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Patriotism Redefined

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PAST FORWARD

KNOW INDIA BETTER

MATHERAN
A MOST CHARMING GETAWAY

THE WAY FORWARD
PATRIOTISM, OR JINGOISM?
THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS

FACE TO FACE
URMILA PRABHU



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(70 years of India's
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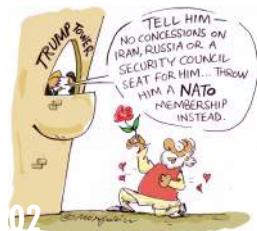
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The way forward

To forecast India's next decade, one needs to review the current political systems in the country, says Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan. According to him, while democracy and federalism have flourished, our progress on parameters like healthcare, education, infrastructure and local governance, have been sluggish.

India has embarked on a daring journey in embracing universal franchise, fundamental rights and constitutionalism in the face of abject poverty, illiteracy, hierarchical society, and centuries of feudal and colonial oppression. It is a great tribute to our society and political leadership that we have remained a democracy, retained freedoms, and achieved modest levels of economic progress, despite the many hurdles. The Indian state and political process have been reasonably effective in reconciling conflicting interests in a diverse society. In particular, linguistic diversity has been handled with great foresight and wisdom, making India a uniquely harmonious, multi-lingual state. Perhaps our greatest achievement lies in the deepening of federalism over the years, while strengthening the unity and integrity of India.

A comparison with China

However, relative to our opportunities, and compared to the global trends, our progress has been slow and modest. The contrast with the remarkable rise of China, which is comparable to India in size and history, over the past four decades, illustrate the point. Since 1980, China's GDP grew 62 times, compared to India's growth of 13 times; China's per capita income increased 27 times, contrasting with India's increase of 6 times. It is easy to attribute China's rise to authoritarianism and India's difficulties to democracy; but that would be wrong. China's breathtaking growth was a result of promoting competition, choice and investment, empowering local governments, ensuring quality education and healthcare, and building quality infrastructure. All these are the paths any mature democracy should pursue, and they are not the prerogatives of an authoritarian regime.

A lost opportunity?

The 2014 Lok Sabha election verdict provided an

exciting opportunity to transform our institutions and recover lost ground. After a generation, people voted for a stable, single-party majority, and an unchallenged leader with charisma, strong will, and personal experience of disadvantages of poverty and caste inequalities imposed on millions by birth, rose to power on his own steam.

At the union cabinet level there has been no major corruption scandal, and the Prime Minister's authority has been near-total. Decision making and execution of some policies

and infrastructure projects has been speeded up. And yet, on fundamental issues plaguing our governance and polity, and in promoting opportunity to all Indians, our recent record has been as disappointing as in the 67 years preceding it. In many ways, a priceless opportunity has been squandered.

In respect of six key areas, there has been practically no progress. First, service delivery to people at cutting edge level continues to be dismal. The asymmetry of power between the bulk of the citizens and even lower level bureaucrats continues uncorrected. In respect of most basic services, petty corruption, harassment, delay and inefficiency continue even as government employees are paid three to four times the market wages for comparable work. The government failed to enact a legislation to guarantee time bound services and enforce minimum accountability. Instead, an ill-thought out, obnoxious legislation providing for long (up to seven years; mandatory minimum of three years) jail term to ordinary citizens who are forced to pay small bribes to get what is due to

them, while at the same time protecting all employees at all levels from even investigation for bribe taking, by making prior government approval mandatory, is now before Parliament. The absurdity of harshly punishing citizens who are victims of extortion for simple services, and protecting the bribe takers from investigation, escaped the attention of the policy makers despite repeated pleas to them!

The trajectory for India in the next decade depends substantially on our ability to address these six challenges – service delivery, education, healthcare, local governance, rule of law, agrarian crisis – effectively, with a credible road map and energetic implementation of rational, evidence-based solutions.



Has Prime Minister Modi been able to fulfill his promises?

Our school education and healthcare are in shambles, with outcomes among the worst in the world. The resultant burdens of poverty, lack of opportunity, avoidable suffering, high morbidity and mortality, and low productivity, continue unabated. There has been no meaningful effort or credible road-map to improve outcomes in both these vital sectors. The only way we can nurture new leadership, improve performance and make democracy work is by empowering local governments in a responsible way and institute local accountability mechanisms.

The Fourteenth Finance Commission afforded a great opportunity to strengthen local government finances. If only a sizeable share of Union transfers to states – say 25 to 30% – went to local governments and independent local ombudsmen were created to check abuse, people's energies would have been unleashed. Instead, only about seven percent was transferred on an ad hoc basis, and we continue to have over-structured and under-powered local governments.

With the vital links – between vote and public good, taxes and services, and authority and accountability – missing, centralised, inept governance continues merrily with poor outcomes.

Rule of law is the basis of democracy, and a vital prerequisite for enterprise, risk-taking and wealth creation. While we have normative rule of law, in reality there are extreme inadequacies and dysfunctionalities in crime investigation, prosecution and justice delivery. There has been no real effort to improve rule of law; money, muscle, networking and political influence continue to be major factors in dispute resolution, and dispensing justice.

Finally, agriculture and rural economy continue to descend into deeper crisis. In the last four years alone, there has been a decline in annual agri-exports to the tune of \$10 billion per year, and increase of imports to a tune of \$10

billion per year; a net loss of demand for domestic farmers by \$ 20 billion annually. This is one of the proximate causes of the deepening rural crisis. Our hackneyed policy responses of the mostly illusory minimum support price (except for wheat and rice), and loan waiver, are both ineffective and positively harmful in the long run. On top of low agricultural incomes, the burden of out of pocket expenditure for education and healthcare and poor outcomes, the ubiquitous petty corruption for even the most basic services, and high degree of centralisation that precludes local innovation to improve living conditions, continue to worsen the agrarian crisis, driving hundreds of millions into despair.

The trajectory for India in the next decade depends substantially on our ability to address these six challenges – service delivery, education, healthcare, local governance, rule of law, agrarian crisis – effectively, with a credible road map and energetic implementation of rational, evidence-based solutions. If our public discourse and political competition continue to be focused on who is in power, instead of on what needs to be done and how, the next decade will be a repeat of the past seven, and we will continue to muddle through.

In order to fulfil our potential, we need to engineer far-reaching political and governance reform to enable recruitment of the best talent into politics and bureaucracy, allow their rise to power through ethical and rational means, and build mechanisms to dramatically improve delivery and outcomes. The practical functions of politics are recruitment of the brightest, most public-spirited citizens into public life, facilitating their rise to power through ethical and rational means, providing genuine alternatives in terms of policy, and effectively implementing people's mandate by delivering the outcomes. On all these four basic criteria our political process has been largely ineffective, and the quest for power has been increasingly divorced from public purpose. The lost opportunity of the past four years has been very costly.

The time is now!

It is unlikely that at the national level, the unique opportunity we have had of a stable government and a strong leader enjoying public trust and confidence will be repeated for quite some time to come. Therefore we need to explore other realistic possibilities to significantly improve outcomes in the next decade, effectively address the growing challenges of underemployment and massive urban migration in the face of rising global trade barriers, and transform the lives of millions. The debate on federalism offers a window of opportunity, if we can bury our partisan differences and focus on giving flexibility to states to improve outcomes, while strengthening national unity. The states are where real governance that affects citizens' lives is; and the states are the real theatre of political competition. The national verdicts are largely an arithmetic aggregate of state verdicts. We created a robust federal system over the decades: States have real power, though constrained by a rigid, uniform system; devolution of finances in a complex federal structure has been significant; and by and large, there has been no discrimina-

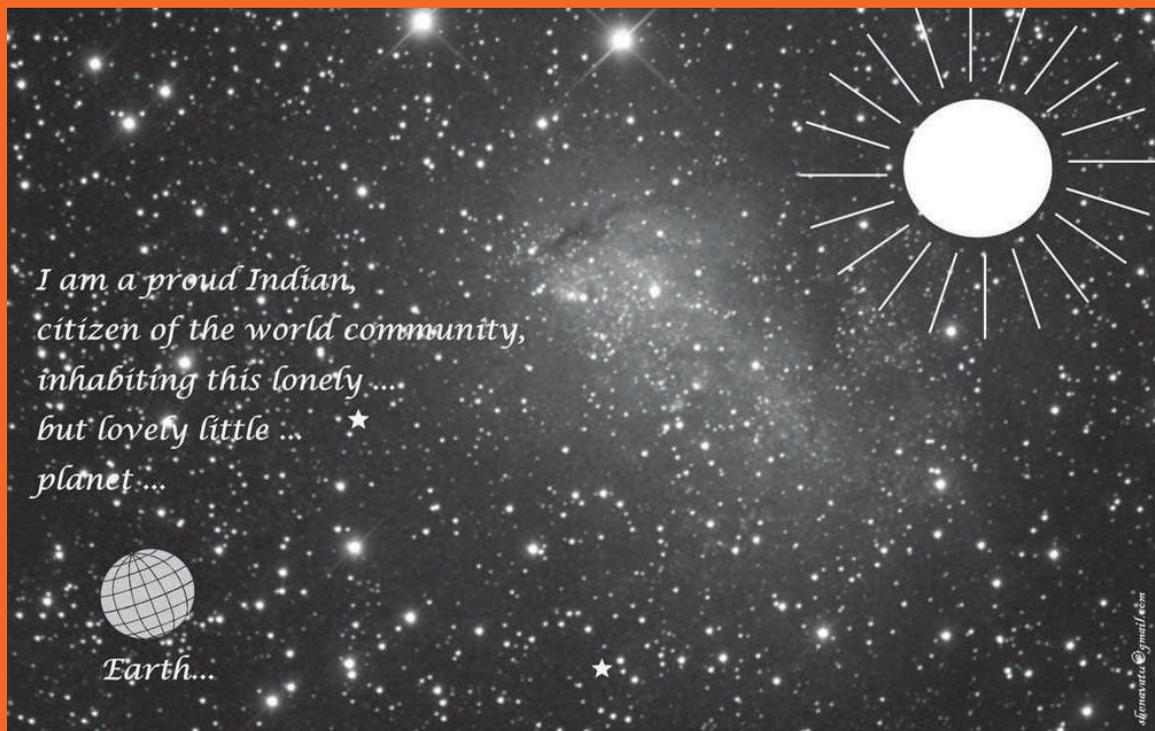
tion of states. The much-abused Article 356 has rightly fallen into disuse, successive finance commissions have made devolution transparent and fairer, end of licence-raj reduced arbitrariness, and rise of regional parties and coalition governments brought a measure of balance between the Union and States.

One-shoe-fits-all model and rigid uniformity – electoral system, bureaucracy, local governments and rigid national laws in key areas like education and land acquisition, are not conducive to local innovation and substantially improved outcomes. Let a thousand flowers bloom, while safeguarding national unity, fundamental rights, common markets, independent judiciary and constitutional check and balances. We need to move from a system of negative power of pelf, privilege, patronage and nuisance value, to one of positive power, to improve accountability and delivery, and from a system of alibis for non-performance, to one of empowerment, participation and assuming responsibility for outcomes. That is the realistic way forward for India in the next decade.



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WHO AM I?



Patriotism, or jingoism?

The way patriotism has been questioned and jingoism glorified in recent times in India, it's time for citizens to question themselves and what they stand for, says Gajanan Khergamker. He especially touches on the controversy over the national anthem.



Playing the national anthem in cinema theatres had become a contentious issue.

There is a distinct surge in jingoism and pseudo-patriotism in the air. While on the one hand there are those who want to loudly proclaim their love for the nation, there are corresponding others who thrive in the chaos that ensues their lack of compliance.

In January 2018, India's Supreme Court ruled the national anthem was not mandatory in cinema halls anymore. The order was passed by a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Misra and comprising Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and D.Y. Chandrachud during the hearing of a petition seeking provision of punishment for disobeying the national anthem.

Can't or won't, does it matter?

It may be recalled that back in October 2017, Misra had said, "People do not need to stand up at a cinema hall to be perceived as patriotic," adding that it "cannot be assumed that if a person does not stand up for national anthem, then he is less patriotic." That it is not mandatory for cinema halls to play the national anthem before a movie isn't of consequence. What is of consequence is the fact that when it plays, you need to stand up for it unless you are infirm or, owing to some reason, unable to stand. Symbolic and pertinent today particularly when viewed against the time during the last government's regime, in 2013, when Bahujan Samaj Party's 82-year-old MP Shafiqur Rahman Barq walked out of the Lok Sabha as Vande Mataram was playing, it kicked up a controversy as predictable as the act

itself. That Muslims don't sing Vande Mataram wasn't a matter of surprise. That the rest continued to make an issue over it...was!

The act provoked a sharp rebuke from the-then Speaker Meira Kumar and the Bharatiya Janata Party, waiting in the wings, who leapt up to compare his act to the Taliban and flayed him even further. And, Shariqur Rahman Barq seemed to want just that. "Do you know how many ulema have come out in support of me today? I have been receiving calls all morning assuring me of their support. Secularists have called and said they are with me. This is a secular country," he had said. "We Muslims bow and pray only to Allah. We do not bow down or pray or respect or revere any other God or any other being whatever you may call it...have you heard Vande Mataram? It talks about bowing, revering, praying to the Motherland. I am not going to do that. It goes against the very grain of Islam," he maintained.

Not an offence!

Now, whether you like it or not, his act does not qualify as an offence under the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 which could have been invoked to pull him up. Barq, who claimed that this act of refusing to sing the Vande Mataram was not the first, is fully aware of the legality of his act. His claim of "genuine and conscientious belief" falls well within the ambit of Article 25 of the Indian Constitution.

For reference, Article 25 (1) reads: Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.

(2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law — (a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice.

The Constitution of India protects Barq and all other like-minded Muslims from any legal reprisal or rebuke. That is, till the State decides to make a law, without changing the Constitution's 'basic structure' to regulate "political or other secular activity", and create a new legislation or adds the singing of Vande Mataram to Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.

Barq, like every other sectional leader, draws political mileage out of acts of 'dissent' or 'revolt' within legal parameters, to support their own motivated agendas. Barq's need to address the media and ensure his views as well as the 'correct use of his full name' exposes an agenda that's deeper than mere religion. Hate speech works on the same logic. Its proponents bay and bellow in public against their arch foes – whether they're Muslims or bhaiyyas or Non-Resident Outsiders – before laudatory masses. They even offer juicy bytes by the minute to a hungry-for-dope media which literally eats out of their hands.

Legally, then, Shariqur Rahman Barq was as much in the clean as the Jehovah's Witnesses' children expelled from a Kerala school in July 1985 under the instructions of Deputy Inspector of Schools for having refused to sing the national anthem, Jana Gana Mana. In this case, the appellants were three children who belonged to a sect called Jehovah's Witnesses and "worship only Jehovah – the Creator and none other". They refused to sing the national anthem because, according to them, it is against the tenets of their religious faith.

A Commission, appointed to enquire and report, maintained that the children were "law abiding", and showed no disrespect to the national anthem. However, under the instructions of Deputy Inspector of Schools, the Head Mistress expelled the appellants from school from July 26, 1985. The Supreme Court had then held that: There is no provision of law which obliges anyone to sing the national anthem nor is it disrespectful to the national anthem if a person who stands up respectfully when the national anthem is sung does not join the singing...Standing up

respectfully when the national anthem is sung but not singing oneself clearly does not either prevent the singing of the national anthem or cause disturbance to an assembly engaged in such singing so as to constitute the offence mentioned in S. 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act.

It also held that any law which may be made under clauses 2 to 6 of Art.19 to regulate the exercise of the right to the freedoms guaranteed by Art. 19(1) (a) to (e) and (g) must be 'a law' having statutory force, and not a mere executive or departmental instructions.

Personal views and reactions irrelevant

In a far-reaching decision, the Supreme Court then laid down that "the question is not whether a particular religious belief or practice appeals to our reason or sentiment but whether the belief is genuinely and conscientiously held as part of the profession or practice of religion. Personal views and reactions are irrelevant. If the belief is genuinely and conscientiously held, it attracts the protection of Art. 25, but subject of course, to the inhibitions contained therein. In the instant case, what the petitioners truly and conscientiously believe is not in doubt. They do not hold their beliefs idly and their conduct is not the outcome of any perversity. The petitioners have not asserted those beliefs for the first time or out of any unpatriotic sentiment. Jehovah's Witnesses, as they call themselves, appear to have always expressed and stood up for such beliefs, all the world over."

So, with Barq insisting "it wasn't the first time" that he had been objecting to singing the Vande Mataram, he was bang on track...legally within the ambit of the law affecting religion.

With the most recent Supreme Court views on the issue made earlier this year, the law on it remains silent because the State has remained silent. That said, it needs to devise ways to stop the mileage being drawn in the name of religion, particularly from such incidents. Probably an astutely-drafted legislation preventing acts likely to incite violence on religious grounds/or communal reasons, could be in order. But then, whichever government initiates a law like that will need to be free of political agendas of appeasement, or will only be shooting itself in the foot.

Till then, it probably rests on the judiciary to be creative and evolve the principle by creating a framework with supportive judgments. The media, on its part, has been busy trying to milk controversy, as usual!



Gajanan Khergamker is an independent Editor, Solicitor and Film-maker. He is the founder of the International Think Tank DraftCraft.

Raising the grade

It is true that a modernising economy is improving standards of living, but the ‘other side’ shows that India has a long way to go in improving the average citizen’s quality of life, says Reshma Jain.

In barely a couple of years, that is, by 2020, India will become the world’s youngest country with an average age of 29 years. While this means that it will not suffer the fate of nations with ageing populations, it also means that it will have to find jobs for a large working age population soon thereafter.

India’s myriad contradictions and inter-states and inter-regional differences within those states gives ample scope for prophets of doom and optimists alike. It all depends on which side of the political, social and economic divide you stand and view the scenario.

The country’s economy has been modernising steadily giving a larger section of the population improved standards of living. But, there is the other side that cannot be ignored; a phenomenal hike in inequality due to income gaps, growing urban-rural divide, very high percentage of out-of-pocket expenditure on health (62% of all health care costs) which impoverishes large numbers and so on. Among the many “facts” that show up contradictions is this one: India has the fourth highest number of billionaires in the world, but ranks 131st in the Human Development Index (HDI) out of 188 countries.

So what is required to improve the quality of life of Indians? This is a topic on which every Indian would have an opinion besides having differing definitions of quality of life. Technically, economists would answer this question with comparison of numbers and statistics. But to the average citizen, the quality of life hinges on the basic amenities plus access to reasonably good education, health care and public infrastructure.

Health and education

India’s spending on health care at 1% of its GDP has been criticised consistently by health activists. Yet, there is very little change over the years in the budgetary allocation to such an important development indicator. As noted above, the out of pocket expenditure forces poor families to sell their meagre land and even house, and pushes them into penury.

However, as every citizen knows (for who has not faced a health crisis?), the public health care sector is shrinking rapidly. The private health care sector is expanding its tentacles far and wide. Worse, studies show that publicly funded health insurance schemes end up benefiting the private hospitals, rather than the poor! These schemes target the wrong sections, and where they do

target the truly poor and marginalised, the benefits hardly reach them. Besides, the patients end up paying for diagnostics and medicines (Role of Government in Funded Health Insurance Schemes, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 23 June 2018).

India’s maternal mortality rate is a distressing 167 deaths per 100,000 live births, though the infant mortality came down from 37 per live 100,000 births in 2015, to 34 in 2016. It is also home to the highest number of TB patients and the multidrug resistant variety of the illness is a health security threat.

And yet, our cities boast of swanky hospitals that can rival five star holiday resorts, and which actually boast of “luxurious health services”. The non communicable diseases or lifestyle illnesses like diabetes and hypertension are no longer restricted to the rich, and India is competing neck to neck with China to become the diabetes capital of the world. Education is another significant area that deserves much more attention. Like in the health sector, private universities are mushrooming all over the country, while government institutions are neglected. This is one area on which much has been written and discussed in India, but to no avail it seems.

Through a fog

India also has 10 of the world’s 20 most polluted cities. Delhi and other parts of North India regularly experience the choking effects of smog caused by crop residue burning, and other cities are forced to inhale the poison spewed by petrol and diesel run vehicles, many of them old and well past the expiry date. There have been suggestions to use machines that can use plant crop residue instead of burning it, and to turn to CNG in vehicles, but it takes a long time in this country for things to change for the good. River linking, afforestation and other measures need to be seriously implemented.

Dying on the roads

In 2015, over 140,000 Indians died in road mishaps. These monsoons too, cities like Mumbai showcase the fatalities and dangers due to potholes in the roads, water logging due to rampant unauthorised construction (and not of slums alone, mind you!), and negligent urban planning. Better roads and transport network are directly linked to a thriving economy due to inter-connectedness. In fact, good transport infrastructure is one of the basic foundations of a strong manufacturing sector.



Potholes have been responsible for several deaths in Mumbai this monsoon

Distress in agriculture

Apart from the manufacturing sector, the agricultural sector is the pillar of the economy. Nearly half the workforce is in this sector, but the distress faced by farmers, farmer suicides, and the flight of landless labourers into towns and cities to ward off starvation is too well known to again describe here.

Here again, there is no dearth of suggestions. Improving agricultural productivity with new technologies and focussing on horticulture, dairying, poultry, piggyery, fisheries, and forestry, has been recommended incessantly. But all this entails access to irrigation, enhancing the seed replacement rate and safe use of fertilisers.

Work and employment

This is the bugbear of governments around the world — providing employment for their young and keeping down the unemployment rate. According to the NITI Aayog,

the country's unemployment rate stands between 5% and 8%. To this state of affairs add underemployment, which means that those who are employed are doing low-productivity, low wage jobs.

It is the manufacturing sector that can best provide proper jobs but as compared to its neighbours like China, Japan and South Korea, this is India's weak spot. The 'Make in India' initiative has not met with the kind of results the economy needs. Jobs in the informal sector are mainly low-paying, insecure, and subject those engaged in them to abysmal working conditions. Theoretically, a large and young workforce and competitive wages gives India a tremendous edge, but it is clearly not enough. There is a crying need to devote much more attention and focus to the manufacturing sector.

The above list might seem like a litany of complaints. But it is exactly these areas that need attention and action in order to improve the quality of life of the average Indian. A mobile phone in every hand, alas, does not guarantee that!



Reshma Jain is one of the co-founders of *The Narrators* which is a publishing platform to lend a voice, a shape, a form to help people tell their story through the print or visual medium like biographies, documentaries or even e-platforms.

The good in the ‘bad’ cop

While we often criticise our police force for corruption and inefficiency, there is another side to the story, says Dr. Harish Shetty. He has worked closely with the force and says they work long hours, often without any support systems, which affects their health and morale. He offers some solutions.

What crosses our minds when one see a cop on the road? Most of my respondents said, ‘A guy who tries to make a fast buck, a professional who is reluctant to file an F.I.R if the complainant is not influential, and one who obeys his bosses, not his seniors, but his political bosses’.

I see them in a different light. The Constabulary that constitutes 90 plus percent of the force, are a sad lot. With so many festivals in India and a million V.I.Ps, they spend most of their time with us. The plight of the seniors is no different. I strongly believe that the we cannot demonise the mother at home, the teacher in a school and the cop on the road. They run the country more than anybody else. That’s my belief, though many of you may not agree with this. Across the last 30 years I have been involved in training the cops, law enforcing agencies, and judicial officers, and have interacted with offenders, not to mention a small stint I did in a jail with the Gandhians.

I still remember a small chat with cops during the 1992-93 riots in Mumbai. A few had serious emergencies at home and they just could not be there. One of the cops had tears rolling down, as he was not able to see his new born daughter for three weeks. Yet, the other side where the

common man has to face hardships when the cop is not compassionate, is difficult, and works against the norms of justice, is also very true. From my listening to a million voices of the police force and as an active mental health professional who has spent as much time on the ground as inside the confines of a clinic, I would like to share a few insights.

Structural changes is a must

There has been an attempt in Maharashtra to experiment with eight hour shifts. This is a great move and should be replicated at whatever cost. Cops in the police stations or doctors in government hospitals cannot be working for two to three days at a stretch without sleep. Tired and weary cops are prone to errors, misjudgements, and also rage. Long term effects of stretched working hours can be disastrous. Apart from the destruction of the mind-body orchestra with lifestyle illnesses, dehumanisation is a consequence. Here one becomes indifferent to pain or pleasure, and becomes a walking-talking robot. Compassion and judgement suffers. In my workshops I always felt like a mason attempting to repair the building when it is on fire. So structural reforms such as decent working hours, good salaries, and working conditions are a must. Teachers, doctors and cops need to be taken care of and allowed to perform in an autonomous manner without interference. Transparency in the functioning improves accountability and mental health. The police force has the habit of having ad hoc workshops following the sudden death of a senior cop or a suicide by one of them. Remember, such workshops follow only health accidents of super cops. This does not help. In the photos of the event, many are found napping!

Building emotional wealth and equity

Yoga and vipassana are gifts by two great scientists of Mother India. Patanjali and Gautam Buddha were scientists as much as they were philosophers. I was happy to see a full-fledged gymkhana at the Powai police station. A meditation room along with a gym will help to beat the stress. This should be a mandate across all police stations. I found cops not making use of it regularly. Well, one does not need to take an hour for exercising or *pranayama*. A quick 10-minute *pranayama* or a quick run on the treadmill as and when one has time, is good too. Short breathing stints or mini bursts of humour calms down the nerves. Calming the autonomic nervous system happens with slow deep breathing, exercise and laughter. Stress is beaten and depression prevented.



Our police force is often overworked and stressed



Meditation and health camps for cops should not be *ad-hoc*

Managing feelings

The 'macho' cop is breathing fire or using his rational brain in using law. The heart remains in suspended animation. Many breath fire at home too, and cannot differentiate between work and home, accuse the family members. Here, using feeling phrases at workplaces is so important. 'I am upset', 'I feel so angry', 'I am so scared', are sentences cops need to hear from their own vocal chords. No cop can be fearless, always on the dot, and must never suffer from a sense of omnipotence, or believe that he is indispensable. The cop at home has to use the 'f' factor. Feeling phrases need to replace adjectives and sarcastic bombs. Healthy sleep facilitates such a change. Irritability is anger in motion, and if it lasts, is a sure red flag. It's a sign of impending stress waiting to knock the cop with a depressive episode. Tears are liberating and the 'force' should never be ashamed of their tears as and when it has to flow. Blocking feelings leads to illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes etc. Identifying, acknowledging, accepting, and experiencing can deal with difficult emotions most of the times.



Dr. Harish Shetty is a counselor and practising psychiatrist with extensive experience in various areas of mental health. He also works extensively with children. He consults at Dr. L.H. Hiranandani Hospital, Powai, Mumbai. He can be contacted at: harish139@yahoo.com

I know of a cop who just could not sleep because of bad memories. He just could not forget the face of a dying criminal whom he had encountered. Many cops who have been involved in encounters become hard emotionally, and at times their demeanour is not different than hardened criminals who have committed many murders. Many of them do not seek help. Such cops need therapy for possible post-traumatic stress disorder that can last throughout life. With this disorder they are not able to feel joy, and are emotionally numb. The 'force' needs to prioritise special debriefing sessions for cops at high risk, after a 'major police operation', with trained therapists.

Stress and depression

India is in the middle of a looming mental health epidemic said the President of our country recently. The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS), in its first ever major epidemiological study found that 1/10 and more are mentally ill in India. During a session with the 'commando force' in one of the states of our country, the chief shared that four of them had committed suicide in the last two years. From the entry point to retirement, every cop should be screened for mental health issues through trained mental health professionals.

Police stations should be in touch with local mental health professionals and conduct mental health activities across the year. The force needs a dedicated Additional Commissioner for mental health to oversee the health of the force. The IPS should stand by the force and be completely loyal to them rather than their political masters. Camaraderie and perceived support also helps mental health. Two elected representatives recently assaulted a cop in the Assembly of our state of Maharashtra. We did not hear of any punishment meted out to them, and the case file may be buried in a police station. Four women police constables were molested by a mob during the Raza Academy morcha recently, and one has not seen any action. Such morale shattering events destroys mental health.

Family mental health

The Indian Army has an association of the 'wives'. Such a structure in the 'force' will help. In the last two decades, the world around has changed. With increased violence, rape and terror attacks, the family members are an anxious lot. Special attention to the family members by the state is a must. Getting them together in small numbers more often, and in large numbers once in a while, will help. Providing accessible health and mental health services should be a right.

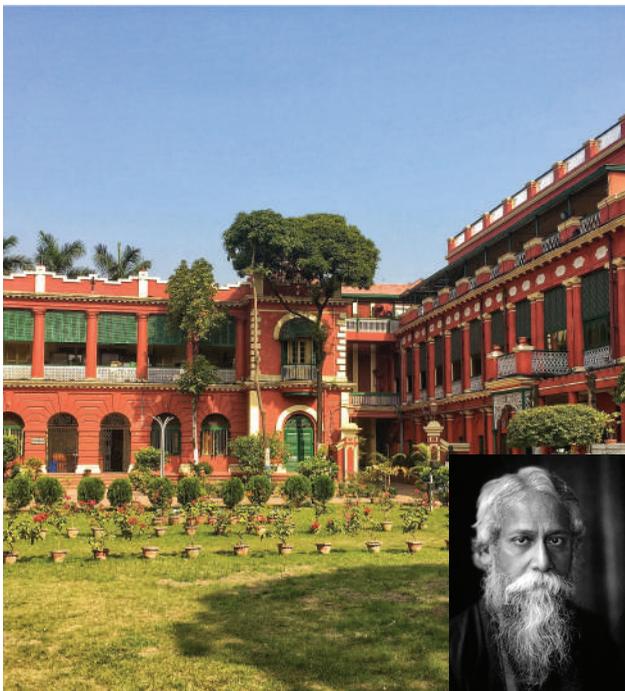
The leadership crisis

India is facing a leadership crisis, and reconnecting to the past is the only way this problem can be addressed. Mamta Chitnis Sen explains why political parties need to take lessons from past leaders in order to create a new leadership for India.

You can't cross the sea, merely by standing and staring at the water — Rabindranath Tagore

The above words of Nobel Laureate and poet Rabindranath Tagore seem to resonate at his vast home, Jorasanko Thakurbari, nestled within the bylanes of North Kolkata. The huge and elegantly decorated building with its pruned gardens, has been converted into a museum by the Tagore family, and is open to the public. Here, Tagore's entire life is recreated through photographs and memorabilia – the rooms he lived in, the chairs he sat on, to the places he had visited abroad to debate, preach and spread the importance of creating a world of progressive India. A timeline of Tagore's journeys abroad to take forward his message, takes up an entire floor.

It is impressive to see that the governments of Japan, Hungary, China and the United States of America have contributed well in setting up their own separate galleries on each floor of the house, in an effort to acknowledge, boost and applaud Tagore's contribution to their respective countries. While a section on China showcases Tagore's talks and books while on his trips in the country, the Hungarian section displays a part of the tree Tagore had planted there during his visit to discuss and debate on



Tagore's home; (inset) Tagore

worldissues. It was an enriching experience to see this and realise why Tagore is what he is, a world leader. The visit to the Thakurbari was an education in leadership first hand. I personally believe museums are not only the best places to revisit our past, but also the best places to understand the kind of leaders that nations created, the kind of men the world bowed down to, the chosen few who steered our past generations.

Museums as repositories

Kolkata, the once former capital of British-ruled India, has quite a number of museums to its credit. A majority of them are the homes of leaders who led the country into Independence, and offer an insight into the disciplined lives they led. The houses of social reformer Raja Rammo-han Roy, freedom fighters Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, and even Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad (the latter spent a majority of his last days in Kolkata), are spread across the City of Joy, and offer an interesting insight into the hard work and the toil they must have put in, to propel their country onto the international map. These houses, which are now converted into museums (a majority of these museums are taken care of privately and not by the government) stand tall, in silent testimony to the lives of these illustrious visitors, even as visitors pop in day in and day out through their halls.

The ugly truth

After a three-hour tour of Tagore's house, on my way out, I was greeted to an ugly and disproportionate structure of concrete outside the main gates of the Thakurbari. This under-construction building had loud hoardings decorated across its façade announcing that it would open as a mall soon. The irony, that the space outside the home of the country's national treasure, would be reserved for a commercial mall wasn't lost on me.

This scene made me recall a similar incident, a few years back in Mumbai, where the home of the late controversial leader and President of Hindu Mahasabha, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, popularly known as Veer Savarkar, in Dadar, was taken over by a new owner. The Savarkar home was built from the donations of Savarkar's admirers, and even housed a museum devoted to the leader. Both the house and the museum seemed to have faded slowly into oblivion. Instead, across Dadar, since the past few years, one can see tall, multi-storeys and commercial malls with glass facade replacing the scenic and serene, two-storied heritage buildings.

Are Muslims only a vote bank?

Are Indian Muslims more unsafe and insecure under the BJP regime as they are seen as en bloc voters of Congress? Is this perception based on reality? Nadeem Nusrath ponders.

It's tragic that of late, in our democracy, the Muslim vote in particular has become famous for all the wrong reasons, especially to deride, abuse and indeed lynch its community members on the popular notion that 'they vote *en-bloc* for secular Congress', which indeed also works as a great motivator in the hate campaign targeted towards them. This, despite the fact that in reality, right until the mid-1980s, the whole of India voted for the Congress *en-bloc* except for the Emergency years, where again the Muslim vote went with the overall national sentiment.

The BJP and the insecurity of Muslims

If indeed, as facts show, such has been the scenario, why have the Muslims felt perpetually unsafe when BJP in particular is seen as coming to power, or indeed when it is in power? Why does the insecurity of Muslims become the lingering question only during BJP rule? It would be safe to deduce, it's because of the patronage, support and indeed the sanction the threat calls to Muslims supposedly gets from the regime, as seen from the various statements issued by BJP lawmakers across the country, post 2014. Even an issue as insignificant as the dietary habit or its preference by an individual gets linked to a Muslim life. And when this happens as has been seen since 2014, then we can hardly dismiss the notion that it's a figment of our imagination that Muslims are unsafe, or indeed that he has ever been safe.

Considering the fact that since post Independence the Congress has been securing votes in its favour, pan-India it was quite expected that the opposition would try and break this Congress hegemony. The Left and the Socialists tried and succeeded, but the BJP found it difficult due to its distinct right-wing agenda, which is still considered unacceptable when pitted against the caste-based politics of the other regional political parties. But the general election of 1989 changed that when BJP supported a non-Congress government from outside, along with the other opposition parties. Overnight they became acceptable and mainstream. That acceptability since then has only grown, and today BJP is the single largest party, and has a majority in the Lok Sabha. And all this even as it grapples with its image of an anti-minority party, and not just as an anti-Muslim party considering Christians too have been targeted on the issue of offering sops for conversion. Does this image actually help BJP acquire power? Yes, it does, and this can be gauged from the fact that the Congress which actually prided itself in being branded as a secular party, is now more often than not seen as pedaling a soft Hindutava line.

Riot victims and justice

The other aspect that needs to be touched upon is to consider the deliverance mechanism of our justice system. Indian courts seem rather comfortable with the accusation of being slow in their deliverance mechanism, so the other yardstick could be how a political party reacts to this issue of justice being done to the riot victims.

Congress cannot be faulted for its soothing words post riots, but in actuality it has not only rewarded an accused named in the Srikrishna Commission Report with a ticket to contest an election in Mumbai, but has also rewarded another who actually watered down his testimony to help the Late Balasaheb Thackeray avoid a conviction, by making him a minister. And when this is juxtaposed with the idle ruminations of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that "Muslims have a first right towards our country's natural resources". But it is worth considering who actually provides fodder to the BJP to make a serious leap to power even as the cohesive Muslim vote in some cities and mohallas get fragmented either as a boycott of Congress or a vote for an acceptable BJP candidate, or a vote for a Muslim centric party, whether an UDF in Assam, an Owaisi in Mumbai, or a Muslim League in Kerala.



The Congress is perceived as more open and supportive of the minorities

Indian courts seem rather comfortable with the accusation of being slow in their deliverance mechanism, so the other yardstick could be how a political party reacts to this issue of justice being done to the riot victims.

The run up to the general elections of 2019 is not about the relative safety of the Muslim or a Christian or indeed a Dalit in a BJP regime. It's more to do with the narrative that secular political parties weave around the minority vote and it certainly cannot be weaved so as to give Prime Minister

Narendra Modi an opportunity to make a clarion call as he did in Azamgarh, that "Congress is only for Muslim men and not Muslim women." Because then we will grapple with another scenario on whether Muslim men are more unsafe than the Muslim women in a BJP regime!



Nadeem Nusrath holds an MSc degree from the University of Wales, UK, and a first degree in Economics from the University of Mumbai. He is the former National Secretary of the Indian Youth Congress and is presently engaged in the private sector.

(...continued from page 13)

The examples of such 'ignorance' or 'neglect' are a dime a dozen. Not only are the houses of our 'national treasures' but even buildings, or open spaces reserved for hospitals, schools, gardens and empty open plots, all of it have been taken over, bit by bit, and sold off to generate profits for both corporations and political leaders.

Over the years there have been several reports and cases of land grabbing and scams and politicians, who are expected to be strict supervisors of the very spaces they vow to protect, often misuse their position and look the other way.

It is sad but it appears that political leaders have forgotten the reason they have been elected in the first place. They need to be reminded that they are not owners but custodians of India's property and its wealth, and also its people at large. Unfortunately, often blinded by power and money, political leaders fail to think beyond themselves and what they can do for their country.

The decline

The race to generate profits at all costs has led to a decline in one important thing—an honest and dedicated leadership. India is definitely facing a leadership crisis. Although the country has made progress in certain areas over the year, we have failed to generate a single leader who can lead the country with honesty and sincerity.

Established political parties have fared no better. The job of a political party is more than just winning elections. Although some are over half a century old, they have failed to create an efficient pool of men and women who could be trained to take on the challenges like the complicated caste system for example. It is upon them to create better leaders for tomorrow. Leaders who refrain from playing caste politics and instead are more interested in driving its people to achieve success for their country whether it be in the area of industry, education, sport or art and culture. It is time that political parties relook and re-examine the volatile caste politics and reservations which has dominated the country for 70 years now, and create a leadership that goes beyond this.

We need to create leaders who are prepared to take the risk where need be. We need to create leaders who stand up for what is right, irrespective of the consequences. We need to create leaders who are not threatened by their counterparts, but who are sensitised to the needs of the people. And last but not the least, we need to create a leadership that stands behind the old, poor, exploited and the marginalised.

Which is why it is important for us to go back in history and take lessons from our past, to understand and explore why we have failed to live up to the sacrifices made by those who gave up their lives for an independent and free India. After all, reconnecting to our past is the only way for us to go ahead in creating a new and better India.



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.



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MATHERAN

A most charming getaway

Touted as India's smallest hill station, Matheran is a unique place to visit. Located just 80 km from Mumbai, it is a universe away in providing a clean, green getaway with breathtaking vistas abounding in waterfalls and scenic spots. Visit this hill station to experience nature at her best, as also to revel in the old structures and bungalows of our colonial past.

Text & photos: Manu Shrivastava



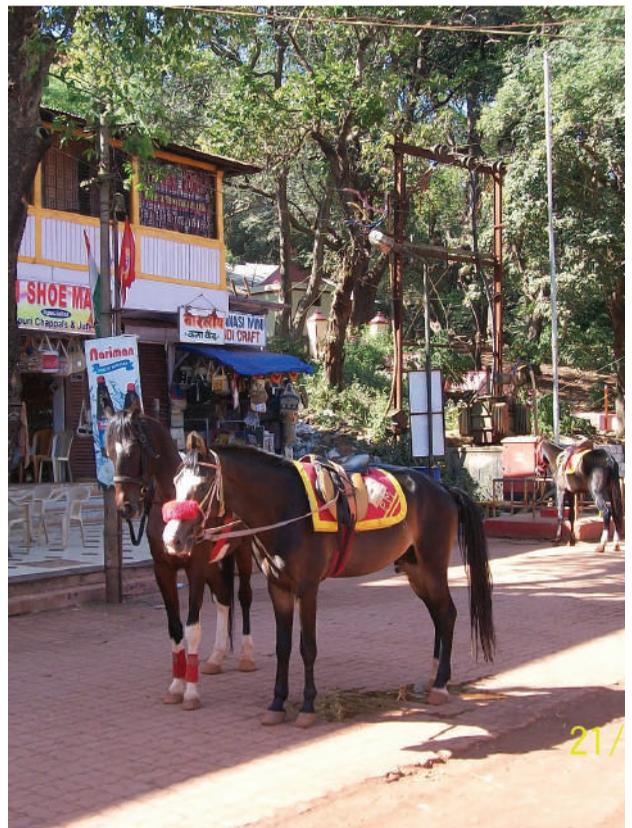
The hill station of Matheran is a world away from Mumbai

Known to be India's smallest hill station, Matheran is a traveller's paradise at an elevation of around 800 m (2,625 feet) above sea level. The quaint retreat located on the Western Ghats mountain range in Karjat (District Raigad), Maharashtra, Matheran literally translates to "Forest on the forehead (of the mountains)". What makes this hill station unique is the absence of motorable vehicles, as Matheran is Asia's only non-motorable hill station. It has been declared as an eco-sensitive region by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, owing to the zone's biodiversity and natural heritage.

To go to Matheran, one has to reach Neral at the base of the hills from where transportation (private cars, taxis, bus service) is available till Dasturi Naka, about nine kilometres from Matheran. Beyond this point no vehicles are permitted to ply. From Dasturi Naka one can walk to Matheran hill top or take a horse ride, the toy train or hand-drawn carts.

The attractions of Matheran

For urban residents near Matheran, especially from Mumbai, the hill station is the perfect weekend getaway as it transports you into a completely different world. The red soil, narrow roads with a boulevard-like thick foliage, horse rides, and the deafening silence from the absence of motor vehicles, brings you even closer to nature. The soil in Matheran gets its distinct colour from the laterite rocks that cover the hills and the hill tops. The proximity to Mumbai makes Matheran a very popular tourist destination.



Matheran is accessible only by horses, toy trains and hand-drawn carts



A bust of Hutatma Kotwal in the municipal garden of Matheran

The biodiversity in the hills is rich. Inside the forests, animals like the leopard, panther, fox, wild boar, mongoose, barking deer, Malabar giant squirrel, and porcupine are commonly found. At the hill-top, monkeys are a common sight as Matheran has a significant population of Hanuman langurs and bonnet macaques. Birds found include the blue breasted barbet, crested lark, Indian small sky lark, common green pigeon, etc.

There is more to the forested hill top than its natural heritage. Matheran has an abundance of beautiful British-style bungalows that were built when the British developed it as a getaway resort during summers. In 1850, Hugh Poyntz Malet, the then District Collector of Thane District discovered Matheran. Lord Elphinstone who was at that time the Governor of Bombay, laid the foundation for the development of Matheran as a hill station.

Initially, only the British were permitted to visit and live in Matheran. They would spend their summers with their families in their bungalows. Indians were taken as labourers to carry luggage, draw the carts and other sundry work. Indians were also employed as 'maalis'(gardeners) who were stationed at British bungalows as care-takers. It was much later that a handful plots of land were distributed among 'rich' Indians, who built their own bungalows, and that is how Indians started residing there.

Matheran is a tourist's delight. There are more than thirty designated 'points' that offer spectacular views of the valley, the hills, Neral town at the bottom of the hill, villages

in the valley, mountains, springs and small waterfalls in adjacent hills, apart from a beautiful view of sunset and sunrise. The most popular points are Panorama Point with a 360-degree view, the Monkey Point, Charlotte Lake and Louisa Point. The other major attraction and a major draw for tourists is the toy train of Matheran and the horse rides.

Cynosure of all eyes: The toy train

The Matheran Hill Railway is synonymous to Matheran. Also known as the Matheran Toy Train or Matheran Light Railway, it was built by an Indian businessman and philanthropist Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy, and was opened to traffic in 1907. The train is a marvel in itself owing to its run on the steep climb on the hills of Matheran. It covers a distance of 20 km and is at par with the other hill railways in India such as Darjeeling, Kangra Valley, and Nilgiri Mountain Railways. The latter three mountain railways have been designated as the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) world heritage sites, as they are "outstanding examples of bold, ingenious engineering solutions for the problem of establishing an effective rail link through a rugged, mountainous terrain". All three are considered "outstanding examples of innovative transportation systems built through difficult terrain, which had great influence on the social and economic development of their respective regions".

Matheran Railway runs over large areas of forest territory, rocky terrain, slopes and climbs. It is a small line



The iconic toy train of Matheran

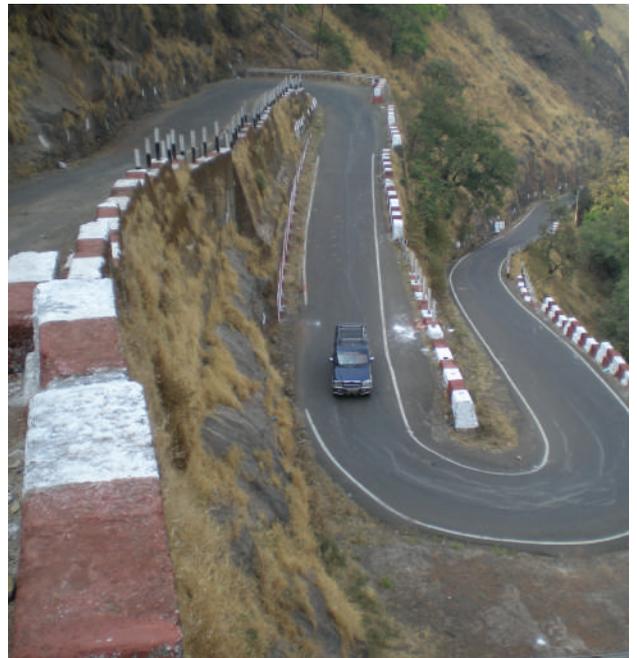
of two-feet gauge or the narrow gauge that meanders around 281 turns on its run from Neral to Matheran hill top. These turns are not only thrilling, but also offer a breathtaking view of the area. The train ride adds an unparalleled adventure and fun to the trip to Matheran.

Matheran was explored as a summer resort at the same time as India's first railway company (the Great Indian Peninsula Railway, now the Central Railway) was formed in 1849. After the construction of the Matheran Light Railway (MLR), it became a popular resort of the British Raj in India and still is. It traverses about 20 km from Neral (altitude 39.31 metres) to Matheran (altitude 803.98 metres).

The Panorama Point -- An adventure in itself

One of the most visited points, Panorama Point, offers a 360-degree breathtaking view of the adjacent hills of the Western Ghats. The view is particularly beautiful at sunset and sunrise. Panorama Point is also the farthest viewpoint in Matheran. The central area of the hill top is the market where shops, small restaurants and vendors selling souvenirs, clothes, hats, etc., display and sell their goods. Panorama Point is about seven and a half kilometres from the market and thus requires a horse ride to reach most times. The wonderful walk to this point is a thrilling adventure as it ensures walkers ramble through the dense forests of the hill where an eerie silence offers a

chance to hear nature in full bloom. You may hear the birds chirping, the trotting of a horse passing by, or just leaves rustling. Professional photographers even enthusiasts make it a point to hike to Panorama Point to get picture-perfect shots of the valley and the hills.



The winding road to Matheran, though Matheran itself doesn't allow vehicles

The Louisa Point

This point is popular among the hikers, photographers and active travellers. This point offers even more spectacular views during the monsoon, especially of the Prabal Fort and Vishalgarh. Some of the best features of this point are the high hills and picturesque views.

The Echo Point

One of the most commonly known and oft-visited points is the Echo Point. It lies in the vicinity of Louisa Point and, true to its name, each time you shout out your name, the valley screams it back. It is quite common to find children often with adults in tow, shouting out the oddest of words to hear them back. It is also a very scenic spot and provides a spectacular view of the mountain range. This point is particularly crowded because of its location and easy accessibility. The place becomes even more mystical during rains as clouds fly by making it surreal and magical experience.

Sunrise at its best

Sunrise Point, also known as Khandala Point, is located very close to the Matheran market. This place is very

popular among the tourists especially at sunrise. This place offers a magical view of the hills during sunrise accompanied with a serenity difficult to find in noisy cities. Often people are seen doing yoga or relaxing and soaking in the fresh air at this point.

...And a Porcupine Point too

Also famous as the Sunset Point, this point is the perfect blend of beauty, serenity and adventure. The point is surrounded with lush green forests that can be reached by undertaking an adventurous hike. The point also offers a magnificent view of Prabal Fort and is popular among tourists for the spectacular sunset. The other highlights include the Cathedral Rock and an abundance of nature.

A hill with just one tree

Another very popular point among hikers and photographers is the One Tree Hill Point, which offers a mesmerising view of the Western Ghats. Just five kilometres from Matheran market, it is among the must-go places in Matheran as the hike is beautiful, and the view is spectacular. To trek to One Tree Hill Point, one has to transverse through a thick forest cover and walk on a slightly difficult trail that is steep at places and adventurous.



The scenic One Tree Hill point



The picturesque Charlotte Lake

Other points with scenic views

The Honeymoon Point is another popular spot, especially among newly-married couples for its romantic ambience.. At one time it was a popular honeymoon spot for the erstwhile residents of the hill i.e., the British. A trip to Matheran would be incomplete without a visit to Honeymoon Point.

The Alexander Point is your gateway to enjoy the magnificent views of several spots around Matheran such as the Rambaug Point, Palasdari Lake, Ulhas River in the valley, and others. The view is even more magical during monsoons when the floating clouds transport you to another world..

The Charlotte Lake

The Charlotte Lake, besides being a highly picturesque lake, provides Matheran fresh drinking water. Located in the vicinity of Louisa Point and Echo Point, Charlotte Lake is popular among tourists looking for some solace and quiet, more than adventure. It is also popular among nature enthusiasts owing to the rich biodiversity in the surrounding zones.

The caves of Matheran

A trek to the mystical Chanderi Caves in the Matheran Hills

at a height of 800 metres and along the way from Badlapur to Karjat, assures you a novel experience. The four pinnacles the trekker manages to see at the end of the trek, along with a panoramic view of the nearby ranges and the valley below are breathtaking, to say the least. A trek to these caves with friends or family is a must-do on the list of most Mumbaikars.



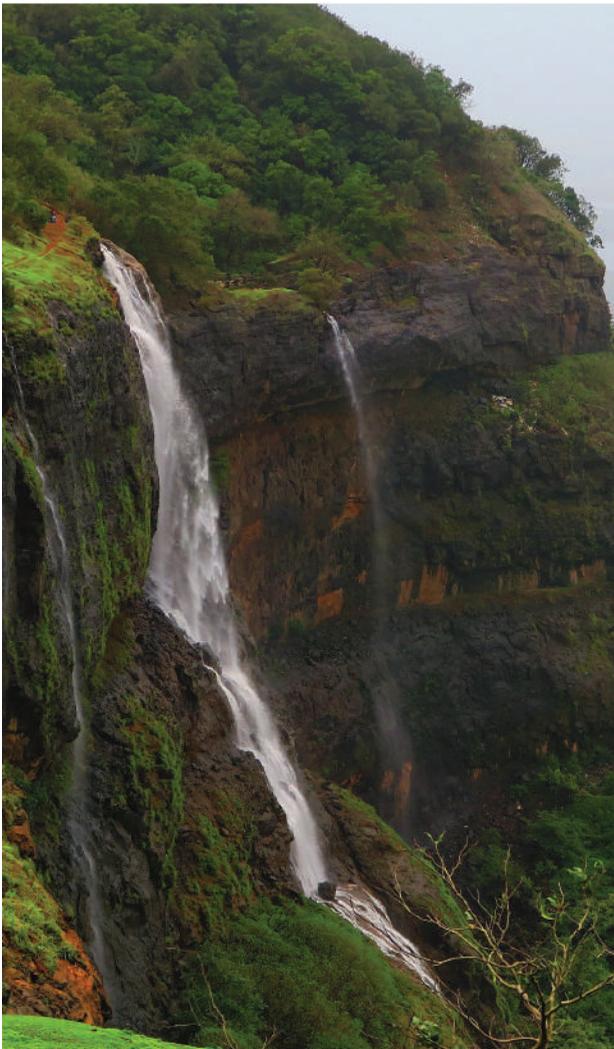
The caves of Matheran

Morbe Dam – For that perfect break from city-life

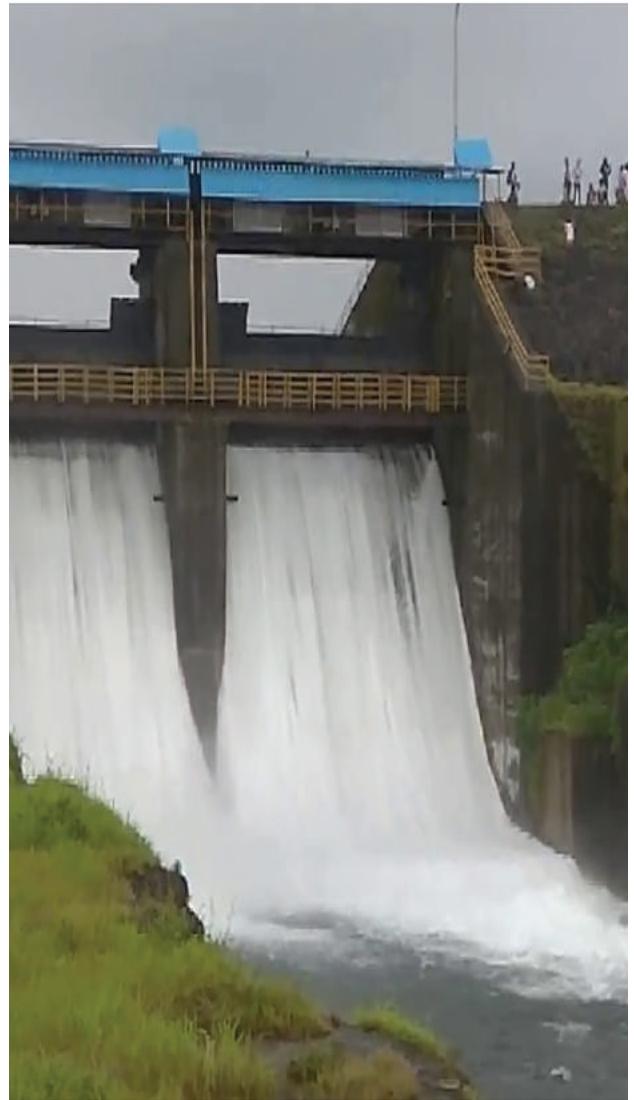
Morbe Dam, a reservoir that lies about 190 feet above sea level, is built on the Dharavi River, and covers about 9,780 km. Constructed by Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran in 1999 to manage the supply of water in the area, visitors cannot help but marvel at the sights offered by the dam and the scenery around it. For those harassed by the traffic and chaos associated with urban life, a trip to Morbe Dam is the perfect panacea.

Prabal Fort – A win from the Moghuls

A flat top hill on the Western side of Matheran, the Prabal Fort, is known for being captured by Chhatrapati Shivaji from the Moghuls, and is said to have harboured several treasures at the time of its capture. At the fort, one can view two gateways and eleven towers which have been damaged and partially destroyed over the years. There's also a large pond at the top of the hill.



One of the many waterfalls that Matheran abounds in



The Morbe Dam offers an excellent vista

The charm of Matheran

As a heritage town, the idyllic Matheran preserves an old-world charm, and is on a must-visit list for travellers looking for a short trip that rejuvenates mind, body and soul. After all, how many tourist spots offer adventure, tranquillity and the proximity to nature, without the humdrum of traffic and associated activity?

Distinctly a contrast from the rushed urban lifestyle of neighbouring Mumbai is that of the local villager in and around Matheran – barely 80 km away from the metropolis. Even today, scores of women like Kamla, a native of Dhodhani village at the base of Matheran, transverses the treacherous pathway uphill, barefoot, every single day, to reach the Matheran market and sell the berries, mangoes or bananas she carries in a dusty *potli*. The natives of Dhodhani, primarily Kathkari tribals, speak Kathkari, of the Konkan family of languages, and are slim and wiry. Walking those miles to sell their wares, they are content with making even just ₹50 daily.



A spectacular view of the Western Ghats

Sadly, owing to an erratic train service that has been resumed after a few derailments and a few years of recent stoppage, touts, taxi drivers, auto drivers and horse-ride vendors have a field day at the hill station.

Over the years, a host of illegal construction began in a big way. The authorities conveniently turned a blind eye, saying the hill station needs development. But the law on its status is clear. Nobody in Matheran is permitted to

build anything beyond the ground plus one level. And despite the law being flouted flagrantly over the last few years, the state remains silent. Now, following litigations and legal intervention, there was a flurry of activity to demolish the illegal structures, followed by an overwhelming effort by the local polity and authorities to maintain status quo. Matheran's uniqueness, the absence of city chaos, today lies at risk of being overrun by over-zealous locals, a profit-hungry tourism industry, and political lobbies.



Manu Shrivastava is a Media Legal Researcher with Draft Craft International, and co-convenor of 'The Woman Survivor' initiative that documents abuse of women and children within families.

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“Beauty is well-defined in our culture. The girl on the Filmfare, Vogue, or a Filmstar cover is beautiful, but not the girl with pimples. Hence, to get accepted with vitiligo will take a long time.”

‘Voice of Vitiligo’, the first vitiligo support group in Mumbai launched by **Urmila Prabhu**, 52, aims to spread awareness, build an active vitiligo community, and combat the huge stigma attached to the disease. This disorder is characterised by milky white patches of different sizes and shapes on the body, and affects 1-2% of the world population. Urmila Prabhu spoke to **A. Radhakrishnan** about this disease and the support systems available for those suffering from it.



What is the main cause of vitiligo?

‘Vitiligo’ derived from Latin, is due to the loss of melanin, the pigment that gives the skin its characteristic color, due to destruction of pigment forming cells known as melanocytes. White patches appear all over the body. It is more noticeable in dark-skinned people. It causes cosmetic problems.

How does a person get vitiligo?

Vitiligo is an autoimmune disease, which happens when your immune system mistakenly attacks and destroys some part of your own body, like melanocytes in the skin, body's own tissues and organs.

When and where does vitiligo usually start?

It can start at any age, but often first appears between the ages of 20 and 30. Beginning on your face above your eyes or on your neck, it progresses to the armpits, elbows, genitalia, hands or knees. Often symmetrical, it can spread over your

entire body. Some people with vitiligo also have patches of pigment loss affecting the hair on their scalp or body. In people with vitiligo, the immune system appears to attack the pigment cells (melanocytes) in the skin.

How is vitiligo diagnosed?

Your doctor, apart from gathering your personal and family medical history will examine your skin and take a small sample (biopsy) of the affected skin and draw blood for lab tests to look for underlying autoimmune conditions, such as anemia or diabetes.

Is vitiligo curable?

There is no ‘cure’, though sometimes patches go away on their own. Otherwise, doctors can prescribe treatments that might help even out skin tone. Vitiligo can affect people of any age, gender, or ethnicity. It is usually a lifelong condition, with no cure. Treatment options include exposure to UVA or UVB light, and depigmentation of the skin. Vitiligo is a genetic disease. It is caused by inheritance of multiple



Urmila Prabhu receiving recognition for her work with vitiligo

casual genes simultaneously, possibly in different combinations in different people, plus exposure to environmental risk factors that remain mostly unknown. It isn't contagious, and doesn't cause pain, nor is it medically dangerous. It affects both males and females alike.

Is it hereditary?

Given that the percentage of people seen with this disease is only one percent, most children will not get vitiligo even if a parent has it, and most people with vitiligo do not have a family history of the disorder.

Can vitiligo be caused by stress?

Stress/depression, though not the direct cause can aggravate it. Stress negatively impacts our immune system, and being anxious or stressed can aggravate autoimmune conditions (including vitiligo and psoriasis). Vitiligo is highly associated with a number of autoimmune diseases, including autoimmune thyroid diseases like Hashimoto's thyroiditis and Graves' disease.

Is itching a symptom of vitiligo?

The edges of the patch may be smooth or irregular, sometimes red and inflamed, or with brownish discoloration. It doesn't cause discomfort to your skin, such as dryness, but the patches may occasionally be itchy, varying from person to person.

What are the different types of vitiligo?

Segmental, which affects one segment, or side, of the body (a hand, a leg, or the face) and in fifty percent of individuals some hair (on head, eyebrows, and eyelashes), and non-segmental, which is more common and affects both sides of the body. The symptoms appear at an early age and progress for only a few years.

What makes vitiligo spread?

Unless treated, most people with vitiligo will continue to notice their condition getting worse over several years. For some, it is a slow and gradual process affecting only small patches of the skin, but for others it is more rapid and extensive. But it is neither fatal nor life-threatening, though it attracts social stigma, resulting in low self-esteem. A sad myth is that it is related to other skin diseases such as skin cancer, leprosy, and albinism.

What has been your personal tryst with vitiligo?

My life-partner passed away four years ago in September and then in May, my daughter married and went off to London. The following day my father passed away in Mumbai. From four of us staying in a house, suddenly I started living alone. Lonely and depressed, I began neglecting myself and my health. I lost my appetite, and daily chores were becoming a burden. Even taking a bath was an effort. My friends started noticing the change in me. I was not ready to be happy.

'Why me?' was my regular initial refrain. It was scary, and I faced anxiety, but thankfully, as it was not on a visible part of my body, I did not have to face much hostility.

Several months later, while getting ready to attend a family wedding, my sister stopped me and asked me about a white patch on my right shoulder? When I inspected myself in the mirror, I saw a small white patch, with a radius of about half centimeter but overlooked it, thinking it was some skin discoloration.

Four months later, however it had grown in size. A dermatologist diagnosed it as fungal infection and asked me to apply some fungicide. But the patch only increased to a radius of 1.5 cm. Finally, a homeopath, my daughter's friend told me it was vitiligo. I had never heard of it. I literally collapsed. And shaken, took an appointment with the best homeopath in town, who confirmed and prescribed some medicines. Soon my patch stopped growing and slowly turned brown to blend with my skin.

How did you overcome your inhibitions?

'Why me?' was my regular initial refrain. It was scary, and I faced anxiety, but thankfully, as it was not on a visible part of my body, I did not have to face much hostility. My sister is the pillar of my strength, and my daughter and son-in-law are very, very loving, caring, and sensitive. I am also fortunate to have kind friends. I soon realised that the victim attitude was in my head, as after being diagnosed with vitiligo, I had started looking at myself as less beautiful, and started fearing rejection by the society. My anxiety started getting the better of me. I started reading self-help books, Lousie Hay's *Heal Yourself* helped me a lot.

Why is society so hostile to those with vitiligo?

Beauty is well-defined in our culture. The girl on the *Filmfare*, *Vogue*, or a *Filmstar* cover is beautiful, but not the girl with pimples. Hence, to get accepted with vitiligo will take a long time. When I was diagnosed, I became very, very nervous. One of the doctors was very insensitive towards me. He told me to think of the larger issues like global warming or children dying in Africa (not in India)! I was aghast.

What about support groups?

I searched the net for more information on vitiligo and also support groups in Mumbai as I wanted to share experiences with others who had vitiligo. But there were none. Hence I started 'Voice of Vitiligo' for people like me, as I do

not want anyone or their family to suffer like me!

I am often asked why I bothered since my vitiligo cannot be seen, and so what was the need to shout from the roof top? Vitiligo is a very individualistic disorder; hence what suits one may not be applicable to another. So there is a need for support. My friends, especially Tanaz, helped me tremendously to give the support group its present form and shape. Yet I confess, it is far from a mass movement. People sadly live a fearful life and do not come out in open arguing that 'my daughter must get married', or 'my son should get a good girl', or 'I may not get a job of my choice if people will come to know that I suffer from vitiligo'.

We seek media help to make it a mass movement, to make it totally and completely acceptable. We need big stars from all fields to lend support so that all can say 'Let's accept Vitiligo as it is'. Though the government has many important things to do, our cause could also be helped, I guess.

What do you tell your target audience?

At support meets, I share my personal stories and attempt to bring and bind people together. I tell them, 'Please come out in the open, accept it, don't be cruel to yourself, you are important, you matter, don't hide. It is indeed difficult, but not impossible. Let the world take notice of us. We are part of the same universe. Do join me, people having vitiligo and without, let's work together to make this a compassionate world'.

What's your advice to people with vitiligo?

I have healed nearly 90 percent by keeping myself totally positive, by focusing on work at hand, and taking medicines at the right time. I have joined, yoga and dance classes. As a Rotarian, I do lots of charitable work, and the fellowship keeps me happy. Over and above, I say just be yourself, do not be afraid of the society, develop skills, work hard, try to be a success in your field, but take no pressure. Believe in yourself, and believe in the universe; you will find peace and happiness.

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Plastic, no longer fantastic!

Is the proposed plastic ban in Maharashtra a step too little, too late, or is there still hope for our degraded, plastics-filled oceans? G. Venkatesh tries to remain optimistic.

Stories – true ones at that – are powerful in getting messages across. They are more effective than theoretical verbose! So here is one. A senior Swedish couple (in their early 70s) – acquaintances of mine in Karlstad (Sweden), visited Thailand recently. I paid them a courtesy call on their return and they narrated their ‘travelogue’ to me (or at least a part of it). Björn (name changed) observed that the Indian Ocean, or rather the Andaman Sea to the west of Thailand and the Gulf of Thailand to its south and east harboured tonnes and tonnes of plastic waste – microplastics, meso-plastics and macro-plastics; in a range of sizes, shapes and colours! He also noted that the Thais were open to using plastic bags at will! Thanks, one may say, to the abundance of raw feedstock which comes from neighbouring Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and now also Myanmar.

Yet he joked, knowing where I came from, that most of those plastics

floating on the Andaman Sea or the Gulf of Thailand (or already settled on the seabed), originated in Mumbai – dumped there and carried by ocean currents around Kanyakumari and into the Bay of Bengal, and therefrom some of them also further to the Gulf of Thailand. Possible? Well, not incontrovertible to some extent, but at the same not easily proven. We now know that petroleum-based plastics are persistent pollutants which cannot be bio-degraded, and they stay on in the environment they are jettisoned into, and find their way back to us. What goes around comes around. This applies not just to your karma, but plastics as well, my friends.

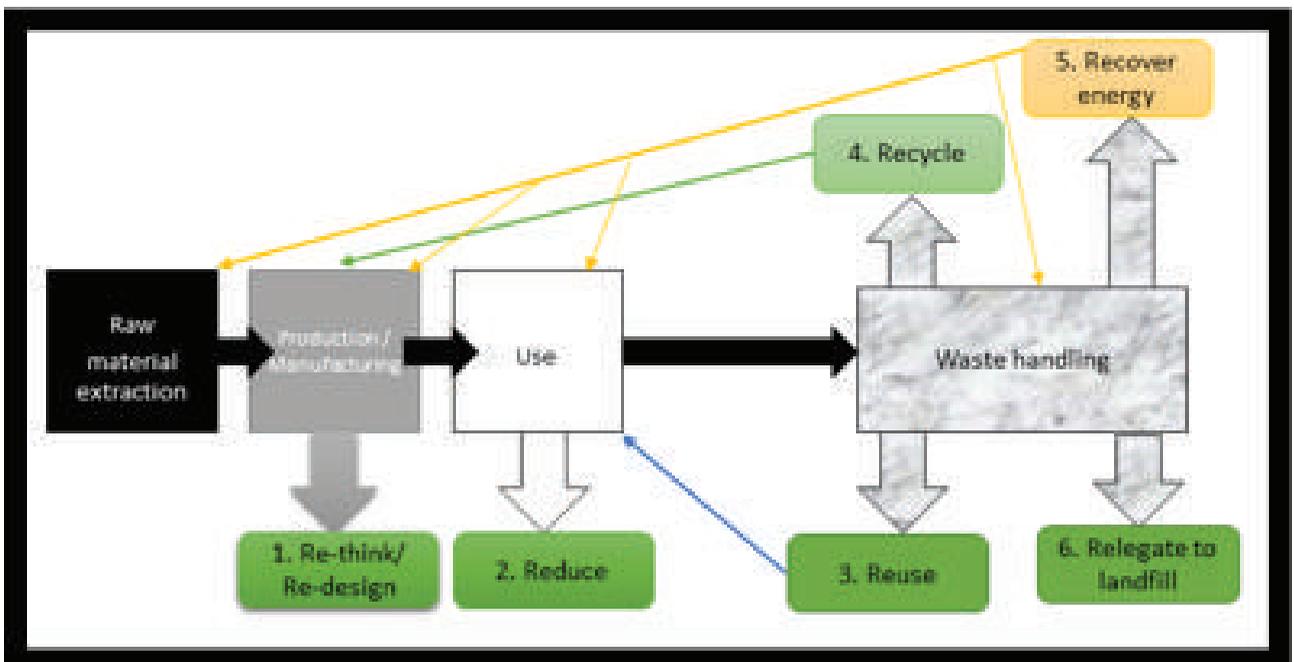
That brings us to the gist of this piece. Plastics when they made a foray into the global manufacturing sector, were heralded as fantastic lightweight substitutes for wood and metal. As the family of plastics – polyvinylchloride, polyethylene, polypropylene, polyethylene terephthalate etc.

– started expanding, plastics became amenable to a plethora of applications. We tend to look upon the post-1950s as the Aluminium Age, but it could very well be labelled as the Age of Plastics or Polymers. The former term indicates a physical property of the material, while the latter refers to the structure of the same.

Quo vadis, plastics?

Well, producing plastics causes greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, both upstream in the petroleum extraction and refining process, and in the plastics production process per se. Then, they enter the use phase. Try doing this, dear readers:

- 1) Track the inflows and outflows of plastics of all types into your household for a month.
- 2) Then, try to get an estimate of the stocks of plastics which have piled up in your homes, as materials of construction of products you use or do not use for that matter.



The product life-cycle management hierarchy

3) Assume average lifetimes of the products made of plastics (wholly or partly) in your household and think of what happens to them when they exit your door – in typical Indian urban and rural settings.

Where I used to work (in Norway), most plastics were dutifully and systematically collected (separated at source by users, responsibly) and recycled. Where I work now (Sweden), most plastics are collected and sent to combined heat and power plants, where they are incinerated to recover heat energy. A part of the heat energy is used to produce electricity in steam turbines. The material mass of plastics which is essentially carbon, hydrogen and oxygen (and chlorine in the case of PVC for instance), is transmuted to gases which are released to the atmosphere. Now, both these alternatives do not function so well in India. The latter does not suit us, as we do not have a demand for indoor heating in our country – not as much as households in the higher latitudes do. But wait a minute. Did we miss an opportunity here? Could we have conceived symbiotic projects, whereby plastic wastes could have been collected and sent to an incineration plant which could recover energy therefrom and supply it as heat to nearby industrial units and replace natural gas and oil as sources of heat in the process? We are sadly, still decades away from getting there – systems which are already well-entrenched in the western world. How much has been recycled thus far in our country, I do not know. How much lies in garbage dumps, I can clearly see.

The journey from the airport to home, when I visit India, is spent simply observing from the cab window, the status of the solid waste management system in *aamchi* Mumbai. Swachh? Well, why are we deluding ourselves, folks? How much is thrown away on the stretches of beaches from Gujarat to West Bengal,

I have seen, off and on. How much is floating on the seas (Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean), we get to hear from time to time, but ignore, as that is so far away. Right? It hits us, when we find a whale with polythene bags in its gut washed away on the beach (I am not sure if any such thing happened in India, but the

Where I used to work (in Norway), most plastics were dutifully and systematically collected (separated at source by users, responsibly) and recycled.

Norwegians witnessed this of late). We ban cow slaughter, and ‘maybe’ it is okay (I am a vegetarian Brahmin, but wish to be non-opinionated on this issue), but then is it okay to let cows suffocate to death, choking on plastic bags? If we must not slaughter them, we must strive to provide them with a good life...to the best of our abilities?

Phase-out – better late than never?

Well, in Maharashtra, the phase-out has begun. This will happen in a stepwise fashion, I guess...till compostable plastics take over totally from the petroleum-based originals. Technology will get us there, but it needs time, and it begs of us to adjust and make some sacrifices en route. I recall having gone out to a Bikaneri sweet shop in New Mumbai and purchasing a box of ‘pedas’ last week. The old man behind the counter got out a plastic bag for me to carry the cardboard box in. I said that I did not need it and he was visibly happy. He said that it would be so nice if everyone visiting the shop had always said that!

As consumers, we have an 80% responsibility while the policymakers we elect have a 20% responsibility. We are responsible for electing them and also responsible for bringing about much-needed change or as Mahatma Gandhi said, being the change we wish to see around us. Top-down and bottom-up must work in tandem like spin bowling from one end and pace from the other, to cull a cricketing analogy. We need to fully and thoroughly agree that unwittingly/-knowingly, directly/indirectly, we have contributed to a host of environmental problems – be it climate change, biodiversity losses or resource depletion. I recollect what a former classmate of mine told me recently about a conversation he had with his teenage son. The son told him, ‘You guys were a luckier generation. We are the ones who now have to face up to the challenges of resource scarcity and environmental degradation. You’ll will have lived your lives by then.’ Well, readers...how many of you would like it if your children spoke out this truth to you?

Cogito, ergo sum

Well, think please. Whenever your rigorous daily schedule gives you the opportunity. Understand what you can do as an individual. Get together with like-minded people and change things if you can. Set the ball rolling on new trends and let these ‘memes’ spread out in society. Exert pressure on policymakers all the way up to the Prime Minister and bring about a much-needed change for the well-being of city, state, country and humankind, now and more importantly for future generations. What my friend’s son told him is the truth and we must not leave this world a worse-off place when we shed our mortal remains someday in this century ahead. I leave you with the illustration, which depicts the hierarchy of alternatives/options for making the life-cycle of any product environment-friendlier.



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What a wonderful world!

*We still don't have answers to many of nature's miracles, and all we can do is marvel at nature and the creatures which inhabit it, says **Bittu Sahgal**.*

I have always been mesmerised by how function is central to body design and behaviour of all living creatures. Take the case of the salmon Arab butterfly caterpillar.

Butterflies almost invariably lay their eggs on specific 'host plants' so the larvae that emerge from the eggs are able to fulfil their singular purpose in life... to eat! The first meal tends to be the eggshell... then the leaf on which the egg was carefully laid. Caterpillars could consume 25,000 times their original body weight, moulting several times before metamorphosing into the next stage of their life cycle. I have edited Sanctuary for 38 years now, but am still frustrated by how little I know. Did you know that caterpillars possess as many as 4,000 muscles? You have just 629 and they have 248 muscles in their head capsules alone!

Though they can't see very well at all, they actually have six times as many eyes as you do. And no, they do not have a large number of legs. They are insects and have just six. Their other appendages that look like legs are 'prolegs' that help them hold on to plants for dear life! When they turn into butterflies, all but the six legs attached to their thoracic segments will drop off.

With no weapons to defend themselves, these soft-bodied creatures pack impressive arsenal to ward off predators. Some steal poisons from host plants to deter birds and other insects and, you better believe it, some adjust their blood pressure to assist in locomotion.

Nature's many wonders

When I see a frog, beetle, or skink that has found a spot on this planet to call its own, I am overcome with gratitude and gobsmacked with wonder. How can things be so utterly beautiful and so miraculously functional all at once?

The sheathed woodtuft mushrooms, for example, offer frogs temporary refuge. The partnership is ancient. Fungi possibly emerged on Earth some 1,300 million years ago. Plants 600 million years later. Frogs had to wait another 300 million years (give or take a few million) before males could serenade potential amphibian mates. Fungi hence laid the foundation for plants and, together, both accidentally helped craft a biosphere able to support myriad lifeforms.

Even as a child I hated it when questions cropped up in my head to which I knew no answers could emerge. How many stars are there in the sky and where does the universe end? How did life on Earth begin? As I grew older, the questions became more complex, but continued flowing. How come dirty water evaporates and falls as rain we can safely drink? How does one skin cell know precisely how to unite with another to heal a wound? Darwin, Gould, Wilson and Dawkins opened door after door for me, only to have 10 more doors materialise for each one that opened. To me all this is pure magic. It's mystical. And it's wonderful beyond comprehension. I feel lucky to be alive. When I am alone, far from civilisation, in the quiet



of a forest, desert, or uninhabited island, I like to pretend I am an early human, gazing in wonder and amazement at the sun, moon and stars. But they did not have even the rudimentary benefits of science to explain the obscurities of outer or inner space... so surely their wonder must have been more wondrous, I imagine.

Back in the city I wonder about different things. When did human experience turn into knowledge... and knowledge into science? What possessed the system to gift us the ability to think abstract thoughts? What does it mean for a frog and for us all that Homo sapiens has launched the Anthropocene, where we have become the agents of geological and ecological change? How does all this magic happen? Your guess is as good as mine. But this I know... Dr. Richard Dawkins got it right when he said: "The truth is more magical – in the best and most exciting sense of the word – than any myth or made-up mystery or miracle. Science has its own magic: the magic of reality."

The next time you visit a distant wilderness, remember the wild exists right next to you, in your home, in your gardens... even in your gut!

As Louis Armstrong exclaimed... long before Dawkins: "What a wonderful world!"



Bittu Sahgal is the Editor of Sanctuary Asia www.sanctuaryasia.com, a publication of The Sanctuary Nature Foundation.

The solo show

Increasingly, women theatre artistes are staging monologues, a difficult but very fulfilling form of theatre. Shoma A. Chatterji reviews some of the popular solo shows and tries to understand the dynamics involved.



Seema Biswas in *Jeevit Ya Mrit*

Monologue theatre is very challenging in its form which demands its own content, as not every play or story or novel can lend itself to monologue or solo performances. Monologues are obviously, intensely character driven, and the incidents emerge from the character or multiple characters where the actor enacts different characters within the same play fluently and naturally.

Women theatre personalities have taken to solo theatre with a vengeance. Every noted theatre personality is performing solo on stage with great success commercially, and in terms of media coverage. Today, women are not only writing plays but are running their own theatre groups, producing, directing and performing significant plays not only within the country but across the world. According to Dr. Anuradha Kapoor, erstwhile director of the National School of Drama, "Earlier, theatre was considered

a hobby at best, but today people are more open to making a career out of it," she says, adding, "though there isn't a substantial reduction in obstacles that theatre faces in India, there is now a parallel narrative that says one can survive in the art. Students, who are driven by passion, still have to fight their way into joining a theatre group or an institute like the NSD. Dr. Kapoor was conferred the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Direction in 2004.

Triumphantly striding a patriarchal world are Neelam Mansingh Chowdhary, Geetanjali Shree, Tripurari Sharma, Usha Ganguly, Saoli Mitra, Swatilekha Sengupta, Sohini Sengupta, B. Gauri, Sarita Joshi, V. Padma, Jyoti Dogra, Seema Biswas, Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal, Neeta Mohindra and many others. They have all performed solo theatre not once but several times, because they are challenged by versatility on

the one hand, and the demand of keeping an audience captive solely with a single-actor performance. Let us take a look at some of these solo performances by women to find out not only how versatile they are performance wise, but also how courageous they are in exploring different subjects, territories, characters and histories.

Some monologue theatre performances

Designed and performed by Usha Ganguly, Rangakarmee's *Antaryatra* is a unique blend of the personal, the retrospective, literal and political. Ganguly uses the strategy of the monologue to journey through a melange of historic characters to portray the psyche of the woman, and interweaves into this larger framework, snippets of her own life and experience as a woman who has chosen theatre as her way of life. In so doing, through the aesthetic and imaginative use of minimalistic props

like colourful geometric shapes of the circle, the square, the triangle used in different ways, she brings to life historic characters like Nora from *Doll's House*, Sanichari from *Rudaali*, *Himmat Mai* (Mother Courage and her children) based on Bertolt Brecht's famous play written in 1939, Kamala from Vijay Tendulkar's play and so on.

Teejan Bai of Chhattisgarh has performed different episodes from the Mahabharata in her unique 'Pandavani' style over the past three decades. She broke tradition by becoming the first ever female performer in the Pandavani style that was an exclusive domain of male performers. Though at 71, she tires easily, her grit and determination triumphs as she takes the stage by storm, singing in her guttural voice, performing different characters from the episode of Draupadi Vastraharan to a spellbound audience. Instead of performing seated as per the Pandavani tradition for women performers, who would only sing, Teejan Bai strides her performance into a celebration.

Jyoti Dogra of Mumbai is a living example of what has come to be known as "Abstract Theatre" which is quite real in terms of actual performance, but abstract in concept and in ideology. The presentation is a blend of the abstract and the concrete. The concept is born of an abstract idea. Dogra has carved a niche in solo performances in contemporary Indian theatre. With *Notes on Chai*, she has turned this mundane, everyday addiction on its head to make a strong, socio-political statement on contemporary life, relationships, and human interaction, making optimum use of not only her body, but also every feature of her vocal elements.

About this stunning performance that keeps the audience mesmerised for the entire span, Dogra says, "Tea works as a springboard that moves into other issues — there is a shift from the seemingly superficial to an addressing of deeper insecurities and fears that one does not speak of directly. Tea is an agency that brings and keeps people together.

Tea keeps you company when you are lonely, depressed, or even happy and overjoyed. Tea is central to my performance because it is not just the cup that cheers. It offers a journey to dwell on nostalgia and to dream about the future. At some point along the way, it liberates itself from the confines of the worldly cup to travel yonder. It becomes abstract because it is an idea and a concept and much more than just a cup of addictive drink."



The play *Khanabadosh*

Among earlier performances, one must mention Shanu Roy Chowdhury, the one-woman performance by the talented theatre personality Swatilekha Sengupta. Inspired by and adapted from a Willy Russell play called *Shirley Valentine*, this one-woman performance revolves around a woman, 42-year-old Shanu RoyChowdhury. The play evolves as the 'collective voice' of middle-aged, bored, exploited, and lonely housewives across the world, bent under the heavy burden of a creative process called housework that patriarchy has reduced to a chore. Women who are craving for simple things like approval, some companionship, a little love, the freedom to express themselves, and last, but never the least, to shape up as individuals in their own right, with their own little islands of sunshine from a life essentially spent in the shadow/s of other people. There is a Shanu RoyChowdhury hiding in all women everywhere, crossing barriers of age, time, class, race and place. It played to packed theatres when it was first staged years ago.

Actor Poornima Shettygar's original solo work was called *Truck*. The "protagonist" is a truck, decorated with tassels, bright colours and feminine accessories as trucks often are. "The truck seems hyper-masculine but drivers often dress it up like a woman. That is because it fills a kind of void in their life," she points out. The script travels across several Indian states and Shettygar's lines touch eight languages, tracing the roots of trafficking, combining humour, nautanki and grim drama.

***The Vagina Monologues* and other stories**

Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal has produced, directed and acted in *The Vagina Monologues*, a play no one was willing to touch, but later ran to packed houses in Mumbai and Delhi. She donated a few lakhs from the proceeds of the play to two shelters for battered and abused women in Mumbai. She brought Jane Fonda, Marisa Tomei (Oscar winners) and Eve Ensler (the playwright of *The Vagina Monologues*) to India in March 2004. About *Vagina Monologues* which she continues to perform across the country over several years, she says, "*The Vagina Monologues* has universal relevance. It is brutal and explicit in its strength, and people, irrespective of their gender identity, are moved. It is hilarious, heart-rending, and poetic. Most people think 'vagina' is a dirty word. It is not. It is the biological name given to a part of the body that belongs to half of the world's population. Everyone has spent the first few months of his/her life in close proximity to this part of the anatomy.

The vagina is the spirit of womanhood. It is this spirit that is battered, abused, raped and dehumanised across the world. The sad thing is that we, as women, are ashamed to talk about it. The message in *The Vagina Monologues* is "silence is death." The mounting of the play was the most challenging part, because everyone from producers to actors and sponsors refused to be associated with this play only because of its name!"



Usha Ganguly portrays the female psyche through *Antaryatra*

In *Khanabadosh*, based on writings of noted Punjabi litterateur Ajit Cour, Nivedita Bhattacharjee under the able directorial wand of Jeetendra Singh brings alive the unconventional autobiography of an unconventional woman writer who broke every rule in the patriarchal book to live life on her own terms and also, to illustrate how a woman's love for a man who is not her husband can lead to the same betrayal she has been subjected to within a married relationship. This is so subtle and understated that the woman concerned does not even realise that she has been emotionally blackmailed and duped to believe in a love that forever, was one-sided on the part of the woman while she surrendered to his physical demands and also enjoyed the surrender knowing fully well that he was married with children.

Sushama Deshpande's *Tichya Aichi Goshta*, *Arthat Majhya Athavanincha Phad* ("Her Mother's

Story, or My Own Memories") has had a successful run for more than a decade. Scripted, directed and performed by Deshpande, the performance is the result of a fusion of her research on tamasha and tamasha performers in Maharashtra into a single character. She effectively communicates the pain, the struggle and the social stigma that attaches to women in tamasha. An unusual feature about the monologue was her emphasis on the empowering element that tamasha bestows on women tamasha artists. This sense of empowerment derives from their ability to influence men.

Seema Biswas gives a completely new turn on her one-woman performance in Tagore's short story *Jeevit-Ya-Mrit* as Kadambini, the woman who died to prove that she was alive. Adapted from Tagore's famous story, *Jeebito O Mrito*. Seema Biswas played the solo act under the directorial baton of Anuradha Kapoor. Biswas through her versatile acting

skills brought alive the miseries and maltreatment of Kadambini who was set on fire by her own family. The silent hall broke into a thundering applause when she woke up in the play – questioning whether she was dead or alive.

Heisman Sabitri of Kaakshetra Manipur, the most celebrated performer among them all, once presented a 40-minute autobiographical journey in *A Process*. She explored her technique of acting, she demonstrated how she privileges the actress in her, over the character the actress is playing, generously drawing from her five decades in theatre with honesty and integrity of expression, fluid and mobile face, her incredible range in voice, tone and pitch, and her command over Manipuri.

Youngsters are getting bolder and rebellious with every passing day. I will close this with Shilpi Marwah's *A Woman Alone*. Despite its pitch black humour, this Hindi adaptation of the famous Dario Fo and Franca Rame piece very popular among women in theatre, became a cult play within eight months since she first performed this solo act in March 2016. Adapted by director Arvind Gaur, the mono play has drawn full houses; tickets, on the odd occasion were selling in black. "It was that direct about sex," Marwah says. "At one point, the protagonist, imprisoned at home by a violently obsessive husband, compares his brutal lovemaking to "zameen main paani ke liye boring karne wali machine ki tarah."

As journalist Malini Nair writes, "A solo is a terrifying act to pull off but it packs the most punch in theatre and allows an actor to evolve along with it over time. An increasing number of young female actors are now going it alone on stage, telling some of the most forceful stories of our times." And so, the solo show goes on.....



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.

Revisiting a classic

Vijay Tendulkar's plays have repeatedly stood the test of time, says Prof. Avinash Kolhe, as he reviews the staging of a lesser known play Kanyadan. Directed by Lillete Dubey, this was a gripping play with beautiful performances, he says.



The cast of the play *Kanyadan*

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008), was a prolific writer who has written some outstanding plays that have a timeless quality. His *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* (Silence, Court is in session) have created history. His equally important but lesser known play is *Kanyadan* which he penned in 1983 when he was at the peak of his creative prowess. Like all of Tendulkar's important plays, *Kanyadan* too created controversies, and was panned and liked in equal measures. Lillete Dubey's theatre group 'The Prime Time Theatre' has been staging this play in English.

I had seen the play in the 1980s when it was staged in Marathi, and now I got this golden opportunity to watch it in English. *Kanyadan* shows us what is a classic and why do they survive the vagaries of time. Just before Tendulkar's play came on the scene, Mallika Amar Sheikh (born

1957), a Marathi poetess, had written her autobiography *Mala Uddhavast Vhayechhe* (I want to destroy myself). Back then, it was widely believed that Mallika's autobiography was the inspiration behind Tendulkar's play.

The story of Kanyadan

The story of *Kanyadan* (Giving of a daughter) is multi-layered. It is the story of Yadunath Deolalikar, a Pune-based socialist leader who is now in his late 1950s. Like him, his wife Seva too is active in the socialist movement. They have a son who is doing his M.Sc., and a daughter who is a graduate. The time-frame of the play is post-Emergency that was clamped by Mrs. Indira Gandhi during 1975-77. The family eats, drinks, sleeps and breathes progressive values, which are bookish in nature, as they are never put to the test.

The Deolalikars are woken up to harsh reality when their daughter

Jyoti drops a bombshell and announces that she is in love with Aroon Athavale, an upcoming dalit poet and leader and wants to marry him. Each member of Deolalikar family reacts to this in different ways. Mother Seva, though a practicing socialist, is a mother first. She asks Jyoti some practical questions about the educational qualifications of Aroon, whether he has a job, where he lives, his family background, etc. These inquiries reveal that Jyoti knows next to nothing about Aroon, and has only read his rebellious poetry and autobiography.

Senior Deolalikar is thrilled to welcome a dalit son-in-law as right step towards annihilation of caste. He feels proud of his daughter who has shown courage to take such step. The brother is in tune with his mother and is not happy with Jyoti's decision. The Deolalikars decide to invite Aroon to their house and have a chat. This is the turning point in the play.

When Aroon comes to their home, he finds Jyoti alone at home as others are out on some work or the other, but are expected any time. Aroon is distinctly uncomfortable in this house, which is safe, well-kept and clean. On the other hand, his house is in the slums where utter poverty and filth rule, and where over a dozen people live like animals. Aroon does not quite know how to handle this situation. He suffers extreme mood-swings, from one extreme of anger and hatred, to tender love for Jyoti. In one such moment he hits Jyoti, and that is the time Seva enters home. Seva is shocked to see this, but controls herself as she knows that she is dealing with her future son-in-law.

In due course, other members arrive and the tension increases. Only senior Deolalikar supports his daughter, whereas Seva opposes this vehemently. Senior Deolalikar argues that they should support Jyoti as she is walking the path of social revolution. Seva does not want her daughter to become cannon-fodder. Despite such heated debate, Jyoti marries Aroon and goes to live with him. This is where the play peaks.

With marriage comes many miseries, poverty being the main problem. Aroon has no job, no steady income, and has a king-size ego and drinking problem. Almost everyday he gets drunk and beats up Jyoti. The Deolalikars look on helplessly at this situation, and do not quite know how to save their daughter from this monster.

Finally, Aroon gets praise and money for his autobiography which is a completely unvarnished and raw story of his life, his struggle and upper-caste atrocities. Now Aroon has arrived and is being felicitated all over the city. In one such function, the organisers want the senior Deolalikar to praise Aroon's autobiography. The organisers sense a good opportunity

here to collect a crowd. By now the dreamy-eyed Deolalikar has died and he realises the folly he made in supporting Jyoti's marriage with Aroon. By this time Jyoti is also pregnant.

Seva pleads with Deolalikar to praise Aroon's book in public. Deolalikar flatly refuses as he cannot be dishonest with his assessment. By now he has also realised the two-faced personality of Aroon and is unwilling to be party to such functions. Seva pleads with him and tells him that if he does not go to the function and praise Aroon's book, Aroon may hit their pregnant daughter. Defeated, Deolalikar presides over the function. This angers Jyoti as she cannot stand this.

The play has been translated by Gauri Ramnarayan and is directed by a competent, senior theatre-person, Lillete Dubey. She has properly understood the ethos of the play, its nuances, and put her cast to the best use.

The Deolalikars and Jyoti have an argument which leads to the end of the play. It is more of Jyoti's broadside against Deolalikar where Jyoti tells him that the way they brought her up was completely different from the harsh world outside. She was led to

believe that life is a big walk in a rose garden whereas in reality one keeps confronting Aroon-like people every step of the way. She tells him that in future they should not cross each other's path as she is beginning a new life where the Deolalikars have no room. This is a clash between 'People Like Us' (PLU) and 'People Like Them' (PLT). The play grips the audience from the moment Aroon comes on the stage.

The play

The play has been translated by Gauri Ramnarayan and is directed by a competent, senior theatre-person, Lillete Dubey. She has properly understood the ethos of the play, its nuances, and put her cast to the best use. Rajendra Gupta (Yadunath Deolalikar), Joy Sengupta (Aroon), Deepika Amin (Seva Deolalikar), Mrunmayee Godbole (Jyoti) and Gandharv Dewan (son) are a competent group of actors.

A few special mentions have to be made. First and foremost is Joy Sengupta, who has essayed the complicated character of Aroon Athavale with tremendous ease and energy. He has shown the development of the character of Aroon through apt body language. Joy shows the tension, the anger Aroon must have felt when he comes to Deolalikar's home for the first time. This must be his first time visit to an upper-caste, upper-class home. And in the second act of the play, one sees a confident, arrogant Aroon. Joy carried these changes very convincingly. Then there is the old war horse Rajendra Gupta, a highly dependable actor supported by Mrimanyee Godbole, who shows the vulnerability of Jyoti and her later determination. The original music score by Mahesh Tinaikar and costumes by Trishna Popat add to the impact of the play. *Kanyadan* directed by Lillete Dubey is sheer pleasure to watch.



Prof. Avinash Kolhe retired as Associate Professor in Political Science from D.G. Ruparel College, Mumbai.

YAMUNABAI VIKRAM JAWLE

The Queen of Lavani (1915-2018)

Aclaimed Baithak *lavani* exponent, tamasha artiste and Padma Shree awardee Yamunabai Waikar, née Yamunabai Vikram Jawle who inspired generations of folk artistes in Maharashtra, passed away at Wai in Satara district at the age of 102. An institution in herself, and the Queen and legend of *lavani*, she was cremated with full State honours. Performed within the four walls of a room and largely for the elite audience, *lavani* is known for using metaphors, and she would enact it beautifully to convey the various meanings. She used to sing based on *raagdari* music along with enactment. An expert in the art of facial expressions, Yamunabai would enthral the audience for hours. Trained in classical music, she could sing *thumri*, *tarana* and also *ghazals* with elan. Soon she took her expertise in the Marathi folk traditions of classical *lavani* and tamasha, folk art forms involving music and dance, to other parts of the country.

She was born in 1915 at Nunekalame village, Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra, in a poor Kolhati community family. Her father was a stereotypical drunkard and her mother busked (played music in the street). At age 10, she joined a folk art group from where she had her first lessons of *lavani*, and being the eldest of the five children, performed street dances with her mother. Looking for better earnings, the family moved to Bombay, and she started performing *lavani* and film songs on the streets.

At the age of 15, she formed her own *lavani* group with her sisters, called the Yamuna-Hira-Tara Waikar Sangeet Party, which achieved wide fame in Maharashtra. Later professionally training with the Rangu-Gangu Sangeet Party, she learnt Hindustani music from Faqir Mohammad of Bombay, and Akhtarbai of Kolhapur.

The success of her street shows propelled her to do a stage show, which launched her stage career, till the popularity of cinema and diminishing audience affected the returns. Later, the family formed a *tamasha* troupe with her father playing the *dholki*, while Yamunbai and her cousin danced. *tamasha* theatre acting offers followed, and made her famous as Yamunabai Waikar across Maharashtra.

Musical dramas like *Sanshay Kallol*, *Dharmaveer Sambhaji* and *Mohityanchi Manjula*, also made her popular.

Yamunabai, reminiscing on her Bombay street days, had opined, "At the beginning, we sang the traditional *lavanis*, but when we realised that people liked to listen to film songs, we added those to our repertoire too". Social reformer Sane Guruji appreciated her act in a play named *Maharachi Por* (Children of Mahar). Sharing the stage in Delhi, with the renowned Kathak guru, Birju Maharaj, where he performed and she sang a *lavani*, helped revive her career once again.



As someone who had wandered looking for a livelihood, she deeply understood how performers like her needed a permanent place to stay. and completed a permanent low cost housing project for her nomadic Kolhati tribe community. She created awareness about water conservation during the 1972 Maharashtra drought, and also campaigned against archaic and regressive rituals of her community.

Retiring from active performance at the age of 50, she trained younger artistes in *lavani* singing and conducted *lavani* camps organised by the Government of Maharashtra. Yamunabai is the only *lavani* artiste to be honoured with the 4th highest national award, the Padma Shri in 2012. She is also the recipient of awards and honours like the Maharashtra State Award in 1990 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1995, among others. She was also elected Tagore Fellow of Sangeet Natak Akademi for her contribution to traditional music and dance.

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

Major General H.S. Kler, MVC, AVSM

Born to lead (1924-2016)

Major General H.S. Kler was born on 3 September 1924, and was educated in Gordon College, Rawalpindi. A born leader, he joined the Army and was commissioned into SIGNALS on 10 October 1943. He took part in the Burma (present Myanmar) campaign in the Second World War at the age of 19, and was Mentioned-in-Despatches. He participated in the war in Jammu in 1948, and two years later commanded the Parachute Signal Company.

A graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, he held the key appointment of General Staff Officer 1 (GSO1), 19 Infantry Division in J & K from 1963 to 1965. Pakistan pushed a large number of infiltrators into India in 1965. They planned sabotage and hoped to encourage revolt by the local population. Kler had already been posted to Staff College and had been dined out. Due to the emergency created by Pakistan, he opted to stay on and as usual, dealt with them firmly. It was decided to capture the Haji Pir pass which was being used by Pakistan for infiltration and supply of arms.

Comprehensive plans were made for this operation. Plans had to be changed due to enemy action. Kler encouraged fellow-paratrooper, Ranjit Dayal, to go ahead and capture the Pass. Kler was awarded the AVSM for his brilliant part in the war.

He was Commander 95 Mountain Brigade in the Eastern Sector in 1971, under command of HQ 101 Communication Zone. Kler decided to take Kamalpur which was held by about 140 men composed of regular and para-military forces under Captain Malik. Attacks by Mukti Bahini from July onwards did not make any impact on the defenders. Two battalion strength attacks also failed, and Kler decided to lay a siege. Attempts by Pakistan to break the siege failed, and at 0930 am on 4 December, Kler hammered the post with strike by seven MIGs firing rockets and canons. General Gurbux Singh, GOC Communication Zone, sent a message to Malik to surrender to save lives as he was determined to eliminate the Kamalpur post.

Malik surrendered at 7 pm on 4 December. It was revealed after taking in the post that they had almost used up all the ammunition. Malik was given a gallantry award on repatriation to Pakistan.

Pakistan had another position at Bakshiganj, South of Kamalpur, and vacated that too without a fight. General Gill, GOC 101 Communication Zone, was wounded due to his jeep hitting a mine. His place was taken up by General Nagra who decided to take Jamalpur. It was held by 31 Baluch under Lt. Col. Sultan. The Jamalpur garrison had been under heavy air and artillery shelling since

7 December. On 9 December, Kler sent a letter to Col. Sultan asking him to surrender in order to save casualties to his men. Sultan enclosed a bullet in his reply asking Kler to take to gun in place of a pen. Attack by Kler was planned for 10 December. In the meanwhile, Gen Niazi ordered 31 Baluch to withdraw to North of Dacca as the capital city was threatened. The Baluchis were not able to break out and suffered heavily. Three hundred and eighty prisoners were rounded up the next morning. Paratroop at Tangail on 11 December helped in quick advance to Dacca. Pakistan Army in the eastern sector surrendered on 16 December.

Kler led from the front with complete disregard for his life. He was awarded an MVC for outstanding courage and leadership. He had led from the front and had narrow escapes more than once. His son, Flying Officer Dejay Kler, also fought in this war in the same sector. It was an unusual case of father and son fighting on the same front. He took over the command of 10 Division on promotion. On retirement, he settled down in Chandigarh and then moved to California, USA. Born to battle and lead, he passed away on 28 May 2016 in California.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



T.V.R. SHENOY

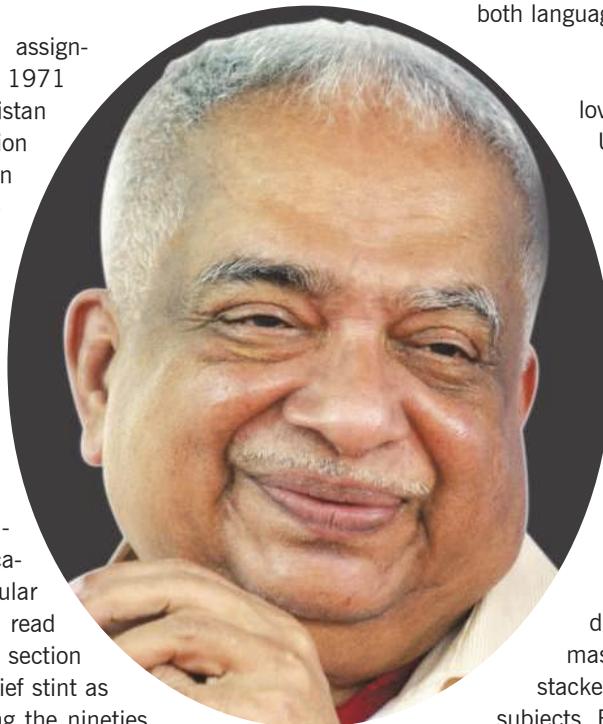
A committed, erudite journalist (1941-2018)

Thaliyath Parambil Vittappa Ramachandra Shenoy, better known as T.V.R. Shenoy, was one of India's most well-known journalists who distinguished himself in a career spanning nearly five decades. Shenoy was born on 10 June 1941, at Cherayi near Kochi in Kerala. His yen for writing propelled him towards a career in journalism and he took his first steps at the *Free Press Journal*, a newspaper published from Bombay. He then joined the *Indian Express*, and in 1968, shifted to the pioneering Malayalam daily from Kerala, the *Malayala Manorama* in Delhi where he was promoted as the Resident Editor.

One of his toughest assignments was the coverage of the 1971 war between India and Pakistan which culminated in the formation of Bangladesh. His association with the *Manorama* lasted for 25 years and he was the Bureau Chief of the paper in New Delhi for the entire duration. When the *Manorama* came out with its English weekly titled *The Week*, Shenoy served the periodical as its Delhi correspondent, and later took over as the Editor. His column 'Last Word' which continued long after he left the publication, was one of the most popular features in *The Week* and was read and appreciated by a wide cross section of the readers. He also had a brief stint as Editor of the *Sunday Mail* during the nineties. Shenoy reportedly played a major role in uncovering and reporting on major banking and stock market scams that rocked the nation a few decades back. He is also credited with introducing graphic reportage in journalism where a cartoonist utilised the medium of sketching to illustrate a text penned by him covering various issues and matters of interest. While he had a wide circle of friends in the political echelons cutting across party lines, he also had a vital role to play in enabling the BJP under Atal Bihari Vajpayee forging links with regional parties, utilising his personal rapport with the leaders concerned.

T.V.R. Shenoy was also a very popular columnist, and he covered a whole gamut of issues including inter alia national and international politics, economy, social issues and current affairs as well. He contributed to several Indian

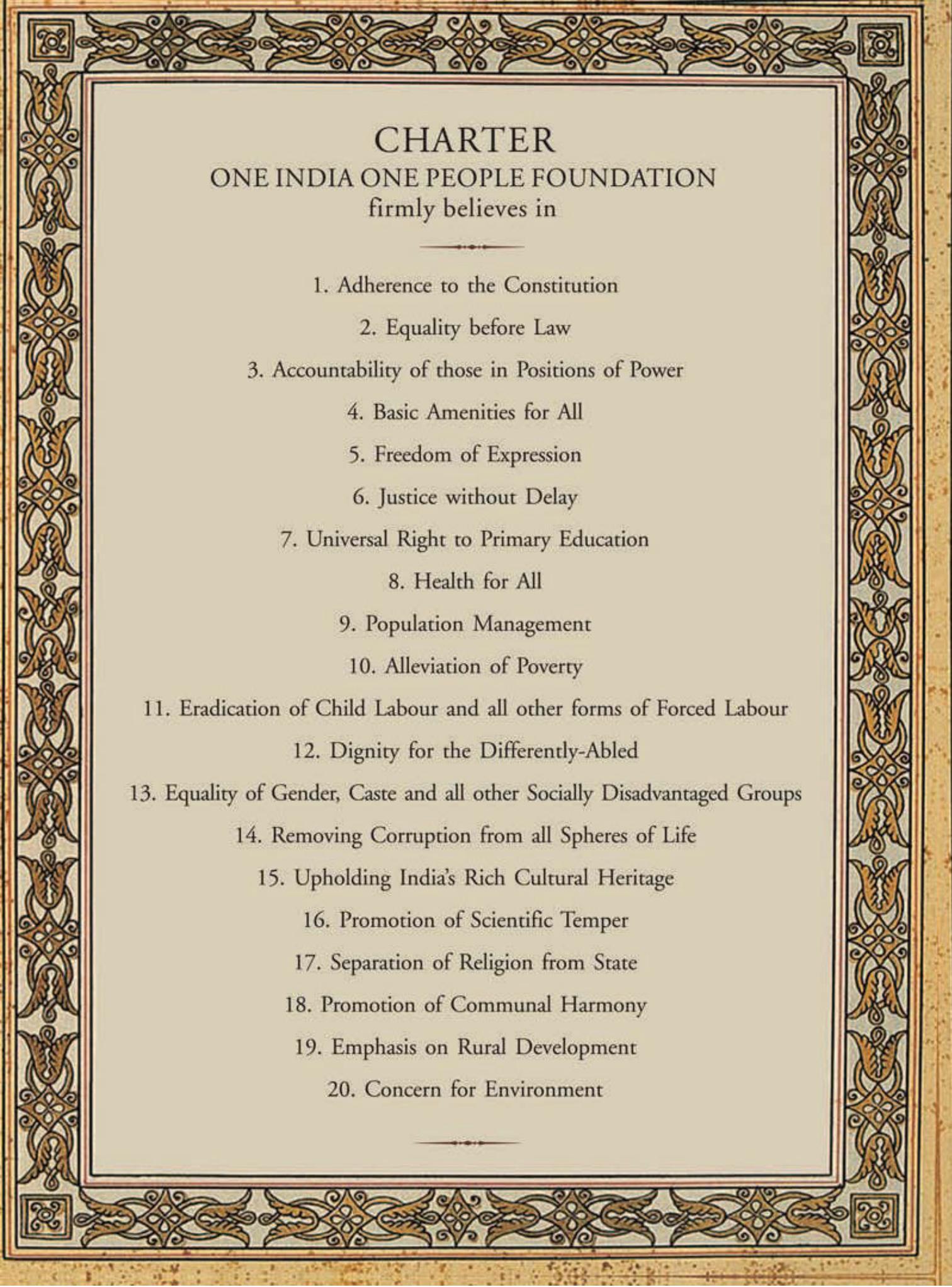
and international publications on a continuous basis. In his role as a mentor to many budding journalists, he lent a helping hand in shaping their careers. His erudition and expertise in the field ensured that he was in demand on the lecture circuit as well. Shenoy was renowned for his vast repository of knowledge, and was even acknowledged as a 'walking encyclopedia'. He had attained a great deal of proficiency in various subjects including ancient history, Greek mythology apart from literature, on which he was a virtual gold mine of information. Although his mother tongue was Konkani, Shenoy was extremely versatile in both Malayalam and English, and wrote extensively in both languages.



A keen sportsman and sports lover, he represented Bombay University in badminton. He also had a flair for games like chess and bridge and indulged in his pastimes whenever he could take time off from his tight schedule. Tennis too remained one of his favourite passions and he was often sighted at Wimbledon, especially during the finals. An avid interest in classical music was instrumental in his accumulating a collection of discs and LPs of the great masters. His personal library was stacked with books on varied subjects. Friends in the fraternity paying tributes to him on his passing recounted his fine sense of humour, and also highlighted the fact that he was an avid conversationalist as well.

Shenoy was the recipient of several awards during his long tenure in journalism. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2003. He was also a recipient of an honour from the Morocco government conferred on him for the keen interest he had taken in developing friendly and amicable ties between the two nations. Shenoy breathed his last on 17 April 2018, at a hospital in Mangalore. He was 77.

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



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Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

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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?

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Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor
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