markets.*” It seems then that what is true on an international level in Africa (difficulty to arrive at a consensus to

develop markets, trade and transport agreements, and cross-border flow of expertise, labour and knowledge), is perceived to apply on an inter-state / inter-regional level in India. We are after all, in effect, a ‘United States of India’, quite like the USA or when you factor in the great diversity, the EU (European Union). Of course, the question of whether what is renewable is also sustainable crops up, and Alex agrees – “*For hydropower to be successful, it has to be developed sustainably, with benefits shared equitably. Its operational flexibility can assist in backing up the input from other renewables, helping to ensure the optimum contribution from all clean-energy sources. It is very much in the hands of the Government of India to seize the opportunity that hydropower presents from the perspective of clean energy systems, responsible freshwater management and climate-change solutions. Currently, India is revisiting its policies to remove difficulties that have arisen in recent decades of less coordinated development of hydropower.*”

It is necessary to hear all sides of a story and present the same to the readers. Here is what Bharat Seth of International Rivers, an NGO, has to say. This would throw light on the ‘what, how and why/why-not’ of hydropower in India in the years to come. He asks himself the question – “Can more hydropower be generated without ‘appreciable socio-economic-environmental damage’,” stressing on the word ‘appreciable’; and believes that the phrase “good large-hydropower dam sites”, if anything, is an oxymoron. From an Indian perspective, he says, such ‘good sites’ may not exist. An ideal project, in Seth’s view, would have minimal human displacement, minimal population in the catchment areas downstream impacted by digging, tunneling and blasting and low flows due

to diversion, less human dependence on the river be it for fish, sand collection, limestone or driftwood, lesser cultural or spiritual value attached to the river by the people in the catchment areas, and additionally, very poor biodiversity in the area. While the IHA believes that there is tremendous potential for furthering hydropower in the southern Himalayan-regions of northern India, Seth would like to disagree. He insists that benefits ought not to be overstated and costs underestimated; and further, when a cost-benefit analysis is done, the discount rate plays a key role! One would agree with him when he says, “You’d be hard pressed to find a single project in India, or for that matter the world over, which has delivered stated benefits at the stated cost.” That would perhaps tempt one to conclude that hydropower is not the best way to combat climate change. Then what is? Seth would pitch for solar and wind, while insisting on hydropower, for what he calls integrated resources planning with the river basin considered as a single unit. IHA and International Rivers need not be at loggerheads with each other; and they are not for that matter. The insistence on integrated resources planning is not a very big ask, readers would agree...

Nothing’s easy. Decision-making at higher levels (a pun on the reservoirs) particularly. Change and ‘flowing or blowing with the times’ are needed; the latter an intended pun for wind power. Water will flow and the wind will blow... we need to decide how best to harness the energy available therefrom! ■

G. Venkatesh is Senior Lecturer, Department of Engineering and Chemical Sciences, Faculty of Health, Science and Technology, Karlstad University, Sweden. He is also a freelance writer for several magazines around the world.



Our bulwark

*The Defence Minister is doing a good job visiting and interacting with young Navy and Air Force personnel, says **Lt. Gen. Vijay Oberoi**. But he also wishes the minister would visit infantry regiments like the illustrious Maratha Light Infantry Training Centre and interact with the young recruits. After all, they form the bulk of the Indian Army's fighting prowess.*

IT was good to see photographs of our Raksha Mantri (RM), Manohar Parrikar, a few days back, interacting with air force pilots under training, in both the print and electronic media; launching the new Trainer HTT 40; and testing the ergonomics of the pilot's seats in the Trainers!

It is this news report that set me thinking about visits of our leaders, especially the RM and the Prime Minister (PM) to various military units and formations. I was a little perturbed to note that the RM seems to have neglected visiting units and formations of the army, possibly because army modernisation continues to languish, and hence there is limited scope of inaugurating anything new; the equipment currently in service was introduced decades back, and needs no inauguration in its present state of obsolescence!

In the nearly two years in office, the RM has interacted with the Navy, the Air Force, as also on a few occasions with the Army, in that order, but usually at rarefied levels. He has sailed in naval ships, including an aircraft carrier; had 'a day at sea', as the navy loves to call it; and has visited at least one submarine. This is good, as the RM should make as many visits as he can to units and formations of the field force, instead of only listening to the MoD bureaucrats and ordering committees, whose reports are rarely acted upon. Such visits also add to the image of our leaders, as it has



The Kasam Parade, before recruits become soldiers: at the Maratha Light Infantry Training Centre

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been rightly stated that such outings are in effect 'oxygen' to all political leaders, especially with photo-ops appearing in the media!

Since I do not see acquisitions of any new helicopters, tanks, medium artillery, air defence missiles and guns, and even the humble rifle that every soldier carries, on the horizon for the army, photo-ops may be somewhat incongruous! However, may I suggest an apparently mundane activity, but one that is extremely important, so that our leaders like the RM are able to witness first hand as to how the army manages to still be professionally effective, even with the ancient weaponry it is equipped with. The activity I am suggesting is the high grade training that the army imparts to its officers, JCOs and soldiers. We have a very large number of training



The Jangi Paltan at the Siachen Glacier

establishments, at every conceivable level for our officers, JCOs and jawans, but perhaps the lowest level is the most important.

Our training institutions

It may be a good idea for the RM to start visiting our training institutions, and perhaps it may be best to start at the lowest level and see how the army converts rural and urban young men into effective, proud and highly capable soldiers. My suggestion, for whatever it is worth, is that it may be a good idea for the RM to witness how the army trains its largest component, the infantry soldier, which has been and continues to be the cutting edge of the army. As is well known, the army fields over 500 infantry battalions, and they are the ones who are in the forefront of all types of operations, be a war, manning

the Line of Control (LOC) in Jammu & Kashmir and the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the northern borders, counter-insurgency operations, internal security duties, disaster relief, or any other duty you can think of, including saving the lives of children who accidentally fall in abandoned bore wells! Despite this, the modernisation of the infantry somehow remains on the back-burner; but still they miraculously deliver.

It is my suggestion that the RM should start by visiting an infantry regiment training centre and see how gawky youngsters get transformed into professionally competent, smart and efficient soldiers, who then are ready to sacrifice even their lives for their regiment, the army and the nation.

The Maratha Light Infantry

I strongly recommend that the RM

chooses the centre of my regiment, viz. The Maratha Light Infantry Regimental Centre at Belgaum for his first visit. I am not being parochial, but there are a number of good reasons for such a selection. For starters, it is the best infantry training centre and has been adjudged so a number of times. It is also the closest to the RM's home state of Goa, and he speaks the same lingo as the recruits. It is also the only regimental centre that has fought bravely in major campaigns, in its earlier avatar of 114th Marathas, which won great laurels in the Battle of Sharqat in Mesopotamia during World War I, and was made the training centre of the regiment during the reorganisation of the army in 1921.

It also played a sterling role in the liberation of Goa by organising the operational and logistics base for launching military operations to evict the Portuguese in 1961.

There is one unique and additional reason. The regiment and specifically its senior most battalion, the First Battalion of the Maratha Light Infantry, which is popularly known as Jangi Paltan, the *nom du guerre* that was awarded to it within 20 years of its raising in August 1768, for its bravery in every battle, would be celebrating its 250 years of Raising in 2018. Prior to celebrating its bicentenary (200 years of Raising) in 1968, it had volunteered to serve in the then most difficult terrain in the country, viz., the cold desert of Ladakh



Feats of bravery and sports being performed by the infantry regiment

at forbidding heights. The Siachen Glacier was not a battlefield at that time. Now, prior to celebrating its 250 years of Raising, it has again volunteered to serve in Ladakh, and that too on the Siachen Glacier.

Within a year of the raising of Jangi Paltan, the Second Battalion of the Regiment, known as the Kali Panchwin was raised, and other battalions followed in succession. I was commissioned in the Jangi Paltan and fought the 1965 India-Pakistan War, where I also lost one leg. I was part of the bicentenary celebrations in 1968, as a Major with less than eight years' service and and hope to be with them in the Quintessential (250 years) celebrations in 2018.

Reverting to my suggestion, I request the RM to visit our Regimental Centre at Belgaum and spend a day with the recruits, witness how they are trained in physical training, drill, weapons training, including bayonet fighting and firing, map reading, education and computer training, orientation training for serving in different types of terrain, *malakhamb* and other Maratha sports and games, and interact with them.

It will be a proud day for the recruits under training, their Officer, JCO and NCO instructors, and indeed the entire regiment. He will also get an intimate insight into the glorious and gallant history of one of the oldest regiments of the Indian Army. In all regiments, the pride of place is accorded to symbols that are dear and inspirational for the regiment. He will see these too and they would include the War Memorial with the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as the centre piece astride his horse, the Centre Quarter Guard, the Officers Mess showcasing its invaluable artefacts, the Regimental Museum, the Regimental Mandir and Masjid complexes and of course the reverence with which everything including historical documents and artefacts are preserved and handled.



The happy Maratha soldiers

In the ultimate analysis, however, it is the soldiers who continue to be the soul and the most valuable part of every regiment. The RM would be able to see them resplendent in their uniforms, with their colourful red and green hackles fluttering in the Belgaum breeze, or in combat dresses or both.

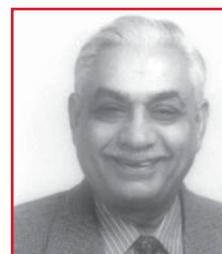
Last but not the least, as a continuation of the old adage – “the army marches on its stomach”, the RM will be able to partake of the delicious and unique spicy Maratha cuisine (not excluding the fiery Maratha Chutney) with the recruits, the NCO instructors, the JCOs and the officers.

Food matters too!

Last but not the least, as a continuation of the old adage – “the army marches on its stomach”, the RM will be able to partake of the delicious and unique spicy Maratha cuisine (not excluding the fiery Maratha Chutney) with the recruits, the NCO instructors, the JCOs and the officers.

The present ‘Colonel’ of our regiment, Lt. Gen. P.J.S. Pannu is currently serving in Army Headquarters as Director General Infantry. I am sure he would be able to plan a visit by the RM at his convenience, whenever he so desires.

I will again emphasise that the RM, as well as the PM must start visiting and interacting with our troops, they are the best they will find anywhere in the world. ■



Lt. Gen. Vijay Oberoi is a former Vice Chief of Army Staff, and an erstwhile ‘Colonel’ of the Maratha Light Infantry Regiment.

Through the bars of hope

*Prisons should not be punishment facilities, but should rehabilitate and help reform the prisoners, says **Sujit Bhar**. He profiles famous dancer Alokanda Roy and her work with prisoners in Kolkata to prove his point.*

A six-foot man quietly strides across the green room, thoughtfully addressing his ducktail beard. He puts on his period costume as he silently mouths verses from Rabindranath Tagore's *Valmiki Pratibha*. He is the lead actor in this well-known dance drama that tells the story of reformation – of how the dreaded *dasyu* (dacoit) Ratnakar metamorphosed into Saint Valmiki, who went on to pen the great epic, *Ramayana*. Nothing unusual so far, except the man, Narinder Singh, originally from Punjab, is serving time in Kolkata, West Bengal's state capital, under trial for being found with a large arms cache.

Up comes a woman, resplendent in her smile, attitude and attire, and helps Singh with his make-up. She is Alokanda Roy, famous danseuse



The bustling green-room at Rabindra Sadan – actors prepare for their performance. (Photo: Sujit Bhar/WFS)



Ready to perform: Narinder Singh ready to take the stage by storm as as Dasyu Ratnakar, in Tagore's iconic *Valmiki Pratibha* (Photo: Sujit Bhar/WFS)

and “reformer of souls”, who is trying to draw out Valmiki from her student. She has done it before, with Nigel Akkara, once a dreaded convict, now an established businessman and film actor, and she wants Singh to do well. In fact, Roy wants her entire cast made up of convicts, some with life sentences for murder and other heinous crimes, to make a mark. Her fervent wish gives them a reason to believe in themselves.

Last year, when Singh (he has since been acquitted) and his fellow inmates trouped onto the hallowed stage of the city's iconic Rabindra Sadan, their heart-felt performance drew a standing ovation from their audience, a huge contingent of policemen. That evening, the men in uniform, responsible for putting them behind bars, truly believed that just like the hero Ratnakar, these

convicted men had a real chance at leading a better life, overcoming the demons of their past.

Music, dance and transformation

For years now, Roy has been using the arts, especially traditional dance and music, to change lives. Be it introducing Tagore to convicts or starting a school for children of female inmates, through her “movement” she is helping them “return to a world they once knew”. However, the erstwhile beauty queen-cum-dance diva-cum-actor embarked upon the journey of reaching out with “dance therapy” much after she had gained a reputation for being a remarkable classical exponent. Having learnt Bharatanatyam from Maruthappa Pillai followed by several years of Odishi under the guidance of Sanjukta

Panigrahi, she eventually started her own dance school 'Chandalaloke'. Apart from that, over the years, she has toured across India and abroad, enthraling audiences with her spectacular, well-choreographed stage performances. Nowadays, she is equally celebrated for her efforts to bring a sense of normalcy to the traumatic lives of those on whom the larger society has given up. "Sure they have committed crimes that need to be punished, but if they wish to change, they should be given a fair opportunity," urges the passionate teacher, who is in her sixties.

It was in 2007 that Roy first stepped inside the Presidency Correctional Home (Alipur Jail); she had been invited as a chief guest for the Women's Day celebrations being held there. "That visit liberated my mind. I was expecting dark, unlit corridors leading to strong metal doors. Instead, as I entered, I saw a nice open space, with some greenery. After the day's programme, some women inmates asked me if I could teach them dance, and I decided to take it on," she recalls.

Another thing that had struck Roy – and it's something that actually pushed her to start her work in the jail – was

the fact that she "noticed many convicts wandering about aimlessly, bereft of anything to look forward to. That saddened me a great deal. It didn't seem like they believed they had any future ahead of them. So I made up my mind to do something for them".

Cutting through inhibitions

Of course, initially, not only was reaching out to the male inmates, in particular, not the easiest of tasks, but getting them to dance, which most of them generally identified as a "feminine activity", was even tougher. Roy realised that she had to use a different approach and so she began by introducing them to Kalaripayattu, an ancient martial arts form from Kerala. This difficult, though rhythmic, art form instantly caught their attention and they became open to learning from Roy. From there on she gradually eased them into understanding dance, and in time prepared them to perform elaborate dance-dramas.

Her first production with them was 'Valmiki Pratibha', in which she incorporated Chhau dance movements along with experimental music and rustic vocals. Staged in 2008, initially in



Dance is Alokanda Roy's tool to reach out to inmates at the Presidency Correctional Home in Kolkata and enable them to express themselves and change their perspective on life. (Photo: Sujit Bhar/WFS)

prison and later in public, the landmark dance performance changed the way the people perceived those confined within the prison walls. Performed over 70 times around Kolkata and other cities, it ended up revolutionising the lived reality of its actors.

Since this early successful experiment, Roy has presented many more productions with the talented convicts, male and female. As she puts it, "I have adapted and developed many established and traditional dance dramas so that they are appealing to both the performers and the audiences. These carefully selected performances have so far yielded great results, allowing hardened criminals and under-trials to realise their true potential, raise their self-esteem, and strengthen their desire to reintegrate with the world outside. Having worked closely with them for a length of time, I see the hope in their eyes."

Targetting the young

If Roy has provided a creative outlet to the inmates, then she has

(Continued on page 51)



Heartprint, a school within the compound of the Presidency Correctional Home, the first such facility in India.

Smile...it enhances your face value!

Are you a natural smiler? Or do you like to be negative and pessimistic, with nary a smile to light up your face. **A. Radhakrishnan** tell us why it is important to smile, and urges us to smile away our blues.

YOU are never fully dressed without a smile. How true. God in his wisdom gave us this ability to ensure life stays positive and we spread cheer. Like cute little Azlan, my neighbour, all of 18 months, who comes scampering to our home, winning our hearts and minds with his beatific smile, which buoys us with a sudden burst of energy. Or like my good friend Manohar, who though beset with vicissitudes in life, laughs, his shoulders heaved in conspirational mode. But then there are some people who seem to feel that they are perennially carrying the burden of the entire universe on their frail shoulders, with hung faces and mouth ready to complain at the slightest excuse. Oh, how they spread negativity.

Defining a 'smile'

So let us consider some definitions of a smile. 'Let my soul smile through my heart and my heart smile through my eyes, that I may scatter rich smiles in sad hearts', says Paramahansa Yogananda, while to Tom Wilson, 'A smile is happiness you'll find right under your nose.'

'A warm smile is the universal language of kindness' to William Arthur Ward, but Thomas Paine avers that 'The real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection.' 'A smile is a curve that sets everything straight' insists Phyllis Diller and Andy Rooney is sure that 'If you smile when no one else is around, you really mean it.'

'We shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do', Mother



Actor Madhuri Dixit is known for her dazzling smile

Teresa insisted and Anna Lee is positivity defined when she says, 'Remember, even though the outside world might be raining, if you keep on smiling the sun will soon show its face and smile back at you.'

Now let's see what a smile is actually?

A smile is a facial expression formed primarily by flexing the muscles at the sides of the mouth. Smiles performed without the eye contraction can be perceived as 'fake'. A smile is an expression which can denote pleasure, sociability, happiness, or amusement. It is unlike the involuntary expression of anxiety or a grimace.

While a smile is a means of communication throughout the world, it differs between different cultures, with some using smiles to convey confusion or embarrassment. According to primatologist Signe Preuschoft, a smile can be traced back over 30 million years of evolution to a "fear grin" stemming from monkeys and apes who often used barely clenched teeth to portray to predators that they were

Smiles performed without the eye contraction can be perceived as 'fake'. A smile is an expression which can denote pleasure, sociability, happiness, or amusement. It is unlike the involuntary expression of anxiety or a grimace.

harmless. The smile may have evolved differently among species and especially among humans. Some view the smile as an effect display that can communicate feelings such as love, happiness, pride, contempt, and embarrassment.

And now social smiling

Social smiling normally develops between 6 and 8 weeks of age. It has a favourable influence upon others and makes one likable and more approachable. Smiling and laughter have different functions. Smiling paves the way to laughter. Female smiles are appealing to heterosexual males, increasing physical attractiveness and enhancing sex appeal. Recent research however indicates a man's smile may or may not be most effective in attracting heterosexual women, and that facial expressions such as pride or even shame might be more effective.

Talking of the animal world, the exposure of teeth, though bearing a resemblance to a smile and implying happiness, often conveys other signals. The baring of teeth is often used as a threat or warning display like a snarl or a sign of submission. For chimpanzees, it can also be a sign of fear. Barbary macaques demonstrate an open mouth display as a sign of playfulness, which likely has similar roots and purposes as the human smile.

Smile, and the world smiles with you

We even celebrate the first Friday of October as World Smile Day. Coined and initiated by Harvey Ball, a commercial artist from Massachusetts, better known as the creator of the Smiley Face in 1963.

The world's first World Smile Day was held in the year 1999 and has been held annually since. Some days, it's easy to smile. You wake up to the sounds of chirping birds, the warm glow of the morning sun cradling your face, as you sip your hot coffee luxuriously. You are

refreshed, excited, and anxious to create and collaborate. But sometimes you wake up to chaos, hit snags and bumps and roadblocks and things seem to fall apart. Well, friends that is life. When things go wrong, you can fall down or look up. You can shut down or wake up, all over again, starting from right where you stand. You can accept that the days won't always look bright, but commit to finding something worth smiling about.

How do you do that? Lori Deschene, founder of the popular Tiny Buddha blog with 50 million readers, has a few ideas....

- Call a friend who knows how to laugh at herself to remember what it's like not to take yourself too seriously. Read a letter, card, or email from someone who thought of you when you were going through a hard time. Take a break to enjoy a simple pleasure that you often multitask – like a cup of flavoured coffee, or a favourite snack.
- Give your cat a ball of yarn or give your dog a wrapped gift and watch him try to open it. Pets playing = instant smile, at least, for me!
- Blast your favourite music and dance around with absolutely no regard for

Call a friend who knows how to laugh at herself to remember what it's like not to take yourself too seriously. Read a letter, card, or email from someone who thought of you when you were going through a hard time. Take a break to enjoy a simple pleasure that you often multitask – like a cup of flavoured coffee, or a favourite snack.

rhythm or appearance.

- Watch a movie or cartoon from your childhood.
- Write a hand-written letter to someone you love, using different coloured pens.
- Call your oldest friend, start a conversation with, "Remember when we..." and end it with, "That was awesome, huh?"
- Make time to see the sunrise or sunset, and make it an occasion.
- Grab your camera and go outside with a mission to capture things that make you happy.
- Tell someone how much they mean to you. Say all the things that might make you feel kind of vulnerable, and then think about how special you just made them feel.
- Create a gratitude list for the day, including the smallest details (a fluffy pillow) and the biggest things (your health and your family).
- Take a run around your block. Trigger some endorphins, whittle your waist line, and remember that the world is so much bigger and greater than it seems when sadness closes you down.
- Laugh out loud. Seriously, just choose to laugh and keep going. I firmly believe that if you learn to smile and laugh at yourself, you can traverse life with confidence. Remember Ella Wheeler Wilcox, the American author and poet, whose most enduring work was Solitude, which contains the lines (to paraphrase), 'Smile, and the world smiles with you. Weep and you weep alone.'



A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance writer, short story writer and poet, who loves to make friends and elicit a chuckle from others.

An unseemly battle

*The tug-of-war often played between the Executive and Judiciary in India, is highly avoidable. The Judiciary must be independent, but whether the collegium system is the way forward or is there an alternative, we will have to see, says **Prof. Avinash Kolhe**.*

LIKE Banco's ghost, some issues in our polity keep coming back to haunt us. Appointing judges to the High Courts and the Supreme Court is one such issue. It has become a bone of contention between the Executive and the Judiciary, where both refuse to blink. This stand-off must be resolved at the earliest, as we are badly understaffed in higher judiciary. We have 24 high courts which should be manned by 1091 judges. Here, nearly 470 positions are vacant. Given this, we can't afford to hold up appointments to high courts and the Supreme Court.



The Supreme Court, New Delhi

The government flexes its muscle

The latest in the series of bouts between the Judiciary and the Executive/Parliament is the announcement by the Modi government that it has asked the Intelligence Bureau (IB) to carry out a 'more stringent' background check on all names recommended by the collegium for promotion.

This decision comes at a time when both the Supreme Court collegium and the Modi government are refusing to yield on many contentious issues in the draft Memorandum of Procedure (MoP), which would guide appointments to the higher judiciary. The government's latest move would be viewed as strong-arm tactics to get the judiciary to agree to 'more transparency' and, possibly, more voice for the government on such appointments. The Supreme Court of India under the leadership of Chief Justice T.S. Thakur has decided not to accept any of the suggestions made by the Modi government to the draft MoP,

including the clause that will allow the government to reject any recommended name on grounds of national security.

The new guidelines

As part of the new guidelines, the IB has been told to scrutinise each and every name recommended by the collegium 'more carefully', so that nobody of questionable integrity is appointed. So far, the IB was simply being asked to carry out cursory background checks, with even the bio-data of lawyers recommended for elevation, not always being provided to the agency. This has drastically changed now. The union government is already scrutinising 'more carefully' the recommendations made for elevations to the Allahabad High Court, Delhi High Court, Punjab and Haryana High Court and Chennai High Court.

The government has asked the IB to vet each name more carefully, look into any issue concerning integrity or

character so that no undesirable person is appointed. Also, the government has decided to give more weightage to the inputs sent by the IB, which has been told to send more detailed reports, especially in case of names where it raises a red flag. In cases where the IB gives a negative input, the government will refer the matter back to the collegium for reconsideration.

Most important, the IB has been asked to take a detailed look at the 'links' of the names recommended, with sitting or retired judges. The government has learnt that in many cases, lawyers' names are recommended only because they were earlier working in the chambers of sitting or retired judges of high court or are related to judges. This automatically led to undeserving persons becoming judges, because there was not a more stringent check on the part of the IB. In other words, the government has decided to be 'more proactive' while dealing with all

recommendations. One example should suffice. Sometime back, the Union government questioned the continuance of six judges – one has retired since – of Punjab and Haryana High Court in the Rajasthan High Court. It is learnt that the government indicated to the Supreme Court collegium that it was not advisable to have six judges from the same high court at another high court.

The above details bring to light the tension brewing between the Judiciary and the Executive. Such tensions are not advisable for the health of Indian democracy. The latest stand-off is the rejection by the CJI (Chief Justice of India) of the official proposal that a committee of retired judges be set up to vet the applications for appointments to the higher judiciary. Such a committee of retired judges may not be immune from government pressure, and hence the CJI was right in rejecting it.

This doesn't, however, mean all is well with the collegium method of appointing judges to the higher judiciary. The collegium system came in vogue in 1993 and is functioning till today. This is a unique system nowhere to be found in any democratic country, where the judges appoint their brother judges.

It would be instructive to note how other democratic countries appoint judges to higher judiciary. In the USA, the judges to the Supreme Court are chosen by the President, but these names have to be ratified by the Senate. In UK, all high court judges are appointed by the Crown, on the advice of Lord Chancellor, who usually consults the Prime Minister. In Australia and Canada, the system is almost identical, where the judges are appointed by the Governor General-in-Council. In Germany, judges of the Federal Court of Justice (the highest court) are picked by the Judges Election Committee that comprises the secretaries of the justice from each of 16 states, and 16 members appointed by the Federal Parliament.

Despite the collegium system, some bad apples made it to the bench. Just recall the case of Justice Soumitra Sen of Calcutta High Court. Justice Sen was appointed in 2003 and had to go in 2011. Were he not to resign at the last moment, he would have been impeached.

From 1950 to 1993 our President used to appoint judges to higher judiciary. But this was done on the advice of the Prime Minister. In 1993, our Supreme Court evolved what is known as the 'collegium system', which is headed by the CJI and four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.

Despite the collegium system, some bad apples made it to the bench. Just recall the case of Justice Soumitra Sen of Calcutta High Court. Justice Sen was appointed in 2003 and had to go in 2011. Were he not to resign at the last moment, he would have been impeached. He was forced to resign as there were charges of financial irregularities against him. One could quote few more such examples to show that the collegium system is not fool proof.

Replacing the collegium?

This is why a hue and cry was raised against the collegium system, and rightly so. This is why the Executive tried to rein in the Judiciary by passing the National Judicial Appointment Commission (NJAC) Act in 2014. The NJAC tried to replace the collegium system, which was and is highly opaque and functions without any transparency and accountability. The NJAC was to

become operative from April 2015.

The NJAC was challenged in the Supreme Court on the grounds that it violates the 'basis structure'. In October 2015, the SC decided by 4:1 majority that the NJAC is indeed 'ultra vires', and the collegium system would prevail. Though the NJAC has been made null and void, their lordships must understand the feelings behind setting up of the NJAC. It is quite clear that all is not well with the collegium system. The opacity in the appointment of judges has allowed for covert manipulation. It has also meant that often, the best legal brains are left out of the judicial system. A transparent, fair, and open system of appointment is central to ensuring that people have faith in the legal system. Since these qualities were missing in the collegium system, the government decided to set-up a new mechanism in the form of the NJAC. And hence, in rare camaraderie shown by the political class, cutting across party lines, the Lok Sabha had passed with NJAC Bill with only one MP opposing and 367 supporting. Such unanimity is rare.

Though the NJAC had some flaws and the SC had rightly rejected it, it should not have blindly brought back the discredited collegium system. Under public outcry, the CJI did declare in November 2015 that in future the collegium system would function with more transparency, but what would be done to ensure transparency has not been spelt till today. No wonder the Modi government has decided to involve the IB in a more proactive way. In such a situation, both the pillars of democracy should show maturity and

find an amicable solution. ■



Prof. Avinash Kolhe is Asst. Professor in Political Science at D.G. Ruparel College, Mumbai.

The lips that bragged, the feet that danced

To entire generations of Indians, Muhammad Ali was a figure to be admired, be in awe of, and emulate! His each utterance was greeted with whoops of wonder and delight. **A. Radhakrishnan** doffs his hat to this great American boxer, who left a mark on the world's psyche.

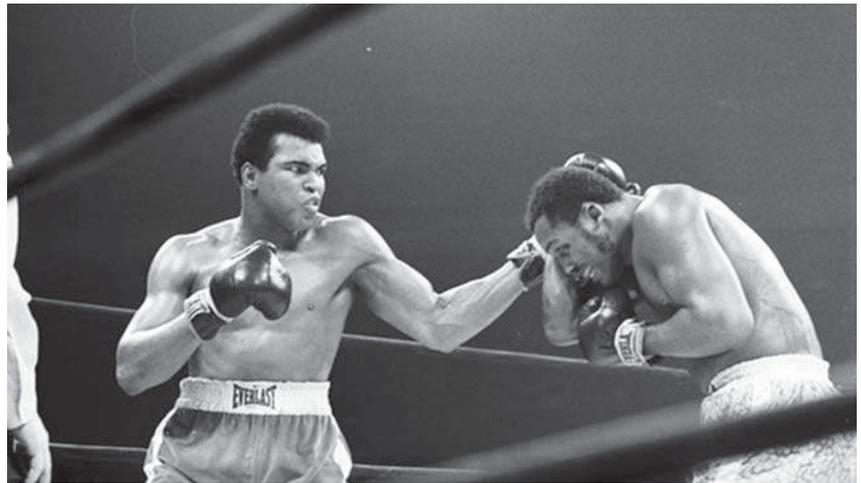
THE tall, 6'3" man, 210 pounds when young, was charm personified, an amazing athlete and a man who could bash in someone's head with a nifty jab. The three-time world heavyweight champion floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee. The greatest boxer, who also was the greatest sportsman of all time.

An unorthodox boxer

Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr., though perhaps not the best heavyweight ever, brought into the ring a unique unorthodox boxing style, which was a fusion of speed, agility and power, for the first time. More than the sum of his athletic gifts, he had an agile mind, a buoyant personality, a self-confidence which was brash, and personal convictions that fostered a magnetism that the ring alone could not contain. His mouth and fists, both entertained the world.

David Remnick in his *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero* describes him as 'a fighter; a draft resister, an acolyte, a preacher, a separatist, an integrationist, a comedian, a dancer, an actor, a figure of immense courage...arguably the most famous person on the planet'.

Ali began boxing at age 12 after his new bicycle was stolen, and vowed to policeman Joe Martin that he would 'whup' the person who took it. Martin began training the young lad, just 89



The famous 1971 Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier 'Fight of the Century'

lbs., at his boxing gym, the beginning of a six year amateur career that ended with the light heavyweight Olympic golden medal in 1960. He beat Liston to win the heavyweight title in 1964, before he converted. He then refused to be inducted in the army to fight in Vietnam.

Changing faith

When the 22-year-old dropped what he called his 'slave name' and became a Muslim and called himself 'Muhammad Ali', it was with a purpose. Along the way, Ali modified his belief systems, he kept plucking and choosing his understanding of Islam, including leaning towards Sufi ideals. As a self-proclaimed Muslim, boxer and conscientious objector to war, he always

thought he was right. Note his famous quote: "I'm the greatest; I said that even before I knew I was".

Interestingly, for 50 years after boxing great Cassius Clay adopted the Muslim faith and changed his name in 1964, his home-town Louisville's daily newspaper, *The Courier-Journal*, refused to call him Muhammad Ali, after which it belatedly apologised.

The most famous anti-war pacifist the U.S ever produced, was hailed for his strong indictment of racism, imperialism and war, and of course, a glorious assertion of individual rights, and thus transcended him from celebrated athlete to great public figure.

He was convicted for draft evasion, stripped of his title and banned from boxing, and facing a possible prison

sentence, he fought Frazier for the first time in 1971, dubbed the 'Fight of the century'. After his lengthy layoff he was not the same fighter, even though he won the heavyweight champions twice more, and fought another decade. He defeated a brooding Foreman to become champion again at age 32. Ali went on to lose to Leon Spinks, but came back to win it a third time in 1978. Then he retired, only to come back for a fourth time against Larry Holmes in 1980.

He was an anti-war activist who lost his title and three years of his prime for refusing to fight in Vietnam. Ali once calculated he had taken 29,000 punches to the head and made \$57 million in his pro career. Of his 61 fights, he lost just five, but his most dogged battle was with Parkinson's, the disease that slowed down his dancing feet and his silver tongue, but not his spirit.

As he put it regarding his battle with Parkinson's, "He (God) gave me Parkinson's syndrome to show me I'm just a man like everyone else. To show me I've got human frailties like everyday

else does. That's all I am: a man".

Ali has however been criticised too, for shying away from taking any kind of position he earlier had on contentious issues, thereby not living up to his own heroic standards. But the moot point is, should we not allow a hero to have a choice not to be heroic all the time?

Ali's sparklers

- "You think the world was shocked when Nixon resigned? Wait till I *whup* George Foreman's behind, float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, his hand can't hit what his eyes can't see, how you see me, now you don't, George thinks he will, but I know he won't, I done *wrassled* with an alligator, I done tussled with a whale, only last week I murdered a rock, injured a stone, hospitalised a brick. I'm so mean, I make medicine sick" - before regaining the title by upsetting George Foreman in 1974.
- "It will be a *kill*a and *thrill*a and a *chill*a when i get the gorilla in manila" - before his victory over Frazier in 1975.

- "You're not as dumb as you look, I saw your wife"- Ali to Ferdinand Marcos, Philippines President, before the fight.

- "Joe Frazier is so ugly that when he cries, the tears turn around and go down the back of his head."

In 1998, the U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan named Ali the U.N. messenger of Peace. To Ali, "Boxing is a lot of white men watching two black men beat each other up", but he confessed that 'my toughest fight was with my first wife'.

Asked how he should be remembered, he had opined it best, "As a man who never sold out his people; but if that's too much, then just a good boxer. I won't even mind if you don't mention how pretty I was." ■



A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, poet and short story writer, who likes to make friends and make people laugh.

Through the bars of hope

(Continued from page 45)

even extended her healing touch to their young children, living with them in confinement. "I have observed that kids staying inside the jail premises are very vulnerable. Not only do they come into close contact with people who have been involved in criminal activities, something they shouldn't be exposed to so early in life, they also tend to pick up the choicest of expletives and bad behavioural traits. Essentially, such influences and experiences make up their everyday life, except for the rare occasions when they are allowed to dress up in bright clothes and go out. But where do they go out? With their mothers when they are transported to court in jail vans for their hearing. Imagine, for children of those who

are already serving their sentence, even such an 'outing' is not possible. Does a child deserve to be this way? What about their education, sports, recreation? I knew something had to be done," says Roy.

Consequently, about a year ago she set up a school within the compound of the Presidency Correctional Home – the first such facility in India – so that the female inmates can rest easy that at least their little ones won't have the dismal lives their mothers are leading. Every morning, a posse of young wards dressed in bright uniforms, lugging their school bag and water bottle head to Heartprint, where they discover a whole new world, courtesy their books and attentive teachers. Their school is

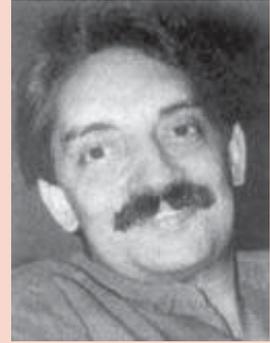
a pretty structure built on the western side of the jail compound, complete with desks and chairs, books, toys and even a television set that Roy has managed to get from the jail authorities. "For the many who have been born in the jail, this is the only 'home' and 'world' they have known. Till we set up Heartprint, they didn't even know what a school is. It's no fault of theirs that they are in jail. They are there because their mothers cannot make it out to the outside world," shares Roy.

Committed to the cause of enabling those caught in an otherwise miserable situation to discover their hidden talents and, at the same time, renew their sense of hope for a better tomorrow through their children – Roy's creative, therapeutic approach is indeed making a big difference. ■

(© Womens Feature Service)

In the forests of the night

There is so much we can learn from the animal kingdom, most of all their peaceful sharing of resources. There is surely a lesson in it for us.



Bittu Sahgal
Editor, Sanctuary magazine

THE jungle was bathed in moonlight; the night air was crisp and cold. I had parked the jeep by the side of the mud road under the overhanging branches of a huge tree, and by now my eyes had become accustomed to the dark. Close by, I could see a herd of sambar feeding in the shallows of a lake. My teeth were chattering and I wondered how the deer were able to tolerate the cold with such apparent ease. Pulling my jacket tight around myself, I took a gulp of steaming coffee from my flask. I was hoping to see some 'nightlife', a tiger perhaps, or if I got really lucky, a leopard.

My jeep was fitted with a powerful halogen lamp with which I could stab the darkness for a few hundred metres and more. Earlier, I had spied a crocodile on the far side of the lake, its eyes glowing like embers above the surface of the water. At night, in the jungle, hearing plays a vital role for the hunter and the hunted. Sounds travel for miles and for those who understand their meaning, night calls tell fascinating stories. It was a chital's sharp 'peeow', for instance, repeated at 20 to 30 second intervals, that had alerted me to the possibility of the predator in the near vicinity. Probably the resident tigress with her cubs in tow.

Before me, however, the scene was most peaceful, the sambar showing no signs of nervousness at all. After a half-hour wait, as I was preparing to drive off to another part of the forest, she appeared like a phantom at the water's edge. Tall grass lay between her and the deer and as the breeze was blowing shoreward from the lake, they could neither see nor smell the cat. Her paws, of course, designed for silent walking, betrayed absolutely no sound whatsoever.

No matter how often you see a large cat in a jungle, a fresh

sighting is always an exciting, heart thudding experience. The tigress did indeed have her cubs with her, but she was not out hunting. Her purpose was perhaps even more important. She was teaching her young ones, no more than four or five months old, the art of stealth. And what a good job she did. There before me, less than 20 metres away, were a herd of sambar and between them and me, a tigress with two cubs passed by without the deer even realising her presence! The young ones almost seemed able to read her mind as they froze, or crept in the grass as she desired.

There before me, less than 20 metres away, were a herd of sambar and between them and me, a tigress with two cubs passed by without the deer even realising her presence!

We may never understand fully or appreciate the advantages of sharing resources as members of the animal kingdom do. Why is it that certain (nocturnal) life forms are active after dark, while others (diurnal) prefer daylight? It is really quite simple. By working in shifts, the same area can be used by more than one type of creature within a span of 24 hours. An Osprey, a very graceful, fish-eating bird may, for instance, monopolise a favourite hunting spot during the day from where it will even chase away other Ospreys.

Yet, when darkness falls, and the Osprey roosts for the night, its favoured hunting spot might be exploited by a Brown Fish Owl. Both birds benefit by not competing with each other. Such 'understanding' also takes place among mammals as different from each other as langurs and bats. During the day, langurs will spend hours feeding noisily in the branches of fruit-bearing trees. When night falls, however, they clear the way for bats, which may fly as far as 15 km to feed on the same trees. The Osprey and the owl, as well as the langur and bat occupy a specific niche, a word that describes any life form's relationship to its food sources, or its enemies. ■

Is cinema driving the crime spiral?

A disturbing number of incidents in recent times have involved attacks on women by rejected suitors or the unrequited stalker. Is this inspired by movies where often women are shown falling in love with their stalkers and abusers?



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

THE ghastly murder of a young girl at a railway station in Chennai, allegedly by a besotted lover who had been stalking her for three months, has once again raised questions about women's safety and the indifference of the public who remain mute witnesses to such crimes that occur in public places in broad daylight. However, a parallel debate has also begun as to whether cinema should share a part of the blame for the rising spiral of crime, especially against women and young girls; they are often the target of misguided youths who believe what they witness on movie screens that it is perfectly acceptable for them to indulge in acts like stalking, teasing or even physically harassing young girls.

So, does cinema glorify stalking? Unfortunately, the answer to this poser is 'yes' to a large extent. What is even more regrettable is that it is the heroes in films who should be role models to the youth who enact roles wherein they are shown, not just smoking and drinking, but also stalking, getting physically intimate and even attacking the heroine and all these scenes get cleared by the censor board. The most unfortunate part is that after undergoing all this torment and torture, the heroine too gets smitten, and thereafter, romance blooms and everything turns hunky dory for the couple who soon set about painting the town red. The message that is sent across to countless numbers of young men is simple: When the object of their infatuation says 'no' it actually means 'yes', and one only has to persevere to succeed in such matters of the heart.

The wannabe Romeos also get a feeling that their female counterparts too would have been influenced by the heroines on the screen and are only too willing to let them have their

fun, which sadly is never the case. The Chennai murder is not the first where unrequited love turned fatal, nor is it going to be the last. Impressionable minds who are hero worshippers and who are swayed by films, totally fail to appreciate the difference between reel and real life.

But then laying the blame at the doorsteps of film makers too can hardly have any salutary effect for the simple reason that those who make films are not in the business of educating people or showing them the right path or advising

them to reform if they have gone astray. The basic premise of cinema is to entertain and the main motive is to recover the huge investments and reap a tidy profit if possible. They faithfully display all the caveats that are mandatory, and then go on to portray characters as per their script, caring a fig for social norms. As a matter of fact, film makers have often defended themselves by asserting that what they depict on the screen is actually based on incidents and occurrences in everyday life, and that it is the society that has to change and not cinema, which too is not far from the truth.

It would also be futile to expect leading men in films to put their foot down and refuse to enact scenes of stalking, harassment etc., as they have little say in such matters, and even otherwise would be loathe to accept that they are setting a bad example to their fans. So unless an awareness is created that certain types of behavior are not permissible, and that they are ultra vires, nothing much is going to change. The only deterrent to such violent crimes is the arrest and prosecution of the accused and awarding of exemplary punishment befitting the crime. Blaming films or social media sites is not going to get us anywhere. ■

The message that is sent across to countless numbers of young men is simple: When the object of their infatuation says 'no' it actually means 'yes', and one only has to persevere to succeed in such matters of the heart.



SPOTLIGHT

Indus Valley Chronicle

Scientists claim that the Indus Valley Civilisation is at least 8000 years old, making it the oldest civilisation in the world.

What was the Indus Valley civilisation?

It was an ancient civilisation that flourished along the banks of the Indus River in modern day Pakistan and northwest India. It is also known as the Harappan Civilisation. The ancient sites were discovered and excavated in the 1920s.

Where were its cities?

Over 1000 cities of the Indus Valley Civilisation have been unearthed, of which Harappa and Mohenjo-daro were the most prominent. While these two sites are in Pakistan, the most important sites in India are Dholavira and Lothal in Gujarat, Kalibangan in Rajasthan and Rakhigarhi in Haryana.

What was unique about the civilization?

The cities were noted for their sophisticated town planning and architecture with streamlined streets and brick houses. There were well built granaries, citadels, burial grounds and great baths. The cities also had a sound drainage and sewerage system. Excavations revealed that the people were proficient in pottery and metal-working and used standard weights and measures.



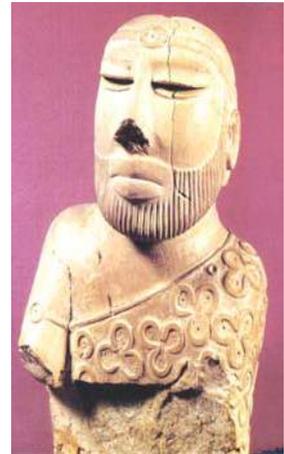
The Dancing Girl

What are its famous artefacts?

Archaeologists have found remains of seals, toys, jewellery and pottery. The two most famous artefacts associated with this civilisation were found at Mohenjo-Daro. One is a stone statue of a bearded man dubbed the 'priest-king' and the second is a small bronze statuette called Dancing Girl.

Why did the civilisation decline?

Scientists believe that the civilisation declined by around 1900BC. It is believed that the civilization most likely suffered natural disasters like flood or drought – the ill effects of climate change. Recent findings suggest that people abandoned the cities due to weakening monsoon and changes in the river's course.



Priest-king

Do you know?

The written script of the Indus Valley Civilization has not yet been deciphered. Hence we still do not know a lot about the life of the people.

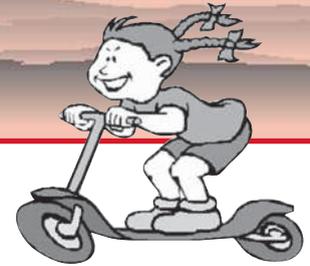
PANORAMA

Nawabi Glory

The Hazraduari Palace in Murshidabad, West Bengal, has 1000 doors as the name suggests. Out of them, 900 are false. The false doors were meant to confuse intruders and catch them. The palace also known as Bara Kothi was built by architect Duncan MacLeod. Located on the banks of the Bhagirathi river, it has a grand staircase in the front façade, which is one of the largest staircases in India. A showcase of Indo-European architecture, the palace was the venue of durbars between the Nawabs and the Britishers. The Durbar hall has a grand chandelier which was gifted to the Nawab by Queen Victoria.



Knots in the Mind



A villager was once taking his three donkeys to sell them at the market. Walking by a river, he felt a strong urge to take a dip. He took out two ropes and tied two of his donkeys to a nearby tree. He then wondered how he could tie the third one. Just then he saw a sage sitting on the river bank. The villager went up to him and asked him if he could lend a rope. The sage said he did not have a rope and added, "Just pretend to tie up the third donkey. He will stay put."

The villager did as the sage asked him to. When he came back after a bath, he was surprised to see the third donkey standing at the exact spot where he had pretended to tie him up. He untied the other two donkeys. They started moving but the third one was rooted to his spot. He patted him asking him to move but he didn't move an

inch. The villager went up to the sage and told him that the donkey refused to move. The sage said, "How will he move if you don't untie him?"

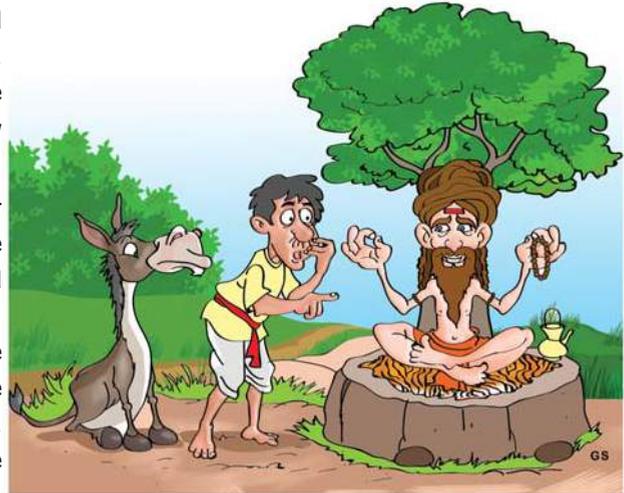
The villager said, "But I never tied him up."

The sage smiled and said. "Yes. But does the donkey know that?"

The villager went up to the donkey and pretended to untie the imaginary rope around his neck. Now when he

patted the donkey on his back, he started walking.

Moral: We are all tied up by imaginary ropes. See what is limiting you and discover your true potential.



CURIOSITY

What is community radio?

It is a radio service run by NGOs. It serves the local population by voicing its opinion and addressing the social issues and concerns of the community. It also has a major participation from the community for which it is intended — for example students, miners, religious groups etc. Community radios also have elements of entertainment like music and dance besides

local news and happenings relevant to the region. It aims at empowering the people and has no commercial interest.

Community radios exist all over the world. India has around 125 community radio stations in various states, a majority of them offering educational services. Anna FM was India's first campus community radio station. Launched in 2004 the programmes are conceived and run by Anna University students.

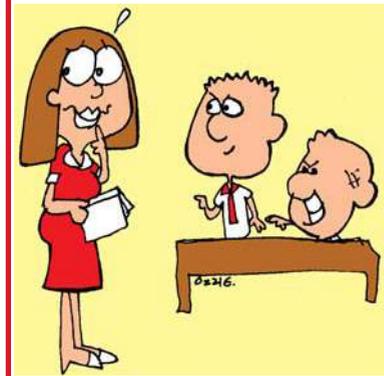


HA!

A new teacher was trying to make use of her psychology courses. She started her class by saying, "Anyone who thinks he is stupid, stand up!"

After a few seconds, Little Johnny stood up. The teacher said, "Do you think you're stupid, Little Johnny?"

"No, ma'am, but I hate to see you standing there all by yourself!"



GENERAL MAHARAJ SHRI RAJENDRASINHJI, DSO

A royal commander (1899-1964)

RAJENDRASINHJI Jadeja was born on 15 June 1899 at Srodar in the Kathiawar region. The family belonged to the ruling family of Nawanagar State (now Jamnagar). He was the third son of Devsinhji Jadeja who was the uncle of K.S. Duleepsinhji, the cricket luminary. He studied at Rajkumar College, Rajkot, and deciding on a military career, joined the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, on 10 September 1919. He was the first Indian to be commissioned from Sandhurst and joined the 3rd Battalion of 60 Rifles King's Royal Rifle Corps in 1921. A year later, he was transferred to the 2 Royal Lancers. He got married to Maya Kunwarba in 1928, and had three children.

In February 1941, the unit sailed to North Africa. It was part of the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade. The Brigade was deployed at Mechili. Vastly superior German and Italian columns surrounded it on all sides on 7 April. Two ultimatums from the German Army calling for surrender were rejected. The last ultimatum offering "honour of war" and signed personally by Erwin Rommel, a highly decorated officer in World War 1 was also rejected. The Brigade was ordered to withdraw to El Adem and two squadrons under Major Rajendrasinhji were assigned the task of rear guard. When Rajendrasinhji learnt that HQ 2 Armoured Division which was in the same location had surrendered, he decided to break out on his own. He charged straight through a battery of enemy guns. After shaking off pursuit, they hid in the nearby hills for the rest of the day. Next morning, the column suddenly came upon an enemy harbour. The Germans were so taken aback that they surrendered without firing a shot. Rajendrsinhji decided to take two lorry loads of prisoners and deprived the rest of fuel and water. He was awarded DSO (Distinguished Service Order) for courageous leadership under enemy action. He was the first Indian officer to be so honoured. He was also the first Indian officer to be posted as Military Attaché in Washington in 1945.

A large number of British officers had left after

Independence, resulting in quick promotions for Indian officers. He was appointed General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Southern Command in 1948. Widespread violence against Hindus was reported from Hyderabad State which had not acceded to India. The Nizam was trying for Independence with the help of Pakistan, and had started importing arms through clandestine channels. It was decided to carry out a police action. Vested interests warned against any military action and exaggerated reports of Hyderabad State forces were circulated. General Bucher, Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C), India, advised against any misadventure as the Indian Army was fully committed in Kashmir. In his view, the Hyderabad Army could inflict large casualties and engage the Indian Army in long drawn out guerrilla operations. He warned that Hyderabad had acquired planes and could bomb Mumbai. Sardar Patel replied that if UK could stand up to the blitz from Luftwaffe, so can Mumbai. He relied on the advice of Rajendrasinhji with whom he had a long discussion and was convinced that the operation could be carried out with speed and little loss of life. On his advice, the cabinet gave a go ahead. Rajendrasinhji opted for advance from the West and East as the southern approach involved logistic difficulties.

The Police action started on 17 September and the Hyderabad Army collapsed in 100 hours. The State was integrated into India.

Nationalisation of the armed forces had progressed rapidly. Some people in the government suggested the name of Rajendrasinhji to be the first Indian to be C-in-C. When this was verbally communicated to Rajendrasinhji, he correctly advised that the honour should go to the senior most Indian officer, General (later Field Marshal) K.M.Cariappa. The President assumed the role of C-in-C on 31 March 1955, and General Rajendrasinhji became the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), another first in his career. He retired on 14 May 1955. He passed away on 1 January 1964. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



KELUCHARAN MOHAPATRA

Ardent proponent and dancer of Odissi(1926-2004)

Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, the Indian classical dancer, choreographer, guru, and proponent of Odissi dance, was born on 8 January 1926. He redefined the dance style with his creativity. As he put it, 'Dance has not only made my life purposeful, it has been my whole life...'

Born into a family of painters at Raghurajpur, as a child, he loved the *jatras* (open air roving theatres) of Orissa (now Odisha). His father, Chintamani Mohapatra, a painter and a *khol* (drum) player, instilled in him the love of rhythm. The sound of the drums, along with nature's music captivated the child. Eventually, he got involved in the effeminate art of *gotipua* dancing and trained under Balabhadra Sahu and then with Guru Sri Mohan Sundar Goswami and his Rasa, a theatre troupe. He learnt not only the arts of acting, singing, and dancing, but also the intricate requirements of stagecraft, make-up, and choreography as well as training in both the *mardala* and the *tabla*, under masters. The group shows were an amalgam of song and histrionics, woven around the theme of Krishna-Leela or episodes gathered from the Puranas.

He then joined Kavichandra Kali Chandra Pattnaik's Annapurna Theatre in Cuttack, and earned seven rupees a month for setting the stage, acting occasionally and playing percussion, under Harihar Rao. He also received training in *khol*, *tabla*, and learnt Uday Shankar's dance techniques and the use of hand gestures from Guru Dayal Saran.

The real break was his solo piece in a dance-drama *Devi Bhasmasura*. He brilliantly performed as *Nataraja*. Playing the role of Mohini was Laxmipriya who later became his wife. They became famous for their performances of the *Dashavataara* dance. After practicing and researching in Puri, the couple returned to Cuttack and Kelucharan, then 30, became a dance teacher at Kala Vikash Kendra. For 15 years, he laid the foundation of Odissi dance, imparted lessons privately to some disciples like Sanjukta Panigrahi etc., and also choreographed a series of popular dance-dramas in Odissi style, including *Krushna Gatha*, *Panchapuspa*, *Geeta Govinda*, etc.

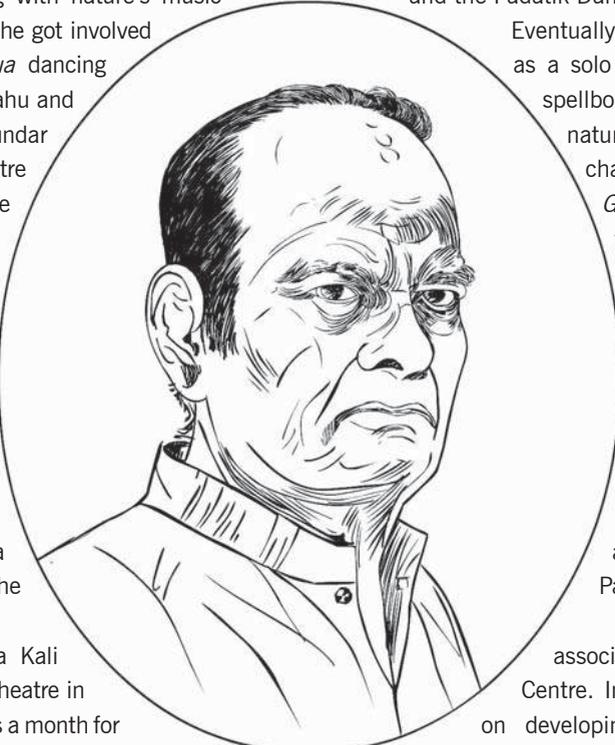
He researched various folk and tribal dances and enriched his foundation of Odissi dance poses through further study of temple sculptures like the Parshurameswara, Bramheswara, and Konark temples. He also provided brilliant percussion accompaniment for many musical broadcasts by A.I.R., Cuttack. In the eighties, Guruji travelled to different Indian cities spreading the charm of Odissi dance. He became a visiting teacher at the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Delhi; the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai, and the Padatik Dance Centre in Kolkata.

Eventually, he began appearing on stage as a solo performer, and left the audience spellbound by the corporeal beauty and naturalness of his interpretations of the character of Radha from the *Geeta Govinda*, of the fisherman Kaibarta from the *Ramayan* and of Krishna from countless Oriya songs.

He participated in the Festivals of India world-wide. His famous compositions in raga *Khamaj*, *Bagesri* and *Kirwani* are striking for their intricate rhythmic structures, which speak expressively of his choreographic ability as well as his expertise over Pakhawaj playing.

For 10 long years, he was closely associated with the Odissi Research Centre. In 1995, Guruji fully concentrated on developing 'Srijan'- the dance academy (established by him and his wife and directed by his son Ratikant). Honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1966; Padmashree in January 1972; honorary doctorate in January 1982; the Kalidas Samman, awarded by the Madhya Pradesh government in 1987; Padma Bhushan in March 1988, he also got the Padma Vibhushan in 2000. He passed away on 7 April 2004 in Bhubaneswar, Orissa. Thanks to him, Odissi dance became a universally admired art form. A noted Indian Sanskrit poet described the Guruji: 'Each fraction of his dancing body leads to paramount sweetness through the miraculous pose and postures. In fact, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra crossed the ocean of style.' ■

– A.Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, poet, short story writer who loves to make friends and make people laugh.



KAVALAM NARAYANA PANIKKAR

Undying love for theatre (1928-2016)

MALAYALAM theatre lost one of its greatest stalwarts recently when Kavalam Narayana Panikkar (88), breathed his last in Thiruvananthapuram. Kavalam, who was born in Alappuzha on 28 April 1928, trained to be a lawyer after obtaining his law degree from the Madras Law College, and practised in the courts for six years. His interest in theatre was kindled after he was made the Secretary of the Kerala Sangeet Nataka Akademi, where he had a tenure of 10 years. Having had a grounding in epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* at a very early age, Narayana Panikkar's first foray into the theatre scene was with the play *Panchayat* in which he also played a major role. His stint at the Akademi afforded him a golden opportunity to work closely with reputed writers and scholars of the time, including those who had close contact with theatre and dance. One of his early plays *Avanava Katamba* was filmed by the reputed director Aravindan. Later, Panikkar started his own drama troupe 'Sopanam' and widened the scope of its activities to include the revival of the dying art forms of Kerala.

'Sopanam' led to the foundation of the 'Bhasabharati Centre for Performing Arts, Training and Research' situated in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram. He has been credited with reviving several folk, tribal and classical dance forms which were on the verge of extinction. As a playwright, Panikkar earned distinction for adapting the works of William Shakespeare and Jean Paul Sartre. He translated and produced Shakespeare's plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* and also the works of Kalidasa, Mahakavi Bhasa and others. Sartre's *Trojan Woman* too was adapted to Malayalam theatre by the famous playwright.

In his illustrious and long drawn career Narayana Panikkar directed 26 plays. Significant among them were *Karnabharam* (in which Malayalam superstar Mohanlal donned the title role of Karna), *Bhagavadujjatam*, *Shakuntalam*, Mahakavi Bhasa's *Madhyama Vyayogam*, *Vikramorvasiyam*, *Oru Bhangam*, and *Swapnavasavadattam*. He worked in many countries including the former Soviet Union and collaborated with a Greek troupe to stage a play titled *Ilyyana*, a fusion of the

Indian Mahabharata and Homer's Iliad. He had a close bond with Ujjain and also worked with the theatre professionals in Madhya Pradesh where he staged Bhasa's play *Dhootavakyam* with artistes from the states playing the main roles.

A singular feature of all the theatrical productions of Panikkar was that all of them were earthy and rooted and were all meticulously researched Panikkar also won plaudits as a poet and lyricist, and during his long and eventful career penned the lyrics for as many as 45 Malayalam films, significant among them being *Utsavapittenu* and

Manjadikkuru. His lyrics for two films *Vaadakaikoru*

Hridhayam and *Marmaram* also fetched him the state award for Best Lyricist. He also

had a number of poetry collections to his credit. As a composer, he composed music for as many as nine documentaries. Another sphere

in which the theatre exponent

excelled was in writing lyrics for classical dances, especially

Mohiniyattam. At the peak of his popularity it was even said that

what the Kerala Kalamandalam meant to Kathakali, Panikkar

was to *Mohiniyattam*. Panikkar also wielded the megaphone

for two films, the first on the legendary *Kuttiyattam* maestro

Mani Madhava Chakyar titled *Mani*

Madhava Chakyar – The Master at work and the other *Parvati Viraham*, in

which Madhava Chakyar essayed the role of Ravana. Panikkar's second son Kavalam

Sreekumar is a talented singer who has sung

playback for several Malayalam films.

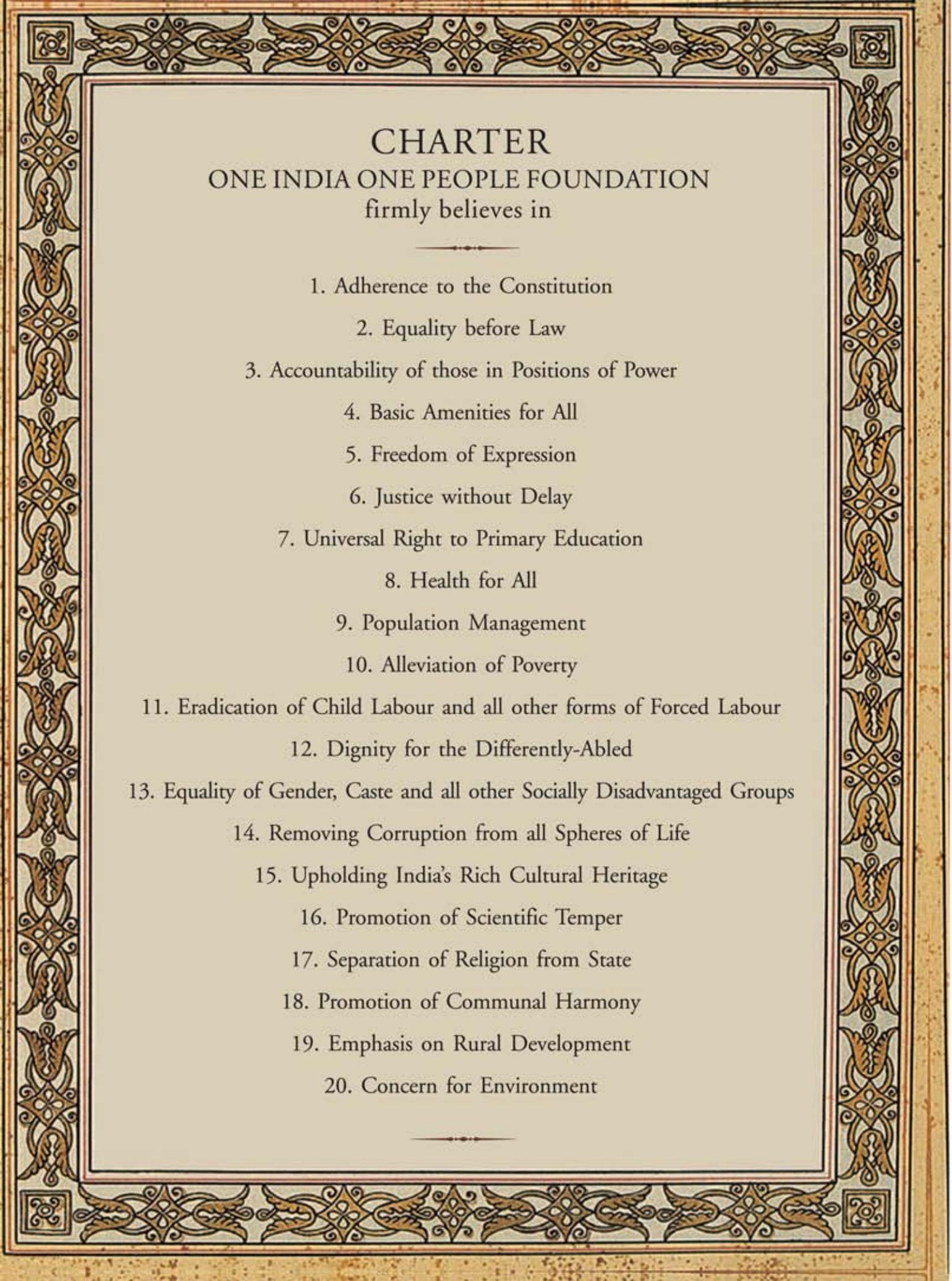
A number of awards and honours came the way of this versatile genius. Significant among them were the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, the Kalidas Samman presented by the Madhya Pradesh government and the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award in the country, from the Government of India.

Kavalam Narayana Pannikar was also a recipient of the 'Outstanding Indian' award in 2009, instituted by the One India One People Foundation. ■

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

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





CHARTER
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION
firmly believes in

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

WHO AM I?

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

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

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

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE