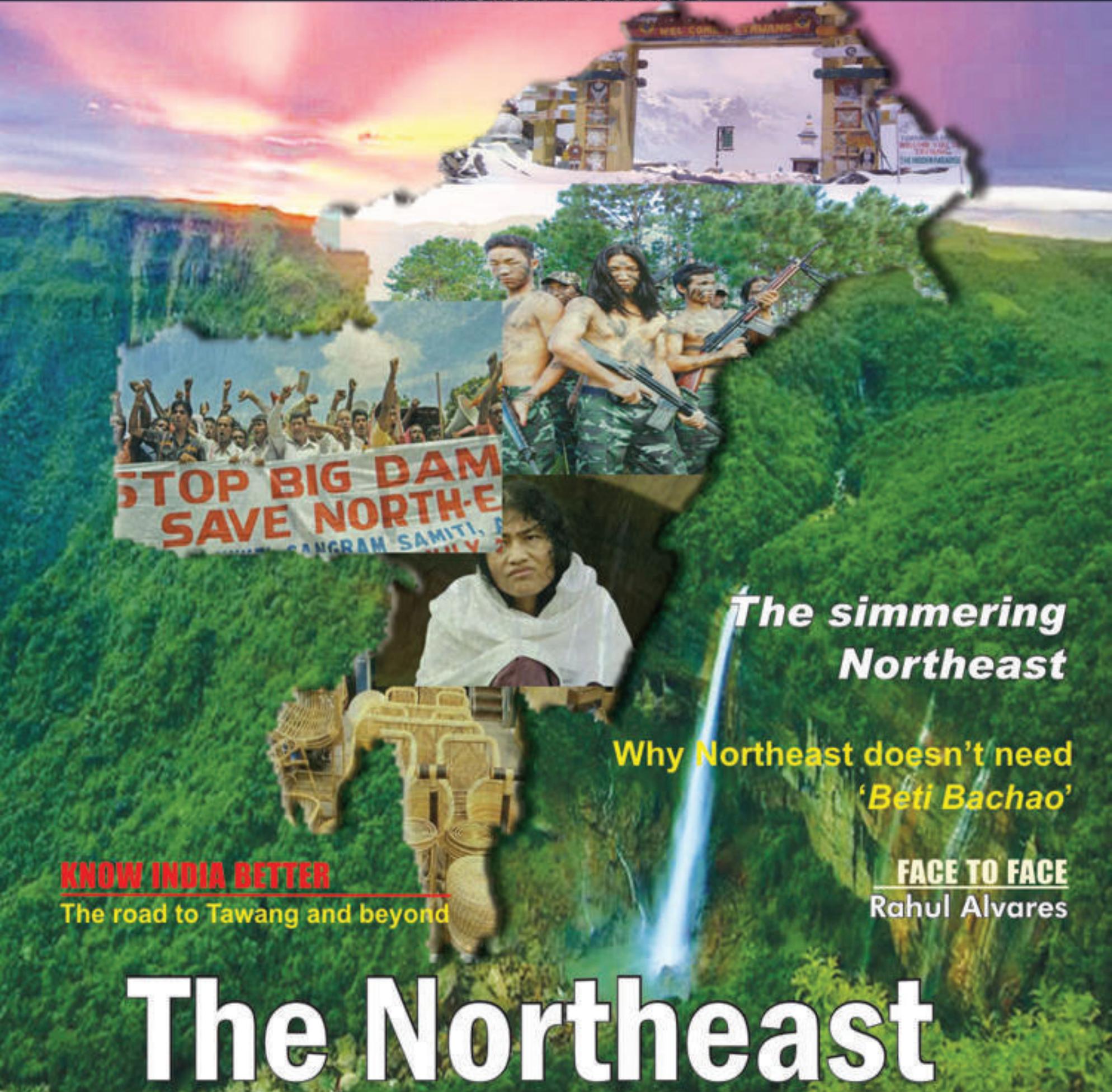


# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined



*The simmering  
Northeast*

*Why Northeast doesn't need  
'Beti Bachao'*

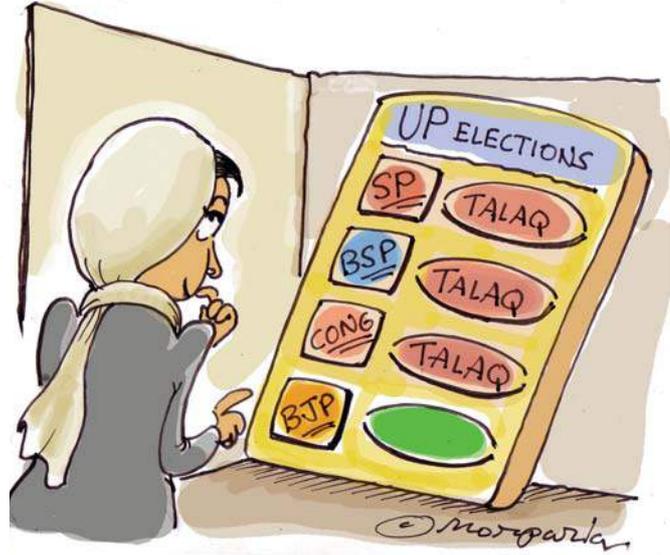
**FACE TO FACE**  
Rahul Alvares

**KNOW INDIA BETTER**

The road to Tawang and beyond

# The Northeast

MORPARIA'S PAGE



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MARCH 2017

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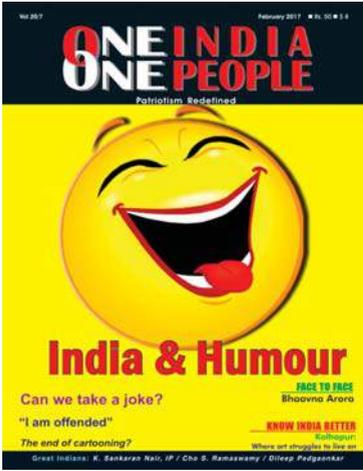
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YSM

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## “Look both ways”



With regard to your theme article in the Feb.2017 issue (*One India One People*, Feb.2017 – *India & Humour*), Mr. Radhakrishnan has quoted that,

We Indians look both ways, while crossing the road.

I used to look only one side, and got knocked down by a scooter coming the wrong way. I now look both sides!

– S.C. Sharma, Mumbai

## “Modi’s digital India drive”

Like many others, I too decided to be a part of Modi’s digital India drive and wanted to create an account for my part-time domestic help so that I can pay her online. Armed with a photocopy of her voter’s id and two passport-sized photographs, I took her to a particular bank and was told by the branch manager that to create an account she needs to have a PAN number. In order to get a PAN card, you got to have a birth certificate. This woman does not have a birth certificate and does not even know when she was born. At this point, I just gave up. The Prime Minister should think twice before introducing such schemes.

– Jubel D’Cruz, Mumbai

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# WHO AM I?



# Not *chinkis* anymore!

*The northeastern states are a very valuable part of India, we must remember, even as we relish the momos and the music, says Nivedita Louis.*

OUR rudimentary knowledge of Indian map begins with Kashmir – Yes, can we forget those icy mountains, apples and the guns, of course, which ends with Madras. Each time I meet someone from up North, I remind them it is Chennai, not Madras, and not the southern tip of the country, they smile and say, “Yes, *beta*...we know. You *Madrasis* always say that!” We remember anything but Kolkatta and its *rosgullas* as the eastern border of the country and conveniently forget the ‘seven sisters and one brother’. For most of us, the Northeastern arm doesn’t even exist in the maps. The Northeast of India is that part of the country that never finds a place in the text books. Please don’t try to recall if we ever read all our books in full, and draw a blank. Whatever little knowledge that filtered past our craniums is unaware of the Northeast. We swallow our *momos* with gusto, we love being pampered at the salons by the Northeasterners, we furtively adore their women, wait, let me rephrase that, we lust over them on our most common misconception that they are freely ‘available’. What we fail to understand is that the Northeast is very much an integral part of India.

Our pre-conceived notions are so discriminatory that anyone with eyes smaller than ours is obviously a “chinki” to us. An open challenge, close your eyes and try remembering the names of the seven Northeast states. I betcha you wouldn’t get past four or five. When we can’t make out a marble from stones, can we make out people of the Northeast from Tibetans? We truly believe they eat dogs. Where did that notion come from? If we ever get to see a Northeasterner playing with a puppy, all we see is RED! Do we know the hill people don’t even eat meat other than chicken? We despise their food habits, yet we gulp down their hand-made *momos* in swanky malls. We write and speak volumes about the sacrifices and perseverance of the Gorkha regiment and dutifully ask them, “Are you Nepalis?”, in case we encounter them on road.

We find their hippie style and coloured hair flamboyant

and rakish – thank you, Danny Denzongpa, you did that right! Their low-waist jean pulls our lips in a leer and so does their country style. We sit in judgment over the poor chaps imagining ourselves as Themis, clad in our pan-stained *dhotis*. Hell, we even laugh at their names – those that sound better than our Kapurs and Kumars. We entertain ourselves with amusement at the name Kiren Rijuju, that must be a tongue-twister for our big, fat tongues!

The insurgency all along the Northeast has never got the

required attention, as we remain cocooned in our self-induced coma. Sixteen years of fasting by Irom Sharmila Chanu, and there are people out there who ask “Irom, who?” When Kareena’s pet puppy skips a day’s meal, it is prime time news, and Irom’s continuous fasting remains best ignored. It is this apathy by media and the Government that fails to highlight their plight that pushes more and more people towards taking up arms.

Northeasterners are the third most joked about community, only next to *Sardarjis* and *Madrasis*. If it is the intelligence of the *Sardarjis*, and the purported gluttony of the *Madrasis* that is being made fun of, it is the

appearance and slangs of the Northeasterners.

Just because we tower over a feet tall over the short-statured, good-natured Northeasterners, we can’t point to their cute button noses and say “I am big!”, for we don’t know what a Caucasian will look down at us and say! Racial and gender discrimination against the Northeasterners must end right now, if we are to remain united as a nation. If we still treat them as brethren beyond our borders, they might very well be right in demanding the realignment of borders. ■



**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](http://www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com).**

# The simmering Northeast

*Indian's Northeast is a hotbed for multiple insurgency movements and outfits. Though there has been a drop in insurgency in the last decade, many outfits continue to operate, some from deep inside the Myanmar forests, says **Rajeev Bhattacharyya**, who has visited some of the rebel areas. He gives a status report.*

It is strange but true that very few regions in the world have given birth to as many insurgent outfits as India's Northeast, a frontier zone sandwiched between China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. There had been ample indications even before Independence that this region would be a hotspot of conflict. In the mid-1950s, the Naga National Council (NNC) led by the venerable Angami Zapu Phizo raised the banner of revolt with a series of offensives against the security forces. The government responded by imposing draconian laws and dispatching more troops to the border state to quell the rebellion. But within a few years, the fire began to spread to other

states of the Northeast, with more outfits demanding independence from India. By the mid-1990s, Sikkim was the only exception in the region that did not witness the birth of a rebel group, although tensions in the state had been simmering between migrant Nepalese and the indigenous Lepchas and Bhutias.

### Reasons for the insurgency

According to some estimates, there were more than a hundred insurgent outfits in the Northeast in the early 2000s, with diverse goals and objectives, ranging from secession to banditry. An interplay of several factors contributed to this state of affairs – unemployment, misgovernance, draconian

laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and support of foreign governments. Resorting to violence came to be viewed as a justifiable means to redress grievances by some sections of the populace. The government continued with the conventional two-pronged policy of keeping the door open for



**Cadres of People's Liberation Army at a camp in Myanmar (Photo: Rajeev Bhattacharyya)**

a negotiated settlement with all the groups and military operations. Over the past several years, many militant organisations across the region have accepted the olive-branch, signed cease fire agreements, and have initiated talks with the government. But there are outfits who have continued with the battle from camps located deep in the jungles of Myanmar.

Nonetheless,

there has been a sharp drop in insurgency related incidents in the Northeast in the past decade or so. In 2013, the Centre informed Parliament that there were 54 militant outfits active in the Northeast, of a total of 66 in the entire country. Out of these, Manipur has the dubious distinction of having the maximum number at 35, followed by Assam at 11, and Nagaland with four groups. Meghalaya and Tripura have two each, while even Mizoram which is considered an oasis of peace in the troubled region, has one outfit that is active. The statement did not include the CPI (Maoist) and smaller groups that are also known to be active in the region. Based on the nature of their activities and objectives, all these groups can broadly be divided into five categories:

### Lure of sovereignty

As many as nine big and small groups from Assam, Manipur and Nagaland that have set up base in Myanmar's Sagaing Division are demanding independence of the Northeast, and the contiguous Naga inhabited region across the border. These include the two anti-talks factions from Assam – the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Kamatapur Liberation Organisation and six groups from Manipur. They are being sheltered and assisted by the Khaplang group of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland headed by the Naga rebel chief S.S. Khaplang.

Emboldened that no harm would be done to the camps and training facilities, three rebel groups from the Northeast have joined hands with NSCN(K) to form a coalition called the United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFW) on 17 April 2015. The six Manipuri outfits, which had constituted the Coordination Committee (CorCom) five years ago in Myanmar, have not yet joined the alliance, but have offered "moral support". This correspondent observed an intimate relationship and inter-dependence among all these groups during a covert visit to a rebel base in Myanmar towards the end of 2011. Explaining the rationale behind the alliance, ULFA chief of staff Paresh Baruah said that the objective would be to give a "greater punch" to the campaign of independence of the Northeast and Naga inhabited area in Myanmar, and drum up support at the global level.

### Case for autonomy

The demand of independence notwithstanding, most of the armed groups in the Northeast are exploring the possibility of a negotiated settlement with the government. The separatist movement in Nagaland took a sharp turn in 1997 when the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN that had been campaigning for the independence of Nagaland, signed a ceasefire agreement with the Indian government. Initially, the government was confident about an early solution, but the issues raised by the Nagas were sensitive and tricky that raised opposition from other states in the Northeast. Besides NSCN (IM), the Centre has also been exploring options of a negotiated settlement with the pro-talks factions of ULFA and NDFB, five Adivasi (tea tribes) outfits in Assam, and more than 20 organisations in Manipur belonging to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic communities. Progress of talks has however been tardy, and the top functionaries of these groups have often complained of insincerity on the part of the government.

### Rise of Muslim Fundamentalist Organisations

Reports about the growth of Muslim Fundamentalist Organisations (MFOs) in the Northeast have occasionally surfaced in the media for the past several decades. On 6 April 2000, Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta tabled a statement in the assembly titled "ISI Activities In Assam", which explained that the Pakistani intelligence agency had embarked on a strategy to assist local militant outfits, create new outfits along communal lines, supply explosives and weapons, indulge in sabotage, promote fundamentalism among local Muslim youth and communal tension between Hindus and Muslims. As many as 120 militants belonging to MFOs have surrendered in Assam and Manipur between 1999-2004. During the same period, 363 militants have been apprehended including cadres from the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and People's United Liberation Front. Ostensibly, the ISI stands to benefit by sponsoring these organisations. MFOs could be used to further Islamisation of the region, facilitate the demographic invasion that is currently underway in the Northeast with the uncontrolled illegal infiltration from Bangladesh, and to carve out a *Brihot Bangladesh* by incorporating areas of Muslim majority with Bangladesh.

### Appeal of Mao

A connection with the Northeast was deemed essential by the Maoist rebels for two reasons. First, it could be a source of weapons and explosives, and secondly, it could provide allies for spread of the movement in the region. Efforts by the People's War Group (PWG) bore fruit when it was invited to attend the Raising Day celebration of ULFA at a camp in southern Bhutan in 1995. The links were maintained, but could not be alleviated to a higher level due to ideological differences. ULFA did not want to engage in a class struggle as it would have diverted the attention from the immediate goal of securing Assam's independence.

CPI(Maoist)'s setback in Assam was counter balanced by an alliance in Manipur in 2008 with the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Investigation by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) revealed that the twin organisations have resolved to assist each other in terms of weapons and training. It managed to recruit some cadres who were assigned the task of carving out a base in Sadiya in Assam, bordering Arunachal Pradesh. However, this formation was dismantled within months and police gunned down four functionaries who had been active in the region. Subsequently, a report

**A connection with the Northeast was deemed essential by the Maoist rebels for two reasons. First, it could be a source of weapons and explosives, and secondly, it could provide allies for spread of the movement in the region.**

compiled by Assam Police said that the CPI (Maoist) has adopted a new strategy to strengthen its base in Assam. Instead of following the model that was applied in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, it has decided to follow in the footsteps of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which means that emphasis would be on indoctrination rather than arming the cadres.

### Guns for money

The fifth category of militants in the Northeast are swayed neither by ideology nor commitment to achieve any particular goal. They are a ragtag group of people whose only objective is to earn a living with the power of the gun. An assessment of the profiles of these outfits point to different factors behind their emergence mainly in Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya. While some have newly emerged, others are breakaway factions of larger groups like Manipur's Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP). At times, it is also operationally beneficial for bigger groups to float tiny squads and keep them alive for ferrying weapons, extortion and gathering information. In some areas like the twin hill districts of Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong in Assam and Meghalaya's Garo Hills, insurgent groups have been fizzling out, but not insurgency. Whenever an accord is inked by

the government with an outfit, a section among them have always opposed and gone back to the jungles to continue the movement.

### A roadmap for the Government

- The ongoing talks with NSCN(IM), ULFA and the others, must be brought to a logical conclusion at the earliest.
- Create employment avenues in the Northeast.
- Come up with a blueprint for ending misgovernance.
- Repeal draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.
- Chalk out long and short term strategies to check infiltration from Bangladesh. ■

Rajeev Bhattacharyya is a senior journalist in Guwahati. He was the founding managing editor of *Seven Sisters Post* and had earlier worked for *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *The Telegraph* and *Times Now*. In 2004, he was selected for the prestigious Chevening Fellowship to the UK where he submitted a special paper on the peace process between the British Government and the Irish Republican Army. He is the author of two books – *Lens and The Guerrilla: Insurgency in India's Northeast* and *Rendezvous With Rebels: Journey to Meet India's Most Wanted Men*.



## FORM IV

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Sd/-

Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde

Date: 1.03.2017

# Damming the Northeast

*The Brahmaputra Basin in Northeast India was identified as having the highest potential to generate hydroelectric power. Thus, sounding the death knell for the region's ecology and biodiversity, says Geetatha Pathak. What's the way forward?*

THE forests in the Northeast would have been completely destroyed had the Supreme Court not banned all forest activities in the country by a verdict in the case of T.N. Godavarman Thirumulkpad vs Union of India & Ors on 12 December 1996. The forest was the main source of revenue of most of the states of the Northeast. It was also a good source of money for politicians and the *babus*. Forests are being depleted as a result of the illegal felling of trees, but it has been checked to a large extent.

Now a new challenge has cropped up not only to the forest, but to the entire environment and ecology of the Northeast. The corporate groups collaborating with the corrupt politicians have stepped in to exploit the economic potential of the cascading streams and rivers. The region has got recognition from the government as India's 'future powerhouse', and at least 170 large hydroelectric projects are set to change the hydrology of the Northeast. The Government of India conducted an assessment of the country's river systems for hydroelectric potential in 2001.

### **Brahmaputra's hydroelectric potential or ecological disaster?**

The Brahmaputra Basin was found to have the highest potential and accordingly, 168 projects were identified with a capacity of 63,328 MW. The Northeast is exceptional for its distinctiveness in cultural and biological diversity, and the unique Brahmaputra and Barak river systems. There are 34 globally recognised biodiversity hotspots in the world, two of which are situated in this region, namely, the Himalayas and Indo-Burma. Its rich biodiversity with significant populations of species such as rhino, elephant, tiger, leopard, wild water

buffalo and river dolphin make this region a unique biological spot. Though covering only 8% of India's landmass, the region shelters 21% of the country's important Bird Areas. A key factor in environmental clearances by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF & CC) is the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, a mandatory document aiding in decision making. If all the power projects

get a favourable EIA report from MoEF & CC and are built in the Northeast, then this region will turn into a time bomb. It will be a matter of time before we see a catastrophe in this region.

The dams constructed for these hydro projects are likely to trigger changes in the flood cycle, sedimentation pattern and ecology of the river. It will affect the national parks like Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri and Orang. The impact of 60 MW Kuri Chu dam of Bhutan has already

been felt. A large area of lower Assam is inundated almost every year due to release of water from the Kuri Chu Dam in the rainy seasons since 2001, the year when the dam was commissioned in the neighbouring country with the economic help and expertise of India.

India has constructed five dams in Bhutan and another six hydro projects are under construction. All these dams constructed in Bhutan along with the dams constructed inside the Northeast will pose a big threat to this seismic region. All these commissioned and under-construction hydro power projects have already raised many issues that include displacement, identity crisis of indigenous people, calamities etc. The Kaptai Dam, built in Bangladesh in the 1960s, displaced indigenous communities like the Hajongs and Chakmas, and forced them to migrate to Arunachal Pradesh,



**The Tipaimukh Dam in Manipur; engineering feat or ecological disaster?**

where they had to face conflict with local communities.

In Tripura, the Gumti Dam commissioned in the 1970s displaced local tribal people. Recently, we have seen major conflicts in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh over the impact of around 170 dams which have been planned in upstream rivers in Arunachal Pradesh. The 405 MW Ranganadi hydroelectric project and the 2000 MW Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project have been stalled in the face of intense opposition from local communities. Indigenous communities such as Adis, Idu Mishmis and Lepchas have expressed their indignation against these mega power projects in their native land. The Siang People's Forum (SPF) and Lower Siang Dam Affected Peoples' Forum (LSDAPF), who have been spearheading the anti-mega dam movement in the Siang Valley, had appealed to the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the centre, and now the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), to scrap the project over Siang. The organisations have submitted a memorandum to the MoEF & CC and vowed that they would not compromise on their demand of scrapping all mega dams over river Siang. The Tipaimukh Dam in Manipur is another project which has triggered controversy from its very beginning.

The Tipaimukh Dam is a multipurpose project for flood control and hydroelectric power. The proposed dam is to be constructed over River Barak. It is apprehended that a large project on a river like Barak would adversely affect the lower riparian areas of Bangladesh, affecting the livelihoods of over 20 million people. The influx of outsiders is another problem which will threaten the identity of native populations. These projects will need large amounts of both skilled and unskilled labour, which the indigenous states are not equipped with. Though the indigenous people of the state are enjoying some constitutional land rights and the governments of some of the states have restricted entry of outsiders in their land, the projects will change this. It is estimated that just in the Dibang Valley projects, more than 1,50,000 labourers from outside the region will be contracted for long periods of stay, whereas the population of the indigenous Idu Mishmi tribe of the area is a only 9500. These projects will definitely bring demographic and other socio-cultural changes which will be faced by the local ethnic groups. In Sikkim, the indigenous Lepcha community is fighting against the hydro projects being

built in the state. The Lepcha community worships mountains, lakes, caves and rivers. There are many mythological stories involving nature among the Lepcha community. They recognise nature as sacred.

The EIA report as well as the Expert Appraisal Committee report, which cleared the Teesta Stage IV project, have ignored the sacred nature of the Kanchenzonga, its importance in the culture and value system of the indigenous people of Sikkim, the Lepcha's argue. According to Gyatso Lepcha, general secretary of Affected Citizens of Teesta, the people of North Sikkim have already suffered a lot of environmental damage from two other mega projects on the Teesta (Stage III and Stage V) which produce over 1,700 MW of energy, even through Sikkim only needs around 112 MW. Under the project agreement for Stage IV, Sikkim will get 12% of the electricity for free and the remaining power will be exported to the rest of India.

#### The Green Tribunal's role

The National Green Tribunal (NGT), which has attracted much ire of the politicians and the governments for pulling them up on environmental issues, has the power to register cases suo motu against environmental offenders. The issue of water contamination and air pollution by diesel powered vehicles in Delhi had last year prompted the NGT to seek the response of the city government in the matter. The green panel had taken suo motu cognisance of a newspaper report on these issues. Although hydropower projects are legal, considering the colossal damage it can do to the environment and the human lives NGT can sou motu take up cases against the respective state governments of the Northeast and the power developers. It can also seek details of how the EIA for these projects have been given from the MoEF & CC. The time has come for the indigenous people to unite and fight against construction of big dams and hydro power projects. Ignoring the issue may sound the death knell for the ecology and environment of this part of bottlenecked landmass of the country. ■

Geetartha Pathak is a Guwahati-based senior journalist. He is vice-president of the Indian Journalists Union, and also a former member of the Press Council of India.



**A key factor in environmental clearances by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) is the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, a mandatory document aiding in decision making. If all the power projects get a favourable EIA report from MoEF&CC and are built in the Northeast, then this region will turn into a time bomb.**

# Why Northeast doesn't need 'Beti Bachao'

*The socio-cultural dynamics of India's Northeast may be more progressive than the rest of India, but women's rights here can definitely do with a boost, says **Tulika Sarmah**. She points to the recent protests in Nagaland against reservation for women in local bodies, to illustrate her point.*

A bizarre episode of widespread violence resulting in several deaths and destruction of government properties in Nagaland, shocked the nation this February. The hill state is in the northeastern region of India that boasts of giving equal rights to the womenfolk, unlike other parts of the country. The state was to hold elections to urban local bodies with 33% of seats reserved for women. But influential tribal bodies with men at the helm, were opposed to the move, fuelling street protests, and the state government promptly decided to petition the Union government for exemption from enforcing reservation for women. A few women candidates were even threatened with social boycott if they refused to withdraw nomination. It only exposed the fallacy of some popular myths concerning gender equation in the region. Merely because the indigenous people don't preach dowry, female foeticide and infanticide does not make their society egalitarian and gender equal. Stray incidents prove that patriarchy rules in overt and covert acts of suppression of women in the tribal societies too. In fact, Nagaland has not elected a single woman to the assembly since the state was created in 1963. The only woman MP (Member of Parliament) to have been elected from the state was some two decades ago.

## Debunking myths

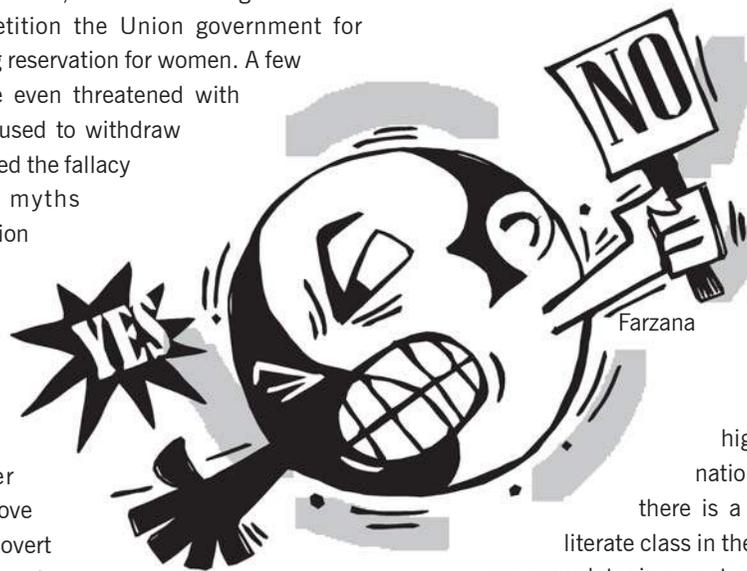
That incident throws myths about traditionally empowered women in northeastern India, into disarray. The Nagaland political leaders were against reserving 33% of seats in urban local bodies for women, as per the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments

of the Constitution. They actually fear that women enjoying a greater say in all affairs in tribal societies will exert much more pressure on political and economic affairs of the state. As per the 2011 Census, the overall sex ratio at the national level is 940 females for 1,000 males, but the situation in the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Sikkim is better. Incidents of foeticide or infanticide in the region are non-existent. Only people who migrated from the northern and western India and settled in the Northeast follow

prejudices of gender biases, which are also negligible if compared to the scale witnessed in Gujarat, Rajasthan or any state from the 'cow belt'.

In literacy, with the exception of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, the remaining six northeastern states have a higher literacy rate than the national average. Barring Assam, there is a definite rise of the female literate class in the Northeast societies, which sooner or later is expected to impact the occupational structure as well as peace politics. However, it has to be kept in mind that the region is still marked by a situation of women's insecurity, materially at least – in spite of having a better track record on many counts. Out of eight states, six have a higher dropout rate for females than the national average. The lack of separate toilets for female children is one reason for girls dropping out of school as more than 78 percent of schools in Manipur, and more than 60 percent of schools in Arunachal Pradesh do not have separate provisions for girls' toilets.

The Human Development Index (HDI) Report prepared by



the Planning Commission of India revealed that gender disparity across the country has declined. But this decline is largely dependent on performances of the Northeast states (except Assam) and the states of the South. Further, the region does not present a homogeneous picture of how women are doing in the time of conflict and peace building. Three states by gender development indices (GDI) are above the national level, implying that women of the region are perhaps subjected to less disparity in terms of life expectancy, educational achievement, social status and access to resources. The gender gap is quite narrow for Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland. In Manipur, the prevalence of women's markets is marked as a cause for the reduced gender gap. It is also to be noted that the health indices for women in the region are better than at the national level, though things remain not very satisfactory due to development bottlenecks resulting from rampant corruption.

Furthermore, northeastern states do not present a uniform structure of women's social existence. So it is not wise to view the entire region as uniform or homogeneous, which is often practiced in New Delhi in dispensation of duties and allocations towards the region. The blinkered view on the region makes its womenfolk suffer most. But the ground reality is such that the demand for gender specific measures, such as women's commission, gender budgeting, greater electoral participation of women, and so on, are on the rise. The latest outrage in Nagaland is only a tip of the iceberg of gender politics. The moot question in the national context is; if tribal people are given reservation because of backwardness, then why not the women who suffer greater social discrimination? In the Northeast, women enjoy better social position, but in modern democratic system of governance they still lack the opportunities of self-governing. Apparently, the social structure in Nagaland favours its males and perhaps they fear that giving space to their female counterparts will pose a challenge to tradition – a tradition that excludes women from political decision making. Their tradition however accommodates their women in extinguishing crisis situations like the Nagaland peace process where their women umbrella organisation the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) had an important role to play. The NMA was the first organisation to ask the insurgent outfits to stop bloodshed and come to the negotiation table. So it is unimaginable that the very first attempt by Naga women to secure their political rights under the Indian Constitution is thwarted by their own people.

Henceforth, tribal women in Nagaland and in sizeable part of the region will be groping in the dark after this bizarre episode when, on the other hand, women in the rest of India will have the right to engage themselves in decision making in local governance by virtue of seat reservation. What is tradition if it does not provide equal justice to men and women?

Democracy and gender justice cannot stay at the bottom of the social structure, and it is high time that the younger generation of men and women rise up to uplift themselves. It is noticeable in Manipur too that while women were praised for their courage and spirited battles against the might of the state power, whether in British India or Independent India best epitomised in NupiLal Uprising or Kangla Fort Stripping Protest respectively, they are not welcome when it comes to taking part in electoral politics. Irom Sharmila, nicknamed "Iron Lady" for her 16-year long hunger strike in protest against rape and murder of a young woman allegedly by jawans of the Assam Rifles and demanding repeal of the draconian AFSPA that gives immunity to such crimes, was a champion of human rights as long as she was on fasting, becoming a symbol of honour and pride, but was perceived as a sort of a 'vamp' when she decided to end her fast and launch a political party with an eye on contesting the assembly elections.

### Conclusion

The gamut of discussions above may produce a rationality of giving space for women's activities in societies where the weaker sex is traditionally given a respectable place, but denied their political rights. Here, the irony of tradition versus development comes to the fore. Tradition allows the girl child in the tribal societies of the northeastern states a far better space of education, health care and everything a male child in traditional Indian societies enjoy. So the government schemes and propaganda of '*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*' do not hold logic in this region. Rather, the policymakers should focus on the peculiarities of the region – that should not be *beti bachao* (save the girl child) in education, but should be *beheno ko bachao* (save the sister, mother, aunty) in politics! When the Panchayati Raj (73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Act was initiated by Rajiv Gandhi government in 1993, some of the northeastern States like Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were kept out of the purview of the Act on the plea that these states had vibrant traditional institutions to accommodate their womenfolk. But gender inequalities, at least in the political hierarchy, have been in persistence since long. India is a vast country and its regions are incredibly different from each other, more so in social and cultural sphere, warranting a careful handling by all concerned. ■



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# Conflict sensitive journalism

*The role of the media in reporting about conflict and protests in the Northeast is extremely important, as they can play a seminal role in events unfolding in the region. But are our journalists trained to do so with sensitivity? asks Patricia Mukhim.*

IN a situation where the powerless who also are at the receiving end of guns and bombs, are constantly being exhorted to stand up and speak out against militancy/insurgency, it is heartening to note that senior scribes are taking a stand against senseless killings which go by the euphemism of ‘freedom struggle’, resistance movements, fights for ‘sovereignty’ (leaving the definition of sovereignty ambiguous or semantic) et al. In India’s Northeast, a section of media persons have been unequivocal in their stance against the diminishing returns of militancy. The media enjoy a certain amount of power to articulate the angst of the weak and voiceless. Besides, media persons are part and parcel of the larger society, and it is in the fitness of things that they contribute to peace building measures.

A wag recently made a wisecrack that better media would result in less conflict. This phrase would of course require some explanation. Does it mean that bad media provokes conflict? And what exactly is bad media? Better still, is there a role for the media in conflict resolution? Before anyone answers this very ticklish question on our behalf, and I am sure there would be many outpourings to these provocative questions, we in the media ought to make time and space for some reality checks. This would also mean taking a fresh look at our own roles in the changing global, national, regional and local scenario.

But there’s a bit of problem here. Seldom ever have the media organised workshops/seminars or training programmes for themselves. The reason is simple. We have no time. Ours is a job that runs from one deadline to the next, and by the end of every deadline, we are totally washed out. Besides, there is a general ailment that media persons suffer from and that is a sense of having ‘been there, done that,’ and therefore, knowing it all. We tend to feel there is very little that we can



**The media must report Northeast events more responsibly**

learn. Short of telling those who pontificate about the media, ‘don’t teach an old dog, new tricks,’ our body language is like a picture that communicates a thousand words.

## Is complacency the answer?

But can we be so complacent about everything? Much less, take things for granted? Do we know all there is to know about conflict in this region? Are there changing contours and road maps that we have misread? The possibilities of us having missed the woods for the trees are endless. And the reason is because we do not always report from ground zero. That is of course a tall order and not always possible in a profession with a deadline. But our over-dependence on sources can sometimes become a treacherous misadventure, because we cannot rule out the possibility of those sources suffering from their own angularities and trying to sell us their view of a story.

The media is not a surreal drama where good nearly always triumphs over evil. In the real world we have to witness several

disturbing events, including senseless killings, destruction of whole villages, an economic breakdown, before peace pipes are taken out of their covers. The truth about the media, particularly the electronic variety, is that conflict sells. Dead bodies scattered hither and thither by a powerful bomb make good breaking news. The 'in your face' repetition of such gory incidents, while it may be revolting, also creates a curiosity for a fresh set of audience who might have missed the scene earlier. The Mumbai attack of 2008 is exactly the kind of coverage that militants and agent provocateurs love. In a sense, our media is promoting sadistic pleasure to some, while it masquerades as a news provider.

Conflict sells because TRP ratings soar and newspapers make a killing the next day. Conflict resolution is boring news. It is a staid process that media prefers not to dwell on too much because there is no story. But even if there is one, we are unable to adequately embellish our peace stores the way we do our conflict narratives. So what does the media do? We dramatise conflict and focus on points of differences and disagreements between warring parties. We highlight inflammatory statements made by the parties in conflict. Given our way, we prefer to focus on win-lose situations because we would run short of story lines if suppose the guns are completely silenced.

Let us not for a moment delude ourselves that having taken to the profession of disseminating news, media persons automatically transcend race, culture and all the 'isms' that afflict the ordinary citizen. The media is as good at 'othering' and 'demonising' individuals and communities. It takes a lot for a scribe from one community to really be objective and remove the jaundice from his/her eyes. This is more nuanced in the case of the Northeast where ethnic loyalty is all pervasive. Whether we do it consciously or through force of habit is a moot point, but the fact is that the media does propagate intolerance, and is guilty of disinformation campaigns and thereby manipulating the readers' mind.

This breach of journalistic ethics is more palpable in the vernacular media where the newspaper or television channel

**This breach of journalistic ethics is more palpable in the vernacular media where the newspaper or television channel feels it owes its loyalty to the readers of the language in which it is published.**

feels it owes its loyalty to the readers of the language in which it is published. One of the greatest human failings is the inability to be rigorously critical of ourselves. The smaller the ethnic community, the greater seems to be the need to glorify our antecedents and our 'unique' histories which we want every other person to appreciate. The problem is that those outside our closely guarded paradigms see us as real people, flaws and all. Our inability to scrutinise our own actions makes us rely heavily on obsequiousness, which a section of the media provides and which we then learn to patronise.

**Need for conflict sensitive reportage**

In a region embedded in conflict, there is an urgent need for conflict sensitive journalism. My own understanding of what this means is that we break away from stereotypical reporting and look for fresh angles in a conflict story. Conflicts are not static. Nor are the ideologies on which they hang. So how can our stories miss out the fresh perspectives that every conflict throws up? There is of course a category amongst us that believe in indolence and picking up stories from the trash basket. But

there is also the hyper-active scribe who sees ghosts everywhere. We need to strike a balance somewhere.

The whole problem with the media is that we are a self-regulating body. This is an extremely difficult situation because we are so used to being policed in every other aspect of our lives. Nevertheless, we can try. For starters, let us explore the possibilities of getting ourselves trained in conflict reporting. I fail to understand why only academics are deputed for peace and conflict resolution trainings when they actually produce so little

for public consumption and engagement. Food for thought, surely! ■



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**Did you know?**

*Northeast India comprises Seven Sister States (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura), and the lone brother – the Himalayan state of Sikkim. The Siliguri Corridor in West Bengal, with a width of 21 to 40 km, connects the Northeastern region with East India. The region shares more than 4,500 km of international border (about 90 per cent of its entire border area) with China (southern Tibet) in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bangladesh in the southwest, and Bhutan to the northwest.*

# The triumph of the male ego?

Amid the strife-torn Northeast politics, there is one protest taking place in the state of Nagaland, which is utterly regressive. The tribal men are protesting vigorously against granting reservation to women in local self-government, a law in force in the rest of the country. **Prof. Avinash Kolhe** writes about this protest and what it means for women in this traditional tribal state.

**T**RADITIONALLY, the Northeast has been a disturbed area. There have been numerous separatist movements, some ended when a separate state was granted to them. Some, like Bodos, are still demanding a separate state of Bodoland. In other words, this region is known for some kind of trouble or the other. But now, Nagaland is facing a completely different problem, which is quite unique in the history of the Northeast.

There are riots that are playing havoc in Kohima, capital of Nagaland, and other cities where elections to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) were scheduled to be held on 1 February 2017. Various tribal organisations began opposing not these elections, but the 33% reservation for women. The tribal bodies have formed a Joint Coordination Committee (JCC).

## The genesis of the riots

The riots began on 31<sup>st</sup> January and such was its ferocity that the state government led by Chief Minister (CM) T.R. Zeliang was caught on the wrong foot, and the state cabinet decided to withhold these polls. Before these, there were various rounds of talks between the state government and the JCC, but they failed to yield any results. Consequently, on 28<sup>th</sup> January, the JCC called a district-wide *bandh*. On 31<sup>st</sup> January there were violent clashes in Dimapur and Longleng where two people were killed and many injured. On 1<sup>st</sup> February, violence broke out in Mokokchung district. The district office of ruling Naga People's Front (NPF) was attacked and the office of the



Women protest in Nagaland, in support of their rights

Election Commission was ransacked. Then came the refusal by the protesters to bury the bodies of those killed in the 31<sup>st</sup> January incident, unless the chief minister and other ministers resigned.

This is the sequence of events and it was necessary to put all these details in perspective to understand the gravity of the situation. It is not one of those riots which erupt regularly in some part or the other of Northeast. It is an extremely unusual situation where the Nagas are asking for the repeal of the constitutional provision providing women a minimum of 33% reservations in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI).

It is also necessary to recall that these reservations were put in place by the Narasimha Rao government when it got passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment, which in turn gave a minimum of 33% reservations to women in rural as well as urban local bodies. It was expected that these constitutional provisions would be applicable to the entire country. Now it seems that the Nagas are not willing to implement this in their state. Hence, the violent agitations.

## Politics at play?

There is an angle of party politics to this issue as well. Today, Nagaland is ruled by Naga People's Front (NPF)-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland (DAN) in which BJP is also an ally. Nagaland has an assembly with maximum 60 MLAs. Though the ruling alliance enjoys solid support in the Assembly, the latest riots have created fissures in the DAN. A large number of legislators of the ruling NPF are challenging the leadership of Zeliang. It is rumoured that nearly 20 MLAs are in touch with Neiphu Rio, former chief minister of Nagaland and currently an MP.

The Nagaland Tribes Action Committee (NTAC) has asked for the CM's resignation and thereby wants to nullify the urban local body polls. The protest in Nagaland started after the state assembly on 24 November 2016 revoked its earlier resolution of 22 September 2012, which proposed a wider consultation with Naga civil society before adopting a Central legislation (Article 234 T) giving 33% reservation to women in PRI elections. But the government of Zeliang wanted to proceed with the elections to urban local bodies.

## Regions accorded special status

We often read about Article 370 that grants special status to Jammu and Kashmir. But in our Constitution there are numerous articles which grant special status to many states of the Indian Union. For example, Article 371 gives Vidarbha, Marathwada of Maharashtra and Kutch, Saurashtra of Gujarat a special status. There are many such articles beginning from 371 (a) to 371. (J). These are grouped together in Part XXI. In the latest violence in Nagaland, we find article 371 (A) in discussion, which gives Nagaland a special status. This article is meant to maintain the special way of life of the Nagas. This is why it provides that if the Indian Parliament makes any law that affects the Naga's customary life, it will not be applicable till such law is ratified by the Assembly of Nagaland. This is why the agitators are now asking for using Article 371 (A) to ensure that the 33% reservation given to women in PRI bodies does not become applicable to Nagaland.

The Article 371 (A) that Nagas wear as a badge of pride, states: 'Notwithstanding anything in this constitution, no Act of Parliament in respect of religious or social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, ownership and transfer of land and resources, shall apply to the state of Nagaland unless the legislative assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides.' Using the Article 371 (A) as a shield, now Nagas are demanding that 33% reservations to women should not be applicable to Nagaland. Traditionally, women in Naga society have not

enjoyed any right over land, nor do they have much voice in the village councils – the core of Naga society – where men have been the ones to exercise control and take decisions.

If 33% reservation is allowed for women in the PRIs bodies, men fear that they will control precious resources like land and money. Many Naga men feel this would violate customs and its effect could percolate to the villages, which in turn could upset how Naga society has functioned for centuries, with men being in control and women remaining in the shadow. Men are also busy pressuring bodies like Naga Mothers Association (NMA) which have been fighting for gender rights and justice. Consequently, many ordinary Naga women have moved away from the NMA.

## Unconstitutional demand?

It must be mentioned upfront that the demand not to allow women reservations in PRI bodies is out and out unconstitutional. What is more worrisome is the fact that the Nagaland government has decided to write to the Centre demanding that Nagaland be exempted from Part IX A of the Constitution. This shows that the state government is playing the role of the biblical Pontius Pilate by washing its hands off the reservation issue, and sacrificing the rights of Naga women at the altar of Naga males' tribal ego. If the demand of the NTAC is accepted, the Naga women will have absolutely no hope of entering into and participating in decision-making bodies.

A careful reading of today's India reveals that at the core is the clash between tradition and modernity. As with Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu, tradition and local customs are the ruse in Nagaland. The protesters in Chennai argued that Jallikattu was their proud tradition and wanted the practice to continue. In Nagaland, men say women played no part in state's politics and that it should stay that way. In a traditional society like India, this is bound to happen. There is where the role of the state comes into the picture. Remember Lord William Bentinck? He took the initiative and passed the anti-Sati law in 1829. Though some progressive Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy had campaigned for this, basically it was an initiative of Lord Bentinck. He did not have to worry about public opinion and vote banks. In democratic polity like ours, such decisions have to be taken quite sensitively. But the state cannot abdicate its responsibility towards progressive agenda. Nagaland is likely to be a test-case for the Modi government. ■



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# Corruption of the systems

*Corruption, as in the rest of India, is not an unknown commodity in the Northeast too, says Dr. Bhupen Sarmah. It manifests itself mostly in the very patriarchal social and political systems of the region.*

THE dappled phenomenon commonly comprehended as corruption, has always been embedded in social, economic as well as political spheres of every organised political formation, whether ancient or modern, across the world. No wonder, therefore, Kautiliya in the fourth century B.C enumerated the “forty ways of embezzlement” in his *Arthashastra*.

As it is all-pervasive with varying degrees of damaging consequences in different times at different places, the word ‘corruption’ is frequently used sloppily, implying a wide range of practices starting with the incidence of petty bribery and nepotism to massive scams, involving the bureaucrats and political decision makers.

Today, corruption has generally been referred to as ‘the abuse of trusted authority for private gain’, or as an economic concept. The anti-corruption movement across the world is now focusing sharply on transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. In the specific context of India, the Right to Information movement essentially to make the corrupt bureaucrats accountable, the present strategy followed by the government in the form of ‘demonetisation’ etc., reflects the state initiatives to diminish corruption in the country. However, political corruption rooted deeply in the existing form of Indian democracy remains as a basic question to be reckoned with.

## Northeast and corruption

The questions pertinent to corruption in the specific context of India’s Northeast must be addressed going beyond the commonalities that the region shares with the country as a whole. The colonial construction of the idea of the ‘Northeastern Frontier’ with deep rooted politico-economic and social exclusion was reshaped by Partition as a new political reality in the form of ‘Northeast India’ to be integrated with the nation state after Independence. For instance, the Indian ‘Nation Building Project’ had to confront with the political aspirations of the Nagas, what appeared to be ‘autonomy aimed at safeguarding the Naga way of life’ or their ‘desire for the restoration of their independence that the British had snatched from them’. The Naga rebellion which inaugurated an era of armed separatist movements

in the 1950s in the Naga Hills district of erstwhile Assam, was followed by the Mizos in the Lushai Hills district. Secessionism soon started smoldering in other parts of Assam, Manipur and Tripura, gradually spreading over Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.

The pan-Indian nationalist leadership approached the colonial frontier with the conviction that merger of Manipur and Tripura, the two Princely States, could be achieved through negotiation. The present state of Arunachal Pradesh could be made an administrative unit of the government of Assam as the North East Frontier Area (NEFA) without making a departure from the colonial system of governance. The question, however, was regarding political integration of the remaining hills, reconciling their aspirations for political autonomy. The instrument for integration designed by the Bordoloi Committee in the form of ‘Autonomous District Council’ with legislative, judicial and executive powers, was accepted by the Constituent Assembly to constitute the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The primary concern was national security in the changed circumstances caused by the Partition.

Although, the instrument was avowedly designed to protect the cultural identity of the hill societies, essentially, the attempt was to accommodate the political aspirations for autonomy in the national political system characterised by centralised bias on one hand, and the need to facilitate a process of assimilation of the tribal societies with the plains on the other. Accordingly, district councils were constituted in 1952 in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District, the Garo Hills District, the Lushai (Mizo) Hills District, and the North Cachar and the Mikir Hills Districts uniting both into an ‘administrative district’. The arrangement was done without altering the colonial map of Assam, with the imagination of politico-cultural assimilation of the Hills with the plains, retaining the hills under the hegemonic political control of the Assamese. While the political integrationist logic largely failed to trim down the counter forces during the first three decades after Independence, the Nation State approached the region with a developmental agenda, reinforcing the binary between the mainstream and the Northeast. The North Eastern Council (NEC) was constituted in 1971 to mark ‘the beginning of a

new chapter of concerted and planned endeavour for the rapid development of the Region’.

However, the paranoia of national security impelled the State to place it under the Ministry of Home Affairs. This was followed by establishment of a plethora of institutions, all prefixed by ‘Northeastern’ and located in Guwahati, such as the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation Ltd. (1997); the North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Ltd. (1982); the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd.(1995); to name a few.

After having institutionalised the political whims and populism, a new project was launched in 1996 called the ‘New Initiatives for the Northeast’; a combination of economic packages and politics of unconditional talks with the insurgents. Subsequently, a high-level commission was constituted to work out the strategy for pushing the region to the level of development of rest of the country in next five to ten years. The commission made 173 recommendations, which included recommendations to formally delink the NEC from all security functions and to detach from the Ministry of Home Affairs; and to restructure it as the North East Development Council to be placed under the Planning Commission. With a vision to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development of the Region, a separate ministry was constituted in 2001; the Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region.

The NEC, now as an integral component of the newly created ministry, published in 2008, the much talked about vision document ‘Peace, Progress and Prosperity in the Northeastern Region: Vision 2020’. The document identified three critical non-economic requirements to condition economic performance, and the critical gaps are, law and order, good governance, and diplomatic initiatives with the neighbourhood of the Northeast.

### The devious ways of corruption

The much talked about corruption and misuse of the development fund is not an exception, but more importantly, the political class could put in place a hitherto unknown process of primitive accumulation in connivance with the bureaucracy, subduing the customary laws and the traditional mechanism of regulations. Protecting the customary laws as a marker of

identity, and prohibiting transfer of land to non-tribals under the system of modern regulations, the newly emerged political class invented many devices for accumulation of land in their hands deliberately avoiding enactment of land ceiling regulations. Consequently, the hill societies are increasingly becoming a class-divided society in which a few people have managed to acquire huge tracts of land and control the lucrative extraction of timber, coal, and other resources, while the number of those with insufficient or non-existent access to land is increasing day by day.

With the benefaction of the statist developmental projects involving huge flow of fund either from the government or other international sources such as the World Bank, the political class in the hill societies has now made its conspicuous presence, having sole control over the political life of the people, but at the same time, remaining unaccountable to the larger society by not allowing any democratic institutions to grow. The traditional institutes are preserved as the markers of identity, and also for hegemonic domination containing democratic space for the people at large at the village level.

In most of the cases, except for Tripura, the Autonomous District Councils avoided constitution of the village councils, leaving the space largely open for control of traditions and customs, the glass case of tribal identity. The question of gender has always been kept on the back bench in the name of customs, tradition and customary laws, which categorically denied presence of women in the decision making at the grassroots. Nagaland provides the best example of denying the political space for women in the name of custom and tradition. The customary laws relating to inheritance of property have been preserved to reinforce patriarchal form of domination. These are only some of the instances of the nature

of the ‘institutions of inclusive governance to assure inclusive growth’ glamoured by the statist development discourses, which largely remained indifferent to the question of accountability of the political class. ■



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### The momo festival!

*We all love to eat momos or dumplings. Imagine a festival just dedicated to the various avatars of this favourite food of India? The first Great Momo Festival of the Northeast was held last August in Guwahati, Assam. It had a wide variety of momos including tandoori, Afghani and chocolate momos! There was also music, dance, art at the festival. The idea was also to connect people of the Northeast, help them to bond and encourage maninlanders also to participate!*

# Amazing debuts

*These are thrilling times for Northeast cinema in India, with the emergence of new, young filmmakers, who bring their own sensibilities, asserts **Manoj Barpujari**. He profiles some of these filmmakers and their work.*

**D**ELIVERING the Aravindan Memorial Lecture at the 21<sup>st</sup> International Film Festival of Kerala last December, the famous Ethiopian filmmaker Haile Gerima said, “History is made by young people who have always defied formalism and the world needs more of them, as universalism cannot be achieved without fighting the stereotype.” Speaking about the young new generation of filmmakers, Gerima said that alternate independent existence is also possible when no compromise is made with the original ideals to let one’s own voice resonate from within his or her films. The world of cinema is in fact pleasantly replete with creative works by radical newcomers from time to time.

The bottomline of this critical discourse is highlighted in Gerima’s speech, as he explains that Hollywood or Bollywood films kill the spirit of creativity, in the sense that they represent the monopoly of culture. The creative filmmaker always revolts against mainstream oppression. In India, there is a long filmography of radicals in every region: they are the ones who pumped air to the canon of “parallel cinema” of yesteryears, and “indie films” of today. The northeastern part of India is one such region where their struggle to rediscover and reclaim the space for films with their own vocabulary, finds newer meaning every now and then. They continue to show the guts, though the general mindset is strongly influenced by the mainstream Hindi cinema, a reason enough for local serious films not getting the expected response inspite of winning national or international recognition, and though the spineless authorities are devoid of the willpower to help local filmmaking enterprises.

## Cinema’s beginning in Northeast, the current trends

Who can forget cinema’s beginning in the Northeast when Jyotiprasad Agarwala made the first Assamese film (*Jyoti*) in 1935, which was a phenomenal film if analysed in the overall context of contemporary Indian cinemas? And who can forget that, under suffocating conditions of filmmaking, the music maestro and the lone Dada Saheb Phalke Award winner from the region, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, made a path-breaking debut in 1956? It is interesting to note that as filmmaking on regular basis started in Manipur in the middle



**Haobam Paban Kumar’s *Lady of the Lake* or *Loktak Lairembee*, was an outstanding film from last year**

of 1970s, when the country made strong strides in the Parallel Cinema Movement, some debut films with distinct aesthetics in Assam made the cut. Next came the new generation of filmmakers such as Gautam Bora, Sanjeev Hazarika and Bidyut Chakravarty, all from Assam, each of whom won the coveted national award for the best first film of a director in the span of just seven years in the 1990s, making all of India acknowledge that filmmaking in the region had come of age. Braving all the increasing adversities, a new breed of filmmakers from the Northeast is still emerging to retain the welcome spirit of their forerunners.

In this backdrop, if someone from Manipur or from Assam carves a success story in national or international film circuit, it automatically causes ripples of no mean interest. Haobam Paban Kumar’s *Loktak Lairembee* (*Lady of the Lake*, 2016) became one of the most outstanding Indian films made last year. It has won major awards at leading film festivals in the country, besides being selected for competition and screening



**From left to right: Haobam Paban Kumar, Jaicheng Jai Dohutia, Deep Chowdhury and Rima Das; a breed of experimenting filmmakers from the Northeast**

at high ranking festivals of Busan and Berlin. In a blend of fable and facts, bringing a common man's belief in spirit and fear of eviction to poetic justice, the film dwells on the plight of the fishermen community of Loktak Lake in Manipur. The famous floating biomass 'phumdi' of the lake has been providing them living space, leisure and livelihood, but as many of their huts are burned down in the name of protecting the ecosystem, the fisherfolks led by their women, fight for their rights.

The film's protagonist is a penury-driven and depressed Tomba, one of the victims, who is haunted by the fear of the worst. He senses the spirit of evil around when he thinks that an old lady mysteriously wanders in the lake and even knocks at his door in the midnight. One day, he accidentally finds a revolver hidden within the biomass that gives him a sense of power, but soon it becomes a weapon to chase the old lady, whom he mistakes as the 'evil spirit' and commits an unintended crime. The movie was shot entirely in and around the Loktak Lake, the camera gliding along as smooth and gentle as the boats on the static water as it captures the daily rhythms of life mismatched by the government's boat-mounted dredging machine or Tomba's metal weapon, as the symbols of oppression and violence. At times, silence becomes



**Dohutia's *Haanduk* chronicles the saga of a mother who waits endlessly for her extremist son to return**

oppressively meaningful, forming the core of the film's structure. Depending on very less dialogue, the director, who is an alumnus of the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute of Kolkata, allows the unfolding drama to remain self-explanatory. The ending of the storyline keeps the viewer engaged for meaning and significance, and that is where the success of this extraordinary visual poetry lies.

At Mumbai's Jio MAMI festival, Haobam's film received the India Gold award for best film while the Jury Grand Prize was won by a film from Assam. It was Jaicheng Jai Dohutia's debut film *Haanduk (The Hidden Corner, 2016)*, which examines the effects of insurgency and unrest on the lives of innocently naïve people, and how one mother of an untraced extremist cherishes an endless hope that her son will return one day. Though the elderly woman, explicitly kept silent for the entire length of the script, performs the funeral of her son after she finds a mutilated and bullet ridden body at her doorstep, yet after receiving intimation that the death of her son cannot be confirmed by the underground outfit he belongs to, she keeps on waiting. She goes to the extent of calling the gods in their community ritual to fulfill her dream of getting her son back.

A diploma holder in editing from Regional Government Film and Television Institute of Guwahati, Jaicheng's film portrays the mother, Hermoni by name, in total Beckettian longing for the most improbable shrouded in mystery under the given circumstances. 'Haanduk' is a word derived from the indigenous Moran language, and its literal meaning is 'very remote interior place' or 'the dark corner of a house'. The meaning is metaphorically carried along by the silent suffering of the mother and her son's (sarcastically named 'Mukti' that means 'freedom') childhood friend Sewali who appears more as his fiancée. Another member of the militant group, Biplob (literally means 'revolution'), who abandoned the path of revolution, symbolises the sarcasm related to their



**Rima Das's *Man with the Binoculars* or *Antardrishti* focuses on a widowed and retired school teacher**

mission and irony of the situation in all its contours. What makes the film authentic in its storytelling is its hardcore treatment stuffed with genuine casting and meaningful colour scheme in rich, cinematic idioms.

A self-taught filmmaker and a passionate hitch-hiker, Deep Chowdhury's first feature *Alifa* (2016), which world premiered at the competition section of the Kolkata International Film Festival last year, is a bold study of desire and moral boundaries with characters lifted from a section of daily wage earners. It projects a touching story of people who also exist on the urban fringe and reassures a filmmaker's faith in the power and purity of storytelling that alternately gives a perfect sub-altern narrative too. The film is set on a hilly forest area overlooking the sprawling city of Guwahati. With a sharp urban-rural divide and mix, Deep's bilingual (Assamese and Bengali) movie *Alifa* is quite unsettling to watch for its inherent environmental and communal diatribe. As the storyline goes, it succinctly focuses on everyday nuances of the hard life led by Ali, his wife Fatima (enacted by acclaimed actors Baharul Islam and Jaya Seal) and their two children Alifa and Faisal, inside the dwindling forest in the city outskirts where they are at the mercy of a corrupt forest guard. As a prowling leopard suddenly appears from the shrinking natural surroundings, a bitter human-wildlife feud ensues. However, it is not as agonising as faltering moralities for Ali when he finds out that their already constrained existence is intruded by Fatima's

secret lover at her work place. In addition to regular insults and abuses on city streets, Ali is now confronted with a devastating emotional crisis. With a formulating cinematographic lay-out, a hand-held camera at its best use in hilly and narrow pathways, the screenplay subverts the spectator's expectations. *Alifa's* ultimate confrontation with death and her little brother's metaphorical journey into wilderness reminded of the fateful allegory in Ray's *Pather Panchali*. Encroachment is a metaphor in the film; encroaching nature and habitat on one side, morality and truthfulness on the other, all criss-crossed together, is the leit-motif of this skillful human drama.

Another Assamese filmmaker whose debut film drew undivided attention by securing national and international premieres respectively at MAMI and Tallinn Black Nights (Estonia) last year, is Mumbai-based entertainment professional Rima Das. With a seemingly uncommon premise, her film *Antardrishti* (*Man with the Binoculars*, 2016) focuses on a widowed and retired school teacher who discovers new meaning in life after some exhilarating experiences he gathers by looking through a pair of binoculars. By the looking device, a gift from his son, he understands his close family members better, often to his dislike: thus it becomes a metaphor of covert human emotions particularly love and affections of young people. In a way, the binoculars transform to a mute spectator of the beholder's own surroundings. Although the plot oscillates

**Another Assamese filmmaker whose debut film drew undivided attention by securing national and international premieres respectively at MAMI and Tallinn Black Nights (Estonia) last year, is Mumbai based entertainment professional Rima Das.**



A still from Deep Chowdhury's *Alifa*

between members of a joint family, their household providing the confines of emoting, and its immediate periphery laden with rural serenity, it uses patriarchy and womanhood as its backbone to see through the narrative of local culture. The film has another uncommon trait to telling effect and it is silence, best negotiated with spellbinding support from sound designer Amrit Pritam. The intrinsic life styles of the countryside are beautifully captured in this romantic drama

of exceptional plot. There are four love stories, one of them going back to the past to examine the protagonist's mindset; and the way they are mingled into one perspective, is quite noticeable. Kudos to Rima, who apart from self-financing her project, even appeared among the lead casts in it, wrote the script and did the bits to make a dream come true, that sometimes evokes impressions of Iranian neo-realism.

Haobam, Jaicheng, Deep and Rima are producing enlightened filmmaking paradigm. They really want to script their stories of defining "anti-monoculture", a term used by legendary director Bernardo Bertolucci to describe his film sense. Most of the actors in their films are non-actors, some are amateurs, only a handful of technical crew have prior experiences of filmmaking. They rely heavily on shoe-string budgets that make for a striking principle of a marginal 'industry' in a disadvantaged location, where heightened spirits of incredible India rests too. ■

Manoj Barpujari received the Swarna Kamal for the best film critic at the National Film Awards, 2011. He has twelve books, including three titles on cinema, to his credit. He is a member of FIPRESCI, the international federation of film critics, and served as juror at several reputed film festivals across the



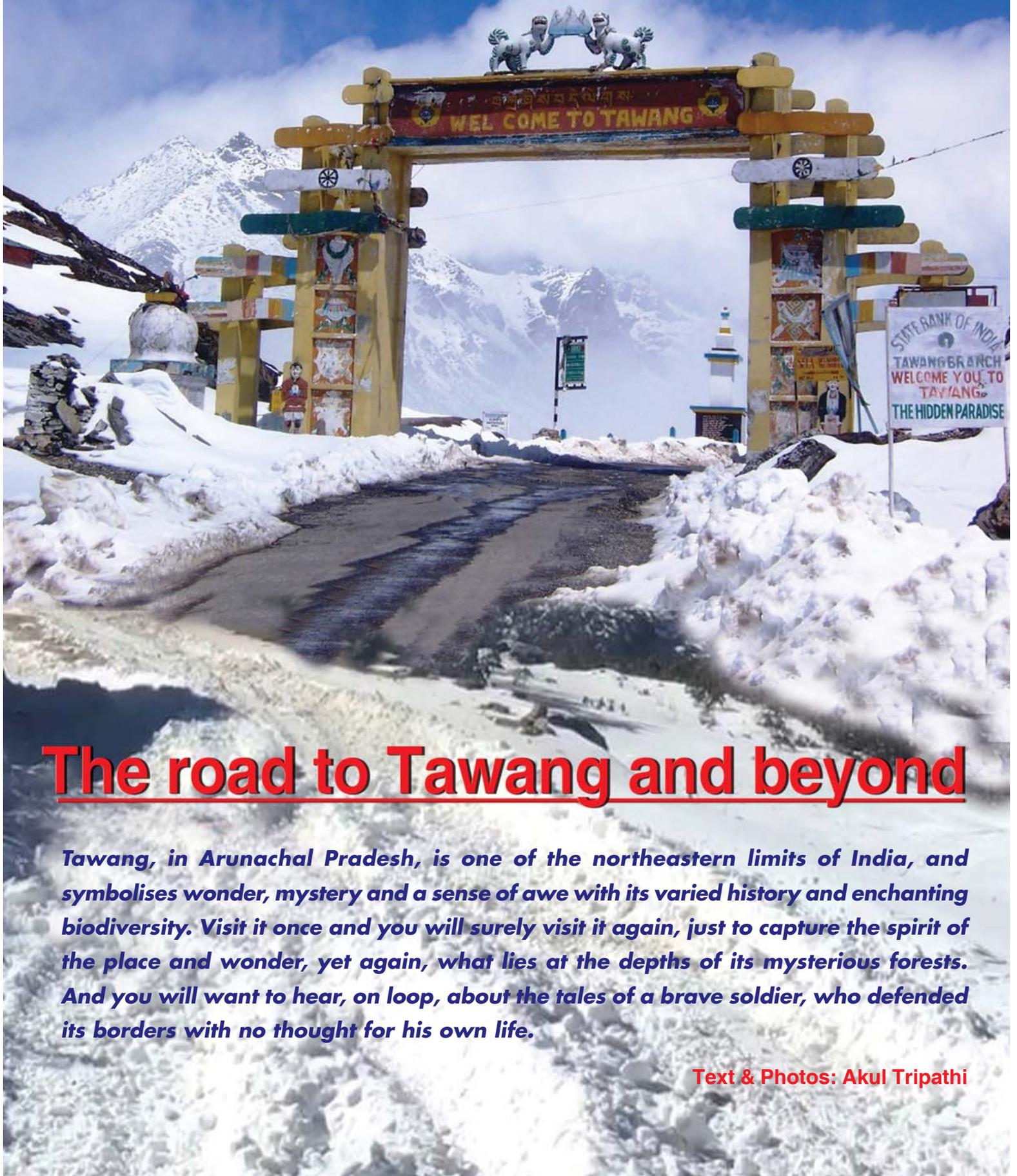
globe. His travelogue *Touching the Trinity* is widely acclaimed and featured in a column at *The Guardian* and reviewed in *The Telegraph*, *The Assam Tribune* etc. He conducted a workshop on film criticism at the University of West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad in 2012 and wrote a chapter in the *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinemas* (London). He is an accomplished Assamese poet and won the prestigious Munin Borkotoky Literary Award in 2003.

### Know your Northeast!

*The Northeast of India is a region endowed with forests, natural resources and great diversity. But our knowledge of it is still bafflingly peripheral. Here are some quick facts that you must definitely know about this integral and stunningly beautiful region of India:*

- *Did you know that Shillong in Meghalaya is known as the 'Scotland of the East'? The beautiful landscape and vista of Shillong is what earned it this moniker.*
- *Have you ever wondered which is the largest tea-growing region in the world? It is Assam! So while Nilgiris and Darjeeling are also well-known, nothing to beat Assam.*
- *Assam is also the only state in India that produces three types of indigenous silks. Kanjeevaram and Benarasi, move aside!*
- *The wettest place on earth is Mawsynram in Shillong, Meghalaya. It receives the highest average rainfall on the planet.*
- *Digboi in Assam has the oldest oil well in operation in the country. The Digboi Refinery is also India's first modern refinery and was established in 1901.*
- *Majuli in Assam is the world's largest river island. This island has featured in several films and literature of the region, and continues to hold many in its thrall.*
- *By now, everyone knows that Mawlynnong in Shillong, Meghalaya is considered the cleanest village in Asia. But what you may not know is that this village also has a stunning bamboo skywalk, which is a 85-foot bamboo structure, which offers a bird's eye view of the village and a panoramic view of Bangladesh plains and hence, the border with that country.*
- *While we all know about Kerala's literacy, you may not be aware that Tripura and Mizoram states in Northeast are among the most literate states of India. In fact, Tripura has a literacy rate of 94.65%. Mindboggling, isn't it?*

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## **The road to Tawang and beyond**

*Tawang, in Arunachal Pradesh, is one of the northeastern limits of India, and symbolises wonder, mystery and a sense of awe with its varied history and enchanting biodiversity. Visit it once and you will surely visit it again, just to capture the spirit of the place and wonder, yet again, what lies at the depths of its mysterious forests. And you will want to hear, on loop, about the tales of a brave soldier, who defended its borders with no thought for his own life.*

**Text & Photos: Akul Tripathi**



**The enchanting vistas of Tawang**

I have always had difficulty in understanding how people dismiss a probable travel opportunity solely on the grounds of having visited the place or some parts of the itinerary before. Some even go the route of declining an entire activity like white water rafting or paragliding because they have done it before. Whenever I come across such a situation, a visual from the Asterix comics flashes in my head with Obelix tapping his temple furiously and calling the Romans mad. The reasoning seems to me as illogical as never eating again, because we have eaten before.

So, when after a decade, surfaced the opportunity of visiting a remote corner of Arunachal Pradesh again, I said yes, before you could blink. The first trip in 2005 was an experience of a lifetime and I was excited to discover what the road to Tawang had in store for me this time around. A decade ago, Tawang was a touch-and-go destination, amongst a host of others in a true northeastern extravaganza. This time, it was the main event. And it did not disappoint. Just as I hope neither will this travelogue...

### **The road to Tawang**

The road to Tawang remained the same on the map. From Guwahati, the nodal point of all Northeast travel, it snaked its way north in the plains of Assam till Tezpur; situated at the foothills of the Himalayas. Tezpur is the point of entry into the hills and demarcates the end of Assam and the beginning of India's twenty-fifth state – Arunachal Pradesh.

The most northeastern of all states, Arunachal Pradesh is

the largest amongst the seven northeastern states of India. With history confirming at least 11,000 years of human inhabitation and with references in the Kalika Purana and the Mahabharata, the state abounds in stories, theories and mysteries. The road from Tezpur enters western Arunachal Pradesh, and rises north with Bhutan flanking its western borders, and heading towards the northern border with the People's Republic of China. Through the district of West Kameng, the road winds up and across through passes and valleys to reach the town of Tawang, the capital of the border district of Tawang.

While the route remained the same, save the names of places, nothing else did. Everything was so different from my memories that it didn't seem like I had ever visited this part of the world before. Shaking my head in amused incredulity at some non-returning friends, I wiped clean my slate of memories and without the anchor of expectations, went about living a new journey...

### **Bhalukpong**

The first major town into Arunachal along the road to Tawang is Bhalukpong. It is almost impossible for someone who knows Hindi to ignore the word *Bhalu* (bear) in the name. And as unlikely as it may seem, it is actually with reference to the bear that the *bhalu* was incorporated into Bhalukpong. Pong, in the local dialect means a salt lick and Bhalukpong became the place where the bears came to consume salt! While once it must have been bears that made this place famous, today,



**Orchids blooming at Bhalukpong**

the most popular destination around Bhalukpong is the Pakke (also called Pakhui) Tiger Reserve – a semi-evergreen forest spread over 861 sq. km.

The Pakke Tiger Reserve was earlier called the Pakhui Reserve Forest, and over time, its status was upgraded to a game reserve, then wildlife sanctuary, and finally as a tiger reserve in 2002. The conservation narrative of the Pakke Tiger Reserve for a little over a decade has been defined by the unrelenting efforts of one man – its legendary protector TanaTapi.

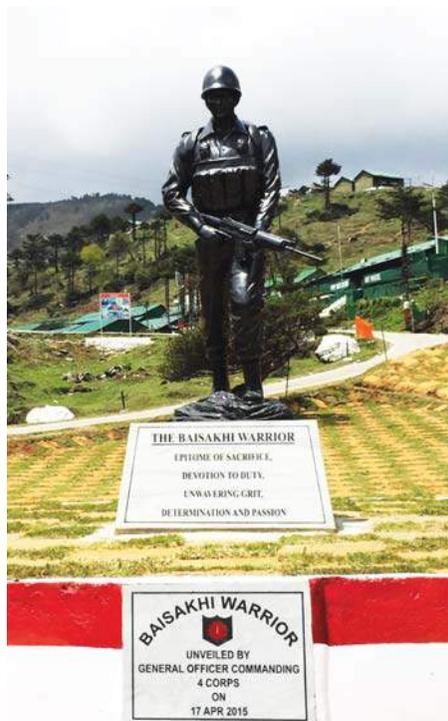
Poaching and other illegal activities ran unchecked in the dense and often inaccessible areas of the wildlife sanctuary. The tribal populations living within the forests viewed forest officials with suspicion. In such a scenario, the case for the endangered species was looking bleak. However, TanaTapi and his team work in near impenetrable forests, against all odds, to protect a vital park and its wildlife.

Meeting challenges head on, Tana met with residents of villages and persuaded them to donate a piece of land for setting up anti-poaching camps, and hired the unemployed youth from

the villages as forest watchers. The flourishing of any forest without the cooperation and involvement of the locals living off it, is virtually impossible. Knowing this, he formed the Ghora Aabhe (meaning village fathers in an Arunachali dialect), which constitutes former hunters and conservationists. Largely belonging to the Nyishi tribe who were traditionally hunters, they through the efforts of TanaTapi, are now an integral part of forest protection. With such solid backing, Tana carried out several anti-poaching measures against poachers, and the camera traps in the forest highlight that the sustained efforts of the forest staff have paid off.

The Kameng River forms the natural boundary between West and East Kameng districts and also between Bhalukpong and the Pakke Tiger Reserve. Getting to the reserve involves a pleasant ride across the river. Walking in a forest is always an experience to cherish, more so at a place like Pakke where the company is of friendly

and knowledgeable forest guards, who are eager to reveal a side of the forest which they sense and feel much beyond our ability to see and understand. It is also primarily because of these guards that one bird species is seeing a revival in numbers



**An army installation enroute Tawang**



**The Hornbill, the state bird of Arunachal Pradesh**

and in the local consciousness - the Hornbill.

An initiative of Tana Tapi and the Ghora Aabhe is the Hornbill Nest Adoption Programme. Hornbills, the state bird of Arunachal Pradesh, are giants amongst birds. Large and bizarre, they are long ranging birds that dwell in tropical forest habitats that contain large and tall trees. Distributed across tropical and subtropical Africa, Asia and Melanesia, they are easy to identify through their size and the characteristic long, down curving bill that gives them their name. India has nine species of hornbills, five of which are found in Arunachal Pradesh.

Started in 2012, the Hornbill Nest Adoption Programme is aimed at protecting the slow-breeding hornbills from hunting and habitat loss. Under this programme, urban residents donate money to adopt hornbill nests and an honorarium is paid to members of the Ghora Aabhe who look after identified nests.

Despite the upward trend in their numbers, Hornbills were once a much more common sight in these parts. Others from my travelling group who have visited these parts earlier talk of

plentiful sightings, often up close and personal. Over the period of my travel, I was fortunate enough to spot three of the four species found in western Arunachal, two of which I managed to photograph - not as well as I would have liked though. The elation at the spotting and clicking is immediately numbed by the realisation that these magnificent birds who seem too large to be able to fly and make the sound of a small helicopter with their flapping wings when they do, may not be around if it takes me another decade to visit. Unless of course, initiatives like the adoption programme are resounding successes and I pray they are. More power to them.

No visit to the Pakke Tiger Reserve should be considered complete without visiting the forest interpretation centre. Perhaps the best nature interpretation centre I have visited in my travels across India, it makes the forests come alive and represents plants and animals as people through some very interesting and interactive exhibits and models. Highly recommended, especially for children.



**The Bompu Campsite at Eagle's Nest Wildlife Sanctuary**



The Kameng River with Pakke Tiger Reserve on the right

### Bomdilla

Back on the road, climbing towards the Tibetan plateau, the next big town on the way is Bomdila – the headquarters of the West Kameng district. Compared to the earlier visit in 2005, Bomdila seemed much bigger and if memory serves correctly, the tarred roads that took us there this time are a recent addition. Tourism, too, seems like a recent addition with the infrastructure and the local entrepreneurship learning and evolving to find the best combinations that accommodate and are hospitable at the same time. The earlier visit and the lives of us travelling then were saved by the hospitality of the Indian Army, a story you can read in a previous issue of *One India One People*. This time around, fortunately, there wasn't any need to bother the armed forces, but nostalgia and a silent thanks filled my heart as we crossed the army camp which had hosted us.

Bomdila, this time around, was not even a pit-stop. Branching away from the road that led to the final destination of Tawang, the call of the wild came to us from a forest high up in the mountains - the Eagle's Nest Wildlife Sanctuary. With no connection to the Eagle's Nest in Germany of Hitler's fame, this sanctuary is named after the Red Eagle Division of the Indian Army which was posted there in 1950. Renowned as a birding paradise, it has an incredible variety, numbers and accessibility of bird species. Of the two photographed Hornbills, it was here that the Rufus Hornbill gave us an audience.

It is part of the Kameng protected area complex (KPAC), the largest contiguous closed-canopy forest tract of Arunachal Pradesh, which includes Eaglenest, Pakke, Sessa, Nameri, and Sonai Rupai sanctuaries and associated reserved forest blocks. The complex covers 3500 km<sup>2</sup> in area and ranges from 100 metres (328 ft) to 3,300 metres (10,827 ft) in altitude. It is accessible by an unpaved road that climbs steadily to the Eagle's Nest Pass at 2,800 metres (9,186ft.), allowing access to its highest reaches. Amongst several mammals, birds and other flora and fauna, Eagle's Nest is considered crucial for the continued well-being of the Asian Elephant. The elephants regularly move up from the Assam plains to the Eagle's Nest ridge, and this is believed to be the highest altitude that elephants reach in India.

The elevation and the relative inaccessibility of the forest through the narrow, unpaved one-lane road that leads to it also protects it from dangers like animal poaching and illegal timbering, which plagues forests like Pakke in the plains. However, the same limitations act as a boon for wildlife enthusiasts and bird watchers as it lends Eagle's Nest the advantage of being home to birds at various altitudes. The forest is equipped with camp facilities at various altitudes that aid the avid and adventurous tourists.

The eco-tourism camps are mainly managed by the Bugun and Shertukpen tribes in a unique and successful model where locals are involved in both conservation and commercial



**This was the scene of the battle at Sela Pass**

activities, forming a symbiotic relationship. My stay was at the Bompou camp which is one of the most important camps for birding. Once a military labour camp, it consists of 15 tents with cots and mattresses along with a dining tent and a fully functional kitchen that serves hot meals.

### **Tawang**

After a couple of days of peaceful bird watching and leisurely strolls in the forest, it was time to reach the final destination – Tawang. To get to Tawang, you have to cross the Sela Pass. This pass is at a height of 13,700 feet above sea level following a high altitude lake of crystal blue water and rhododendrons running along the road in various colours and hues.

The Sela Pass is of great significance in Indian military history. It is the site of martyrdom of several brave Indian soldiers in the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Interestingly, in the gap of 10 years that I revisited the place and the story – another story had taken the place of the earlier one. As per the chronicles from 2005, during the invasion by the Chinese in 1962, the Indian army had withdrawn defeated from most quarters. However, some quarters were still manned by Indian troops. One such soldier manning an outpost was Rifleman Jaswant Singh Rawat of the 4 Garhwal Rifles. He refused to withdraw

from the lines and with the help of two locals Sela and Naranang fought the Chinese. The two girls would reload the guns and he would arrange them strategically and fire them together by tying them with a string. In this manner he drove back two waves of the Chinese.

However, the girls' father went and spilt the beans to the Chinese. The Chinese now having the advantage of knowledge, conquered the outpost. By then, Jaswant Singh had hung himself from a telephone wire and Sela had jumped off a cliff to her death. Naranang was caught and executed, and so was their father. Once the war was over, Jaswant Singh's name was on the Indian army's list of deserters to face court martial. The Chinese, impressed by the soldiers bravery narrated the incident to Indians and declared that if the Indians did not honour Jaswant Singh, the Chinese would. Following this embarrassing incident for the army, Jaswant Singh of the 4 Garhwal Rifles was awarded the Mahavir Chakra (posthumous) and a shrine was constructed in his memory. Two peaks were named after Sela and Naranang.

Other versions of the same events add details like because Jaswant Singh killed over 300 Chinese soldiers, the Chinese beheaded Jaswant Singh and carried his head back, but after the war returned it along with the bust that is installed at the



The courtyard of the Tawang Monastery

memorial site. One telling also states that Sela died in a grenade burst, Naranang was captured and Jaswant Singh shot himself.

The newer telling of events has none of the panache and

fantastical emotions of the previous narration that seems right out of a Bollywood story. In a measured voice and practised script, a soldier explained the sequence of events in the war



At the Sela Pass



**A panorama of Sangetsar Lake, aka Madhuri Lake**

and how the Chinese had managed to get a MMG (medium machine gun) at an elevation from their post, and thence Jaswant Singh along with two comrades made a daring plan wherein they attacked the Chinese position to silence the MMG. In the effort to get the MMG back to their post, Jaswant Singh was martyred. For his exemplary bravery, Jaswant Singh was posthumously awarded the Maha Vir Chakra.

While the battle is long over, the sacrifice of Jaswant Singh lives on in these parts. While the hero may no longer be physically present in his regiment, it is believed almost without exception that his presence lingers. As much as his deeds of valour inspire those who serve there today, for the locals, he is now a 'baba', a saint - and the battlefield is as much a tribute to the



**A bust of Joginder Singh at the Tawang Memorial**

bravery of the soldiers who died there, as it is a shrine that lives by the name of Jaswantgarh. His bed linen is routinely washed and his towel changed regularly. Soldiers claim that the bed seems 'lived-in' the next day. Those who polish his shoes claim that they are often found covered with mud, a sign that he has been walking around. The myth goes that convoys in blizzards have seen Jaswant directing the vehicles through the treacherous bends. Eight promotions have come to him after death and Jaswant is now a Captain. Almost no soul – soldier or civilian goes past without paying their respects.

After briefly stopping at the Jaswant Singh memorial, we descended our way to Tawang which is at a height of 10,000 feet. The area of Tawang district is approximately 2085 sq. km. bordered by



Tibet in the North, Bhutan in the Southwest and Sela ranges separate West Kameng district from the East. The inhabitants of the districts are all of Monpa tribes except Shyo village which is dominated by people of Tibetan origin. The Monpas belong to Mongoloid stock. They are well built, fair in complexion. This has earned Tawang the epitaph of 'Land of the Mon'. As we checked into a decent hotel, it struck me how Tawang has changed. A decade ago, we had lived in a monastery as there were limited establishments for tourists and none that would have held the thirty of us travelling then.

Besides being a border town, Tawang's picture postcard is the Tawang monastery which has been around for far longer than historical and political narratives that now define Tawang. The



**A plaque outside Tawang Memorial commemorating soldiers of the 1962 war with China**

monastery was founded by Merag Lama Lodre Gyatso in 1681 in accordance with the wishes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Nagwang Lobsang Gyatso. Tawang in Tibetan means 'chosen by the horse' (Ta – horse; wang – chosen). Legend says that the Dalai Lama let a horse loose and instructed that the monastery be built at the place where the horse is found. Another version says that while Merag Lama was meditating on the problem of the location, his horse went missing and was found standing peacefully on the mountain top. Taking this as a divine guidance, the monastery was built at this place. It is also called the Galden Namgye Lhatse meaning celestial paradise and one look at the monastery on a clear night will make one realise how true its name is.

Perched atop a hill engulfed in a



**The Joginder Singh Memorial enroute Bum La**

perennial mist, this is the largest monastery in India and the second largest in Asia. It can house as many as 400 monks. It is a fortified monastery as it was built in an era when tensions between the sects of Buddhists were at its peak. This fortified complex covers an area of 135 sq. meters enclosed by a

compound wall of 610 meter long. Within the complex there are 65 residential buildings and 10 other structures. The library has valuable old scriptures numbering to 850 bundles. Housed within the monastery is a museum which contains various personal possessions of the Dalai Lama and his family and



**The house where the sixth Dalai Lama was born**



**The Tawang Memorial**

other Buddhist artifacts. The monastery was built by the people from the villages in the vicinity and even today, they bear the cost for the upkeep of the place. Not far from the Tawang monastery, is the Urgelling monastery which is the birthplace of the 6<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama – Tsangyang Gyatso whose life as a spiritual head is a fascinating chapter in Buddhist history.

Just as male monks join monasteries which are called *Gompas* the female spiritual aspirants become part of nunneries which are called *Ani Gompas*. Unlike the monks (Lamas), the girls become nuns and join the nunnery on their own and there is no social pressure or tradition making the practice compulsory. Tawang has a long history of nunneries and the oldest one is the Brama Dung-Chung Ani Gompa, located 12 km from Tawang, which was commissioned by Karchen Yeshi Gelek in 1595 and houses about 45 nuns. There are several such nunneries in Tawang.

The city centre in many ways of modern Tawang is undoubtedly the Tawang War Memorial – a forty-foot structure dedicated to the martyrs of the 1962 war. Locally known as the 'Namgyal Chortan', it has names of 2420 dead soldiers etched in gold on 32 black granite plaques. The memorial is blessed by the Dalai Lama and is flanked by two halls – one that houses the personal effects of the martyrs and another that facilitates a light and sound show depicting their heroic deeds. This one memorial elevates the horrors of battle into legends of pride, and a distant border town becomes an integral part of the vocabulary and prayers of every Indian.

It is from here that the story of Tawang in my head grew new plot lines. At Tawang the blitzkrieg visit of 2005 had paused and then withdrawn back home. Weather, then, had prevented us from visiting the Sangetsar Lake (42 km from Tawang) also known as the Madhuri Lake after Madhuri Dixit shot there for the film *Koyla* in 1997. This lake was formed in 1950 by an earthquake and the locals have left a vision in our head of a picturesque lake with a perpetual floating slab of ice surrounded by tall cliffs and pine trees. This time around too, the weather Gods were playing the tricks of their trade, but perhaps half-heartedly, and a visit to the lake could finally be accomplished.

### **The road ends...**

From Pakke to Madhuri Lake, from orchids to hornbills and tales of mysticism to sagas of bravery, Tawang showed me all. However, the one single experience that achieves pole position in my memories of the second Tawang trip is the road beyond Tawang – the road that reaches out beyond the high Himalayan passes into the reaches of the Tibetan plateau; halting for us at the Line of Actual Control with China at the mountain pass – Bum La.

The northern borders of India are a bucketful of acronyms – LAC, LOC and AGPL among others. While seemingly similar, there is a marked difference between them. The LAC is the 3,488-kilometre long, de facto border with China. The LoC, or Line of Control, is the unsettled, 776-kilometre de facto border with Pakistan (distinct from the settled 2,308-kilometre border from Gujarat to Jammu). The AGPL, short for Actual



The board at Bum La; the road beyond Tawang

Ground Position Line is the 110-km long border between India and Pakistan in the Siachen Sector.

Unlike the LOC, which despite ceasefire agreements continues to see action and casualties on a regular basis, the LAC is a comparatively peaceful line. Despite military presence and build up on both sides, no lives have been lost in combat since the Sino-Indian war of 1962 in which several Indian army personnel lost their lives in defence of the motherland. Most prominent amongst these, distinguished by the Param Vir Chakra - India's highest military honour - is Joginder Singh of the 1 Sikh Regiment, who led an astonishing defence with meagre resources at his disposal, and died as a prisoner of war due to the injuries he suffered and the biting cold weather.

India and China have regular meetings at this border outpost and even celebrate some festivals together. A large rock on this line has been christened the Rock of Peace and it serves

as a symbolic marker for the Line of Actual Control that separates India and Tibet (PRC).

As peaceful as this high Himalayan pass is, and no matter the bonhomie between the two armies and the promises of better cooperation in the future; to the traveller, it is disheartening to encounter an invisible barrier and not carry on beyond like the wind and the whispers...

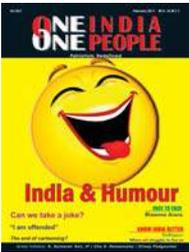
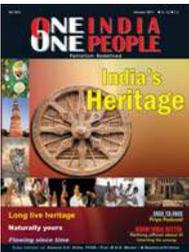
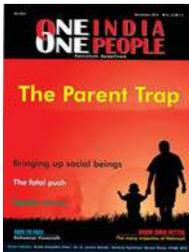
Perhaps someday the rock will not be a road head, but a landmark, and the roads shall stretch further away in all destinations to some other even distant road head and then will come a time when even that head becomes a landmark, and the world will be roads without ends. Perhaps. Someday. ■



The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.

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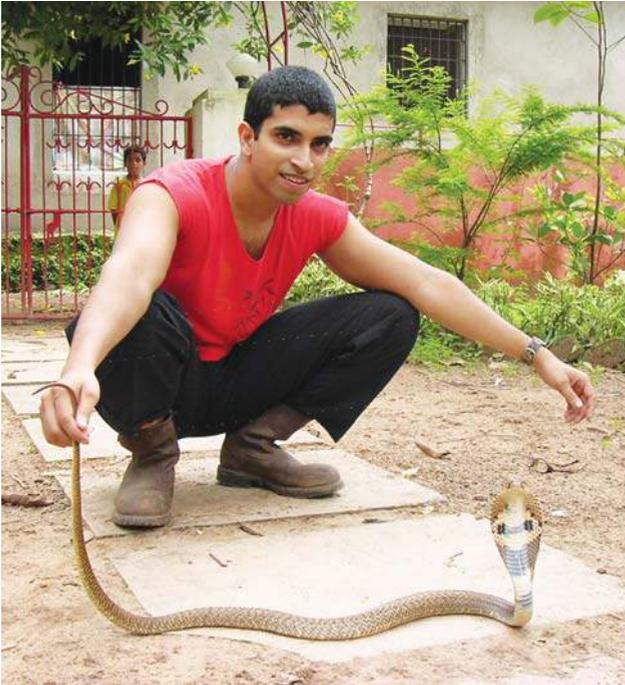
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*“I caught snakes in the company of Irula tribals, and got bitten by hot-tempered reptiles, but came out of it all grinning and wiser.”*



*A most eligible bachelor **Rahul Alvares**, 36, is really living it up, doing what he wants to and enjoying every nano second. A many-faceted personality, he began his career as a herpetologist, but soon expanded his field of activity. He is a wildlife guide, writer, photographer, fitness instructor, pain therapist, backpacker, all rolled into one. Son of the respected journalist from Goa, Claude Alvares, Rahul has created his own place in the sun. He spoke to **A. Radhakrishnan** in a freewheeling interview.*

#### **How would you describe yourself?**

I have a mind that constantly wants to learn. I'm obsessive whenever I'm researching something. I'm quite self-centered and opinionated, but not afraid to admit I'm often wrong about things.

Actually starting off as a herpetologist, these days I'm into learning all about wildlife, including birds and insects. I like photographing reptiles, amphibians, birds and insects, and also photographing landscapes when travelling too. As a snake rescuer for twelve years, I'd get calls from all over Goa to remove snakes from people's houses, and at last count it was over a thousand snakes!

#### **What do you like or dislike about your job?**

Most of all, I love the freedom to be who I want to be, and do what I want to do. I never give much importance to dislikes. If I don't like something I either change it or just put up with it! I am more than compensated in this job. The common misconception people have about this job is that it is extremely dangerous. It's a challenging job. I got loads of free time. A typical work week these days is a birding trip every few days! I intend reading and travelling a lot. I have loads of free time

to watch movies, study subjects of interest on the internet, and these days I'm most excited about learning to ride my motorcycle. I want to become a good rider and own some fast motorbikes!

I also spend a fair amount of time photographing wildlife which is very exciting for me. I want to publish books as often as I can and travel the world.

#### **What are the precautions you normally take?**

I always handle venomous snakes in the day and in an area where I have sufficient space to manoeuvre them. I always wear all the gear needed to handle them.

#### **Is any education or skills needed for this profession?**

Well, I learnt snake handling from an Irula tribal in Mammalapuram. Can't think of anything else!

#### **Would you advise others to take up this as a career?**

I am not sure of the status of herpetology in India. But this isn't a career you take to, if you're going to constantly be thinking about money. My parents were the ones who pushed me to follow my dreams in the first place! Honestly though, I'm not

encouraging or discouraging anyone else from taking up this career. I know this kind of a life works for me, but I doubt it will work for most other people.

### Have you travelled extensively in your job?

I have travelled to a few places including Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Europe, and some parts of Southeast Asia. I've been to quite a few wild places in India too pursuing my interest in travel and photography.

### Tell us about your books.

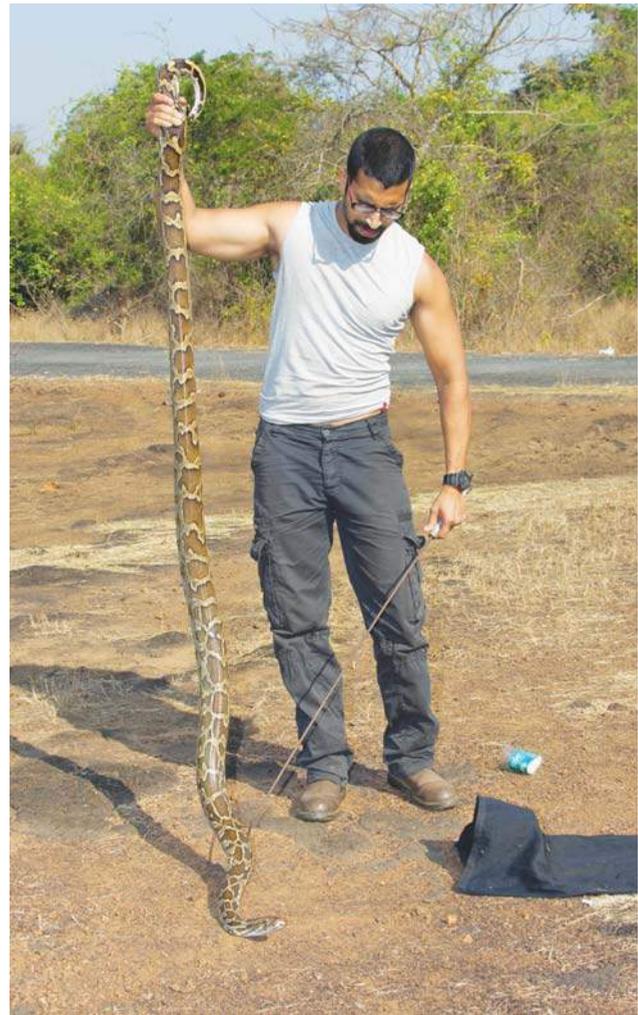
I have written three books and plenty of articles for local and national newspapers and wildlife magazines including *Sanctuary* magazine! I'm working now on bringing out a coffee table book on the reptiles and amphibians of Goa.

I like getting books published. I have three so far. The first one called *Free From School* is about my experiences travelling around India when I was fifteen. It was then that I learnt snake handling. The second called *The Call of the Snake* is about my most interesting and amusing experiences as a snake rescuer in Goa. The third one is called *Birds of Goa* where I only contributed the photographs for the book written by a German colleague Heinz Leiner. I'm hoping to get the fourth one out soon.

*Birds of Goa* is a glossy book where the photos are mine and written by Heinz Leiner, who has had 35 years of bird watching experience in 2013. The beautiful volume is published by the Forest Department, Government of Goa in association with the Goa Foundation.

It is a great combination of science and art, with authoritative information on the habitat, population, distribution, migration, breeding status and any other locally relevant data of all the 440 plus bird species. It has hundreds of pictures of birds, exquisite, extraordinary, always in action. Never thought so many "feathered friends" have holed up in such a small corner of the planet. In fact, most people will depart this earth without even having seen these beauties. The simple one-syllable word 'snake' readily conjures up waves of terror in the hearts of most people. The book *The Call of the Snake* will help you change your mind – and successfully treat your inherited fears – about these creatures. It contains consummate little stories about snakes I have come across on my snake-catching rounds.

I have related it with a fine sense of humour and with great attention to detail, while also keeping you wholly enthralled and entertained. After you have read and enjoyed them, you will see snakes differently forever; as friends and not as mortal enemies. In addition, critically useful information about snakes and how you can survive a venomous snake bite is also included. It's not every day that a 16-year-old writes a



Rahul Alvares with a python

book. In fact, girls and boys of that age spend time studying what other people write and have nothing interesting to say. And the education system guarantees just that – rewarding those who can parrot answers. Those who try to use their imagination or reply differently are often punished with low grades.

I did not set out to write a book, but under the encouragement of my parents, I consciously set out to try my hand at learning things outside the school framework, and as a result, *Free From School* emerged.

After SSC, unlike my other classmates, I opted out of schooling to follow my instincts. It was the best thing I could do back then. I was fond of reptiles, and chased them at the Pune Snake Park, and at the Crocodile Bank at Mamallapuram. In the process, I also picked up trails of spiders, earthworms and turtles. I caught snakes in the company of Irula tribals, and got bitten by hot-tempered reptiles, but came out of it all grinning and wiser.

This book is my story of a year out of school, when the

learning graph of my young life went up leaps and bounds. I wrote it to encourage other boys and girls of my age to move out of the sterile school and college environment offered by India's antiquated educational system, if they wish to experience another side to life and learning. I lost nothing but gained a lot, and so did my parents.

**Should the government give any kind of encouragement to your profession?**

Of course! It would be swell if the government encouraged wildlife conservation as much as they encourage growth in other sectors of our country. Today, progress often comes at the cost of destroying forests and biodiversity. It doesn't have to be that way.

**What have you learnt from the snakes, the birds, and insects which human beings could very well emulate? Are we doing much for them?**

Live in the moment! No, we aren't doing much at all. Look around...forests are being flattened to make space for buildings and roads. With the forests gone, the animals are gone too. What's needed is to protect all existing forests. Animals can look after themselves so long as their home is intact.

**What is this bird trip all about?**

I take small groups of enthusiasts on birding trips apart from showing my snake-wrangling skills. Happy punters get to see golden orioles, scarlet minivets, sunbirds, rufous woodpeckers, kingfishers, and an orange headed thrush... and that on a bad day too.

**What do you offer in your photography workshop?**

I conduct a one to three-day photography workshop, all year round. It's a crash course in wildlife photography, and guarantees you will with my training methods, learn more about photography in three days than you will learn in two years on your own.

The workshop covers everything you need to know about your camera (ISO, exposure compensation, white balance, focussing systems, etc.) and everything you need to know about editing your images on your computer (light room and photoshop software). Besides, we visit the best spots to photograph our subjects!



**Rahul Alvares is an avid photographer**

**What about your snake trips?**

They are most unusual and particularly recommended for those who've harboured an irrational fear of snakes all their lives. Within three hours you go from herpetophobia to philia.

**Can your trips be customised?**

One can even have their own customised trips. I conduct such overnight trips to Dandeli, Mollem National Park, Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary and other day trips to Carambolim Lake, Neura Wetlands, Morjim Beach, Aguada Lighthouse, Arpora Woods, Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary and other birding areas.

**In conclusion, has the reputation of your famous father ever intimidated you?**

No. I admire him for his work and the person he is. He is the kind of writer that I could only dream of being. And his work as a social activist is something I have immense respect for. But I'm happy with the things I do, and have my own life which is very different from his. ■

**Rahul Alvares** can be contacted at: Mob: +91-9881-961071 Res: +91-0832-2268617 and rahulalvares@gmail.com



**A. Radhakrishnan, a Pune-based freelance journalist, with close to four decades of experience in mainstream print journalism, is aiming for the digital platform. Making friends interests him and for company, he loves music and books. He also writes short stories and indulges in poetry.**

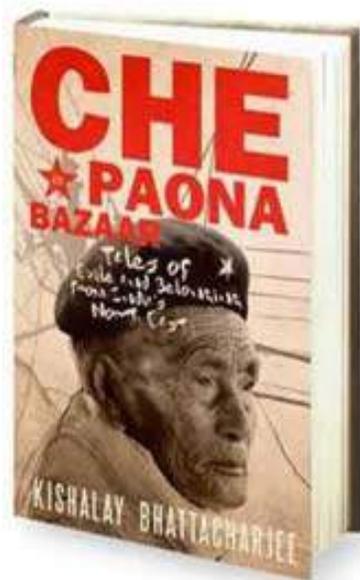
# A glimpse into the Northeast world

Contemporary literature coming out of India's Northeast is vibrant and reflects the concerns and issues faced by the people of this aching beautiful, but strife-ridden region, says **Prof. Subhajt Bhadra**. He introduces us to some of the writers who are making waves.

**T**HE contemporary literature of the Northeast is vibrant and multidimensional. The major changes which have taken place in the context of Northeast literature are responses to growing unemployment, insurgency, disappearance of traditional ethos, youth losing sense of direction, political unrest, and a sense of intolerance regarding communal politics. All these themes are reflected in the contemporary literature of the Northeast. As a result of which, it has taken a new direction.

## Assamese literature and the world it reflects

The poetic responses to these tumultuous developments have been varied in the context of Assamese poetry. Readers also discern in some poems a yearning to live a life not tormented by conflicting questions of ideology. Sometimes, there is an expression of discomfort at the fast pace of change



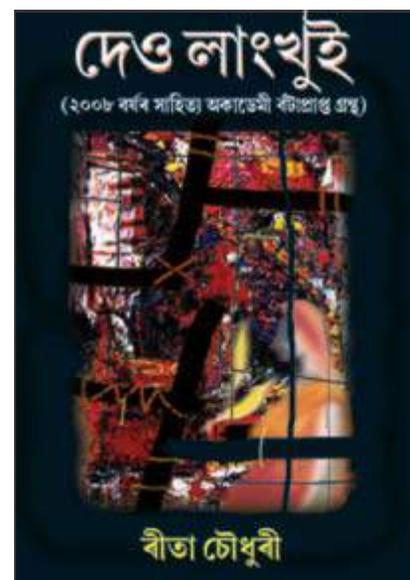
Dhrubajyoti Borah's *The Sleepwalker's dream*.

all around. The intrusion made by the latest advances in information technology has hugely influenced the individual life and interpersonal relations. In many poems, readers find a desire to loll in the peace of an unhurried life that is fast replaced by instruments of modernity, in a region that remains as a peripheral participant in the market economy of an

increasingly globalised world.

While the society in the Brahmaputra valley has been changing over the decades, Assamese poetry too has witnessed many changes in every sphere – imagery, technique, diction. But it may be remembered that while translating the poems into English, the original resonance may be lost. Some of the major Assamese poets of the contemporary period are Harekrishna Deka, Sameer Tanti, Nilim Kumar, Aunbhav Tulsi and Manoj Barpujari.

In the field of short fiction, writers like Shibananda Kakoty, Bonti Shenchua, Manoj Goswami, Getali Bora and Mausumi Kandali have made their mark. Their stories are varied and rich in texture and structure, and innovative in terms of aesthetic appeal. They have carved a track which newer writers can walk on without much difficulty. Mausumi Kandali's story *Lambada Nacher Khekhhot* (*After the Lambada dance*), Bonti Shenchua's story *Jol Vori Jashoda*, Geetali Bora's *Appolo Appolo*, Manoj Goswami's *Shamiran Baruah is Ahi ase* (*Shamiran Baruah is arriving*) are novels that attempt to form an indigenous signature style. Smriti Kumar Sinha's collection of stories *Seducing the Rain God* has broken new ground. Sinha writes in an endangered language which faces threat of elimination and annihilation, but when his stories



Rita Choudhury's *Deo Lang Khui*

were made available through English translation, it created a ripple. Sinha is just one example of someone who champions the cause of endangered languages in the context of literature of the Northeast.

In the field of novels, the Bengali writer Bikash Sarkar has written a novel titled *Astro (Weapon)* which highlights the troubled relations between the Bengalis and the Assamese people in the context of the Northeast. In recent times, there has been a spurt of historical and mythological novels in Assamese literature which highlight painstaking research, meticulous treatment of these, and innovative and often poetic language. Rita Choudhury's *Deo Lang Khui* and *Makam*, Anuradha Sharma Pujari's *Mereng*, Chandana Goswami's *Patkair ipare mur dekh*, Dilip Bora's *Hodhoyapurar hunor Mekuri* and Pradhana Saikia's *Jatadhari*, are major examples. On the other hand, writers like Debabrata Das, Arun Goswami and Madan Sarma have written innovative novels whether in the field of short story or novel.

The Northeast is being regarded as the "Other" (In the sense of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said) of mainstream India, and most of the regional language literature is losing ground because of the cultural invasion of English. While on the one hand these are writers who write in English and two recent novels deserve attention. One is Dhruba Hazarika's *Sons of Brahma*, and Dhrubajyoti Borah's *The Sleepwalker's dream*.

These two novels deal with the problem of insurgency in the Northeast, while Kishlay Bhattachary's *Che in Paon Bazaar* demystifies the stereotypical representation of the Northeast.

### Conclusion

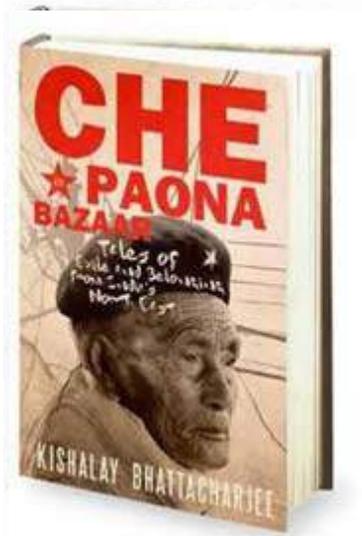
In conclusion we can say that literature of the Northeast in the contemporary period is doing well, but we have to be careful of the 'invasion' by the English language. However, Northeast literature will break new ground and continue to exist in spite of the ongoing onslaught of English. The literature of the Northeast also includes in its rubric Bodo, Manipuri and other such so-called minor languages' literature. One can find in these literatures a tendency to indulge in nostalgia, a growing sense of unease and an anguished response to the bleak socio-political scenario. Pankaj Gobida Medhi's Assamese novel *Srehara* talks about the ongoing infiltration of Bangladeshi citizens into Assam through the border areas. Juri Bora Borgohain's *Bhuk* (Hunger) talks about the trade of girl-trafficking in the Northeast. On the other hand, the English poet Anindita Das talks about a tendency to withdraw into the self.

Most of this region's literature points towards the newer challenge brought about by the growing political unrest and

intensification of the crisis of moral values. Jitumoni Bora's Assamese novel *Shesh Prishta (The last Page)* talks about the growing moral degeneration and plight of the old people who are relegated to the backdoor. The literature of the Northeast also echoes the concept of yellow journalism which has also been shown by Jitumoni Bora's novel *Siahir Rong (The color of Ink)*. Previously, Northeastern literature was highlighted

by insurgency, but in the contemporary scenario, the literature of Northeast assumes a varied and colorful hue. Some of the writers are dedicated socio-political activists, and their works bring a fresh social perspective.

The literature of the Northeast is mostly published in newspapers, journals and magazines, which have given them a strong platform. In the field of drama and other performative arts, the tone and tenor has changed. In contemporary literature of the Northeast there is a strong folk element. The combination of younger and older generation of writers has witnessed the birth of the balanced form of literature in the Northeast. The burning issues are poverty, unemployment, and a resurgence of strong regional sensibilities. However, sometimes, we witness the response of the writers of the Northeast towards its specific demography and topography. Modernity is still an unfinished project as Hebarma said, and the literature of the Northeast is trying to the modern in the truest sense of the term. The response of the writers of the Northeast writing in regional languages should be seen in the context of globalisation. ■



**Kishalay Bhattachary's *Che in Paon Bazaar* gives a real picture of the Northeast**



Subhajt Bhadra is an Asst. Professor in the PG Department of English, Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon, Assam. He is a gold medalist from the Tezpur Central University. Till date, he has published various national and international seminar papers, books and anthologies. He specialises in American Literature, Indian Writing in English, and Post Colonial Literature in English. He has also widely published in Sahitya Akademi's bi-monthly journal *Indian Literature*.

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# Taking the bull by the horn

*The Marina Beach protests in Chennai recently, against the banning of the bull-taming sport called Jallikkattu, was an unprecedented event. The Chennai youth converged on the beach for days, in calm and peaceful protests. But inexplicably, the protests turned violent, says **Meera Krishnankutty**, who had a ringside view.*

**T**HE month of January witnessed, a historical upsurge at Chennai's Marina beach, to protest against an earlier ban by the Supreme Court (SC) of India on the sport of Jallikkattu. Jallikkattu is a bull-taming sport played in some parts of Tamil Nadu.

The apex court had banned Jallikkattu on grounds of animal cruelty in 2014 – drawing protests from political parties across the state. In November last year, the SC dismissed the state government's plea for a review of its judgment. Strong supporters of Jallikkattu, along with major political parties in Tamil Nadu demanded an ordinance for conducting Jallikkattu despite the Supreme Court ban. Protests also erupted around the state including at Madurai, Salem, Erode, Coimbatore, Nagercoil, Thiruchrapalli, and Puducherry. But Marina was chosen to be the main arena of protest, closer to the powers-that-be, with easier access to the media.

The first stage of the mass protests occurred on 8 January 2017, at Marina. Soon after, the villagers of Alanganallur followed suit. They practised the sport in defiance of the ban, at their own village. During the second week of January 2017, the public protest intensified.

## My ringside view

It was one of those days, on a bright, clear evening that, my friend and I got stranded, at the middle of the action packed beach road, in front of the light house, close to Marina. The beach seemed to overflow with the supporters of Jallikkattu. They had spilt over into



**The sport of Jallikkattu is popular in some parts of Tamil Nadu and is considered a part of popular culture**

the main road, blocking the entire traffic and the side roads. We had plunged in, underestimating the enormity of the mass reaction. There were processions that passed by, with beautifully decorated bulls leading, confused about their exact roles, followed by large groups of happy dancers, showing off their jubilant moods.

While trying to inch forward through the procession, our car was stopped at several points. But, only to be gently advised by the volunteers, to change the route or wait, to our greatest surprise and relief, contrary to our anticipation of abuses. The protestors looked unbelievably calm and composed, while helping us to park the vehicle at a safe place, and suggesting not proceeding till the crowd thinned. But the crowd, mainly of students, swelled up, gathering more strength.

As the evening sky darkened, the uncertainty of our quick return loomed large. But, we were pleasantly taken aback, as some volunteers came forward to offer us tea and snacks. To ease our remaining anxiety over the wait, we started conversations with the spectators gathered around.

“Yes, this sudden getting together for a cause like Jallikkattu is an unusual phenomenon. Basically, what many share could be the frustration and unhappiness over the indifference shown to the common people, by the rulers and, politicians...”, commented a teacher, who taught history and Tamil in school. “May that explains, why none of the political leaders are allowed to take lead!” another responded. Both seemed least affected by the long wait to move on. The same was the case with the rest

of the people, who waited for the road to clear.

Meanwhile, we could see the lavish distribution of food packets and water amongst the crowd. "People are staying over. Why go back when good food and company are available?" one of the spectators commented. Yet, how could the ban that happened in 2014, on Jallikattu, be the cause and excuse for such a mammoth movement, after three years? we wondered.

### What is Jallikattu?

"I am sure many of the protesters may not even know about Jallikattu or had ever seen it. I am from Alanganallur. Only we know, how passionate the people from the rural belts of Tamil Nadu are, about the rearing of the bulls and preparing them for the sport. For us, Jallikattu is a part of our life. The so called, pro-Jallikattu group and the animal activists, both want to use this movement to their advantage and publicity. They are eyeing the elections and votes only", a native of Alanganallur and also one of the many taxi drivers, waiting for the road to clear, opened up.

The teacher of Tamil culture and history readily sprang up to explain. He took a small booklet from his pocket. "The book speaks of our agrarian culture and Jallikattu."

"Jallikattu is a traditional sport which is entrenched in the Tamil culture. It is said to be in practice for more than 2,500 years old", he began. "It is popularly held across several rural areas of Tamil Nadu such as Madurai, Coimbatore, Tirunelveli, Erode, Trichy, Vellore, Salem etc." Alanganallur of Madurai is particularly famous for this bull taming sport, associated with Thai Pongal, the traditional harvest festival of Tamil Nadu. The game begins with a specially bred bull being released into the arena through the vadi vasal, or an entry gate into a crowd. The contestants individually attempt to grab and hold on to the bull's hump, within a



**The Chennai Marina Beach protests were unprecedented in scale, and was very peaceful, initially**

specific time and distance. The ultimate aim is to conquer the animal, and own the sully or the prize money or gold tied to the bull's horns. The contestant is supposed to only hold the bull by its hump. Jallikattu bulls belong to a few specific breeds of cattle that are descended from the *kangayam* breed of cattle.

"We should understand that Jallikattu is promoted, also to preserve the healthy native livestock. Indigenous cattle bulls are critically endangered in Tamil Nadu. Banning Jallikattu will have the adverse effect of wiping out the species completely."

### The other version

But, animal lovers have other versions to be told. They contend that animals are prodded with sharp sticks and forced to drink alcohol to be disoriented, and their eyes rubbed with chilli and pepper, to get them aggravated. During the attempts to tame the animal, the bulls are stabbed with knives and sticks, and their tails bent. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) India had valid reasons to raise concerns that the sport was causing injuries to the animal and was inhuman, and has caused various injuries to the participants, and sometimes even claimed lives of the people.

As opinions rolled on, the police

appeared armed with many volunteers. They came cheering and smiling, as if from the middle of a celebration. With utmost discipline they navigated the stranded vehicles to safety. No rally, no protest, would have showcased this kind of perfect calm. And that was the unique feature of the initial stages of the Jallikattu protests.

But ironically, a few days later, on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, when the protesters refused to vacate, police had to resort to forceful evictions. Most unfortunately, what began on a peaceful, happy note, ended in bloodshed and unexpected violence, in spite of the appeals and requests of many eminent personalities from various walks of life.

The Jallikattu protests began as a celebration of an idea initially, though it was adulterated later by multiple interests and agendas. But the fact remains that the recent turnout of the masses, regardless of the caste, creed, sex, status or religion, for this specific cause of promoting Jallikattu, has proved to be unparalleled in the history



of any revolt that was staged in the state. ■

**Meera Krishnankutty is a Chennai-based freelance writer.**

# Toxins on your shelf!

*There are a plethora of cosmetic products available in the Indian market today. But do you know what they actually contain? Many of these products have toxic chemicals, which are even carcinogenic, says Usha Hariprasad. A primer on what to look out for in our daily beauty and hygiene products.*

I happened to glance at the label of my toothpaste and I was surprised to find that I did not recognise most of the components listed in it. Except for sodium chloride, the table salt, everything else sounded foreign to me. To name a few - sodium lauryl sulphate, parabens, sodium monofluorophosphate etc. So what were these? And were they really beneficial? A quick search on the net revealed that the presence of these chemicals were not only toxic to us, but they were also harmful to the environment. Here are a few of them.

**Triethanolamine (TEA):** This substance is a by-product of two toxic chemicals, ethylene oxide and ammonia. TEA is used in personal hygiene products like shave foams, lotions, makeups to increase the product's shelf life. TEA also helps the lotion spread and assists oil and water soluble components in the product to gel well.

Though skin and eye irritations are side effects of TEA, when coupled with sodium lauryl sulfate it can turn carcinogenic. The FDA (Food and Drugs Administration) mentions that it cannot be coupled with N-nitrosating agents as it produces nitrates and nitrosamines. The concentration of TEA should never exceed more than 5% if the product is meant to be used for a prolonged period of time. Diethanolamine (DEA) and monoethanolamine (MEA) are other components to watch out for.

**Methylparaben:** This again is used in a number of cosmetics like sun screens. Methylparaben is added to increase shelf life of the product. An article titled 'What are the dangers



**Triethanolamine or TEA is a by-product of two toxic chemicals and are found in shave foams, lotions, etc**

of Methylparaben' in the Livestrong website mentions some of the effects – breast cancer, skin damage, a decrease in sperm count etc. So beware of parabens and try to choose paraben free products whenever possible.

**Triclosan:** Antibacterial soaps, pastes contain this component as Triclosan acts as an antibacterial agent. But this ingredient has been banned by the FDA as unsafe, but is still being used in many cosmetics. Triclosan disrupts the hormonal balance in the body. It also increases antibiotic resistance as it kills both good and bad bacteria. It can effect soil bacterial community and in turn plant growth. It does not get completely removed in water treatment and can reach freshwater streams and

oceans disrupting the food chain.

**Sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS):** This is found commonly in paste, soaps, hair products etc. Sodium lauryl sulfate is used to create lather. It strips away oil from the skin, removes moisture and can irritate the skin easily. It is also a main component in most hair products like shampoos. Continuous usage of it can lead to hair breakage, scalp irritations and eye problems as well. Another component to watch out for along with sodium lauryl sulfate is sodium laureth sulfate (SLES).

**Propylene glycol:** This is a synthetic alcohol used in a variety of products from food, beauty products to drugs. It is used in perfumes for fragrance and in moisturisers for supple skin. The side effects of propylene glycol is, it can lead to skin issues such as hives and dermatitis. People with eczema are advised to use this product with caution. Prolonged use can also bring in respiratory disorders.

**Sodium saccharin:** This is an artificial sweetener to enhance sweetness. So you can find this ingredient frequently in food products and in toothpaste. But the presence of this can increase the risk of diabetes and cancer. An article on sodium saccharin at Livestrong website also mentions that it can stimulate insulin, leading to insulin sensitivity and can promote weight gain.

**Talc:** Face powders can be toxic too. Talc that is hydrated magnesium silicate is no less problematic. It is added in powders, even baby powders, as it useful in keeping skin dry and free of rashes. Talc, however has been linked to

(Continued on page 51)

# The trees, the bees and Kusum tai

*Just when we start despairing about the state of our planet, we come across individuals like Kusum tai, who are working tirelessly to make fellow citizens value and protect India's indigenous plants and trees. Surekha Kadapa-Bose met this activist for our beleaguered planet, and came away completely inspired.*

"The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness!"

– John Muir, naturalist and environmental philosopher, who was an advocate of preservation of wilderness in America way back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**T**HE 60-plus Kusum Dahivalkar lives up to Muir's philosophy each and every day. In fact, her life has been all about the forest, the flora and fauna. A retired plantation officer in the Social Forestry Department in Nashik, Maharashtra, she has made it her mission to inspire people to save and plant trees, and live as close to nature as possible. Her love for the green comes through as one sees her interacting with her two-year-old granddaughter, Yashshree, who is playing with shrubs in her home nursery.

As the toddler inadvertently tugs at the leaves of a creeper, Dahivalkar says, "Tell her (leaf), 'Bala (child) don't cry, I didn't pull you. I just caressed you. I love you a lot.'" Of course, the little one, who hasn't even started speaking coherently yet, emulates her granny's voice and kisses the leaf! As she indulgently looks on at the child moving around the green patch trying to get a feel of the plants and the soil, Dahivalkar ponders, "Yashshree is lucky she has plants to see, touch and feel. I wonder what will happen to her grandchildren. Will they get to see verdant flora and fauna only in pictures?"

For several years now, Dahivalkar has been visiting inaccessible forest areas, meeting up with teachers



**Kusum Dahivalkar and her nephew Chirantan, with whom she runs the nursery and a workshop programme wherein she takes participants through the process of cultivating herbs and plants. (Photo: Surekha Kadapa-Bose/WFS)**

from agricultural colleges and plant scientists, and interacting with tribals who live as one with nature. Sitting at her beautiful home in Nashik's Pathardi neighbourhood, she laughingly admits that during her stint with the Social Forestry Department she took full advantage of the indifference of her colleagues and attended every workshop, lecture series and conference she possibly could across the country to acquire knowledge about plants and their healing properties. "Everyone thought I was insane to dedicate all my time to researching about plants," she remarks. But that was her true passion and she had no qualms in pursuing it single-mindedly.

## Rooted in the plant world

She developed an abiding interest in

the plant world in childhood; she hails from a family of ayurveda *pundits* from Nizar village on the border of Gujarat and Maharashtra, and began learning about plants, roots and flowers from her grandfather and father at an age when girls are generally more interested in playing with dolls. Taking up a career closely connected with this line was only natural.

So committed is Kusum tai, as she is fondly called, to building awareness around conservation of plants, that following her superannuation she pooled in funds from gratuity, Provident Fund and other savings to invest in half-an-acre of land on the outskirts of Nashik. Today, she runs the Hirvepunya Institute on the property, which has her two-floor apartment and a cozy conference room with a seating capacity of about 50 plus



**Kusum Dahivalkar, a retired plantation officer of the Social Forestry Department in Nashik, has made it her mission to inspire people to save and plant trees, and live as close to nature as possible. (Photo: Surekha Kadapa-Bose/WFS)**

people where Kusum *tai* conducts her workshops. In the open space around the house she has created an extensive nursery which has over 2,000 varieties of saplings of medicinal plants and herbs collected from different parts of the country.

“My colleagues, friends and relatives tried to dissuade me from buying land to set up a nursery. However, this had been my dream and I had always wanted to impart my knowledge to as many people as I could so that somehow we all could all do our bit to save the planet,” shares Kusum *tai*. Incidentally, she has been a single parent to her nephew, Chirantan Parekh, who lost his parents when he was a toddler. She runs the Institute along with him now.

In the beginning, Chirantan, an Electronics and Telecommunication engineer, too, was skeptical about Kusum *tai*'s decision; however, when he saw the kind of love and respect she commanded in her professional group and the kind of response she received from those who attended her

workshops, he came on board. In fact, since then he has become a full-time advocate of cultivating plants and foods the organic way.

Indeed, Kusum *tai*'s workshops are quite popular with people signing up well in advance to secure their place. “It’s her passion which is very contagious. If you spend a day with her, you will automatically start looking at trees with a different perspective and instinctively start caring for them,” remarks Milind Babar, a Nashik-based lawyer, who has been a beneficiary of a workshop.

Dr. Ujwala Kapse, an ayurveda doctor practicing in the city, adds, “During the course of my education, I have learnt about the medicinal plants. But what makes Kusum *tai*'s three-day workshop unique is the fact that she painstakingly explains the inimitable healing qualities of over 100-plus plants available in her own nursery.”

Her workshops also include a do-it-yourself guide on identifying and propagating plants. “We learn to grow plants in pots either through seeds or cuttings. Currently, I grow my own *adulsa* (*Justicia adhatoda*) to treat cold and cough; *Costus igneus* or the insulin plant, to treat diabetes; *Peltophorum* that helps keep BP in control; Aloe vera and, of course, varieties of *tulsi*, and so on, in my own verandah. This has reduced our dependency on over-the-counter allopathic medicines, and increased our sensitivity to plant life. A win-win really!” elaborates Rekha Choksi, a homemaker, who like Dr. Kapse and Babar has her own farm where they all put into practice the knowledge they have gained from Kusum-*tai*'s workshops.

Talking about their work, Chirantan, who has gained enough knowledge about the plants to ably assist his *aayee* (mother) says, “A full-time course is for three days. For those who can’t sit through the entire duration we conduct classes for an hour or two for 15 days.

The cost per workshop is a modest ₹3,500.”

Like most environmentalists, Kusum *tai* is concerned with the indiscriminate felling of trees in the name of development and replacing them with exotic species like the *gulmohur*, *subabul* or eucalyptus, which are “hardly beneficial to the ecosystem although they grow fast”.

“The indigenous plants last for decades; at times, even centuries. Their seeds need a minimum of six to 18 months to germinate and then take years to stand tall and mature, in the process building an ecosystem suitable for birds, animals and insects,” she points out.

Kusum *tai* bemoans the quick-fix culture prevalent in the forest department officials these days. “Unfortunately, every forest officer knows about this, but they have to bow down to the pressure of the authorities who demand the fast growing plants which end up doing more damage than good,” she says, visibly agitated.

When she takes up landscaping gigs or starts working on creating a garden for corporate office or for any locality, she makes sure that she has a mix of sustainable plants and decorative flowering plants or she makes different sections like a herbal garden, kitchen garden, rose garden, orchid garden, spice garden, etc., so that visitors get to see all kinds of plants in a single allotment. And she fervently hopes that authorities and the ‘*aam janta*’ (ordinary people) “wake up to the danger our planet is facing from our deep neglect of our indigenous flora and fauna”.

She signs off rather poignantly, with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi: “What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another!” ■

– Women’s Feature Services

# More than able

*Adversities can bring out the best or the worst in us. The war wounded and disabled, who participate in the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon every year, have turned their disability into their strength. An admiring **Rashmi Oberoi**, who ran the marathon with them, salutes their spirit.*

**J**UST back after participating in the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon (SCMM) 2017, my batteries are charged and that feeling of exhilaration will keep the spirits high for days to come, even in this dull and dreary weather of Delhi.

Though I have been to Mumbai innumerable times and spent a part of my college life there, it was my first experience as a marathoner. I was simply blown away by the spirit of Mumbai and more so by the Mumbaikers. This city never sleeps, and is certainly the land of dreams. The people and their attitude make the city different.

### Among the top ten marathons of the world

The Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon is a yearly event and among the top ten marathons in the world. It is also one of the most popular because of having a cultural mix of the kind the city has, and their spirited outlook of life. The sheer ability to 'never say die' in the worst of circumstances and to wholeheartedly open your door, window, wallet and heart in situations where you have no idea whom you're helping, makes Mumbai different.

SCMM has six different race categories: Marathon (42.194 km), Half Marathon (21.097 km), Dream Run (6 km), Senior Citizens (4.3 km), Champions with Disability category (2.4 km) and DHL Corporate Champions (42.195 km, 4-person relay). As the event's official philanthropy partner, United Way Mumbai manages the



The WWF team shows extraordinary dedication every year

fundraising platform for the event.

The marathon is an event where people from all walks of life participate including Bollywood celebrities, sports personalities, business tycoons and amateur athletes. People fly in from all over and it is only due to the spirit of Mumbaikers that it turns out to be an amazing event year after year. One has to witness and see and feel the encouragement and support by the locals on this day. Hats off to the helping hands from the city.

I was there to support the War Wounded Foundation (WWF) team and take part with them in the Dream Run. The Foundation has been set up for the long-term rehabilitation of war-disabled personnel of the defence forces. In my mind, they are all indefatigable and invincible. with the true spirit of die-hard *Faujies*. For the last seven years,

they have been participating in the Marathon, and slowly but surely the Mumbaikers have started recognising them. These are men who have lost their limbs and organs, fighting the enemies of the nation, in different wars that have been imposed by nations inimical to us. There are others who have become disabled in other war like operations, like counter insurgency operations in different parts of the country. These are the men, belonging to the Indian Military, who may have lost a leg or an arm or an eye or more than one limb or organ, but whose spirits continue to soar. They run in the marathon so that the people of our country see for themselves that it takes more than the loss of a limb for the officers and soldiers of the Indian Army and the other two services to lose their spirit!

Although the WWF President



**The marathon is also a colourful and energising event**

(Lt. Gen Vijay Oberoi) and the Vice President (Maj. Gen. Ian Cardozo) of the Foundation are senior citizens, they also participate in the longer 'Dream Run' category, so that the whole group of war disabled personnel participate as one team. For those that don't know: both Generals Oberoi and Cardozo lost a leg each in the war, both rose to be 'Generals' in the Army...always leading their men from the front.

General Oberoi says it is important that the war wounded personnel become productive citizens by participating in the economic development of the country, and in turn being able to supplement their pension, including disability pension that is often embroiled in legal battles due to the lackadaisical attitude of the government. In his own words, "I wanted to provide long-term rehabilitation and financial independence to young lads, rather than hand out freebies."

Being war wounded soldiers themselves, there is no one better than Generals Oberoi and Cardozo to understand the woes of the soldier who is ready to lay down his life for his country without a blink of an eye. There are not many, who after retirement from the services, give back to their

organisation unselfishly, passionately, and unconditionally.

Lt. Gen. Vijay Oberoi was severely wounded during the war with Pakistan in 1965, when he was a captain with just four years' service. At that time, he was serving in J&K with his battalion, First Battalion of the Maratha Light Infantry, better known as Jangi Paltan, for its bravery on many a battlefield in India and abroad. On account of the severity of his wounds, his right leg had to be amputated at the military hospital in Delhi. Thereafter, he was transferred to military hospital, Pune for another operation and getting an artificial leg fitted after the wounds had completely healed. His 'never say die' attitude refused to bow down to any restraints, and he came out physically and mentally stronger. During his over 40 years of distinguished service, he has held highly prestigious and important appointments, including that of DGMO and GOC of a Strike Corps. He was the Army Commander of two commands – the Training Command as well as the Western Command. Earlier, he had held a diplomatic assignment at Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). He was also an International Fellow at the US Army

War College. A recipient of all three Distinguished Service awards, he is now engaged in intellectual pursuits and social work.

An officer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Gorkha Rifles (FF), Maj. Gen. Ian Cardozo was severely wounded due to mine blast injuries after being dropped behind enemy lines in the Sylhet Sector in India's first heliborne operation during the Indo-Pak War in 1971. Uncaring of his serious wounds, he cut off his injured foot with his *khukri*. After nearly a year in hospital he rehabilitated himself and convinced Army Headquarters that he could perform as well as anybody else. Later, he became the first officer with an artificial leg to command a battalion and later a Brigade. Recipient of many medals, he is now a social activist, author and military historian. His books, *Paramvir: Our Heroes in Battle*, *The Sinking of INS KHUKRI* and *Lt General Bilimoria: His Life & Times* have received both critical and popular acclaim. He was also Chairman of the Rehabilitation Council of India till 2014.

The team this year comprised of the two Generals, Colonels Gulshan and Sanjeev, Priscilla Cardozo and I being the two proud ladies supporting the team and the brave hearts that need mentioning:

**L/NK Ashok Kumar:** belongs to Tigrana village in Haryana. He sustained severe multiple bullet injuries in his left shoulder and left leg due to enemy shelling. He was medically boarded out of service with 75% disability when he was barely 26 years old.

**Sub Satbir Singh:** of 19 Rajput, belongs to Bhiwani Distt of Haryana. In 2003, while operating against ULFA militant in Manipur, he was grievously injured in an IED blast and exchange of fire with militants. Both his legs got severely injured with ACL tear both knees (nerves damaged) and damage to his right ear. He was boarded out with 100% disability.

**Hav Madan Lal:** of 18 Punjab, belongs to Hamirpur Distt of Himachal Pradesh. In 1993, he suffered severe injuries due to a grenade attack by militants while patrolling in Kupwara area of J & K. This resulted in damage to his liver. He was medically boarded out with 50 % disability.

**Hav Gurdeep Singh:** of 27 Punjab, belongs to Balachaur in Punjab. In 1991, he suffered multiple bullet injuries due to militant fire in a search operation against the militants, resulting in severe injuries to his left arm effecting ulnar nerve in Anantnag area of J & K. He was boarded out with 50% disability.

**Nk Parupkar Singh:** of 26 Punjab, belongs to Fatehgarh Sahib Distt of Punjab. He suffered severe bullet injuries in the right arm in an ambush by Tamil Tigers in Trincomalee area of Srilanka in 1991. He was boarded out with 50 % disability.

**Nk Anand Kumar:** of 19 Grenadiers, belongs to Bhiwani Distt of Haryana. He suffered severe injuries of his left leg and right eye due to enemy mortar fire while deployed in Pallanwala area of J & K in the year 2000. This resulted in amputation of his left leg below knee and permanent damage to his right eye. He was medically boarded out with 80% disability.

**Nk Mahender Singh:** of 19 Grenadiers, belongs to Jind Distt of Haryana. In the year 2000, while patrolling on the LOC in Pallanwala area of J & K, suffered severe injuries of left leg in a mine blast resulting in amputation of his left leg below knee. He was medically boarded out with 60% disability.

**Hav Jagdish:** Corps of Signals, belongs to Rohtak Distt of Haryana. He suffered severe injuries of right leg in a road accident on duty while posted in Babina, MP. He was medically boarded out with 80% disability.

It was heart-warming to see people cheering the War Wounded team,



**Team WWF at the run**

thanking them for serving the nation, saluting them and also stopping by to take photos with the team. A nation that doesn't forget its soldiers will go a long way!

Having learnt of this NGO, Sonali Mandlik Patil, an army officer's daughter, started a page on Facebook called, 'Fauji Kids for War Wounded Foundation India' in an attempt to start a fundraising effort along with other *Fauji* kids. She initiated this with a desire to gather all *Fauji* kids and others in a unified way to give back to all the gallant men and women who are part of the defence services.

The Mumbai Marathon is not just about running but it is about great triumph, amazing stories, defeating odds and many people, who put everything behind to just run. The spirit of Mumbai on the day of the Marathon was simply electrifying. Just under half a lakh people ran... Unbelievable! It is all about the runners, the bystanders, the cheering brigade, the various podiums, bands, performers and the police force in strength that deserve a pat on their backs for carrying out their duties with patience, fortitude and a smile. For the marathon, people left the confines of their home early in the morning, disregarding the fact

that it was a Sunday, just to support the ever enthusiastic and energetic participants.

The full marathon was flagged off from the iconic Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus in South Mumbai at 7.20 am by a host of dignitaries. The night before the marathon, I remember seeing all the preparations on in full swing as we headed back from a scrumptious dinner at Mahesh Lunch Home. Things are upbeat in the city even a few days prior to the marathon, as the tempo builds up. The reason is the interest the people of Mumbai take in this annual event and the way they rise to the occasion. ■

As an army officer's daughter, Rashmi Oberoi was lucky to travel and live all over India, as also a few years in Malaysia and U.S.A. Keenly interested in writing for children, she wrote two story books – *My Friends At Sonnenshine*, which was published in 1999 by Writer's Workshop, Kolkata, India, and *Cherie: The Cocker Spaniel*, which was published in 2009 by the same publishers. For a few years she moved into the corporate world of HR, but her love



for writing took precedence, and she pursued her passion by writing articles and middles for newspapers, print and online magazines, including a children's magazine abroad.

# Remembering Gita Sen

A tribute by **Shoma A. Chatterji** to the talented Gita Sen, who was a consummate actor, and also the wife of celebrated filmmaker Mrinal Sen.

**W**HO is Gita Sen? Rather, who was Gita Sen? Some Bengalis know her as the wife of the great filmmaker Mrinal Sen. Some know her also as an actress who featured in a few films directed by her husband. But beyond West Bengal, few people know who Gita Sen was, how she looked, what kind of a lady she was. Film festival buffs might have chanced upon the quiet, smiling and petite, sari-clad lady beside the charismatic personality of Mrinal Sen, and concluded that the lady in question might be his wife. But sadly, few beyond those who frequented the Sens or knew them closely, were acquainted with this gracious lady who perhaps wilfully quit acting, first on stage, then in films directed by men other than her husband, and finally, even in her husband's films.

Fans and admirers of Mrinal Sen will remember the slender woman in elderly roles in films like *Chaalchitra*, *Calcutta 71* (1972), *Chorus* (1974), *Ekdin Pratidin* (1979), *Aakaler Sandhaney* (1980) and *Khandahar* (1983). She also acted in Ritwik Ghatak's *Nagarik* when she was not yet married to Mrinal Sen and later, in plays produced and directed by Utpal Dutt under his banner Little Theatre Group. She did an outstanding cameo in Shyam Benegal's *Aarohan* in which she plays the widowed mother of a daughter and follows her to Calcutta where, worried to death about the fate of her young daughter, she collapses and breaks down.

Gita Sen's career as an actress preceded Mrinal Sen's entry into films. She stepped back to evolve into a solid support system for her husband, as he grew from fame to fame, and her son



**Gita Sen, a talented actor in her own right**

who went to the US for higher studies, and reached the top of his profession as chief technical development officer for *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and is settled in Chicago with his wife Nisha.

Says the Sens' only child Kunal, "My mother grew up in extreme poverty. Her father, a freedom fighter, fell ill while in jail, and the authorities did not want the inconvenience of a dead political prisoner on their hands and released

him towards the end. He was around 35 then, and died soon after. *Ma* was the eldest daughter and had to take responsibility of her mother and two younger siblings. She was just 15. That is when she started working, among other things, as an actress. She had to survive on favours from relatives and friends, and developed a keen sense of adjusting to everyone and everything. Even after she got married, my father had no income, and she once again had to keep everyone around her happy. I think this developed a deeper than usual sense of responsibility towards her family at the expense of her own wellbeing."

Gita Sen and Mrinal Sen were very close. She was always there beside him, be it the visit to Tiananmen Square in Beijing soon after the student revolution in China, or at Cannes, or Locarno or Venice or at the dozens of festivals within India. She talked a little, smiled a great deal and was simply dressed in a sari. Theirs was an inter-caste marriage, very unwelcome at that time. Besides, Mrinal Sen was jobless.

Did she regret having quit films? Kunal has no definite answer. "I don't think she had any regrets or felt particularly bad that she was not acting. She just assumed this to be her proper role. In the process, she made my father even more dependent on her. My father and I enjoyed the comfort of being looked after, and rather selfishly enjoyed the benefits without pausing to think whether things could have been different. It remains a mystery why my father did not think of casting her until *Calcutta 71*. For some reason he never thought of her as a film actress, but I

**Gita Sen and Mrinal Sen were very close. She was always there beside him, be it the visit to Tiananmen Square in Beijing soon after the student revolution in China, or at Cannes, or Locarno or Venice or at the dozens of festivals within India. She talked a little, smiled a great deal and was simply dressed in a sari. Theirs was an inter-caste marriage, very unwelcome at that time. Besides, Mrinal Sen was jobless.**



**Mrinal Sen and Gita Sen on the sets of *Akaaler Sandhane***

do not think it was a conscious thought. She got offers from almost all major film directors of that period, and she would either reject them, or agree, but back out at the last moment. I think we could

have seen more of her talents if she was a little more self-centred, but it is hard to say how that could have affected our family life.”

Her passing away on 16 January

2017 at the age of 87, after a cerebral attack was a major piece of news in every national and local paper, followed by a beautiful tribute paid to her by leading stars and directors who had worked with Mrinal Sen. This included a photographic exhibition of which she was the central figure. Why, then, was she not celebrated, acknowledged or recognised when she was alive except as the wife of one of the greatest filmmakers of India? ■

**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.**

## Toxins on your shelf!

(Continued from page 44)

cancers especially ovarian cancer when used in genital areas. In fact, Johnson and Johnson lost 55 million dollars in a talcum powder side effects law suit last year. So, that innocent looking baby powder is not so innocent after all.

**Petroleum jelly:** The lip balm that you use for your cracked lips may not be safe. The reason? They contain petroleum jelly. The jelly gives the feeling of skin becoming softer and hydrated, but in reality it blocks out air and moisture to your skin pores. Plus an article on *Huffington Post* on petroleum jelly mentions that it can lead to lipid pneumonia if it enters lungs. Frequent usage of such products can also lead to increase in acne and other breakouts on face. Remember, petroleum jelly is obtained during oil refining, and its safety is always questionable.

**Fragrance:** The fragrance term is most often found in cosmetics. Though added for smell, these could be any component. Often this category is never revealed and so you do not know what chemicals are added to the beauty product. The synthetic stuff can cause issues like skin allergies to respiratory problems. So, if you get a sudden headache or have itchy skin you know where to look.

There are plenty of unsafe ingredients not listed here. Some chief ones to look out for are alcohols, dyes, colourants, mineral oil, phthalates etc. It is always best to be aware of what side effects these chemicals can bring to your body in the long run. Where possible, substitute



**Petroleum jelly, in reality blocks out air and moisture to your skin pores**

these products for home made alternatives. Coconut oil, shea butter, honey can be effective beauty treatments. There are plenty of do-it-yourself videos on the net to help you create beauty products like face packs, moisturisers to soaps and tooth pastes. If there is a lack of time, then you can opt for natural, chemical

free products that are safe as well as eco-friendly. ■

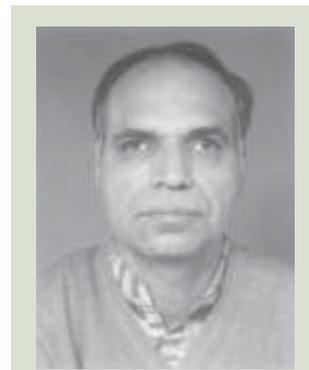
**Usha Hariprasad is a freelancer who is**



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

## *Sahi Disha!*

*For almost four decades, Disha, an NGO, has been working in North India to bring a measure of justice and reforms in the communities there.*



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

If we try to identify the most crucial steps for bringing peace and prosperity to our rural areas, then it's likely to be the promotion of social harmony based on justice and equality. This will in turn help to improve productivity and eliminate poverty.

This basic understanding has guided the vision and work of Disha, a leading voluntary organisation of North India in the last 35 years. Starting from an almost resourceless existence in a few villages around Sultanpur Chilkana in Saharanpur district, the impact of the work of this organisation and its affiliates now extend to several hundred thousand people in western Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

K.N. Tiwari has been the founder-co-ordinator of this organisation all through its eventful years. He was one of the brightest young politicians of Dehradun district when he took the life-changing decision of shifting from politics to social work. At a very young age he had already won two elections of Dehradun Cantt as ward member. Extremely popular, his decision to settle in a village in a different district as a social worker, was widely resisted by his supporters.

In view of this opposition and the numerous difficulties he faced at the new place, even Tiwari had several doubts about his big decision at that time, but now after 35 years of the efforts of Disha he says, "I do not have any regrets. The affectionate and long term relationships I could establish with so many people, particularly those from weaker sections, are perhaps the biggest reward of my work."

At a wider organisational level, Disha was involved in several successful struggles for the rights of women farm workers, dalit farmers and rope making artisans. Such efforts led to the formation of another front for workers, small farmers and women, which took up several issues of weaker sections at the village level. There were other prolonged but eventually

successful struggles led by women for resisting the spread of liquor vends and injustice to women representatives.

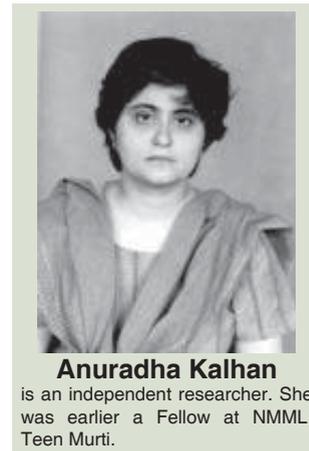
These struggles were combined with many-sided constructive work to improve livelihoods and economic security, most notably in the form of organisation of self-help groups of women and, at a later stage, micro-finance activities based on this experience. Other activities included efforts to improve eco-friendly farming methods in several villages. Disha hosted an international conference on the hazards of GM crops at a time when there was very little awareness on this issue in India.

Disha not only practiced equality based on gender, caste and religion in its own functioning, but in addition, its practices also had a much wider impact in several communities where it worked. Of course, initially, there was a lot of resistance from some people, but eventually more people were attracted to it and contributed to such efforts based on social equality and harmony. For more than three decades, Disha has tried to bring relief to victims of violence and other injustice. In the process, hundreds of women have been helped and infact, many of them say that they received help from Disha at a time when they had almost lost hope.

The early years were the most difficult. Tiwari remembers cycling long distances across muddy paths and living in a dilapidated house. Although some initial help and local contacts were provided by a Delhi based organisation CENDIT which had been making development films here, some local influential people were initially very hostile to the newcomers who were mobilising the poor. However, Tiwari persisted and stayed on. Today, sitting in the small but beautiful campus of Disha located in a mango orchard, Tiwari can afford a smile and say, "We certainly faced big hinderances, but if we had run away from difficulties, then we would not have achieved so much." ■

# Such a short journey

*We have certainly come a long way in including the poor in the banking and financial system in the last two years. But is this enough?*



THE transition from Jan Dhan of 15 August 2015, to Universal Basic Income in the Economic Survey of January 2017, has been a swift one. Jan Dhan, was about instantly including the unbanked poor into the financial system so that wages, specific subsidies could be transferred directly to them without any leakages.

Just a letter issued by a gazette officer, with an attested photograph of the person was enough to start a zero balance bank account, which entitled the account holder to be part of many other financial services like insurance, accident and pension cover (provided some criteria were met and premiums were paid from the account directly). By April 2016, about 22 crore accounts were started with deposits amounting to ₹ 36,700 crore, averaging out to a deposit of about ₹ 1,668 per account. However, over 60% of these accounts were zero balance, and an estimated 33% were second accounts. So, even inside this segment of Jan Dhan with unbanked poor, hoping for cash benefit transfers, there were the not so very poor with an average of ₹ 4000 to spare for deposits into Jan Dhan accounts. So far, LPG subsidy has made it into the bank accounts regularly. This was accompanied by a push to digital payments, payment banks and payments over mobile phones called JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhar, and Mobile). Mobile phones now have a high degree of penetration in India; by 2015, 82% of the population had a connection. Phones become a substitute for payment by cards or cash, overcoming the cost and paucity of bank branches, card reading machines and ATMs, especially in rural areas. This digital world was expanding at an unhurried pace. Barely literate and illiterate people (and older people of all classes) still prefer to count and hold cash rather than press numbers on smart phones. Not to mention the uncertain state of power and internet connectivity in the smaller towns.

Then came November 2016 and demonetisation. There was a surge of cash into some 48 lakh Jan Dhan accounts

to double the total amount deposited in Jan Dhan within a month. It is believed that the wealthy used the Jan Dhan accounts of their servants and employees to deposit unaccounted for cash. But for the majority, the accounts were rapidly depleted because livelihoods and incomes were hit for over three months. These account holders are mostly in temporary, contractual jobs, farm labourers or self-employed in petty trades, their families members too are often domestic workers or helpers in the same petty trade.

The Economic Survey has acknowledged that they were the primary collateral damage of the exercise to fight black money hoarding by the rich. They are the subjects of occasional newspaper reports on farmer distress, troops of migrant workers returning to their villages in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal due to closure of micro and small enterprises in Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Karnataka and Kerala. Subsequently, they will not need the remittance services of the banks or mobile phones for a while, and it's quite likely that their unsubstantial savings will not grow. It's also likely that they will be excluded from most financial transactions except debt for a while.

The Economic Survey informs us that India is ready for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) now. People below the poverty line will get ₹ 1,200 every month, to stay alive. This is a calculation based on the official estimate of poverty line. However, this largesse is possible only if other subsidies like PDS (Public Distribution system), fertiliser and poverty alleviation schemes are scrapped. Otherwise, India cannot afford UBI since ports, electricity, internet, bridges and road connectivity are also needed. However, the Finance Minister thinks that Indians are not mature enough to accept this otherwise first-rate idea. He is probably correct. The government of the day is quite convinced that as a sovereign state it cannot deliver basic public goods or welfare services to all citizens, but why should the people be similarly convinced? Food for thought indeed. ■



## SPOTLIGHT

# YOUNG

## Women in Space

**S**OVIET cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin created history in 1961 when he travelled to outer space aboard the Vostok I spacecraft. The space age had dawned. It was proved beyond doubt that humans could survive in outer space.

Close on the heels of the USSR, the USA had begun Project Mercury, a programme that aimed at realising American dreams of human space flight. In 1961, 25 women from all over the country were invited to participate in a private programme that assessed women's fitness for space flight. Thirteen women successfully completed extensive endurance tests. Unfortunately, the programme was unexpectedly cancelled, aborting their chances of becoming the first women in space. That honour went to Valentina Tereshkova of USSR.

Valentina hailed from a humble background and worked in a textile mill. She was inspired by Gagarin's feat and volunteered for the Soviet space programme in 1961. She had 126 jumps to her credit as an amateur parachutist. Over the next eighteen months, she studied hard and underwent gruelling physical and psychological tests before being chosen as the chief pilot of the Vostok 6.

On June 16, 1963, Valentina was launched into orbit. The flight was meant to last only a day, but it was extended to almost three days and she made 48 orbits of Earth. She



Valentina Tereshkova



Svetlana Savitskaya



Sally K. Ride

### India Calling

Kalpana Chawla blazed a trail of her own when she took her first space flight in 1997 as part of the six-astronaut crew of Space Shuttle Columbia. The first Indian-born woman to go into space, Kalpana had logged over 372 hours before she boarded the ill-fated Columbia, which disintegrated upon re-entry in 2003.



maintained flight logs, took photographs and conducted experiments designed to understand how gravitational forces affected a woman's body. Valentina returned to land a Russian hero and a beacon of hope for future women astronauts.

It would be 19 years before another woman set foot in space again. Svetlana Savitskaya, again a Russian, travelled to the Soviet space station Salyut 7 in 1982. During her second space mission in 1984, she became the first woman to perform a spacewalk.

The space age saw a marked rivalry between the USA and USSR. While the USSR sent its astronauts into space first, the Americans were the first to land on the moon. Nearly twenty years after Valentina made her trip, the US included astrophysicist Sally K. Ride as a crew member on Space Shuttle Challenger in 1983, making her the first American woman in space.

Since then, women have contributed immensely in space exploration, be it commanding space shuttles or the International Space Station (ISS). In 2010, a record of sorts was set when four women were in space at the same time during the space shuttle mission STS-131 – the most number of women in space at one time.

# INDIA



## STORY TRAP

## You Are Wrong, Mr. Holmes!

I had called on my friend Sherlock Holmes on the second morning after Christmas. He was lounging on the sofa in a purple dressing-gown, a pipe-rack within his reach, and a pile of crumpled morning papers at hand. Besides the couch was a wooden chair, and on the back hung a very dirty, worn, hard felt hat.

"You know Peterson, the commissioner?" he asked me.

"Yes."

"It is to him that this belongs."



"What can you gather from this old battered felt?"

He picked it up and gazed at it. "It is obvious that the man was very clever."

"You are certainly joking, Holmes," I said. "I must be very stupid, but I am quite unable to follow you. For example, how did you guess that the man was clever?"

In reply, Holmes put the hat on his head. It came right over the forehead and settled on the bridge of his nose.

"A man with so large a brain must have something in it," he said.

(Excerpt from Arthur Conan Doyle's THE BLUE CARBUNCLE)

**Answer:** Holmes is wrong to conclude that a large head indicates greater intelligence. A man's intelligence is not related to the size of his skull.

## CURIOSITY How and why do flowers develop their scent?

When a plant grows, it produces certain essential oils that decompose to form volatile oils. These oils are usually present in petals but they can also be found in fruits, leaves, barks and seeds. When the oil evaporates, the flower gives off smell. The type of fragrance depends on the chemical composition of the volatile oils.



No two flower species have the same scent although their colour and petal structure may look quite similar.

The purpose of the scent is to lure pollinators. Plant species pollinated by bees and flies have sweet scents while those pollinated by beetles have musty or fruity odours.

Large flowers like *Rafflesia arnoldii* and *Titan arum* smell like decomposing corpses and the smell attracts their pollinators, the flies.

Flowers give off scent only when their prospective pollinators are most active. Thus plants like the jasmine that are pollinated by moths and bats bloom at night and emit a sweet fragrance.

While some plants emit strong scents to keep animals away, the Venus flytrap uses its scent to attract insects which are then 'eaten' by the plant!

## PUZZLE

## Mindbender

Hari, a farmer went to the weekly market to sell his produce of corn and wheat. He had only one sack so he put corn into one half of the sack, tied it in the middle and filled the other half with wheat. He found a buyer for corn. But the corn was at the bottom of the sack and the buyer who also had only one sack, didn't want to exchange his sack.



How did they get the corn from one sack to the other without pouring the grain somewhere else?

**Answer:** They put wheat into the buyer's sack. Then they tied the sack and turned it inside out. Then corn was poured in. They untied the pocket with wheat and poured it back to the farmer's sack.

# ABDUL HALIM JAFFER KHAN

Sitarist par excellence (1927-2017)

**U**STAD Abdul Halim Jaffer Khan, who passed away recently, was one of India's most celebrated sitarists. He was the youngest of the three eminent musicians who formed the sitar trinity, the other two being the late Bharat Ratna Ravi Shankar and Ustad Vilayat Khan. He was also a part of the quartet that included the trinity and another acclaimed sitarist Nikhil Banerjee.

Born on 18 February 1927 at Jabra in Madhya Pradesh, he was the son of Jaffer Khan, a noted vocalist, who was an accomplished sitarist as well. Influenced largely by his father's achievements, Abdul Halim Jaffer Khan who belonged to the Beenkar Gharana of Indore, took a keen interest in musical instruments, especially the sitar, and right from the 1940s won recognition as an artiste on AIR (All India Radio). In those early days when *jugalbandis* were not well-known, Khan collaborated with the jazz pianist Dave Brubeck and earned international acclaim. He also played with the noted English guitarist Julian Bream. Blessed with prodigious talent, he had a yen for innovation, and he christened his style as *Jafferkhani Baaj*, a concept which he defined as a synthesis of precision in technique, systematic thought with a vigorous playing style. *Jafferkhani Baaj* was also hailed for containing very original phrases. Khan also won renown for the *ragas* that he first created like Madhyami, Chakradhun, Kalpana, Sharawati and Khur Shiawani.

Khan was one of the earliest Hindustani musicians to incorporate Carnatic *ragas* into his music, and some of the *ragas* that he added to his repertoire were Kirwani, Kanakangi, Latangi, Karaharapriya, Manavati and Ganamurti, all of which he rendered with a Hindustani sensibility and in the Jafferkhani style. He was also the first Hindustani musician to collaborate with Carnatic musicians and his concerts with the eminent veena virtuoso Emani Sankara Sastri, were immensely popular with aficionados of both forms of music.

Another South Indian classical musician with whom he shared a great rapport was the famous violinist M.S.

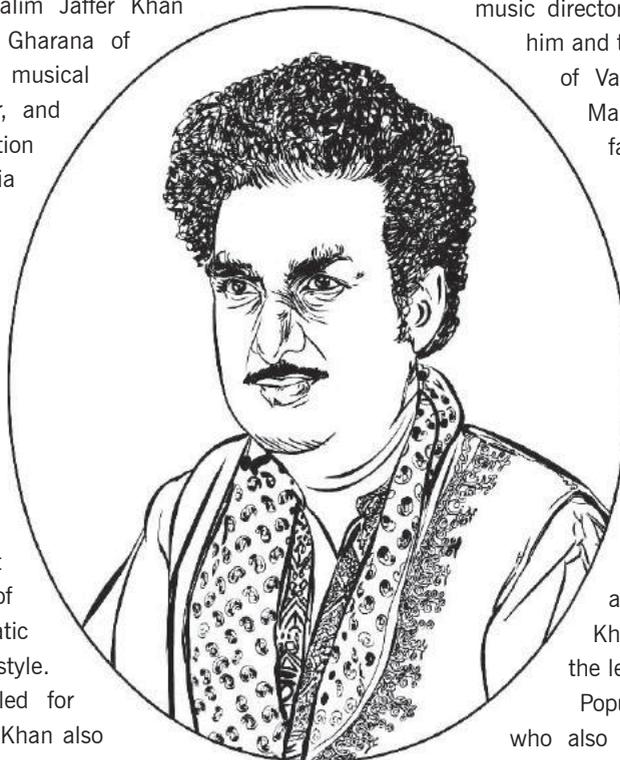
Gopalakrishnan, and their *jugalbandis* were a huge hit with the audience. All these crossovers were always conducted with a lot of gravitas, and also afforded both musicians an opportunity to give full rein to their talents. He also had a long stint with the film industry where he was first introduced at the age of 17 by composer Khwaja Kurshid Anwar. He played the sitar for the songs in films like K.L. Saigal's *Parwana* released in 1947, and he also composed and played the sitar in *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje* and *Kohinoor* among other films. Almost all the popular

music directors of the era collaborated with him and the august list included the likes of Vasant Desai, C. Ramachandra, Madan Mohan and Naushad. The famous composer Naushad held Halim Khan in high esteem and had once observed that the latter's contribution not only enriched film music, but also lent prestige to his songs. He established the Halim Academy of Sitar in Mumbai (then Bombay) in 1976, and the institute trained a number of budding sitarists who later went on to carve their own niches and among them was his son Zuhain Khan who has been carrying on the legacy of his great father.

Popular among his other wards who also imbibed a bit of his musical genius include sitarists like Dr. Prasad Joglekar, Rajendra Varma and Gargi Shinde. The versatile and

innovative musician's rich contribution to music was recognised both nationally and at the international level. Khan was awarded the Padma Shri (1970), Padma Bhushan (2006) by the Government of India and the Sangeet Nataka Academy Award in 1987. Indisputably, the musician was worthy of even greater honours, but his unassuming nature and his reluctance to lobby for laurels stood in the way. Yet, the maestro who is often spoken of in the same breath as Ravi Shankar and Vilayat Khan, will live on in the memories of all his admirers for the sheer brilliance of his music and his wide repertoire. ■

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



# VEENA SAHASRABUDDHE

Eminent vocalist, composer and teacher (1948-2016)

**V**EENA Sahasrabuddhe, a leading Indian vocalist and composer of Hindustani classical music, with roots in Gwalior *gharana* (but also borrowed from Jaipur and Kirana *gharanas*) was also a singer of khyal and *bhajan*. She performed all over India and in several countries the world over.

Born into a musical family, the last of three siblings, she began her early musical education under her father, Shankar Shripad Bodas, one of the earliest students of Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, founder of the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, and then under her brother Kashinath. Her musical mentors included Padmashri Balwantrai Bhatt, Pandit Vasant Thakar, and Pandit Gajananrao Joshi.

She held a bachelor's degree in vocal performance, Sanskrit and English literature; and master's degrees (*Sangeet Alankar*) in vocal performance, and also in Sanskrit. The subject of her PhD was the *tarana*, said to be invented by Amir Khusro – a form, of which she remained an unmatched master.

For some years she was the Head of the Department of Music at SNDT University, Pune Campus, and from 2002 to 2004, served as the additional professor in the Humanities department at IIT-Mumbai, and conducted a series of music appreciation courses on its campus.

Imbued with tremendous melodic appeal, her concerts were memorable. She was known for her clear pronunciation and her ability to develop an instant rapport with the audience. Her impassioned *Khayal* renditions held her audience spellbound. At the prestigious Sawai Gandharva Music Festival, organised by Pt. Bhimsen Joshi, she revealed her musical virtuosity with her powerful voice projection and singing, like no other female vocalist of that time.

Veena laid great emphasis on understanding music in order to appreciate it. With detailed renditions of *ragas* and clarity of concept, she quickly became one of the top women vocalists in the country. A gifted teacher herself, her lecture demonstrations were unique in that she would explain the finer points of music or the raga, breaking them down into syllables to make it comprehensible to the youngest novice in the room. Her precise intonation, neat presentation, variety of

repertoire, her cultivated voice and style, shorn of gimmickry, released the Gwalior tradition from its shackles even while remaining true to it. Her elfin frame belied the formidable power of her music.

Her music was dramatic, yet meditative and soulful; her singing, a beautiful amalgam of all the various *gharanas* that shaped her syntax. She affirmed that “the road to earning acclaim was one paved with hard work.” She recalled lessons from her father (who told a young Veena that ‘her music must speak for her’). Pandit Shankar grounded her in ‘the importance of honest ‘self-analysis’ when it came to her performances,

as well as in the basics of various musical instruments, reading and writing musical notes. A generous but uncompromising teacher, she remained a down-to-earth person, wonderfully free from artistic caprice. She was so involved in the lives of her family and quite unassuming, even not hesitating to perch on a stool, trying to clean the cobwebs on the ceiling fan.

Among her awards included a prize in Vocal Classical category in a national competition for artists under age 25, conducted by A.I.R in 1972; in 1988, she was conferred the honorary doctorate of Sangeet Praveen by the Vidyalaya; the Uttar Pradesh Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1993 and the National Sangeet Natak Akademi in 2013.

Veena gave her last public performance at California, in December 2012. Detected with Progressive Supra nuclear Palsy, a rare debilitating, degenerative neurological condition, Veena retreated from the stage, but continued to teach – a testament to her dedication. When even teaching became impossible, she sat quietly in a corner, gesturing to her students when they made a mistake.

She passed away in Pune on 29 June 2016, tragically at just 67 years of age. She will be remembered as a fine person, a great vocalist and an outstanding teacher who readily treaded the extra mile to help one understand Indian classical music. The voice that captivated music lovers will live on. ■

– A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, short story writer, poet who wants the world to be happy always.



## COLONEL M.N. RAI, YSM

Valiant Soldier (1976-2015)

*Play your role in life with such passion, that even after the curtains come down, the applause doesn't stop.*

– Col Rai

**C**OL. M.N. Rai hailed from Ghazipur in eastern Uttar Pradesh and grew up in Kalimpong, where his father was a teacher. He was the youngest of three brothers and joined the Army. He was tough and helped two other cadets by carrying their packs in a gruelling route march, so that the platoon got a good position.

He joined 2/9 Gorkha Rifles (GR) in September 1997, and took over the command of 42 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) in May 2013. Rai was conferred the Yudh Seva medal on the eve of Republic Day in 2015 for outstanding contribution in planning and conduct of operations, including a gun battle with militants in south Kashmir. A foreign terrorist was killed. He was the youngest officer to receive this honour. Rai had taken a number of initiatives for the positive engagement of youth like organising cricket and football tournaments. Clearly under his leadership, the narrative in Tral was changing. He earned the admiration of all the administration for his meticulous planning and we have seen how Tral turned out to vote. Earlier, it was considered to be the most volatile area of Kashmir and a militancy hotbed.

Bravery came easily to Col. Rai, the other two brothers also having earned gallantry awards. The eldest brother D.N. Rai of CRPF was awarded a police gallantry medal for battle against the militants who had stormed the Raghunath Temple at Jammu. More than a dozen people were killed and many more injured. The other brother, Y.N. Singh, was wounded by a Lashkar-e-Taiba militant.

On 28 January 2015, Col. Rai received information about the presence of two hard core militants of Hizbul Mujahdeen organisation in village Hindoora in area Tral of Pulwama district. Soon, 42 RR and 185 CRPF forces cordoned the village. The militants were hiding in the house of Jalal-ud-Din. The two militants, Avid Khan and Siraj Dar had been working with Hizbul for three and one year respectively. They both were involved in many terrorist operations. Avid Khan belonged to Hindura and had come to visit his family. Abid

Hussain Khan was a major support for militant Burhanuddin Wani. He was instrumental in motivating the local youth to join the militancy.

Avid's father is a head constable and mother is a government employee. Siraj Dar was involved in killing and intimidating Sarpanches. Once the house where the militants were hiding was cordoned off, Col. Rai was approached by the father and brother of one of the slain terrorists, saying he would like to surrender. While Rai was hearing them out, the terrorists burst into the scene firing indiscriminately.

Colonel Rai displayed quick thinking and retaliated immediately and after a one-hour gun battle, the two terrorists were eliminated. The officer's swift actions prevented many civilian casualties during the operation. Two AK 47 rifles along with ammunition and other warlike stores were recovered. The operation was based on specific intelligence.

Col. Rai, Head Constable Sanjeev Singh and Signalman Nilesh Kumar were injured and were airlifted to the Army Hospital in Srinagar. Col. Rai and Sanjeev Singh succumbed to the injuries while being evacuated. Colonel Rai's funeral was held in Brar Square, Delhi Cantonment. Army Chief General Dalbir Singh, Vice Chief of Army Staff and other senior officers besides Col Rai's relatives were present.

ShriAkhileshYadav, Chief Minister of UP, paid tribute and announced a grant.

Col Rai is survived by his wife, two daughters and a son. Emotions ran high as the funeral pyre was lit by his brother, D.N. Rai. Rai's 11-year-old daughter Alka, choked up as she shouted her father's regiment's old battle cry:

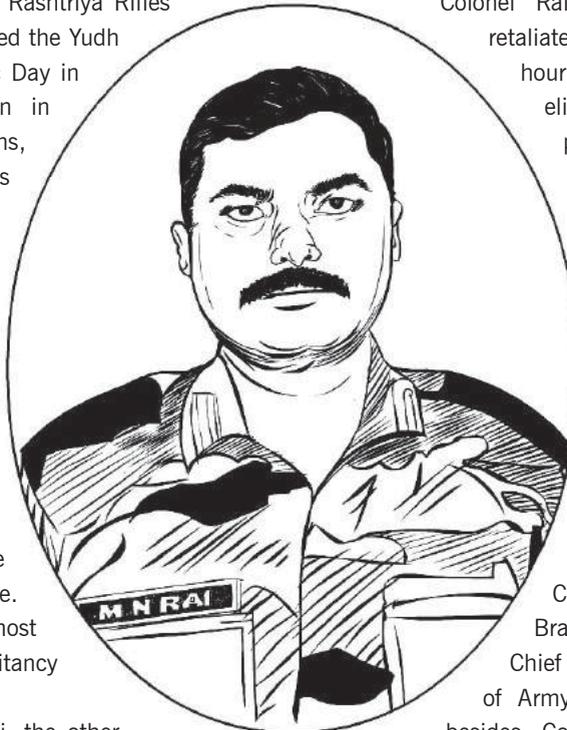
"Tiger 9GR, *ho ki hoina?*" "*Ho, Ho, Ho!*"

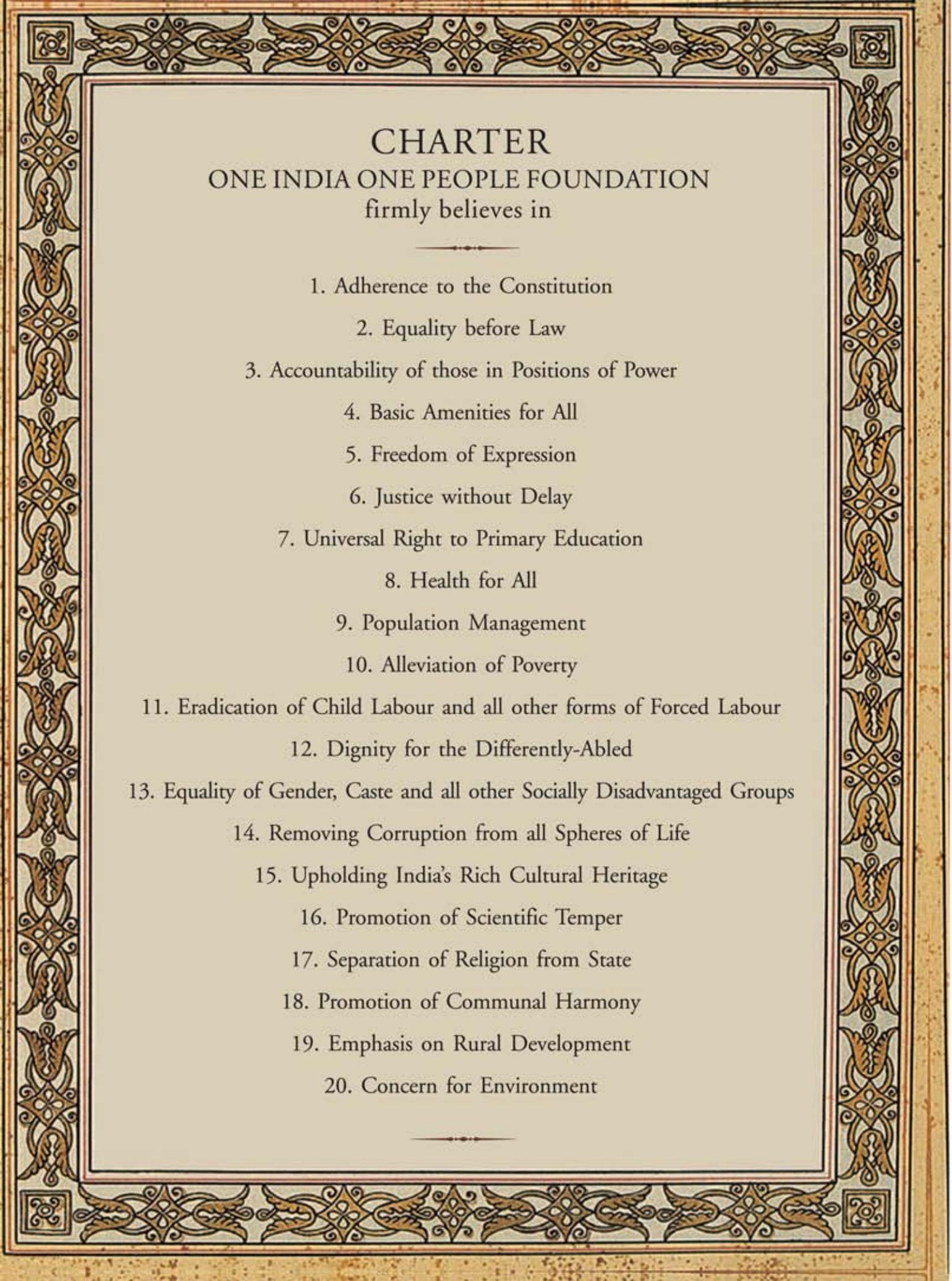
(Was he a tiger? Yes, Yes, Yes!)

Then she raised her right hand to salute him for the last time as she burst out in tears. Her war cry led to the Gorkha officers and soldiers repeating it several times over. She plans to join the army. She is a proud daughter and said, "My father was a brave father." ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd)

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





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ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION  
firmly believes in

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

# WHO AM I?

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

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

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

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