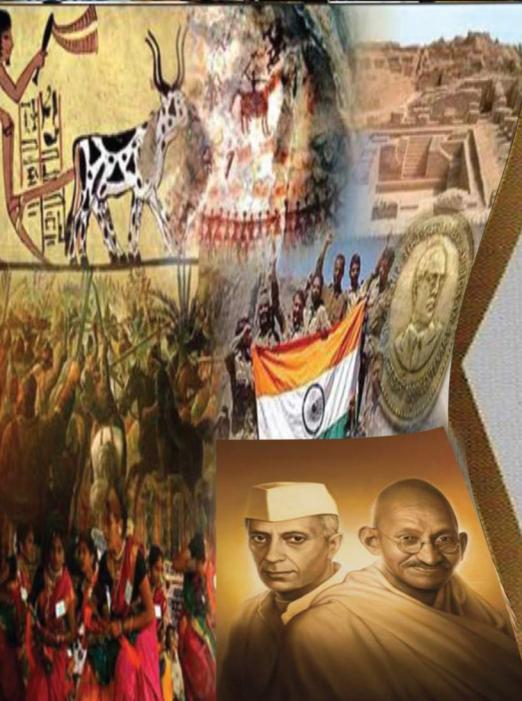


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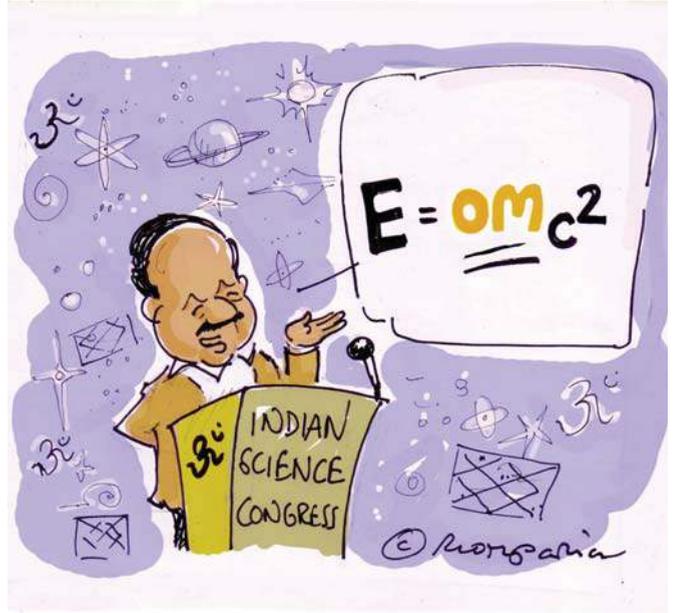
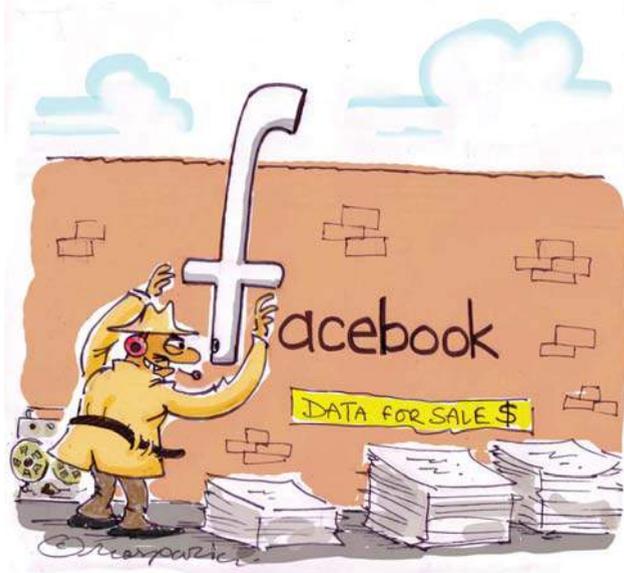
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FACE TO FACE

Sadguru Yogiraj Sri Sri Dr. Mangeshda

MORPARIA'S PAGE



A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIMES



ONE HAS TRIED TO READ THE BOOK



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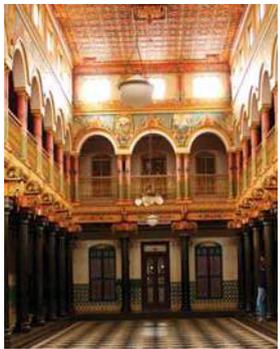
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A Grand Union

India has defied all naysayers who predicted that she wouldn't exist as a Union for much beyond her Independence. That she exists today as a whole, thriving democracy, is an achievement whose foundation was laid long ago by very able leaders, says Akul Tripathi.

INDIA has a knack for being an oddity of sorts. Since early days, it has managed to absorb the best and the worst that the world had to offer, imbibe it, process it, and churn out something that made it greater than the sum of its parts. Its modern history is another such testament.

The first constitution of the United States was ditched within the first decade. China's first republic broke up in 40 years.

The geographically ambitious Pakistan split up. Winston Churchill predicted that once the British

left it, "India will fall back quite rapidly through the centuries into the barbarism and privations of the Middle Ages". Much before Churchill, Sir John Statchey had warned that never should the people of the sub-continent ever feel that they belong to one nation. Right since the time of the first general election, there has been an unending line of doomsdayers calling it the last general elections of India.

And how India defied everyone

A sovereign, democratic republic since 26th January 1950, it has defied all the naysayers who expected it to crash as a failed state in spectacular ways.

Though much before it was expected to fail, it would not have been seen possible by most that a Union of States like India could ever become a reality. India, at the time of the British rule was an amalgamation of several princely states and territories. While some were directly under British rule, others were under the suzerainty of the British Crown. Also, on the sub-continent were the colonies controlled by the French

and the Portuguese.

The devious British in their long standing policy of divide and rule had perhaps expected to strike a death blow that



Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and V.P. Menon; the architects of modern India

India may never have been able to recover from. In an attempt at Balkanisation, they proposed that India become an independent dominion of the British Commonwealth, whereby it would have its own constitution and making allowance for any province to reject it and form another one with the agreement of the British Government.

It allowed the rulers of the states to decide the destiny of the millions of the land. The Working Committee of the Indian National Congress saw this to be what it was – "negation of both democracy and self-determination".

When the partition of India and the creation of two independent countries became more than just an abstract notion and a very tangible reality, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and V.P. Menon began the mammoth task of ensuring that India as a Union of States becomes a reality, and within the span of a decade, they ensured that there was little difference between the map of erstwhile British India, and that of the Union.

With the princely states having the option to choose between India and Pakistan, the amalgamation of the grand alliance that is today India, is a feat surpassing any Herculean task. In his book, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, V.P. Menon describes in detail the challenges and commitment that went into making modern India a reality.

From among the 550-plus princely states that were bound

together by the Constitution of India, the cases of the most obstinate, Junagadh and Hyderabad, are well known, and that of Jammu and Kashmir is the enduring legacy of the Partition. In fact, these states have taken up so much print and mind space over the years due to the dramatic events that led to their accession to India, the equally interesting stories of some other states is often overlooked:

Bhopal: Bhopal remained independent from 1947 to 1949, and was amongst the last states to sign the Instrument of Accession with India. The largest state with a Muslim leadership, after Hyderabad, the state of Bhopal was founded by Dost Mohammad Khan – a Pashtun soldier in the Mughal army. Post India's Independence, the last Nawab – Hamidullah Khan – chose to remain an independent state. After protests and agitations by several *satyagrahi*-s, including Shankar Dayal Sharma - the future president of India, the Nawab signed the agreement of merger on 30th April, 1949.

Jodhpur: Umaid Singh, the Maharaja of Jodhpur, had been very clear regarding joining the Indian union. However, as fate would have it, he died on 9th June, 1947, with independence looming in sight. His son, Hanwant Singh ascended the throne. Jodhpur was contiguous with Pakistan, and the new king thought that Pakistan could possibly give him a better deal than India and engaged with Jinnah. Jinnah, on his part, gave the king assurances of whatever deal he desired. Jodhpur was a Hindu majority state, but suddenly, religion made no difference to Pakistan and a Karachi-Jodhpur-Bhopal axis started taking shape, which Sardar Patel would go on to describe as a 'dagger thrust into India's heart'. He understood the importance of the third largest princely state and the possibility of Bikaner and Jaisalmer following suit, were Jodhpur to accede to Pakistan. Sardar Patel played the game wisely, promising the Maharaja what he needed in assurances with regard to better connectivity and access to arms and ammunition, while driving home the point that a Hindu majority state acceding to Pakistan would not only be against the core principle of the two-nation theory, it could also result in widespread communal flareups. The insecurity of the chieftains of Jodhpur of being in a Muslim majority country, coupled with the very real riots in Punjab and Bengal, helped shift Hanwant Singh's stance, and he signed the Instrument of Accession on 11th August – four days before Independence.

Travancore: Constituting most of southern Kerala and Kanyakumari, Travancore was one of the most advanced princely states with a level of education perceived to be better than British India. It was the only state to have a navy strong enough to defeat a European country, along with international naval routes for trade. The discovery of Thorium – needed for the coming atomic age – made it a very valuable ally. The

Dewan of Travancore, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, was a brilliant lawyer and it was widely regarded that he actually controlled and moulded the opinion of the King of Travancore. An ambitious man, he recommended a rejection of accession and a struggle, if it so be, against the Union and whatever other civil challenges that might arise from it. Despite trying in every way possible to persuade the King, the Maharaja saw that the welfare of the state would be better served with accession to India, and joined the Union.

Lakshadweep Islands: Then part of the Mysore Presidency, the islands were set to be part of India. During the last days before independence, it is said that Sardar Patel sent a navy frigate to Lakshadweep to hoist the Indian tricolour. Not long after the Indian ship reached there, another from Pakistan was seen approaching in the horizon. The islands had a 100 percent Muslim population and Pakistan planned on taking them over. However, on seeing the Indian frigate, they beat a hasty retreat, and the beautiful atolls remain a part of India.

Sikkim: While Sikkim was given the status of a Himalayan State and not taken as a kingdom that would be merged with the Indian Union, the Indian independence movement stirred democratic movements in the kingdom of Sikkim. The Sikkim State Congress launched a civil disobedience movement. The Chogyal kings of Sikkim asked for a small military police force to restore order, and agreed to having an Indian *dewan*. In 1950, Sikkim became a protectorate of India, wherein it came under the suzerainty of India, and India controlled defence, external affairs, diplomacy and communications for the kingdom, which otherwise retained administrative autonomy. Demands for democracy, however continued, and in 1973 anti-royalist riots took place in front of the palace. In 1975, the Prime Minister of Sikkim appealed to the Indian Parliament to become a state of India. A referendum was held in April 1975 where 97.5% of voters voted to abolish monarchy, and Sikkim became the twenty-second state of the Indian Union.

Article 1 of the Constitution states "India, that is, Bharat, shall be a Union of States". That 565 states – comprising two-fifths of India's land mass and a quarter of its population – were integrated into the union in the period between 1947 and 1956, is an achievement as momentous as that of India's independence. "That there is today an India to think and talk about" wrote President Rajendra Prasad in his diary, "is very largely due to Sardar Patel's statesmanship and firm administration." ■



Akul Tripathi is Content and Programming Head, EPIC Channel.

Whose history is it anyway?

*History, especially in India in recent times, has become a rather elastic subject, pulled from all directions, and moulded to hold that particular view point. In the process, what are we forcing down young peoples' throats? asks a concerned **Nivedita Louis**.*

HISTORY seems to be the next 'big thing', after India's IT boom. The IT 'infested' career consultants have now started to talk about humanities stream, history and colleges that offer epigraphy classes, sudden spurt in heritage excursions and 'discoveries' being made left, right and centre, literally. The 'history' passion seems to have caught up ever since the change of power at the helm, I should say. Down in Tamil Nadu where I reside, Kanchipuram and Mahabalipuram have been soaked, washed, rinsed, wrung and thrown to dry! So much has been written and read about the places, that by now the Gods must be going crazy about whether they belong to Pallava or Chola style.

Everyone wants a fistful of history!

Along comes a movie like *Padmavat*, and all hell breaks loose. Karni Seva, Kuch nahi Karni Seva...everyone scrambles for their fistful of history. There is a whole bunch of historians turned politicians who 'rewrite' history, riding their Pushpaka Vimanas. There were reports of a special 'high level academicians' gathering to work on rewriting history. Using archaeological 'finds' and DNA mapping, the special task team intends to dig out the 'untold history'. When the 'culture' ministry was formed, there was simmering discontent among the learned, progressives. The website of Ministry of Culture screams of a 'scheme for Raj Bhasha', where a first prize of

60,000 is offered to Central Government employees for writing a book in Hindi, on culture. The push towards Hindi is making the southern states wary. The Chief Minister (CM) of Andhra Pradesh, Chandra Babu Naidu, and Karnataka's CM Siddharamaiya, have raised their concerns on subsidising the North from taxes collected from the South, and are asking for increased resources for welfare, in tandem with the taxes paid by them!

Talk of the Aryan, Dravidian theories, and words fail me. There are so many research papers sanctifying DNA, study of genetic chronology that has now concluded that availability of Caucasian R1a DNA in the Indian gene pool proves that there was substantial Bronze Age migration, finally, we can say there was indeed patrilineal, sex-skewed migration into the Indian gene pool, settling the "who is older than who" debate. Talk of the Vedas, Puranic texts, Manu Dharma, Vasudaiva Kudumbakam, all that is Greek and Latin to me. "Do you think the Vedas and the Puranas are stories?", asked one of my friends. Now that is KBC's 'core-worthy' question! Ram Sethu, Ayodhya Mandir underneath the mosque, the 'technological marvels' depicted by Ramayana, is a good story line. Ramayana is said to have 'happened' during Treta Yuga millions of years ago, and how the 'Hindu' India existed then, makes any rational thinking historian shudder. Any historical evidence beyond 10,000 years is non-existent, and one wonders



Is there a sudden interest in Hindu monuments like at Mahabalipuram, above?

how the fundamental forces will go beyond their capacity to prove something 'non-existent'.

History as we see it

Everyone has the right to their religious beliefs and pushing one's beliefs through the throats of little children, in capsules called 'history', is quite annoying. Lord Macaulay's education system is of course not fool proof, yet it never shoved a bunch of lies down our throats. Here we have a Union Minister for Science who has claimed, "Stephen Hawking said Vedas had a 'theory' superior to Einstein's Relativity Theory", as I write this. Earliest available literary proof of Vedas is only 11th century, and the tall claims that they existed millions of years ago in oral form is downright unscientific. Well, in that case, all religions defy science, don't they? When we ply the young minds with this, what are we making? A generation of 'believers' akin to their counterparts in Pakistan who believe Pakistan was created as an Islamic State in 712 BC when Sindh was conquered, and not in 1947 after a blood-ridden partition.

History can never be fiction. We need proof, corroborative evidence that point to the course people have travelled with time. Without anything concrete, 'believing' in texts that have travelled orally from Iron Age/Bronze Age defies all sane logic. When science and common sense rule, we have a healthy democracy, and when it goes down the window, we are left with a country ridiculed by the world.

People like to talk of heritage – the new age historians vie for attention and money, not in the same order. The sudden spurt of historians has paved the way for lacklustre thesis and hypotheses supporting fringe elements. Give them a stack of cash or a page three article in a tabloid, they will fight tooth and nail to prove Malik Kafur invaded South India, ravaging one thousand temples of their riches. Poor guy must have spent hardly a few days here, yet you find his name hanging in thick air in places as remote as Chidambaram or Srirangam. He was a destroyer, they will say. He slayed priests, emptied temple riches in tanks, broke all the flooring of a 40-acre temple, pulled down pillars. I am beginning to think Malik Kafur was probably Lord Voldemort with his wand, puking 'destroyal'. What a busy man he must have been, pushing Rajput women into their *Sati* fire one day, and looting temple tanks in Tamilnadu

the next day. Hell, he didn't just play a double role, he played multiple!

If there is something that needs immediate relooking and analysis, it must be our social science text books. The CBSE prescribed NCERT text books wax eloquent of Varnasrama, Manu Smriti et al. When Varnasrama is taught to eleven-year-olds, one has to be sensitive in phrasing the history text books. One cannot ask, "Who is the lowest of all castes?" and expect the child to think of equality. Teaching them the prevailing caste system and its effects is a great idea for sensitising them, yet, it has to be done solving the specific purpose of learning, not to sow seeds of differences in young minds.

There is this other school of "English Historians". The fellow still thinks he was born in Birmingham and raised in Oxford. His everyday routine is filled with scones and English tea, with of course "History of India" by some 'faarin' Lord gracing his hands. The person is sure he will be buried in a cask at Windsor Castle. Someone please put him on the next plane to Heathrow. He might rewrite English history. The Brits of course need someone Dalrymple to tell them there is Indian blood in British Royal lineage and this probably happened in Vedic Period when Manu wed Tanu, their child being George the -325th. Well sire, the sun didn't rise with British history in India, we had civilisations two thousand years earlier than that!

Any history/historian neglecting the diversity of a country like India, ignoring the marginalised sections of the society and the minorities, will be doing grave injustice to the very fibre of this nation. History of India has never been kind to the Muslim 'invaders' and the Christian 'converts'. Now that fringe forces are gunning for their kill, it is high time for all sections of the society to wrestle back their history from the divisive forces. There can be only one decisive answer to the question,

"Whose history is it anyway?". The answer is, 'Ours, together'. If we give a section free reign to rewrite it, our future is DOOMED! Period. ■



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.

Blinkers on!

*History has always been written from the point of view of the victor or the prevailing regime. Even India has undergone this gamut, from a celebration of patriotic history during her Independence, to the current culture of Hindutva driven history being introduced in school curricula, says **Ketaki Nair**. Where will this end?*

MOST schools teach their students history. History is important, right? There are many people who would sniff at that notion, but learning about the past helps people understand the world better, and it should ideally also help people learn from the mistakes of their ancestors, so that the world itself improves. So we have to learn history; we have to study history textbooks. History textbooks. They sound innocuous enough, but these books are unfathomably powerful.

These books tell students the stories of the world. They shape their understanding of everything; they can change the way they view their present. They can prejudice students against something and influence their world view. They're powerful tools that could become catalysts to revolutions.

History as a weapon

This isn't an exaggeration, but a well known fact — one that people have exploited for aeons. Modifying history to validate one's cause is an ancient political tactic. Hitler did it back during the time of the Nazis, as did Mussolini. Only people who believed wholeheartedly in Nazism or Fascism could become teachers, and the history that was taught to students glorified the German or Italian past, and worked to transform its readers into fierce German or Italian nationalists. They spread the despots' propaganda and had a powerful influence on young minds.

Similarly, in India, our history has always been written to suit a particular purpose. In the days of the British Raj, British historians ensured that the history taught to impressionable students worked to engender communal feelings. Indian history was interpreted in terms of an interplay between Hindu and Muslim societies. Islamic rulers were portrayed as foreign invaders, under whom Indian society and culture declined. This contributed to a rift between Hindus and Muslims.

Later during the freedom struggle, and even post-Independence, Indian history was altered to cater to a different purpose; to unify, this time. Mahatma Gandhi and other freedom fighters romanticised our history and glamourised Indian culture to foster a spirit of nationalism. Leaders like

Akbar, who were secular and open-minded, were celebrated, while intolerant leaders like Aurangzeb were condemned. History was designed to make people feel patriotic and fraternal, thus unifying and strengthening the nation.

Even today, countries everywhere tamper with their history textbooks to suit their own ends, ones less noble than those of our freedom fighters. In 2015, the Texas board of education revised their textbooks to downplay the role of slavery in Southern history. That same year, South Korea's centre-right government tried to rewrite their history textbooks to get rid of their alleged leftwing bias.

Such biases in written history are practically omnipresent. When there are so many perspectives, it is easy for the writer's own to creep into what should be an objective narrative. In India, this is even more likely.

The 'nationalist' history

Our country has been 'India' for hardly any time. Our history is a jumble of different cultures and perspectives entwined in one another, and we have only recently been unified. Furthermore, our history hasn't been as well documented as the history of some European countries, and with so many contradictory opinions it is very difficult to approach our past, and almost impossible to gain a dispassionate perspective on it. And now once again in India, efforts are underway to revisit history from a new 'nationalist' perspective. Several states are using schools' history textbooks as a means to achieve this objective.

It seems as though in a response to the idealised, nationalistic interpretation of history that we have been fed by our freedom fighters, our current government is now promoting a Hindu-nationalistic version of it. India is being slowly 'safronised' is a charge leveled by left-liberal historians. This has been shown through many instances. For example, Prime Minister Modi presented young children with copies of the Bhagavad Gita on Teacher's Day. There have been more overt examples of our pro-Hindu policy as well. For instance, last year when there was a call for a nationwide ban on the sale and slaughter of beef, for cattle are sacred to Hindus.

But we aren't in the 1900s. This isn't a despotic country, the British Raj is over. This is 2018, and we are in an independent, secular India. India is home to not only Hindus, but also Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and many, many others. Why should they be forced to follow the tenets of some other religion? In fact, why should all Hindus be mandated to follow these tenets? They aren't compulsory, even according to the religion.

A pro-Hindu agenda is now trickling into India's history textbooks as well. The Mughals are being painted as plunderers once again, and their chapters in history textbooks are shrinking. Even great emperors like Akbar are in danger of fading from textbooks entirely. Instead now, the Maharashtra State Education Board has expanded chapters dedicated to Chhatrapati Shivaji. In fact, the achievements and contributions of Muslim rulers are starting to be overlooked entirely. In Rajasthan, students are now being taught that it was Maharana Pratap who won the Battle of Haldighati, and not Akbar.

Clearly, history proves that the interpretation of history has never been entirely neutral. It has always tended to favour a certain perspective. But we need to ensure that we don't lose chunks of our past because of the way we teach it. Writing history objectively is messy and difficult, but if our textbooks are too narrow minded, it could just leave us in the dark about many aspects of our past. We might have had a vastly different, improved view of the world around us had we studied an unbiased, straightforward telling of history. This clearly isn't something easily

achievable, but if we want a country full of clear thinking, unprejudiced citizens, we must try. ■



Ketaki Nair is a student in the 11th grade at the Cathedral and John Connon School, Mumbai. Words are her weapon of choice, and she enjoys writing on subjects varying from socio-political and cultural behaviour, to fashion and make up.

A large advertisement for Blue Cross Laboratories Pvt Ltd. The entire advertisement is enclosed within a decorative border made of a blue and white checkered pattern. At the top center is the Blue Cross logo, which consists of a blue square with rounded corners containing a white cross with a blue outline. Below the logo, the text "WORLD CLASS QUALITY MEDICINES AT AFFORDABLE PRICES" is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the company name "BLUE CROSS LABORATORIES PVT LTD." is written in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font, followed by the address "PENINSULA CHAMBERS, LOWER PAREL, MUMBAI - 400 013, INDIA." in an even smaller font.

A protest for the masses?

India's history since the Independence movement is replete with protests and agitations, which is a healthy part of democracy. But if it is used by self-serving political parties for their selfish interests only, then the marginalised communities will get even more alienated, says Mamta Chitnis Sen.

"Protest beyond the law is not a departure from democracy; it is absolutely essential to it."

– Howard Zinn

PROTESTS form an important element of any democratic movement. The right to free speech and the right to dissent cannot be taken away from the citizens. Governments which deny the above stand the risk of losing not only their stature, but also their respect amongst the voters. In the Sanskrit epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata too, the importance of protests are explained through various stories of valour and courage — that which the Indian psyche continues to refer to every now and then when in doubt.

The Gandhian protest

Protests are important for the survival of any democracy, and India has been through its legacy of protests to emerge as a strong democratic nation. Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India Movement against the British to leave India forever, laid the foundation for protests that would later take place the world over, and encourage leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. to lead the Civil Disobedience Movement in the 1960s in America.

Who knew protesting through non-violence could prove to be such an effective weapon that it would inspire democracies not only in India, but the world over, to survive?

During my student days, I would read about Gandhi's Quit India Movement as part of my study material. It wasn't until I visited the National Archives library to research on newspapers of the colonial era of Bombay that I realised how humongous



The Bhima Koregaon protest: Do the poor take to the street because their voices are ignored otherwise?

his efforts and the movement actually were. Unlike newspapers today, periodicals of the colonial era did not report on protests and independence movements that were enveloping and spreading to the country. It was while poring through those several old copies of *Bombay Herald* and *Bombay Chronicle*, did I realise that there was no mention of India or Indians in particular in any of those papers then. A majority of the reports featured articles on local interests in Bombay, advertisements on sales of bungalows and British artefacts and crockery, announcements of deaths, marriages, births, public gatherings etc., of who else but the British.

The papers were devoid of the vast protests that were taking place across the country by Indians who were demanding their freedom from colonial rule. The efforts that Gandhi and many like him undertook to get their protests heard and recorded in these very British newspapers, spoke volumes of their enormous sacrifices and dedication to the cause and the nation in particular. Something we should not let go in vain.

Unfortunately, the new India is grappling to understand

and realise the true meaning and importance of the sacrifices that he made. Bombay, the same city that hosted Gandhi's protests and was the centre of the independence movement, continues to witness agitations even today. On a positive note, while this may confirm that democracy is alive and kicking, on the other hand, it also gives root to the fact that this 'freedom' is being misused to benefit only a certain section of society.

Protests today

In the land of Gandhi, his methods of protests have taken on a different hue altogether. Today, protests aren't just spontaneous reactions to serious issues anymore, but are made to resemble one. Leaders are unfortunately resorting to host protests to further their own cause, than that of the cause and the people they represent.

When political parties resort to tactics like demonstrating for rights to empower a particular community or caste to win votes, or when certain religious groups or sects manipulate public sentiment to avail of special concessions to get elected to power, democracy gets taken for a ride. When protests are no longer being used as a means to uplift the poor or the underprivileged, but to mislead and misinform, there is havoc. The poor, especially those from the backward communities, when faced with the reality of having nowhere to go, end up alienated and hurt.

This alienation, when not recognised and corrected in time, may prove costly for the nation, and more importantly, its democratic fabric. Its backlash may further damage democracy in itself.

In January this year, clashes between the Dalits and Marathas in Mumbai dominated the headlines. Mumbai city came to a standstill as protesters blocked roads, shut shops and local trains in agitation against the killing of one of their own at an event held in Pune to mark the 200th anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle, in which forces of the East India Company defeated the Peshwa's army.

Two months post the Dalit protest, the city yet again witnessed a protest rally of over 35,000 farmers, who took to the streets to demand loan waiver. In both of the above cases, it was the poor and the backward classes who took to the streets as a final resort to get their voice heard. It is not yet clear what they gained out of this protest, but the fact is that this agitation surely led to some very uncomfortable

questions being raised.

In the land of Gandhi, his methods of protests have taken on a different hue altogether. Today, protests aren't just spontaneous reactions to serious issues anymore, but are made to resemble one. Leaders are unfortunately resorting to host protests to further their own cause, than that of the cause and the people they represent.

Why as a democratic nation, are we still in doubt of our own? Why do our own need to agitate on the streets to ask for something that is rightfully theirs? Why hasn't education empowered us to identify these problems and correct them on time?

The democratic fabric of a nation is truly tested when its people take their revenge – not through violence, but through the ballot box. All said and done, a nation like ours that celebrates diversity, cannot do without protests. A worker of a prominent political party once told me why political leaders host agitations every now and then even for insignificant causes. "Protest rallies are the only way to keep the party workers busy. People are too busy and engrossed in their daily lives. By protesting on the streets, people are happy that someone or something is being done for them this way," says the 50-year-old who confesses that he first protested for demanding water supply to his area in suburban Mumbai in the early eighties. Now hundreds of protest rallies later, he finds comfort in ideating kinds of protests for his party, whenever the opposition slips

up on certain issues. "Protests these days are more to be in the limelight. To let people know that we are around and that we celebrate democracy and are not afraid to show it," he sums up with a smile. ■

A journalist for over 15 years, Mamta Chitnis Sen has worked with reputed publications like *Mid-Day*, *Society* and her writings and columns have been published in *The Sunday Observer* and *The Daily*. She also worked with the *Sunday Guardian* and handled their Mumbai bureau for eight years reporting not only extensively on various political parties but also on crime, politics, religion, art, community, human interest, and general news. She headed *Dignity Dialogue*, India's foremost magazine exclusively for the 50 plus age group as the Executive Editor. She presently handles Media Advocacy for Child Rights and You (CRY) – an NGO working for the rights of underprivileged children in India covering the states of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat. Mamta is also an artist having studied painting and ceramics from Sir J J School of Art, and has exhibited in various groups shows in India and abroad.



Teaching history

Is the subject of history a dying subject that no one in India seems to want to study anymore? The way it has been taught so far in Indian schools, it's a miracle the subject still flourishes, says E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan.

I had a history teacher in primary school, who taught us the major civilisations of the world. I still remember her description of the Indus Valley Civilisation's town planning. The way she described the drainage system and the Great Bath, I was transfixed. Her description was so vivid, her explanations so lucid, I was transported to that era. That's how history should be taught, I had exulted. That teacher ignited such a passion for the subject, that I was to pursue the subject for my under-graduation too.

But after her, it was only in the last year of my under-graduation that I found another teacher, this time who taught International Relations, who could similarly bring alive the subject. For the rest of the years, I had a slew of teachers who often mixed up dynasties, and eras and narrated history in the most dry and unappealing manner possible. Consequently, most of my peers hated history with a singular passion.

History is a peculiar subject. It has so many stories embedded in it and colourful tales of people (kings, emperors, leaders, philosophers, influencers) and yet, it has reams of dates and chronologies of dynasties too. No one can ever claim to love learning up dates of feats by people long gone. But if the interest in the rest is ignited, learning up dates becomes a worthwhile chore.

History is actually many stories!

I have narrated to my son, who is now 11, many stories of our Independence movement from the book on India's freedom movement, ironically written by a Frenchman Dominique Lapierre and an American, Larry Collins, titled *Freedom at Midnight*. This is an absolutely seminal work on our freedom movement, albeit seeming to favour our last Viceroy Lord Mountbatten's version of our freedom struggle. Yet, it is also much corroborated by events recorded elsewhere, in others' versions too. There are such delightful anecdotes of the leaders who strode the stage then, making them more human, more likeable. It is history on a breeze. My son is so entranced by these stories that he's completely taken even by the dry rendering of history he learns at school. I have often found him bent over his school text book, asking me questions, a curious learner. I don't take all the credit for his interest, but it's true that narrating to him off-beat facts and anecdotes about historical figures, has made him

interested in the subject.

I also give credit to the Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) comics for sustaining this interest. The comics with evocative illustrations cover every aspect of history one can think of. It's largely well presented, and not a prejudiced rendering too. Stories told in a few pages, but with a wealth of information. Long live ACK!

Teaching history

How then, must history be taught? One may argue that every event cannot be presented with a flourish, nor every historical figure made colourful and interesting. So, how can history be taught to make it more attractive? First of all, I think, one has to 're-humanise' history. History is primarily about people. Battles, wars and monuments come later. Yet, we often present historical characters as great people, often put on a high pedestal, often without any flaws. Or we dash them to the ground, branding them as villains, Oh, no! Kings need to be seen as mortals, their foibles dissected, their interests and what make them what they were, discussed. We need to set them in the setting of their times, judge them accordingly. We need to talk about interesting anecdotes about them and the events of their times, to make them more human, more appealing.

In school we were taught about Gandhi and Nehru in such pious tones that it's a wonder more of us didn't grow up hating them. There is no need, for instance, to put Mahatma Gandhi on a pedestal. I personally believe he was one of the most far-sighted and greatest men to have walked on this earth. But while we eulogise him (though today most often he is reviled, than eulogised), we also have to treat him as a person who has his flaws. And yet, such 'flaws' don't take away from his revolutionary ideas and his foresight, they only make us understand and appreciate him more. And the onus

is ultimately on the teachers. If the teachers teaching history love the subject, everything else will naturally follow. Are there such teachers out there, especially given the paucity of 'good' teachers today? ■



E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan is Assistant Editor, One India One People.

A calling card named Bollywood

Bollywood or the Bombay-based Hindi film industry has had takers far beyond the Indian shores, cutting a swathe from Egypt and Afghanistan to Japan, since the last many decades. The story of modern India cannot be told without a huge chapter devoted to Indian cinema. This is also a kind of diplomacy which has worked and continues to work in India's favour, says Shoma A. Chatterji.

INDIA was the guest of honour at the 33rd Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF), which opened in Cairo in 2009 with the screening of *New York* directed by Kabir Khan. The India Focus notwithstanding, this writer learnt that Egypt had

banned Indian films from being screened in its theatres for 20 years. Yet, when I strolled across to reach the theatre nearby, I saw that among the pictures spread out by the hawkers on the pavements on either side, were huge posters of Amitabh Bachchan as the Angry Young

Man. They identified me as the lady from the country where Bachchan belongs. They knew neither Hindi nor English. My *bindi* gave me away as an Indian. Since they had not seen any Indian film for 20 years, they had no clue that he had aged and now did mature roles. Such is the influence of Bollywood on Egypt.

The opening of doors

Chennai Express created a new milestone for Bollywood in Egypt with the thundering response to its release in theatres

of Cairo. After two decades, Egypt finally made way for the gateway to Indian cinema. On 2nd October 2013, United Motion Pictures (UMP), Egypt, tied up with Gaurang Films (GF), Kolkata, to distribute Indian films theatrically in Egypt. “90%

of the exhibition market lies in Cairo and Alexandria. Both cities will release these films in multiplex theatres and also in single-theatre outlets,” informs Gaurang Jalan.

Flash forward to 2017. Despite the political turbulence in

the country, the Cairo Film Festival organised by the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) of the Embassy of India, in collaboration with the Culture Development Fund of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, featured an eclectic mix of contemporary and evergreen Hindi films with leading stars Shahrukh Khan to Amitabh Bachchan and others. The films included *Devdas*, *Mera Naam Joker*, *Drishyam*, *Mother India*, *Black*, *Swades* and *Sangam*. “We wanted to bring Indian movies onto the big screen because in Egypt you see them only on the television, so that is why we wanted to bring some old



The 33rd Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF) where Indian films were screened after two decades

classics like *Sangam*, *Mother India* and others which are very well known, and some contemporary films,” said Sanjay Bhattacharya, Indian Ambassador to Egypt.

In January this year, Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu’s six-day visit to India on the invitation of the Indian PM Narendra Modi, raised a lot of controversy and a lot of anger in many quarters. But Bollywood turned a deaf ear to all this and met the PM on his last day of the tour. “The world loves Bollywood, Israel loves Bollywood, I love Bollywood”, said Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he wished

“Shalom” to the Hindi film fraternity at a glittering event where he was welcomed by megastar Amitabh Bachchan. The visiting PM showcased Israel’s natural beauty as a shooting hotspot for Bollywood, which has helped boost tourism for several exotic foreign locales over the years. “You have seen what you find in Israel. In an hour’s drive, you have snow, the beaches, the desert; you have the salty sea, a sweet lake, great Indian food,” he said. Extending an open invitation, Netanyahu added that Israel and Bollywood “can create magic” by forging partnerships with its technology giants.

“In recent times, Netanyahu has not had a very easy time with his western allies. After years of indulgence for Israel’s expansionist urges, the West is showing a faint glimmer of awakening to the disastrous denial of Palestinian rights. In circumstances where Israel’s intent to render Palestinians into a state of permanent displacement are abundantly clear, the global civil society has stepped up to shame weak-kneed governments. The “boycott, divestment and sanctions”(BDS) movement was launched by a broad coalition of Palestinian civil society actors, to hold Israeli entities to account – where culpability was proven – for the occupation and the daily violations of the human rights of Palestinians. Since the call went out from Palestine in 2005, BDS has gained traction especially in Israel’s traditionally unquestioning allies in the West,” wrote Sukumar Muralidharan in *The Wire*. But all this has not had any negative impact in the least in the renewed relations between India and Israel in general, and Israel and Bollywood, in particular.

The old connection

Themes and images of globalisation in Bollywood that has transformed it into a “calling card” for India in the outside world are not recent. For decades, Hindi films have alluded



Actor Raj Kapoor (centre) with his Russian fans: Indian cinema has indeed transcended borders

to transnational identities to keep up to certain preconceived and fixed notions of ‘Indianness’. But notions began to change and a very popular song from Raj Kapoor’s *Shree 420* (1955) *Merajootahai Japani...* comes up perhaps as the earliest example. The first lines of the song, hugely successful in India and the Soviet Union, are:

*My shoes are Japanese,
My trousers English,
The red hat on my head is Russian,
But my heart remains Indian*

– (Kaur, R. and Sinha, A.J. – *Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*)

Lip-synced by Raj Kapoor in *Shree 420* merrily strolling down the road with a backpack, became a symbol for classic Bollywood; i.e., “assert(ing) an Indian identity in the face of global consumerism.” (*Communicating globalization in Bombay cinema: Everyday life, imagination and the persistence of the local’ in Comparative American Studies: An International Journal Vol 3, Issue 3, pp 319-344.*) By foreshadowing the widespread economic shifts to come in later decades, the song became a “narrative about the production of nationalism through its intricate entanglement with the global that though the Indian nation is swamped with all kinds of foreign influences on products, this does not need to undermine the strength of patriotism.”

The most important function of Bollywood – its cinema and the people who inhabit the film industry is its ability to act as an interface between traditions of Indian society and *disturbing* modern or Western intrusions into it. The Hindi film is a means of; (a) giving cultural meaning to Western structures superimposed on society, (b) demystifying some of the culturally unacceptable modern structures now in vogue,

and (c) ritually neutralising elements of the modern world that must be accepted for sheer survival. Are Western intrusions into the Hindi mainstream film ethos *really* disturbing? Not really, because the emphasis is not on the inner struggle between modernity and tradition. Nor is it on any deep ambivalence towards the West. The function of the Hindi film according to Shyam Benegal, the noted film-maker, is to externalise an inner psychological conflict and handle the inner passion generated by social and political processes, as problems created by events and persons outside. These events and persons are both ideal types and representatives of different aspects of a fragmented self. These fragments are separately controlled.

Bollywood seeks to sustain this control by sharpening the focus of these differences – the hero and the anti-hero, the heroine and the anti-heroine, the large-hearted father-in-law and the middle-aged don. Hindi cinema does this because integration of these separate fragments into a unified whole would highlight the grey elements of characterisation that it does not wish to adhere to. The cinematic influences of a foreign culture cannot uproot the cultural roots of a nation dotted with a largely illiterate mass population nurtured on a steady and generous diet of mythology, folklore, theatre, folk arts, music, all of which are reflected, represented, interpreted, distorted and questioned in and by popular cinema.

Reflection of change in values

Rapid globalisation and the advances made in electronic communication have created an ambiguous relationship between Western and Indian traditions. Till about 30 to 35 years ago, the socio-political backdrop in which culture evolved underscored traditional Indian values of simple living and non-materialist goals as the ideal. The growth of the urban middle class, a chunk of which is composed of the urban slum, has brought in its wake a paradigmatic change. Materialistic goals have neatly and definitely replaced ideology. This is a spin-off of globalisation. The family as the basic unit of Indian society has surrendered to the growing demand for the individual as the basic unit, thereby fragmenting and decimating society

from a cohesive whole of related people to single, atom-like individual units. This materialism is not a Western import. It is an inevitable and inescapable part of global reality. All this finds expression in a popular, much-adulated film like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. The film illustrates an idealistic blend in mainstream entertainment where the displaced NRI is constantly rid with feelings of nostalgia for his homeland. He seeks vicarious satisfaction in feeding the pigeons in London's Trafalgar Square since he can no longer feed the pigeons back in his Punjab village.

Thanks to the information highway and the opening up of technological gizmos where films can be downloaded on cell phones and exported through DVDs across the globe, regional films, mainstream and off-mainstream, have reached many countries of the world almost simultaneously with their home premieres. Rajnikant and Kamal Hassan's films are a great rage across the Middle-East, in the US and so on. The native citizens of Greece and Romania are great fans of Amitabh Bachchan's films, while France, Italy and other European nations swoon equally over the films of Satyajit Ray, Mani Ratnam and Adoor Gopalakrishnan.

Bollywood films are being dubbed into European languages, attracting newer audiences and greater revenue. But then, cinema has proven itself over the years to be more than mere business. It is first and foremost an art form, but one that by its nature has to involve huge sums of money. Cinema has performed a role to play much beyond just its commercial aspects, and this is where the importance of functioning as a diplomatic calling card is so important – other than to those who are so glamorised by Bollywood, as to be blind to reality. ■

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.



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New OIOP Clubs in Mumbai

S.V.M. International School Dadar (W), Mumbai



Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde, Trustee, One India One People (OIOP) Foundation being led to the dais at S.V.M. International School, Dadar. She was the chief guest at the school's annual day celebration.



School Trustee Nityanath P. Ghanekar presenting a memento to Mrs. Hegde, while Principal Mrs. Suchita B. Shetty looks on.



Mrs. Hegde presenting the OIOP Club membership certificate to the Trustee and Principal.



Mrs. Hegde addressing the school students and parents



A student being felicitated on the annual day



A cultural programme was presented by students

One India One People Club activities in Mumbai

Disaster Management Workshops by Mr. A. Gopalakrishnan, Resource person for OIOP



C.F. Andrews High School, Santacruz (E)



VPM's B.R. Tol English High School, Mulund (E)



Chandrabhan Sharma College (Degree), Powai

KNOW INDIA BETTER



Inside the **CHETTINAD** heartland

Chettinad in Tamil Nadu is redolent with beautiful mansions of Chettiyars, with their typical tiles, chandeliers, and a life that had been lived lavishly. Today, most of these mansions stand empty, but that way of life can still be summoned up for visitors.

Text & photos: Nivedita Louis



The *mutram* of a traditional Chettinad house

CHETTINAD, the geographic area limited to a single district in interior Tamil Nadu, has a very rich culture and heritage. Known for its palatial mansions and authentic 'Chettinad' food, Chettinad is a one-stop travel destination for foodies and heritage enthusiasts alike, and Devakottai is a bustling town sitting at the heart of Chettinad, near Karaikudi. When historian and novelist Venkatesh Ramakrishnan suggested we take a two-day trip into the heartland of Chettinad, there were no second thoughts for a dozen of us. As the team assembled for the overnight journey at Chennai Egmore station, there was plenty of laughter and fun. Reliving the good old school tour days, we were smiling and prancing around the station like little kids on vacation. As the train hurtled past stations in the cold December night, there were *antakshari-s* all around, and a card-play marathon ensued late into the night.

The Devakottai Zamin

A word about Venkatesh – he belongs to the Devakottai Zamin family, and what we were about to witness and relish was the priceless Chettinad hospitality at its best. The wake-up call came from him at 4 am! He had gone to Devakottai a couple of days earlier to check on our stay and food. By the time we got down at Devakottai Road railway station, we were fully alert. We reached our homestay, just as the sun was rising. The orange and yellow rays bathed the vintage

buildings, birds chirping and people cycling to their daily work. Traditional Chettinad houses have plenty of rooms built around an open courtyard called '*Valavu/mutram*'.

The *mutram* of Venkatesh's house was where we had our sumptuous breakfast of *vellai appams*, fluffy *idli-s*, *sambar*, *chutney-s*, *podu* and *kavuni-arisi pongal* – the sweet dish made from red *kavuni* rice imported from Burma. Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Malaysia – the countries where the Chetti clan had migrated or had business interests. Hard working and enterprising, the Chettiyars of Chettinad have invested their hard earned money in humongous houses here, and this house of Venkatesh was no exception. The Devakottai Zamin had once held the Ramnad Kingdom for ransom! They had established the first Indian owned textile mill in Coimbatore – the Somasundaram Textile Mills Private Limited, and were great patrons of the arts and movies.

After breakfast, we visited the Meenakshi Natesan Kalyana Mandapam in Devakottai. Most of the huge houses of Chettinad have now found new faces as marriage halls. This was no exception. Built with Burmese teak, Belgian glass, traditional *athangudi* tiles, and now remodeled with part granite flooring, the marriage hall was a beauty. The traditional Chettiyar weddings were large family affairs, held in the main hall and *valavu/mutram* of the large mansions, with entire extended family attending and sharing the chores.



The Kalaiyarkoil temple with its towering *gopurams*

A Sangam era town

Collecting some snacks, the group headed in a van to Kalaiyarkoil. A town that has existed right from the Sangam era – Thirukaanaper mentioned in Purananooru. Later, the town of Kalaiyarkoil was a fort of the famed Muthuvaduganathar, King of Sivagangai, who was the first to revolt against the British rule in the 1770s, and Maruthu Pandiyar, the brave chieftains who laid down their lives in our freedom struggle. Said to be built in the 7th Century by Maravarman Sundarapandian, and later additions made by King Varaguna Pandiyan and Maruthu brothers, the present nine-tiered Rajagopuram of Sri Swarna Kaleeswarar temple, Kalaiyarkoil, built by Marudhu brothers, towers a lofty 150 feet!

Next to it is another five-tiered older tower built by Sundarapandian. Entering inside, one can find the large four-acre complex housing three separate shrines for Lord Shiva – Swarna Kaaleswarar, Somaeswarar and Sundareswarar. There is a statue of King Muthuvaduganathar in the temple, his hands folded in prayer. He was killed in the battle of Kalaiyarkoil on June 26, 1772. There are statues of Maruthu brothers. Inscriptions dating to early Pandiyas- Jatavarman, Sundara Pandiyan and Kulasekara I are found in the temple complex. There are separate shrines for Swarnavalli, Soundara Nayagi and Meenakshi.

The temple complex also has a large water tank called

'aanaimadu', which is said to have been created by Airavatam, the elephant of Lord Indra. On our way in and out, we had a happy time petting and posing for pictures with the temple elephant Swarnavalli. She was very compliant and happy at the attention she received, munching away the bananas we fed her. The temple which was kept locked for a time was renovated and reopened by the Devakottai Zamin family. It is managed by the King of Sivaganga, ably administered by a trust of Devakottai Zamin family. We next moved on to the Vedanta Mutt, another large mansion belonging to



Inside the temple



The *teppakulam* tank, Kalaiyarkoil

Devakottai Zamin. Vedanta Mutt was set up by A.L.A.R.R.M. Arunachalam Chettiyar, the erstwhile zamindar, who took up *sanyas* and changed his name to Arunachala Gnana Desikar Swamigal. As we offered prayers to his *samadhi* inside the *mutt*, admiring the long pillared corridors and the breezy terrace, we could see the large temple tank and longed to reach the *mandapam* at the middle of the tank. Orange-stalked *pavazhamalli* jasmines lay strewn in front of the *mutt*, lending an ethereal feel.

The team walked through the barren tank's side and reached the middle of the tank and the tall *mandapam*. The

teppakulam where the annual *Teppam* festival is held in the Tamil month of Vaikasi, bore a serene look. Cooling our heels, we enjoyed the fresh air and clicked pictures. The next spot on our itinerary was Maruthu Pandiyar Manimandapam, a small shrine erected in 2006, on a road opposite to Kalaiyarkoil temple. The Maruthu Pandiyar brothers – Periya Maruthu and Chinna Maruthu, local chieftains of then Sivagangai King Muthuvaduganathar, supported Queen Velu Nachiyar establish her supremacy after the king's death. They helped Oomadurai, the brother of Panchalankurichi King Kattabomman, escape from the clutches of the British.



The Vedanta Mutt, Kalaiyarkoil



The statue of King Muthuvaduganathar



The Sarugani Church

There started a hunt to kill them, the English forces fanning the entire town knowing they were hiding in their favourite Kalaiyarkoil temple. After a prolonged struggle, they were captured and hanged by the British on October 24, 1801. The deified Periya Maruthu has *pooja*-s done, and their mother Ponnathal is interred here.

The church at Sarugani

After a sumptuous lunch at the ALAR Trust house at Kalaiyarkoil, we moved on to Sarugani, another small village nearby. The Sacred Hearts of Mary and Jesus Roman Catholic Church is said to be the first church of India dedicated to Sacred Heart. The church's frontage with interesting stuccos of Sacred Hearts of Mary and Jesus has not been altered, ever since it was built in 1753. Rev. James Thomas De Rossi, the missionary from Italy served in this part of the country from 1736, and was revered by the local population as "Chinna Saveriar". Consecrated by the Bishop of Cochin, the church has separate altars for Our Mother of Sorrows and St. Theresa. The tomb of Father Leveil, a Jesuit priest from France, called "People's Priest" who rendered yeomen service in this church, is much revered by the people, and is within the church complex. There is also a separate Grotto, where Father Leveil prayed. On 21st March every year, the Feast of Father Leveil is celebrated in Sarugani when people of different faiths come together. Again, Maruthu brothers are remembered by the faithful here, for it was they who

donated land for this church. Chinna Maruthu, just before his execution, requested the British to honour the grants he had given to this Roman Catholic church. The car festival expenses of the church were borne by Chinna Maruthu, and he donated a village called Maraneri to the church.

Pillaiyarpatti and a rare Ganesha

We returned to the Zamin house for lip-smacking evening snacks, and traveled to Pillaiyarpatti. Located near the town of Tirupattur, the Karpaga Vinayagar Temple of Pillaiyarpatti is very ancient, the Lord Tiruveesar and Karpaga Vinayagar both carved out of rock. The rock-cut cave temple is said to have been excavated between 2-4 CE. This temple is revered by the Nagarathar community, as one among their nine Nagarathar clan temples. There are 14 inscriptions in this temple dating from 5CE to 13CE. From 1284 AD, this temple has remained with the Nagarathar. The Vinayagar (Ganesha) of this temple is said to be the oldest Ganesha and also a rare one, a sculpture with two hands.

Interestingly, the sculptor of this Ganesha has affixed his signature in stone, 'Ekkaatur Kone Paranan Perunthachchan' in the script of 4-5 CE. Hence the assumption, that this sculpture could have been made in 4-5 CE. The Ganesha is massive – it stands tall at 6 feet, a bas-relief fully covered in silver armour. His trunk is curved to the right, and so he is called Valampuri Vinayagar. There are three shrines for Lord Siva and his consorts in the temple complex – Thiruveesar,



The Pillaiyarpatti Temple is a rock-cut temple

Marudheesar and Senchadeswarar, with their respective consorts, Sivagami, Vadamalar Mangai and Soundara Nayagi. The festival of Vinayaga Chathurti is celebrated for ten days with great devotion in the temple.

We attended the *mangalaarti* with help from the trustees – the PKNK brothers. Interestingly, the trustees stay back at the temple office for their entire term of about three years, and are selected from the clan in charge of the temple. The brothers took us around their office – a hi-tech kitchen where a massive production of *idli*-s was underway, and we were taken to the newly constructed *gaushala*, complete with cool flooring and fans. They opened the stores and showed us the ingredients stocked up for the daily food served at the temple, and also the *naivedyam* for the presiding deities. The entire area is maintained spic and span, and the temple tank looks serene with clear water.

The temple on a hillock

The next stop was Kundrakkudi Shanmuganathar temple on the outskirts of Karaikudi. The 130-feet high hillock loomed above us, and as it was almost time for closing, we had to jump and hop the steps to reach the temple on top. We were just in time to witness the *arthajamapooja*, the presiding deity Shanmuganathar with six faces and 12 hands stands majestically, looking as if he is alighting from his peacock. Saint Arunagirinathar has sung his Tirupugazh hymns, the 15th century anthology on Muruga, praising the Lord Shanmuganathar of this shrine. The merciful consorts of Muruga, Valli and Deivanai look graceful, all three seated individually on peacocks. There are some Brahmi epigraphic evidences that point out to the existence of Jain Pallis in this cave temple complex. Here too, there are sculptures of Maruthu brothers. As we were late, we missed visiting the three caves on the western side of the hillock, which are said to be the architectural marvel of the Pandyas, currently under ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) control.



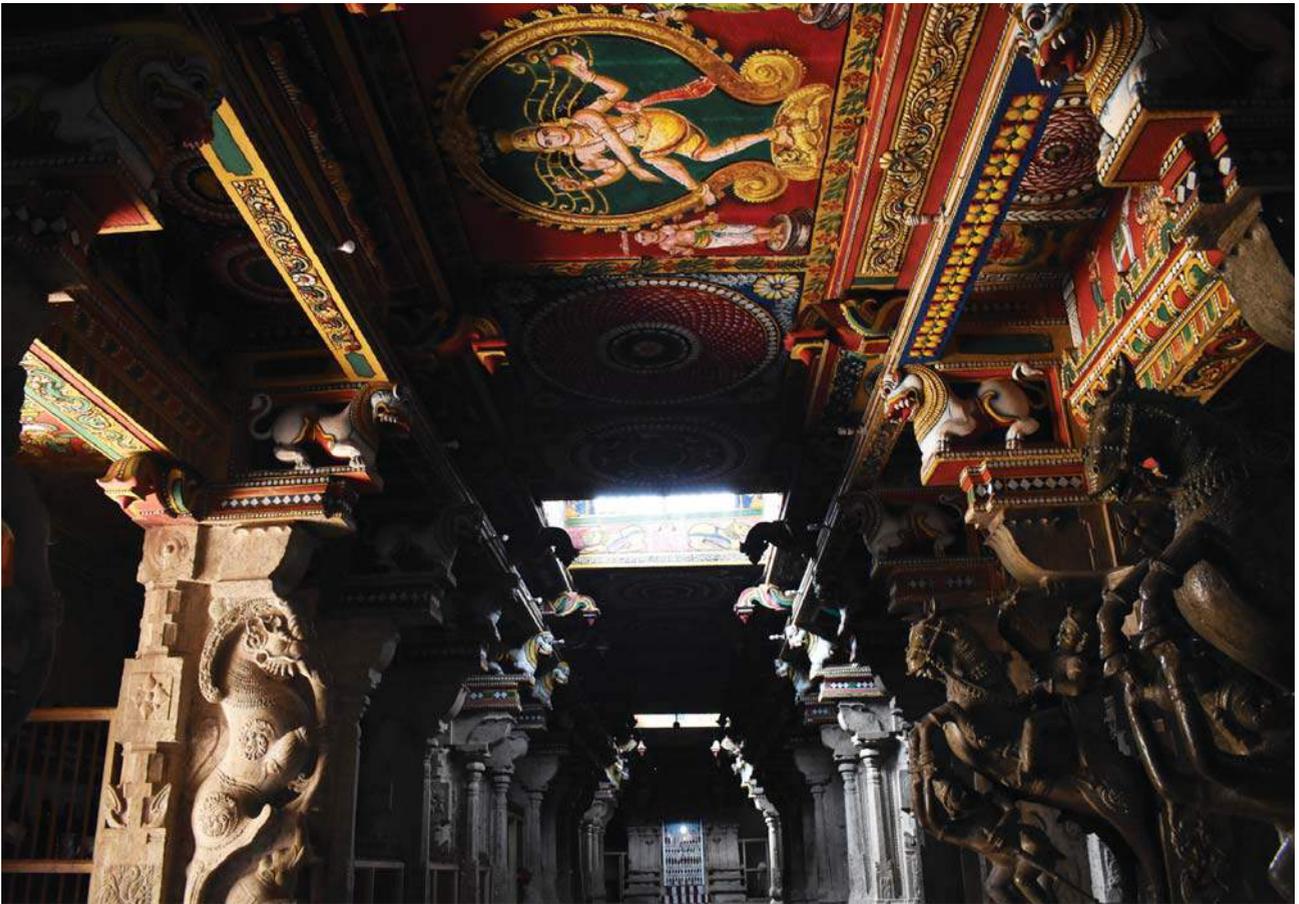
The main hall of the Lakshmi Vilas bungalow, Athangudi

After a hearty meal of *parotta*-s and curry in a hotel at Karaikkudi, we retired for the night, too tired to even speak with each other. “I shall come and wake you guys at 6 am! Coffee will be served by then, and we have a hectic day ahead”, warned Venkatesh as he left, and we were sleeping like logs in no time.

A walk through Devakottai

The next morning went in a flurry, and by the time we got ready for breakfast, the sun was up and scorching. We were again treated to a hearty breakfast, and dragged our feet to one of the ancestral houses of Venkatesh, watching peacocks loitering around. The house was a mansion with separate armoury. As we got hold of the spears, freshly painted and gleaming, we started a photo-op, jostling to grab them and pose with them. We walked through the town, admiring the Emperor George Gate, erected in commemoration of the coronation of King George V, in 1911, opened by R. Nagasundramlyer, Taluq Board President, Devakottai. The next stop was another palatial house of Venkatesh, the Lakshmi Vilas. The rambling mansion with high arches, massive pillars and windows, has once been the abode of the Zamin, and has hosted innumerable VIPs who have visited Devakottai. The external courtyard has a small pond, and in its midst is a podium that has hosted prominent Carnatic music singers, including M.S. Subbulakshmi and M.L. Vasanthakumari. As we entered the house, the chandeliers, the traditional black and white checked tiles and teak banisters, welcomed us to a bygone era of grandeur.

The walls are adorned with amazing Tanjore paintings, adding to the glory. The star attraction was however the underground *nilavarai* where the riches were once stored. Holding a torch we fumbled down the stairs, standing for a few moments inside the badly lit room with zero ventilation, imagining how the room must have been once, with its gold and silver.



The Vayiravanpatti Temple corridor, with the mural of Nataraja on its ceiling

The temple at Vayiravanpatti

Next on the packed itinerary was Vayiravanpatti, Vayiravankoil. Located about 15kms from Karaikudi, this temple is one of the nine Nagarathar temples, and is managed by a trust. The Vairava Theertham, the temple tank, is filled with water, and we were awed by the stucco figures on the five-tiered Rajagopuram. A stucco of Lord Subramaniya with 12 heads and 24 arms peered down at us from the *gopuram*. The presiding deity is Valaroli Nathar with his consort Vadivudai Nayagi. However, it is the Bhairavar of this temple who is famous that has fetched the temple and the village the name Vayiravar and Vayiravanpatti. He appears in a separate shrine to the right of Vadivudai Nayagi's shrine, with his *vahan*, the dog. Though said to be more than a 1,000 years old, there is a lack of inscriptions to support the claim.

The temple has typical Nagarathar architecture, and can said to have been constructed less than 500 years ago. On the external wall of the sanctum sanctorum, there is a sculpture of Lord Ram praying to Hanuman, with his hands folded. There are interesting sculptures of Chandikeswara, Kannappa Nayanar and Meenakshi Tirukalyanam carved out of a single rock, musical pillars in front of the Dakshinamurthy shrine, a warrior on horseback ready to strike, the Sthala Vriksha, Bikshadana, Manmadha and Rati, Kali, Muruga and many more. The most striking feature of Vayiravanpatti temple is,

however, the murals on the ceilings. There are 37 murals of Vairava Purana and 43 of Ramayana and Mahabharata, all done with exquisite details and vivid colouring. The *mandap* looks like a multicolor rainbow, the ceilings and walls shining with paintings. The temple was electrified in 1947.

The next stop is Sathyamurthi Perumal Temple in Tirumayam Fort, near Pudukottai. The temple is said to have been built during 9CE by the Pandyas. The cave temple has Lord Vishnu in a sleeping posture, with Lord Brahma and Devas behind him, as bas reliefs. The Ananthasayanam posture is inside a natural cavern, and the sculptures in the Mukha *mandap* are exquisite. This is also said to be the biggest reclining Vishnu made of stone, in India. Outside the main shrine are dozens of Nagas, five-headed serpents. The temple complex also houses the Sathyagiriswara Temple, both the temples share the same compound.

The Tirumayam Fort was built on a hill, during the period 1673-1708 by King of Ramnad, Kilavan Sethupathi. Said to have been an extensive one, the fort that we see now is only part of the old fort that existed with seven layers of walls protecting it. Now there are only four. There is a huge canon mounted atop the hill, and six more on the north, south and east gates. There are pigeon holes on the fort walls to enable placing guns for shooting. There is a small cave with a Siva *linga* found *enroute* to the hilltop.

The scorching afternoon sun reminded us of our lunch



The Canon atop the Tirumayam Fort

and we scamped to Konapattu, another village to visit an old mansion. After a delicious lunch in the courtyard of Sambandan Chettiar, who had recently turned a century old, we move to our next destination - Athangudi.

The beautiful tiles of Athangudi

Athangudi is a sleepy village in Sivaganga district, known for its handmade Athangudi tiles. The day being Sunday, we couldn't locate a tile making factory that worked, and chose to visit Lakshmi Vilas or the shooting bungalow first. Awestruck will be an understatement. The grandeur of Italian marble, Burmese teak pillars, exquisite paintings, arches, patterned ceilings in multicolour paint, mirror work on doors, glazed Athangudi tiles and long corridors – the house of N.A.R. Nachiappa Chettiar and A. Muthupatnam has an entry fee of ₹50, and is worth every single *paisa!*

Venkatesh was finally able to get hold of his friend, who promised to show us how Athangudi tiles are made. The traditional tiles are still handmade, and are in great demand. He mixed cement powder and coloured oxide in a liquid slurry state, and poured it into patterned moulds, repeating for different colours, placed on a glass piece. A thin layer of

sand is spread over it, and the tile is then filled three-fourth inch with cement, sand and small stones, to get the tile. He explained how the dried tile is then immersed in water for 21 days for curing. Imagine, each one of these tiles goes through this rigorous process, and a lot of careful manual labour is involved. However, when we think of ethnic buildings, the flooring has to be Athangudi tile in these parts. We returned to Devakottai travel-weary and tired. After a short break, we started for the railway station to catch our night train, fully loaded with lovingly packed *idli-s* and *chutney-s*. As we continued playing *antakshari* while waiting for our train back to Chennai, the only wish I had was to stay back and enjoy the small-town peace and life.

Once in a while, I guess, I will be dusting my memories and picking up tiny fragments of happiness that travel brings. As Gustav Flaubert said –“Travel makes one modest. You see what a tiny place you occupy in this world.” ■



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“I am a very practical person. A guru should be a friend of the disciples, not be aloof from, but be part of the society, mix with people and spread social awareness.”



Sadguru Yogiraj Sri Sri Dr. Mangeshda, with a doctorate in *kriya yoga*, is a multi-faceted personality who has excelled in whatever he has chosen – be it sports, studies, music, yoga, naturopathy and spirituality. A *karma yogi*, who believes that actions speak more than words, he has been personally leading various social activities for the under-privileged and the disabled. A patron of the International Naturopathy Organisation, he has participated six times in the World

Congress on Alternative Healing. In conversation with **A. Radhakrishnan**.

What is the basic purpose of establishing the Sadguru Mangeshda Kriya Yoga Foundation?

It is a registered charitable trust, established to carry out charitable work and inculcate in the disciples, the habit of doing selfless work, and help society lead a healthy, balanced, and a peaceful life through *kriya yoga*.

A brief enumeration of its activities.

The 93 centres of the Foundation worldwide spread the message of ‘unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness’ for world peace. I conduct regular *kriya yoga* initiations and its other services include ‘Eye Pledge-We Pledge’, a campaign to eradicate corneal blindness, now reaching 50 lakh pledges; regular sessions of stress management, self-recognition and development, *yoga* and meditation, diet, alternate healing techniques, cleanliness awareness drives, tree plantation drives, regular yoga teaching sessions in schools for students and teachers. We also bestow the Kriyasheel Global awards upon distinguished personalities from different fields for their outstanding contribution to society.

What is *kriya yoga* and how is it different from other *yoga*?

I am a *kriya yogi*. *Kriya yoga* is a 5,000 year old ancient path of spirituality, which is the essence of all *yoga*-s. The main 5 fold paths are: 1. *Kriya hatha yoga* 2. *Kriya kundalini pranayama-s* 3. *Kriya mantra yoga* 4. *Kriya dhyana yoga* 5. *Kriya bhakti yoga*. Known collectively as ‘*Sahaj yoga*’, everyone can practice it. Its base is *dhyana* (meditation), which makes the mind focussed, calm and ready for any challenges in the outer world. Its regular practice refines the metabolism of the individual, leading to good health devoid of stress and disease.

It works on all 3 levels of the body, the mind and the spirit and is different from other *yoga*-s as its foundation is spiritual, where health and fitness complement each other. Lord Krishna narrated *kriya yoga* to Arjuna in the 18 chapters in the Bhagwad Gita. A basic platform, it deals with human beings.

What are the highlights of the techniques developed by you? How does one learn it?

Kriya yoga can be learnt only after the age of 13. The initiation includes the transfer of spiritual energy from the *guru* to the disciple, after which, he discloses the secret techniques. The

person concerned has to maintain the secrecy of this science. It is an intense session of six levels. After the first level, one should practice as per capacity for at least one year before going on to the second level. Self-commitment, readiness and an intense desire to learn are essential for success. Guru-disciple communication and guidance always exists in this spiritual progress.

Kriya yoga became available to the modern world when in the 1890s, Sri Sri Mahavtara Babaji disclosed the techniques to Sri Sri Lahiri Mahasaya. This lineage was taken ahead by Yukteshwar Giriji and Yoganandji. Keeping in tune with the complexities of the modern world, I introduced mindfulness techniques to augment the *kriya yoga* techniques without changing or modifying the original. It is necessary to practice it throughout the day and not just for 30-40 minutes to help keep the practitioner alert, full of energy and concentrated throughout the day.

How satisfied are you with your journey of spreading the message to the common people?

This is my 50th year of practising *yoga*. After nine years of *sanyas* in the Himalayas, I returned to the material world, *sansar*, 32 years ago. I have visited more than 55 countries, and am very satisfied with the response. In these testing times of violence and intolerance, the youth are looking for a unifying force of peace and calmness. At one end, there are negative forces creating violence and hatred in the world, and at the other end there are people practising love and forgiveness with *Kriya yoga*.

My Sadguruji wished that I live like a normal person and systematically spread what I had learnt about *Kriya yoga* as a mission to spiritual seekers. There is no need to renounce anything. One can continue to lead the life of a householder and yet walk the pious, ancient and scientific path of *Kriya yoga*.

What is the importance of *yoga* in life?

Yoga means union of the gross body and the subtler body. We use our five senses, to see, hear, smell, touch and taste. But often we are unmindful, unfocussed and overcome by stress, losing our energy, forgetting things. In a short time, without investment in any equipment or space, one can easily practise *yoga* effectively with correct postures, pranayama and meditation, and instead of controlling the mind, one can direct the mind to reality through mindfulness, and be stress and disease free.

Talk a bit about your childhood. How did you metamorphose into becoming a Sadguru? What does it mean?

My upbringing was from the lower strata of the society. As

the youngest of nine siblings, I started to earn at a very young age due to our financial circumstances. Completing my own education by selling newspapers and doing mundane jobs, I also started learning classical dancing at a very young age and composed ballets at the age of 10, when in fact, I took a troupe of 75 people and performed at The Royal Albert Hall, London.

The area that we stayed in was infamous for notoriety, bootlegging, crimes, etc.. I realised that I needed to keep my body healthy and pure and eschew vices. But luckily, there were also people in our area, who used to practice *yoga* and trying to emulate them, I became a part of their group. I further learnt martial arts with the sole purpose of self-defence. I am a three time national karate champion and even won the gold medal for India at the Asian Karate Championship.

Soon after, the pious day of Mahashivratri was a turning point when I took a bold step and left home. I met my Sadguru, Yogiraj Sri Sri Mahavatar Babaji Sadguru at Dahanu for the first time. I did not recognise him, but there was a strong attraction, which made me follow him. I got initiated in *Kriya yoga* and after passing all the six levels was then sent back to spread *Kriya yoga* throughout the world. 'Sadguru' is a post given respectfully to me by my disciples, out of love and affection.

Can your versatility be called a miracle? What makes you such an unconventional jeans-clad Sadguru?

No, I don't believe in miracles. What I achieved was because of my passion and determination. I would practise martial arts daily for 10 hours, and would aim only for gold, neither silver nor bronze and the same went for gymnastics, etc. Passion helps you achieve the ultimate. I love travel and trekking too. When I reached the base camp of Mt. Kanchenjunga, I vowed to touch the summit of Mt. Everest, but did not get the opportunity.

I am a very practical person. A *guru* should be a friend of the disciples, not be aloof from, but be part of the society, mix with people and spread social awareness. 'Yes, I can, Yes, we can', is my slogan. I integrate the talents of all my disciples, and encourage them to contribute to society.

How much importance should one give to wealth and money?

One should know how to have a balance of everything in life. Money is certainly very important to meet our basic survival needs and care of our family. Spending is important, but it is also very important to realise the source of this income. There is no balance, if one has wealth, but no health.

How important is the charity of the individual?

I feel that we need to contribute 25% of our earnings to

charity. In spirituality, we say, *Aham Brahasmi*, which means that 'I am a part of the society'. If I can contribute a tiny part for the benefit of others, it will surely help the needy. Just as we know to inhale, we should also know how to exhale.

How can the world be rid of its agony, sadness, and pain?

Basically these are negative emotions. Expectation from others is the biggest cause. I always advocate 'do your best positively and accept the results gracefully'.

You have done yeoman work in the field of cornea donation and the elimination of blindness. Elaborate other services.

My friend Dr. Tatyrao Lahane, who has been working with the visibly challenged for decades, asked me to promote eye pledges. My mission of 'Eye Pledge – We Pledge' in a very short time, has achieved almost 50 lakhs. The day we reach two crore eye pledges, will be when we would have eradicated corneal blindness from India. '*Tulsi Abhiyan*' was started to combat swine flu, where more than 10 lakh *tulsi* saplings were distributed door to door, free of cost. For the protection of women, self-defence training is given.

Our unique programme, 'Gurukul' teaches adolescent children to hone their hidden talents, aid in career guidance, improve memory, remove stage fright and impart many practical skills which will prove useful later on in life.

You have significantly contributed to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Please also tell about your journey from 'Mumbai to Mansarovar'.

We began the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' about 19 years ago. We would go street to street and educate the community, especially kids, about the value of cleanliness, the ill effects of spitting on the road, littering etc. This awareness campaign, which began in Mumbai, reached the pious Lake Mansarovar, where we cleaned a tonne of garbage from its vicinity.

The Foundation does not propagate any religion or superstition, but it is essentially Hindu, right?

As a science graduate, I teach scientifically and have fought superstitions. I respect astrology too, but mental health is equally important. Superstition builds fear and spirituality negates it. Both are contradictory and cannot stay together. My Foundation has people from all religions and is based on the five elements everyone is born with. Where is it written that they belong to any particular religion?

Are awards important? What awards have you and the Foundation won?

Awards basically mean recognition for the work done, and an appreciation, a sign of inspiration, and encouragement,

though I do not work for awards.

Among the awards received are the Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam's Lifetime Achievement award, the Best Citizen of India award, the International Social Service Achiever award, Asia Pacific International Award, the Bharat Jyoti award, Jewel of India award, Indo-Vietnam Award of Excellence, Green Ambassador award, etc.

What do you feel about the politics and spiritualism in present India?

India has been the propagator of spirituality and home to many renowned spiritual seekers for thousands of years, and continues to be. Even Mahabharata saw politics, through messages of the characters of Duryodhana, Dushyasan and Shakuni. Similarly, we also learn the meaning of politics from Chanakya. Every human being is different with different feelings and experiences. The 18 chapters of Bhagwad Gita are very apt even now, where what Lord Krishna teaches about the true nature of a human being, beginning with the quote, '*yada-yada-hi-dharmasya-glanir-bhavati-bharata...*' Thus, in spirituality there can be no politics and is above all worldly desires.

How can Kriya yoga be used in making the dream of today's youth meaningful?

Youngsters understand better if taught scientifically. Today, stress and expectation is the main cause of imbalance in the youth. Kriya yoga is a 24-hour practice session, which is, consciously doing things and resting the brain at regular intervals. Daily practice of Kriya yoga gives immense energy to the *kriyaban-s*.

My message is, "You have tremendous energy which needs to be properly channelised. There is a high possibility of moving on the wrong track and going astray because of wrong influences. Don't be negative! Come forward, get counselled. Please note that there is a solution for everything."

What's your message to the world?

The effects of global warming and environmental disasters, are being felt. Turbulence has already begun, thanks to our ignoring the environment. This is the right time to introspect

and be a part of positive groups, and unitedly fight against negativities. Nothing is impossible. Happiness is waiting for us. Don't give up hope. ■



A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, who also writes short stories, indulges in poetry and photography, and when not making friends, likes to pass around humour in good measure.

The die is not cast(e)

India's caste system has and continues to be a subject of many debates. In the end, it comes down to this - Is the caste system dead in India, or is it flourishing?

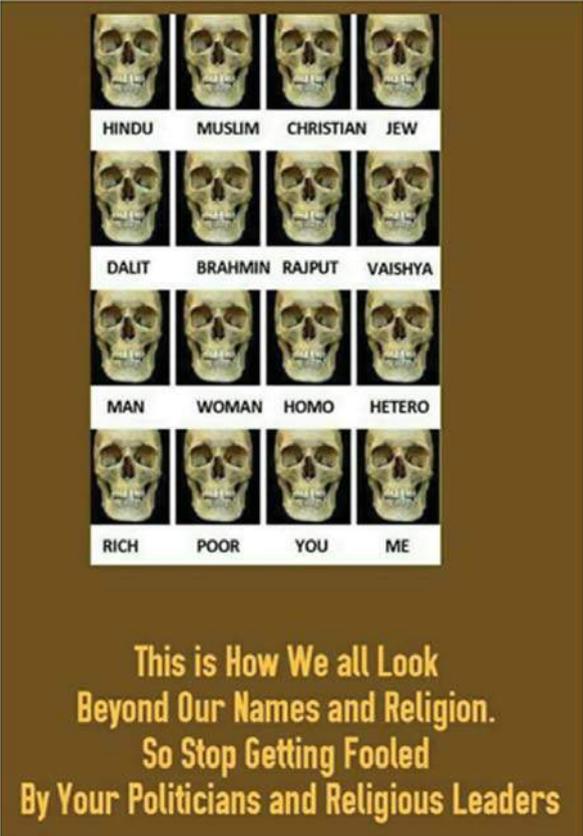
G. Venkatesh talks to a cross-section of his peers to piece together some realities.

THIS piece is inspired by two events. One, the dalit uprising which brought Mumbai to a halt recently. Two, the 60th anniversary celebration of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour (OLPS) High School, Chembur – this author's alma mater. The first is the reason for the choice of the theme of this article – caste system in India. The second has led yours sincerely to reach out to his former classmates – convent-educated, city-bred, progressive 46-year-olds, who passed out of OLPS in 1987. Yours sincerely has availed of the freedom of expression in a democracy to compile diverse-yet-similar opinions and viewpoints through a WhatsApp group chat from people who have seen and observed, heard and listened, thought and introspected, and finally decided. No half-baked spontaneous outbursts, but well-formed ones which have stood and will stand the test of time. The motivation is not to challenge readers or question beliefs, overturn traditions or hurt sensitivities. It is more a 'question-raising', a buffet of comments from which readers can pick and choose, what and how much they want, or simply decide to walk away without tasting anything. Alongwith the freedom of expression, comes the freedom of agreement and disagreement.

In God's image?

Let me begin with an excerpt from a published article of mine, in the journal *Problemy Ekorozwoju* (Problems of Sustainable Development, in Polish). "According to the *Manusmriti*, 'But for

the sake of the prosperity of the worlds, He caused the Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra to proceed from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet. He refers to the Infinite God... and of course, you will all agree that what originates from His feet is as precious as what originates from His mouth, thighs and shoulders! So, how can one say that one caste is superior to the others?'" (Venkatesh, 2017) And if we also believe that God created Man in his own image, it follows indisputably that each and every one of us, is an admixture of the four castes we have created in society! This spiritual awareness is indispensable for sustainable development in the post-modern era, when every one of us is looked upon to make diverse contributions to the upkeep of social welfare, economic growth and environmental conservation. At once, all the professions one can think of come to mind! Even if it is true that the caste system was, at its inception, developed for the division of labour, interpreting the *Manusmriti* differently in the 21st century will enable one to understand that nothing is the preserve of any privileged section of society anymore, nor should any group of people be



The above was received on WhatsApp by the writer

barred from taking up professions of their choice on the basis of outdated caste-based discrimination.

With that backdrop, let us move on to dwell on what the respondents had to say. They have been identified by their first names here. Saikat reminded me that the caste system is alive and kicking in rural India and that I should focus there for my survey, in order to get antipodal viewpoints for this piece. Of course, when the potential respondents are delimited by the aforesaid criterion, one misses out on the diametrically-opposite points of view, which make any

'talk-show' on TV for instance, extremely interesting. City-bred, convent-educated 46-year-olds obviously will concur with each other that the caste system is a blot which needs to be bleached out of society. This though is a generalisation, and unless one investigates far and wide, one can never be sure of even this.

While Arjun from the USA agrees with Saikat, Danny and Anil – both Christians – chip in to tell me that the caste system is not the sole preserve of Hinduism. Anil points out that the term '*Bhamun* Christians' (Brahmin Christians) was often bandied about by Christians who knew that their ancestors – several generations ago – who were converted to Christianity had been upper-caste Hindus. Danny concurs by observing that it is prevalent in some parts of rural Goa even now, where '*Bhamun* Christians' do not get married to 'non-*Bhamun* Christians'. This harks back to Saikat's observation that it is alive and kicking in rural India. Danny tells me that the European powers which colonised India – the Portuguese and the British – excelled in 'Divide and Rule' and the caste system which was prevalent became a weapon in their hands, which they wielded very dexterously to subjugate us. Interestingly, he refers to the 'God made man in his own image' allusion which appears earlier in this article, albeit in a different way, by saying that he understands the importance of a diverse range of qualities for a human being. Both Danny and Claude were 'introduced' to the caste system so to say, when they heard from their friends (who were upper-caste Brahmins) in the late 1980s, that despite scoring very high marks in the XII standard, they struggled to secure admission on merit to good engineering colleges of their respective choices, thanks to the reservation policy.

This author often wanted to believe that the caste system came about for

better division of labour in society, but Anil reminds me that it was created by privileged groups of people in society in order to hold on to their privileges and dominate the ones who were categorised as 'lower castes'. He also does not see any reason to reinterpret the quotation from the Manusmriti which appeared in an earlier paragraph, as he believes that the frame of reference was created so that the collective conscience could be satisfied, theoretically. Very convincing indeed. Asked if the top-down hierarchy of the castes could be redesigned as a left-to-right random ordering of co-existing groups of people in Indian society, he wonders why the concept itself cannot be expunged for good. Another classmate, Deep, is of the view that casteism in all religions, not explicitly at times, but it can be seen if one closely observes how people in society behave vis-à-vis other co-religionists. Here, Girish wishes to differentiate between 'upper-class mentality' and 'upper-caste mentality'.

The topic of reservation triggers an interesting discussion among the group members. Deep believes that as long as the policy of reservation persists in India, people will automatically be reminded of the caste divide, whether they believe in it or not. However, Rajesh points out that the said policy is a fledgling compared to the caste system which has prevailed for centuries. The policy was implemented to right some of the wrongs and create a level-playing field for the oppressed classes. However, even though the intention was pure, it failed to yield the intended outcome. Governance, Ramdas observes, has declined since the 1960s, with the focus having been directed just to a small basket of wrongs to be righted. The wood has been missed for the trees.

When asked if the caste system has held India back all along, Anil uses examples of Shambuk from the Ramayana and Ekalavya from

the Mahabharatha to reinforce his observation that caste has often been used to restrict development of knowledge in art, philosophy and warfare, for example. Social consciousness, he avers, must break through the silos of outdated value-systems, making choices free for everyone in society. May the best man win. May the most eligible take away the trophy. Reservations must be like the starter motors in automobiles. They must be taken away once the automobile is in motion – in other words, once a single generation of people from the oppressed classes has reaped the benefits, one would expect that generation to pass on the benefits to their wards who could then compete fairly with the so-called 'upper castes'. But that is what ails India. We do not know what and when to do and what and when to undo.

The die though is not cast. The generations to come – even the ones in India's villages – which will be exposed more and more to modernity, will not want to waste time abiding by the caste system. As Anil pointed out, social consciousness will prevail. If India, with its manpower and skillsets, has to steal a march over other developing countries, this is a *sine qua non*. Period.

(Acknowledgements: Thanks to all my friends from school who shared their viewpoints with me on WhatsApp. This piece is dedicated to my alma mater – Our Lady of Perpetual Succour High School, Chembur, Mumbai, which turned 60 recently. The author and the respondents passed out of it when it was 30 years old.) ■

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Education without borders

*Environmental education in India is restricted by its curriculum. This despite India being one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, with its rich cultural heritage and its profound and intimate relationship with nature, says **Harshad Sambamurthy**. He earnestly suggests that we utilise stories and the oral traditions of the past to bring about a shift.*

PLAINLY defined, environmental education is an interdisciplinary field that seeks to raise awareness on environmental issues through science-based knowledge dissemination. As a space, it has had its fair share of criticism, with its detractors pointing to its failure in keeping pace with environmental degradation. It is significant to note that nature conservation — and environmental education alike — seem to have drowned in a culture of negativity and hopelessness; often, the result of depressing coverage and bleak portrayals of conservation issues. This might stem from the difficulty in communicating the immense relevance and importance of conservation and sustainability to the average person.

Creative education, the need of the hour

The fundamentally science-based, and cognitive-centric character of environmental education leaves little room for tapping in to the affective domain — the part of the brain which relates to moods, feelings and attitudes — and such constriction is perhaps what straitjackets our discourse on conservation and sustainability. To bridge this gap, the inclusion of creative educational and pedagogical tools like storytelling or mythology and symbology can realise a never-before-seen scope and potential in harnessing the strength



The tiger has a seminal role in India's folklore

of the affective domain in playing a decisive role in nature conservation. Such an approach — presently missing in conventional science-based environmental education — will help forge and re-imagine a newfound relationship with the natural world.

Storytelling particularly, helps highlight the interrelationship and interdependence of both nature and culture; how the conservation of one is intrinsically linked with — and perhaps requisite upon — the conservation of the other. Stories offer creative and empowering ways of strengthening education in a multicultural world. It is a crucial ingredient that helps people

derive meaning and purpose in their lives. In a variety of literature spanning nations, stories appear in numerous forms; from novels, myths and fables, to plays, films, histories and biographies. Myths — as is true in many communities and cultures — “shape worldview and are truth-laden, often considered sacred and are set in the distant past”. Myths convey continuity with past values and lifeways, whilst offering contemporary messages and details. Myths are particularly “invoked during times of crisis, to help us affirm that our lives are indeed livable”. Stories invite teachers, practitioners, and students to consider how persons in any culture come to

understand themselves as they do, how such understanding “determines behaviour and relationships, and how change in self-understanding occurs”.

Imagine a curriculum or educational system that weaves together stories and narratives to supplement learning in courses such as the natural sciences or environmental studies. Using folklore, symbology and storytelling as complementary educational and pedagogical tools could provide a holistic learning experience; by unifying scientific, cognitive-centric curricula with affective-appealing techniques to help spark creative strategies towards conservation.

The use of myths and stories for conservation

Historically, the tiger, India's national animal, has played a major role in folklore as a guardian spirit, god or soul brother of humans, that demonstrates an early conservation ethic and innate belief in the balance of all beings. It is the most iconic of the big cats and is a symbol of strength endowed with longevity, known to be the steed of the immortals. The tiger's longevity however, has since been jeopardised by human-induced threats.

As Valmik Thapar, the renowned tiger conservationist notes, before the “advent of the gun, tigers were killed only during ceremonial occasions, there was no mass or wiful destruction”. This is an interesting point; perhaps the progress of technology that has allowed for the exponential increase in human populations, urbanisation and human encroachment into many natural spaces, has diluted our reverence for, and relationship with tigers, and thus, contributed to their astonishing decline. It is remarkable, that amongst all the communities that shared the forest with the tiger, it was never feared as a bloodthirsty killer nor wantonly slaughtered, instead

regarded as the protector of the forest. The interrelationship between culture and wildlife is noteworthy, and the conservation of one appears requisite upon the conservation of the other. By conserving myths, stories and folklore, can we indeed conserve our wildlife?

Many of the countries that fall within the tiger's geographical range have recognised — in their education strategies — the importance of involving the local community in tiger conservation, and emphasise the need to highlight in their curricula and educational material, the significance of tigers as celebrated members of a rich cultural heritage. Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Russia in particular, explicitly make connections between nature conservation and cultural heritage. Although the usage of symbology or mythology as a means for conserving tigers are not explicitly mentioned, the educational strategies of these countries indicate enormous scope and potential for the incorporation of such tools. Drawing on the cultural heritage of a nation or of a peoples can transform conservation education into a pedagogy that is historically, personally, and culturally relevant. Thereby, the subsequent development of a *cultural consciousness* will not only appeal to the affective domain —creating a well-rounded and balanced education — but moreover, serve as a platform by which individuals can re-connect with their environment, and once again, regain their sense of place and identity.

There are pockets where environmental education in some form is being taught in our schools, yet for the larger part, our educational system is predominantly textbook, and this robotic rigidity and subservience to the syllabus makes the case for the inclusion of unconventional, creative approaches, complex. Broadly speaking, there is very little motivation or impetus, over and above the core syllabus, to encourage students to develop a more holistic

view of their immediate surrounding environment. Familiarity and the eventual cognisance of local cultural and environmental heritage is paramount for a complete learning experience.

A place-based model for environmental education, where individuals are conscious of, and actively exposed to their immediate environment as places of learning, can help nurture an appreciation and love for one's surrounding space. It is unrealistic to expect teachers and students, or even schools for that matter, to immediately find reason in these methods, and employ them within their classrooms. Rather, we must start small; for example, environmental education in the form of an extra-curricular activity can organically spur students to push for its inclusion in core curriculum. This could help catalyse a wave of fresh grassroots approaches to nature conservation outside of the classroom; that will drive and influence educational and environmental policy from the bottom-up.

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The real superstar

The untimely demise of India's only female superstar, Sridevi, has shocked and jolted her fans in India and across the world. Shoma A. Chatterji pays tribute to this colossal artist, whom India will miss very much.

SRIDEVI (1963-2018), whose real name was Shree Amma Yanger Ayyapan never went back to her real name after she stepped into films at the tender age of four, never having gone to school, much less, to college. The name and the person who stripped herself of that identity to slip into another one, called Sridevi – *Sri* meaning beautiful and *Devi* standing for Goddess, became a living icon of the Indian screen striding five languages, crossing cultures, and seamlessly stepping into the hearts of millions of fans who came in large numbers to catch a tiny glimpse of her on her last journey. She is the only Indian female actor who was as successful as a mainstream actor as she was popular among critics who continued to be fascinated by her performances, though initially, most of them were puerile, *masala* films that will never find a place in the archives of good Indian cinema. She could make the weirdest of costumes look graceful on her, and could turn the popular conception of the *sati savitri* image on its head.

Among the approximately 300 feature films she worked in, it would be really tough to select her best because there were so many. She was a great actor with amazing versatility, and a fabulous dancer who made even mainstream dance numbers appear extremely entertaining and attractive. Directors she worked with were intelligent enough to see that her talent as a dancer was taken full advantage of, which made her an absolute delight to watch. Sridevi could emote with her eyes, winking,



Sridevi, India's perhaps only female superstar

wide-open eyes registering surprise, confusion, shock, fear, amazement, or go cross-eyed within the batting of an eye, with equal ease. Her mesmerising screen appearance, and her ability to carry anything and everything across with absolute conviction, were qualities that find no parallel among her peers and successors.

Such a long journey

She began her fifty-year-plus journey through Indian cinema at the tender age of four when she did not even understand what she was really doing, why, and how. She was once asked whether she missed school like other children and also missed playing like kids of her age did. Her response was, in essence, dramatic. She said she did not miss school because she had never gone to school, but she did miss playing like other kids only because she saw them at play wondering why she was not with them. But she never expressed

regret for missing all that normal children enjoyed. But then, why would she? She was an extraordinary kid in every respect. If you catch snatches of her performance as a child actor in the Sivaji Ganesan starrer *Kundan Karwai* (1967), you would know. The four-year-old kid admirably portrayed the role of the child Muruga, a famous deity of the South. Another notable film was the MGR–Jayalalitha starrer *Nam Naadu* (1969).

Her debut into Hindi cinema in *Solva Saawan* turned out to be a disaster. This was strange because it was the Hindi version of Bharathiraja's debut film 16 *Vayathinile* (1977) which turned Sridevi into an iconic star in mainstream Tamil cinema, and was a thumping box office hit. She played the female lead opposite two giants Kamal Hassan and Rajnikant who were paired with her in umpteen films in the South, most of them big hits. When *Solva Saawan* flopped, Sridevi went back to make it

bigger in Tamil cinema between 1979 and 1983. She simultaneously did Telugu films opposite N.T. Rama Rao and Krishna, averaging around 15 films a year between Tamil and Telugu films. She also did a spate of Malayalam films between 1976 and 1978 making her one of South Indian cinema's busiest actors. No one noticed her performance as the younger sister of Lakshmi in the Hindi film *Julie* because she had a marginal role, and the screen space was dominated by Lakshmi. But she turned the tables on the mass audience of Hindi cinema in India with films like – *Himmatwala*, *Tohfa*, *Mawaali*, *Justice Chowdhury Akalmand*, *NayaKadam*, *Balidan*, *Judaii*, *Ram Avtar*, *Laadla*, *Nagina*, *Laddla*, *Lamhe*, *Chandramukhi*, *Gumrah*, *Khuda Gawah*, *Banjaran*, *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja*, *Army*, among many others, which dubbed her the First Female Superstar of Indian Cinema.

Himmatwala (1983) changed the course of her destiny. The song-dance number with Jeetendra that went *Naino mein sapna, sapno mein sajana, sajana pe dil aa gaya* cinematographed against a huge assemblage of colourful pots in a never-ending field became an all-time hit. Jeetendra was a hit hero at the time but in this duet, she proved who,

between the two, was the better dancer. In *Tohfa* (1984) she was pitted against Jayaprada, also an excellent dancer and had Jeetendra as her hero caught between these two beautiful women. The film was a pure entertainer. The title song was picturised on Jayaprada and Jeetendra, but Sridevi expressed herself through the number *Dhintara dhintara dhintara, mere nazon ne mara*.

Sadma (1983) changed our perception of Sridevi as the ideal leading lady for commercial films. It is among the best performances that demanded of her to play the role of a young girl whose mental faculties are reduced to that of a six-seven-year-old girl as the result of an accident. Her entire journey is mapped through the young teacher (Kamal Hassan) who rescues her from a brothel and brings her to his grandmother's home to take care of her and bring her back to normalcy. Though Kamal Hasan bagged the National Award as Best Actor, on hindsight, one feels Sridevi deserved it too. Her childlike behaviour, her giggles and shrugs, her completely oblivious approach to her way of dress and her body language kept the audience spellbound. Sadly, the film turned out to be flop.

Dozens of films that showcased Sridevi in off-beat roles within

absolutely mainstream films will open a new window to the theory that a commercially successful star cannot necessarily be a classic actress at the same time. Let us just briefly glide through this journey – *Lamhe*, *Nagina*, *Chaalbaz*, *Chandni*, *Judaai*, *Laadla*, *Gumrah*, *GairKanooni* in which she upturned the theory that mainstream Hindi cinema was dominated by the hero because she managed to hold on to her own in male-dominated films through the characters she portrayed as well as through the sheer brilliance of her performance. How many actresses can make a comeback like Sridevi did after 15 years, with a sterling performance in *English-Vinglish* and then *Mom*? Did I say "good" Indian cinema? Sridevi redefined this term and one can never forget that. ■

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.

Education without borders

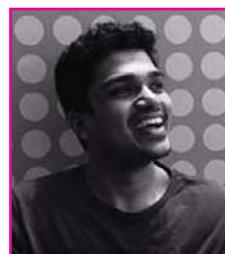
(Continued from page 31)

What we, as educators, should strive towards awakening within each other is the significance of places, for otherwise, a lack of attention to these matters will undoubtedly lead to the impoverishment of one's educational experience, and potentially lead to – in the words of educational researcher and scholar David A. Gruenwald – regrettable "biological and cultural extinctions". Place-conscious education promotes

the inclusion and immersion of experience that encourages students to, in addition to the predominating focus of a school's syllabi, re-discover the wider natural and cultural environment to discern for themselves a new sense of place in rapidly urbanising regions alienated from nature. This notion will help demonstrate the urgency of, and substantiate the case for a place-conscious environmental education,

which studies the world around us, to be superior to a standardised, generic and regimented education. ■

Harshad is an environmental educator with a strong foundational background in sustainability. A recent graduate of NYU's Environmental Conservation Education Programme, Harshad is striving to develop an environmental consciousness that recognises the inherent link between culture and nature



by using creative educational and pedagogical tools like storytelling and folklore. He is based in Chennai. He can be reached at: harshad.sam-ba@gmail.com

That language in the scene

*Is the spoken or written word the primary tool that humans possess to communicate? Or are the elements in the 'scene' itself, especially when it comes to theatre, enough for communication to happen? **Nikhil Katara** introspects.*

WHAT is cinema, what is theatre? How do we engage with it? How should it be conceived? are questions that puzzle. What is the root of cinema? Is it the language in which these films and scripts are produced? If one were to focus on this nation, about 1,600 films are produced in India every year. This makes India the number one producer of films in the whole world, and if one were to add the dimension of the number of plays produced in India, the number of television soaps, and the number of short films India produces, then that number can get pretty big. But the question isn't about the number of stories that emerge through these various media, but it is of the languages they deal with. For somewhere they get branded in the language they get produced in.

The Indian Census of 1961 recognised 1,652 languages, however, the official count of these languages in India is 22. Nearly 150 of these languages are spoken by a sizeable number of people. India produces films in about 35 languages and only 17% of these films are in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam. These numbers talk about the diversity of language in India. No other country in the world produces its film and theatre in such a diverse spectrum of languages. That gives India a very unique locus on the cinema and art spectrum of the world. This is because what makes the work so attractively diverse, also makes small pockets of audiences in a rather large nation. Of course, there is seminal work



Deepan Sivaraman conducting the workshop

that transcends the border of language and appeals to other audiences who don't necessarily speak the language, but this work is far and few. For, most of the film and theatre centres on a community and the language that they speak, thus making it focussed on that community's story, their tastes, their lives and their hopes.

The origin of language

The language origin story is a discourse in itself, and the branch of linguistics deals with it. Noted thinkers of the world have put their mind into wondering where did language first begin. Among them Noam Chomsky suggests that language developed due to a mutation after a cosmic ray shower implanting a language organ in an otherwise primate brain. But irrelevant of how language began, one thing is for

certain, language is here to stay and will remain to be one of the primary tools with which human evolution will continue. It will be a method to communicate ideas, write history, make scientific discoveries, and also to tell stories. Hence, the complex nature of the languages that come from India make a rich study of the progression of the spread of language, and its evolution.

But is script the primary tool with which a work can be made meaningful? Or to reiterate, is the spoken or written word the primary language that humans possess? Perhaps history disagrees. Before the advent of the talkies, silent films were the only modes to engage with cinema, and they relied on the human body to convey ideas and thoughts that were embedded in movement, and expression. Charlie

Chaplin's brand of comedy was representative of a language that did not depend on words being spoken. The question that begs being answered here is that does the freeing of a movie or play from a particular language make it a more universal entity? The language of gesture, of expression and of the human body doesn't need any particular dialect for it to be communicated, does it? Of course, it does need the skill of an actor, and that of the camera, but doesn't it become a more understandable entity to anyone who watches it, no matter what language she speaks, or what country she comes from.

Theatre as an entity

As far as theatre is concerned, a recent talk by thespian Deepan Sivaraman titled 'Post dramatic turn in Indian theatre' brought into light the way theatre has evolved over the ages. He mentioned how the written word in theatre was given a huge amount of importance at one time because theatre as a medium is so ephemeral. Cinema may be able to last because it has a record of its existence. But theatre lasts only during the run time of the show. That same play will never be produced again. Any repeat performance will be a fresh journey for the actors, and the show will have a new meaning all over again. The only way theatre could survive is through its script, and hence the playwrights gained such popularity, because their scripts and the words written in them were the only record of the performance to remember it by. But people don't go to the theatre to hear the script, they go to the theatre to engage with the image and the words embedded in those images. But what if the words were removed? What if spoken word altogether disappears. The works by Romeo Castellucci, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski, and Oskar Schlemmer showcase the fact that languages can be engaged with in different ways.

In the Theatre of death, Tadeusz Kantor engaged with a different language of theatre. In this, death played a predominant part and most of the scenes involved people long dead and

gone. The objects Kantor used in these productions had a language of their own. In fact, the objects Kantor used in his productions still survive in the centre of the documentation of the art of Tadeusz Kantor in Krakow. What was the language of Kantor's theatre, for it yet survives to this day and age, and people engage with it in the museum where it stands. Deepan's talk extended into a workshop titled 'Towards the language of theatre of scenography', which dealt with the ideas that give prominence to the moving image and elements in the scene itself. Scenography brought up some quintessential questions. The images, the objects, the active involvement of every motif in the space, and explorations that many theatre makers have to deal with. The images are a language in itself, and possibly scenography is very poor art form because it borrows words, thoughts, ideas from various languages that already exist, thus making a hybrid vocabulary in space. The reading of this language depends on an intelligent mind, which makes meaning from it.

Space, empty or occupied is meaningful through the utilisation of this language, and a lot can be said through images, its complexity can be layered through science, fine art, architecture, and a host of other vocabularies of space that exist. Just the sight of something that occupies a space is a meaning making mechanism. This

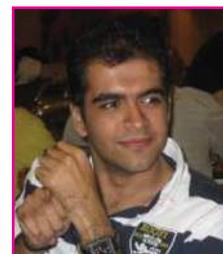


Deepan Sivaraman explains a point

complex language is seen in some ways by everyone who ever engaged with film. Some images make a mark on the gaze. Hence the primacy of the language of film or theatre perhaps in its immediacy deals with its scenography, and that is where any piece of work frees itself from being contained by boundaries.

Does that mean that works should free themselves from scripts as such? The answer to that is 'No', for script driven theatre and script driven cinema is a style and form of cinema which exists, and will exist for a long, long time. But embedded in it is the language of the scene that can never be taken away from it. The scenography of design, of costume, of art installations, and of objects, is a metaphorical realisation of the visual world in which the piece is set. But this language needs to be explored with more intent. ■

Nikhil Katara initiated his journey as a writer with his own production titled *The Unveiling*, a science fiction drama in the year 2011. To strengthen critical learning he initiated an MA programme in 'Philosophy' at the Mumbai university with optionals in Kant, Greek Hellenistic Philosophy, Feminism, Logic and Existentialism. His play *Yatagarasu* opened at Prithvi Theatre in 2016. He is a consultant facilitator at J's paradigm (a novel performance arts institute) and writes book reviews for the Free Press Journal.



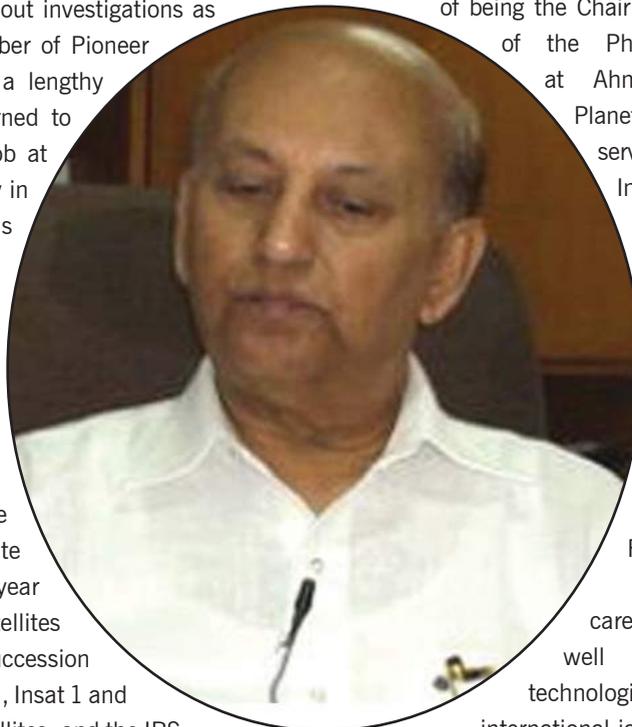
PROF. U.R. RAO

A life devoted to science (1932-2017)

ONE of India’s foremost space scientists Prof. Udupi Ramachandra Rao was born on 10 March 1932 at Adamaru in Karnataka. He completed his Bachelor of Science Degree from the Government Arts and Science College, Ananthpur, and his post-graduation from the Benares Hindu University. Later he obtained his doctorate (PhD) at the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad under the guidance of the eminent scientist Dr. Vikram Sarabhai.

One of his first assignments was that of a Faculty Member at MIT and Assistant Professor at the University of Texas in Dallas. His brief was to carry out investigations as a prime experimenter on a number of Pioneer and Explorer spacecrafts. After a lengthy stay in the US, Prof. Rao returned to India in 1966 and took up a job at the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad, where he started his career as a Cosmic Ray scientist, and worked in tandem with Dr. Vikram Sarabhai.

The responsibility of establishing satellite technology in India fell on his able shoulders, and in 1972, an institute was set up. Under his guidance India launched its first satellite ‘Aryabhata’ into space in the year 1975. Since then, over 18 satellites were launched in quick succession including Bhaskara, Apple, Rohini, Insat 1 and 2, two series of multipurpose satellites, and the IRS 1 a and ISRB remote sensing satellites. Prof. Rao took over as the Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in 1985, and was instrumental in the acceleration of the development of rocket technology in the country resulting in the successful launch of ASLV rocket in 1992 with the development of the operational PSLV launch vehicle. Rao also initiated the development of the geostationary launch vehicle, the GSLV. He was also chiefly responsible for the development of cryogenic technology and the launch of INSAT satellites. These satellites were designed, fabricated and launched for providing communication, remote sensing and meteorological devices. The launch of the INSAT satellites gave a fillip to the communication sector in India in the 1980s and the 1990s, leading to the development of



the Subscriber Trunk Dialling (STD) facility, which was to later play a key role in enabling India to emerge as an IT hub.

Prof. Rao was appointed as the first Chairman of the Antrix Corporation, and also served as the Chairman of the Karnataka State Science & Technology Corporation, and Chairman of the Bengaluru Association of Science Education, Chairman, Governing Council of Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, Vice Chancellor of the Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow, and Member of the Board of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India. Prof. Rao also had the distinction of being the Chairman of the Governing Council of the Physical Research Laboratory at Ahmedabad, and the Nehru Planetarium at Bangalore, and also served as Chancellor of the Indian Institute of Space & Technology (IIST) at Trivandrum. He earned the privilege of being the first Indian scientist to be inducted into the prestigious Satellite Hall of Fame in Washington on 19 March 2013. He was again the first Indian to be inducted into the Institute of Astronautics Federation on 5 May, 2016.

In his long and distinguished career Prof. Rao also published well over 300 scientific and technological papers in national and international journals, revealing his expertise in diverse subjects like cosmic rays, high energy, astrophysics, space applications, interplanetary physics, satellite and rocket technology. He also authored books, among them, *Space and Agenda 21 - Caring for Planet Earth*, and *Space Technology and Sustainable Development*. A recipient of several national and international honours, Prof. Rao was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in 1976, and the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award after the Bharat Ratna, in 2017. The celebrated scientist passed away at Bengaluru on 24 July 2017, at the age of 85. Prof. Rao has left his indelible imprint with his invaluable contributions to the growth and progress of space research in the country. ■

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

BRIG. VARINDER SINGH MINHAS, VrC, SM

Courageous officer (1955-2012)

BRIG. Varinder Singh, a fifth generation army officer, was born on 24 January 1955, and was educated at Cambrian Hall Public School in Dehradun. He joined the Army and was commissioned into 12 J&K LI. He later served in 8 J & K LI. In June 1987, Major Varinder Singh was commanding a company at 19,600 feet high Sonam Post in Siachin. Siachin is the highest battle ground and the second largest glacier in the world. It had earlier been left unoccupied. Pakistan had started sending expeditions to the mountain and India occupied the area in 1984. Taking advantage of bad weather, Pakistan had established Quaid Post on the peak. Located at a height of 22,153 feet, it gave a clear view of the entire Salto range and the glacier. The Pakistani soldiers started firing with machine guns and rocket launchers, preventing maintenance of Indian posts by land or air. It was almost an impregnable fortress with 457 high ice walls on either side. It was decided to clear the Quaid Post. Three attempts had failed. Lt. Rajeew Pande took out a patrol for reconnaissance of the area. They did not realise that they were constantly under watch of the Pakistani soldiers from an overhang. They fired on them when they came under firing range, killing all except two soldiers. Lt. Pande was also a casualty. Pande's patrol had managed to fix the ropes to guide our troops in the assault.

Major Varinder Singh was detailed to capture the Quaid Post. The troops had been training for the assault for a month. Two soldiers were killed during training. They had slipped into crevasses and their bodies were not found. The soldiers were instructed not to get captured alive and carried cyanide capsules. Two officers, three JCOs and 157 men were selected for the final assault. Major Varinder Singh instructed all ranks to write their last letters to be posted in case of death. It had taken them two days to locate the ropes fixed by Pande's patrol. It had got buried under snow blizzards. Major Varinder Singh led the assault on the night

of 23 June 1987, advancing along the most difficult route to the 700 feet high ice wall on the Salto Ridge, and reached within 200 metres from the top. Varinder had led, climbing from the head of the rope to the saddle on the Ridge using crampons (metal plates with spikes to their boots). The men followed suit. For three days, they had little to eat or drink.

Advance was resumed at 9 pm on 25 June and they captured the bunker after lobbying grenades. His team captured the second bunker after firing twenty rounds from a Rocket Launcher. He provided supporting fire to Naib Subedar Bana Singh who cleared the last bunker. Soldiers overran the post and turned the guns from facing south to north towards Pakistan. Bana Singh was awarded PVC. After the post had been overrun by own troops, Pakistan brought heavy artillery fire on what used to be their own post to evict the Indian troops. A shrapnel from a Pakistani shell pierced Varinder's chest and torso. Disregarding his injury, he continued to lead his team in mopping up operations and complete control was established by 4 pm on 26 June. He displayed conspicuous courage and gallant leadership in the face of enemy and was awarded VrC (Vir Chakra).

He came down the hill holding his wound with his right hand in order to stop the bleeding. His wound coagulated quickly due to the extreme cold and stopped bleeding. He was evacuated to the Military Hospital at Leh and recovered after 17 stitches and 15 days. He resumed his duties and served in various appointments. He was awarded Sena Medal (SM) for distinguished service of a high order. He died on 12 October 2012 doing what he loved most, playing basketball. He is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



KALIKA PRASAD BHATTACHARYA

Most versatile singer (1970-2017)

FOLK singer and researcher/song archivist Kalika Prasad Bhattacharya (11 September 1970-7 March 2017) was super versatile. Born and raised in Silchar, Assam, music, rhythm and tune were an intrinsic part of his growing years, his musical inspiration being his uncle Ananta Bhattacharya.

He took to the *tabla* as naturally as he learned to walk, and was gradually propelled towards various ethnic percussion, and also trained in vocal music. With a comparative literature degree from Jadavpur University in 1995, he got in 1998 a research grant from India Foundation for the Arts for 'Industrialisation and Folk music', and went to Bangalore.

His keen interest in music eventually led him towards the folk music of Bengal and Bangladesh, Barak Valley in Assam and northeastern India, and the search for traditional vibrant, melodious folk songs. In 1999, he co-founded the band *Dohar*, a group of folk musicians with the intent to revive the folk music tradition of northern and eastern Bengal, and got unnoticed folk songs flowing from time immemorial, reach innumerable people through the nine albums produced by his band. *Dohar* amazingly merged the urban feelings with their commitment to the roots, research and entertainment, being inseparably entwined.

He can also be attributed as a Tagorian scholar. 'Bangla', a collection of Rabindra Sangeet and folk songs in the form of a dialogue between the genres was based on its thematic reading. His *Ajab Kudrati* proves his unique innovativeness and dramatic craftsmanship. *Dohar* incidentally was also empaneled by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

He also contributed music to a number of movies, like *Bhuban Majhi*, *Selfie*, *Bhuban Majhi*, *Bishorjan*, *Rosogolla* and *Sitara*. He also sang a few playback songs in Hindi and Bengali movies. The Hindi films include *Gumshuda*. The Bengali films *Chaturanga*, *Moner*, *Manush*, *Jaatishwar* and *Bhuban Majhi*.

He also steered many television music-reality shows. He promoted Bengali folk music in the popular Zee Bangla programme 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa', and got worldwide acclamation. His last concert was at the Baguihati Krishi Mela.

In 2012, Bhattacharya wrote various research oriented articles for national and international journals and newspapers. He also gave music for eminent theatre groups like 'Nandikar', 'Kalyani Natya Charcha' and 'Tritiyo Sutro'.

He was also one of the founder-organisers of 'Sahaj Parav'- an annual root music festival, striving to celebrate the diversity and variety of folk forms of arts and crafts in greater south Asia, with a deliberate focus on Bengal. Through this, Kalika's commitment to the proliferation of the traditional arts is explicit, and once again confirms his pledge for the development and rediscovery of the lost tunes of the soil.

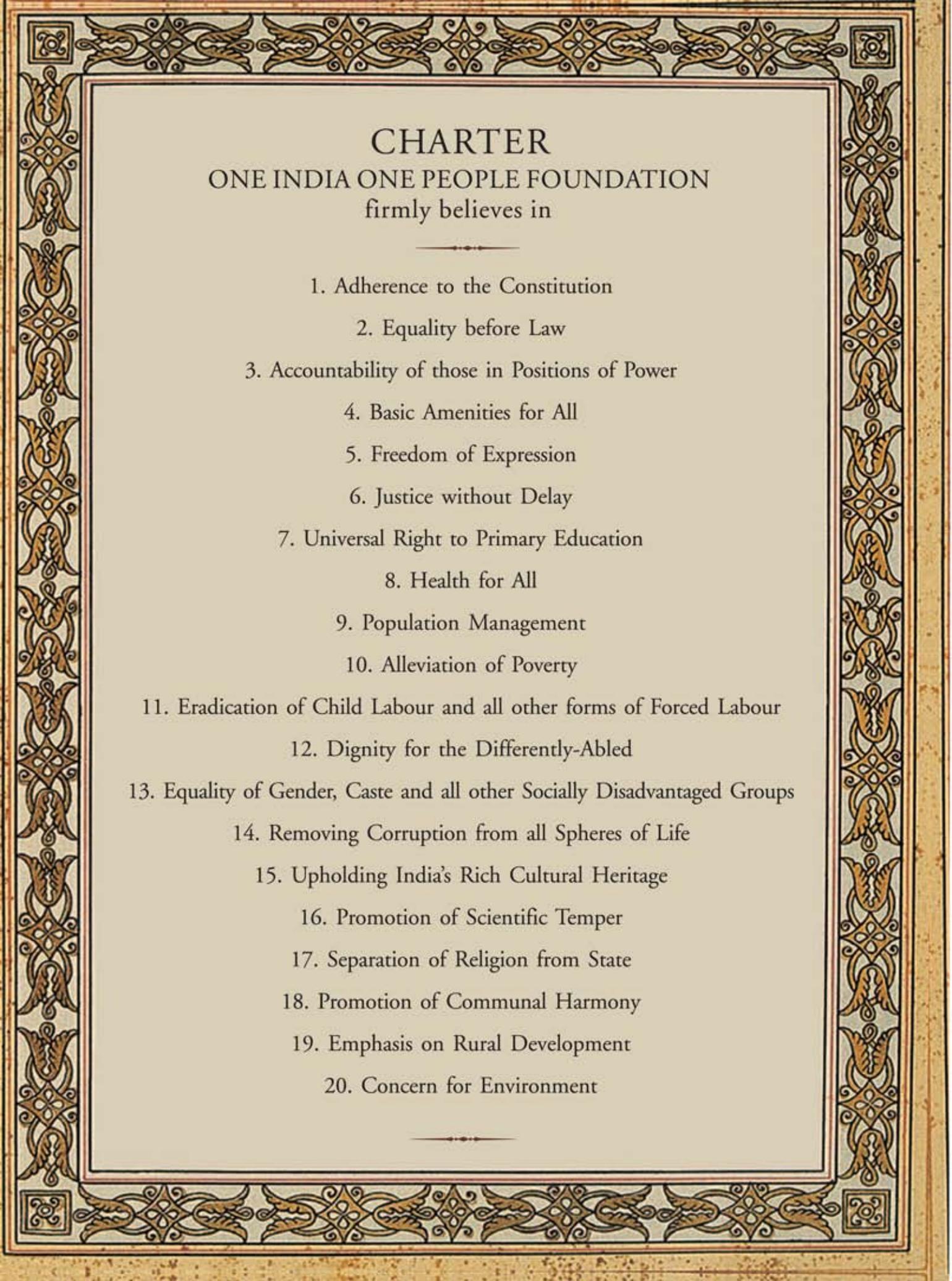
The Bangladesh government organised a memorable programme as a token of tribute to the maestro Bhupen Hazarika where Bhattacharya led *Dohar* dished out unforgettable numbers of the former. Besides, he was the pivotal personality at a seminar on Dr. Hazarika at a Dhaka programme.

Bhattacharya received the 'Sangeet Samman' award from the government of West Bengal for his unique creation and musical excellence in 2013, and the 'Cultural Ambassador of North East' award from Bytikram Group, Guwahati, in 2013.

Bhattacharya died in a terrible road accident near Gurap village in Hooghly district of West Bengal on 7 March 2017, aged just 47. On his way with four other members of his band, *Dohar*, to perform at a Birbhum school, their SUV was hit from behind by a truck, and fell into a nearby water body. He was declared brought dead to the hospital. Condolences poured in. He was creative thinking personified. His passing is a big loss to Bengali music. He leaves behind his wife and daughter. ■

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





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-

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- 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?*
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- Am I a white-collar/blue collar worker first or an Indian first?*
- Am I a youth/senior citizen first or an Indian first?*

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Be a Proud Indian. Make this country Great, Strong and United.*



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

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

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