

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

The Power of Literature



KNOW INDIA BETTER

CHETTINAD

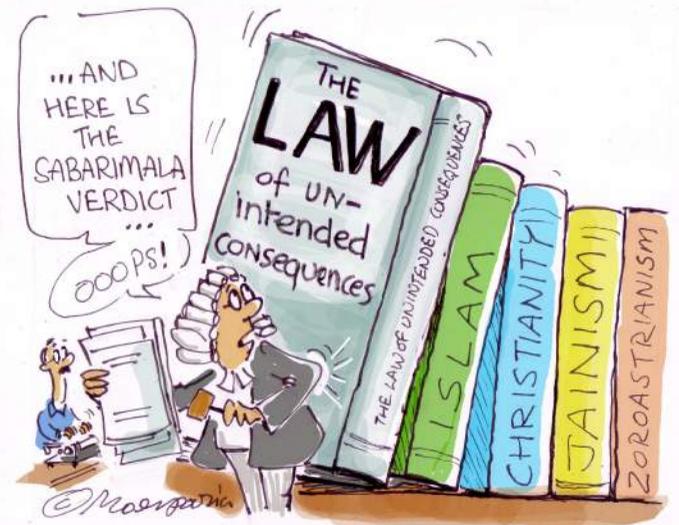
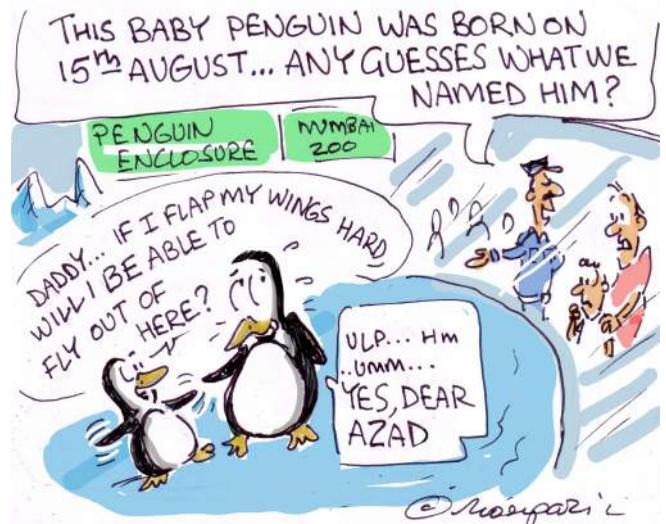
A WEDDING AND A GRAND TOUR

THE READERS

THE INDIAN STORY

A CONTROVERSIAL ALLIANCE

FACE TO FACE
SUPREETA SINGH

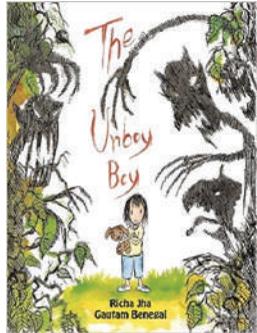


CONTENTS

September 2018

VOL. 22/02

THEME:
INDIAN LITERATURE



| | |
|--|-----------|
| Morparia's Page | 02 |
| The Readers <i>Nikhil Katara</i> | 04 |
| The case of isolated teaching <i>Deepti Nair</i> | 06 |
| The Indian Story <i>Lakshmi Vishwanath</i> | 07 |
| Not a drudge <i>Ketaki Nair</i> | 09 |
| Tomorrow is here <i>Vinitha Ramchandani</i> | 11 |
| Multiliteracy is here to stay! <i>Vinitha Ramchandani</i> | 13 |
| A controversial alliance <i>Shoma A. Chatterji</i> | 15 |
| Know India Better | |
| Chettinad: A wedding and a grand tour <i>Nivedita Louis</i> | 17 |
| Face to Face | |
| Supreeta Singh <i>Shoma A. Chatterji</i> | 25 |
| General | |
| What did Dr. Ambedkar want? <i>Jashwant Mehta</i> | 29 |
| Faux nature, fake wildlife? <i>Harshad Sambamurthy</i> | 31 |
| A timeless play <i>Prof. Avinash Kohle</i> | 33 |
| Book Review: my HANUMAN CHALISA <i>G. Venkatesh</i> | 35 |
| Great Indians | 36 |



Managing Editor
Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde

Editor
Anuradha Dhareshwar

Assistant Editor
E.Vijayalakshmi Rajan

Design
Resurgam Digital LLP

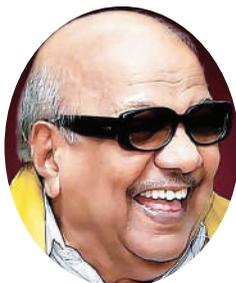
Subscription In-Charge
Nagesh Bangera

Advisory Board
Sucharita Hegde
Justice S. Radhakrishnan
Venkat R. Chary

Printed & Published by
Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde for
One India One People Foundation,
Mahalaxmi Chambers, 4th floor,
22, Bhulabhai Desai Road,
Mumbai - 400 026
Tel: 022-2353 4400
Fax: 022-2351 7544
e-mail: oiopfoundation@gmail.com
oiopsub@fouressindia.com



DADA J.P. VASWANI



MUTHUVEL KARUNANIDHI



COL. MAGOD BASAPPA
RAVINDRANATH, VRC

visit us at:

www.oneindiaonepeople.com
www.facebook.com/oneindiaonepeoplefoundation

The Readers

*Reading together with a bunch of like-minded people can be a most pleasurable experience. And if such readings are conducted in a dramatic space, then it gets elevated to a whole new level, says **Nikhil Katara**, the Director-Curator of 'Readings in the Shed', an initiative which brings literature and theatre together in a very unique way.*



'Words from a shared past': Readings from the Independence Day

The 'Readings in the Shed' is a project that I undertook in the year 2018. It is essentially a performance art initiative that focusses on bringing a contemporary or classical work of literature in the form of a 'Reading' and performance format, in small alternative spaces across Mumbai. The literature chosen is from different parts of the world, written in different times, but are essentially close to the times we live in, and find resonance in our own life here in India.

But why Reading?

Everyone who has ever held a book in their hand very fondly remembers a quote, a phrase or at least a small little poem that they engaged with. Words, verse and prose, have a distinct effect on us as human beings. We romance the idea of a story and always have some to tell. What is life, but many stories with introductions, conflicts and resolutions.

This romance with the written word made me contemplate, I wanted to read more, not the run of the mill stuff that is being force fed to us through smart publicity, but those books and words that are not readily available.

Those poems which have touched people's hearts, but aren't available on the bestseller racks of a bookstore. It is true that a lot of interesting literature, is not necessarily the most popular literature. Hence, the idea sprung in me to get a few like-minded people to read together. Thus, a small group of people, essentially theatre makers, came together to read plays about seven years ago. Plays were an interesting entry point for reading together. Since plays had multiple characters, multiple participants could engage in the reading together. The reading would move into discussions about themes, ideas and philosophy of the texts that were being discussed. Somewhere, the readings attracted like-minded people. The group that essentially started with three people, grew to many. People came, some stayed, some left. But what they shared, always stayed. A number of beautiful pieces of literature that stemmed from various parts of the world. Some were from Africa, some were from Norway, some seminal Indian works that I hadn't heard about, unveiled themselves through random discussions, heated arguments, complex debates and simple conversations.

As the years went by, the readings grew more intensive and we diversified from plays, to short stories, to essays, to poems, and even a novel that we finished in (believe it or not) one day. The beauty of reading a story together had its own meaning, and I began to realise that a reading in solitude is markedly different from a reading together. First, a reading together had a performance value to it, because no matter who the reader was, they would always end up, rather peculiarly, reading as if they were on stage. This was not how people read in solitude. This wasn't a drama either, because the book in one's hand limited the amount of movement one can or cannot do. The type of text also affected the quality of this performance. A play was performed differently to a screenplay, and a ballad was performed differently to a sonnet. Every piece of text had a unique and rather beautiful dramatic quality to it, which was a new form of entertainment. Second, the reading always and unavoidably led to a discussion, which would necessarily spiral into many other conversations, some new works would reveal themselves, some political ideas which I was not aware about surfaced, and sometimes just personal experiences of readers came into the conversation. These readings were a ground where small talk had no place. The community led to a group of people who came from all walks of life, their professions did not matter, their thoughts did.



The reading in progress

Readings in the Shed

After many years passed an increasing need to share the texts we have accumulated, arose. To make an even larger community of readers, to bring those texts to the masses that aren't necessarily well marketed, but are so rich in content that they cannot be ignored once their words have reached the ear. So my co-reader, Himali and I set out on the journey to read to a larger audience. The idea of 'Readings in the Shed' was born. Each reading is a new chapter of exploration, where fellow readers journey into the unknown land of a new conglomeration of words. The first chapter was a play from Chile, the second chapter was short stories by women writers from Pakistan, the third chapter was poems from Poland, and the fourth was original writings (developed over four months in collaboration with 'The Readings in the Shed' Critique Team) by playwrights from the UK for India's Independence Day.

The Readings in the Shed is a project that not only explores the power of the written word, but also explores the device through which the mind receives this word. Theatre and reading combine to form a third form of entertainment

that cannot only be identified with one or the other.

Now, the question, What is the Shed?

A shed is an idea and not a place. A shed can be any structure which is ready to house a reading, ready to accommodate readers comfortably, and ready to support the experience. The shed keeps moving, and as it moves, the voices reading the text change, and so does the form. What the shed provides is a ground for like-minded readers to find a place to read together, and then converse. In the long run we would like to make a community of readers who keep going back to the shed to read together, philosophise together, and converse together. It also aims to make the world one large shed of readers, where texts can freely travel between countries, and thoughts are exchanged with a discussion on the sub text and the context of the literature in question.

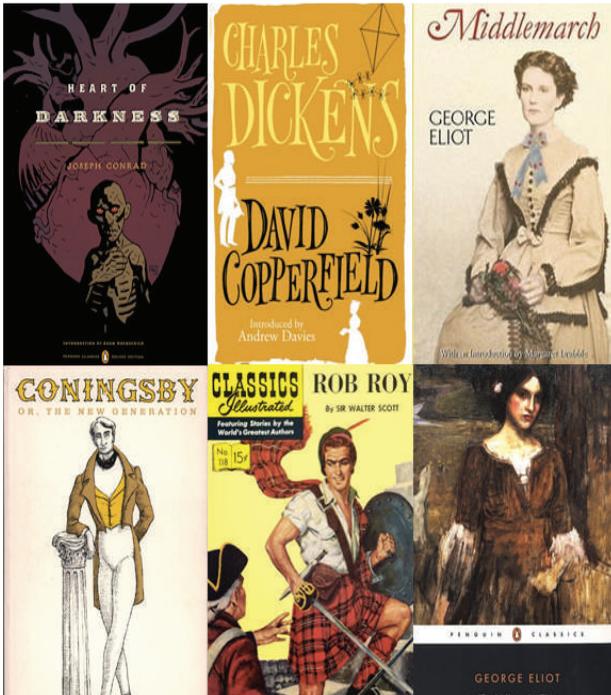
'Readings in the Shed' is an honest attempt to make the world of literature marry the world of theatre, while being witnessed by readers in India, and in the process, revealing texts and reading them in a format one wouldn't have experienced before.



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

The case of isolated teaching

*Teaching literature in today's India is a rather challenging task, says a teacher of English literature, **Deepti Nair**. Rote and mechanical learning, as also other modern distractions, kill the beauty and wonder of literary works. Often, literature is taught in splendid isolation, which also doesn't help the cause, she rues.*



Some of the beloved titles we grew up with

Growing up in 'prehistoric times', as my kids put it, there was nothing to beat the excitement of getting a new book. Immersing myself in another time or place, sharing another person's skin, escaping completely from the real world; these were the pleasures to be found in the paperback realm.

You don't need me to tell you that this is no longer the case with most kids today. Working with teenagers, I've discovered they have their own set of escapes and their own fantastic worlds to occupy, but, sadly, they don't necessarily need words to take them there. And while I don't mean to disparage their modern interests, I do think something has been lost in translation.

The magic of literature

The literature of any time, be it philosophical treatises or fast paced fiction, carries with it a subtle essence of the world it came from, like a source code. This is what makes writing such a miraculous thing. Stories of any kind don't just tell a tale, they invite you to join them, much like a virtual reality programme, the difference being that your imagination gets to be the programmer of much of the code.

Jane Austen allowed us a chance to live in her world, share its joys and anxieties, laugh at its silliness, and chafe at its limitations. Margaret Mitchell didn't just tell a tale of a headstrong, vain girl and her tumultuous coming of age, but also made us feel the chaos and fear that is experienced when social and political structures are turned on their heads. They wrote about life. They made unseen places real. They created universes.

So teaching literature for me is not about explaining a text, but creating a reader. Teaching a person how to enter that world without resisting it, so that they can have the authentic experience the writer wants to share, and understand the many worlds within ours. In the Indian schooling system, teaching English literature can be fraught with peril and a English teacher had better have a sense of humour. Today's tiger moms want to raise Pulitzer Prize winners – or at least board exam toppers - even though their kids have never opened a book, and we have to steal a line or two from Ezekiel's professor and say:

"I am not against. We have to change with times. Whole world is changing. In India also We are keeping up. Our progress is progressing. Old values are going, new values are coming."

Very often, English is not spoken or read much at home and idiomatic expression and nuance is often alien to the reader. And the result of explaining some of this is the same as explaining a joke. One is often flogging a dead horse. (Need an explanation, anyone?) The solution, of course is to read more, but that suggestion is usually met with screams of outrage and mutterings that this teacher has clearly lost it.

The elephant in the room

There is, of course, the elephant in the room. Can I really expect a child to enjoy reading a book or engage themselves in its atmosphere when they need to be able to recollect who said this line to whom, and where they were standing at that point? One has to knock Shakespeare off his pedestal (which I doubt he ever wanted to be put on) before one can get a child to see it as a story, and not something to be seen as inscrutable just because it's in verse (and in five acts).

(continued on page 10...)

The Indian story

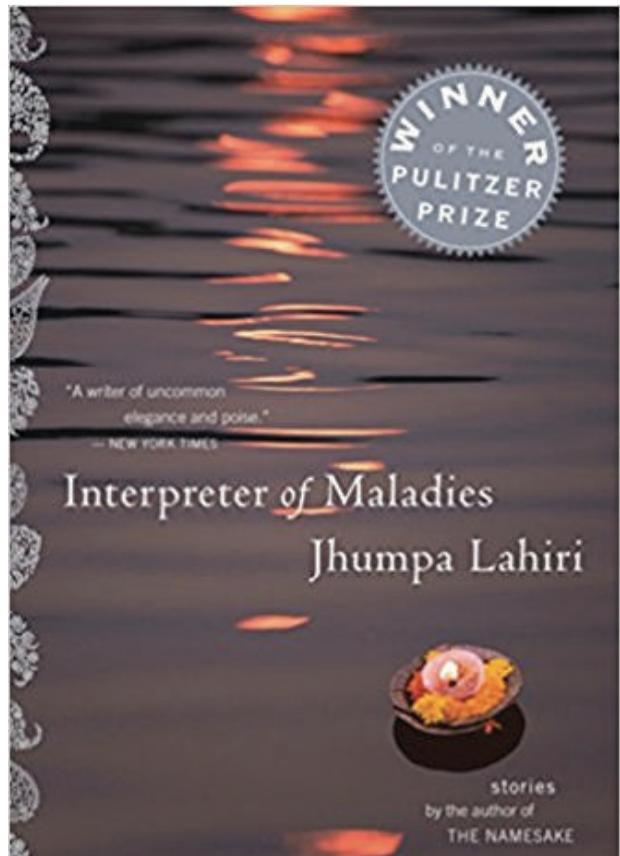
While foreign books and writing have been very popular in India, the rich Indian literature, with its vast repertoire and ethos has many takers too, says Lakshmi Viswanath. She too started her journey with American, British and Russian writers, but today dwells happily in the world of Indian writing.

When I look back at all the books that have fascinated me through the years, I find a slow but definite change in my taste in literature. There are, no doubt, those evergreen writers – authors at whose altars I shall always kneel in reverence – the foremost among them being William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, O Henry, Saki, Oscar Wilde, Somerset Maugham, Pearl S. Buck...and how can I not mention Charles Dickens! But that apart, I find that whereas in my younger student days I was more fascinated by the British and American writers, and quite overwhelmed by the Russian giants Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov, today it is Indian writing in English which holds me.

The reason, I feel, is that a younger me was more outward lookingmore fascinated by the sights and sounds of the vast world outside my window, and the tales and stories relating to people living in faraway lands. Their unseen landscapes, their strange costumes, their alien tongues, their delectable sounding cuisines caught and held my lively imagination, and soon I could actually believe I knew them all intimately. Hyde Park, the fishing hamlets of Yorkshire, the Unter den Linden, the Bavarian mountains, the Volga, the Red Square and the Kremlin, the bleak and hostile Siberia, the Australian outback, the Malaysian jungles, the Mexican desertI felt as if I had been there, that I would actually be able to find my way around those places. Another reason was perhaps, that English having been the medium of instruction during my impatient student years, I found it easier and faster to devour books written in the language, in spite of being able to read and write in a couple of regional languages as well.

All the time, my only idea of India was that gleaned from my history textbooks – the invincible fortresses of the proud Marathas and the fearless Rajputs, their exploits of daring and valour, and the monuments and courts of Akbar and the Mughals.

As I grew older, perhaps with increasing wisdom, (I am being a bit facetious here), a turning inwards perhaps...or perhaps purely because more Indian writers began writing in English, or because by chance I came across more such books, the varied ways of life of our Indian peoples drew my imagination in a similar manner. I began to perceive that the people of my own land too displayed the variety and novelty of lifestyle which had caught my young fancy. There was also, an underlying oneness which I came to appreciate and which I now found fascinating. My first contact with Indian writers were the beguiling chronicles of

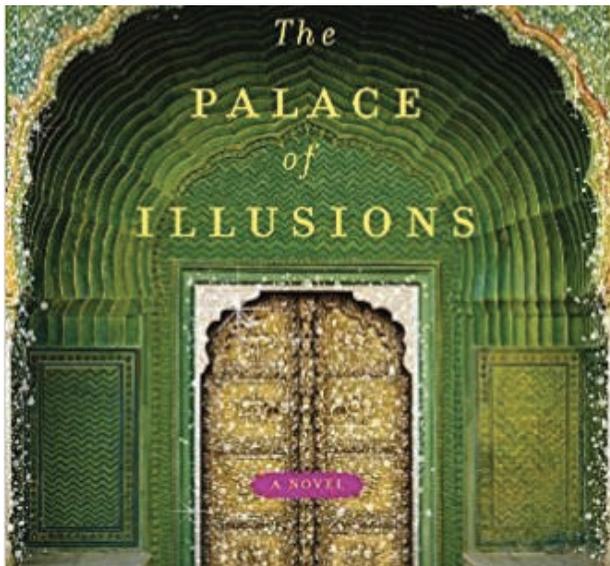


Jhumpa Lahiri is a very popular author of Indian origin

Swami and his friends in the quaint south Indian town of Malgudi, Jim Corbett's adventures in the man-eating-tiger-infested Kumaon jungles and Kipling's heart-warming stories. Later came the translations of Rabindranath Tagore, Lalitambika Anantharjanam, Sharat Chandra Chatterji, D.L. Roy, and that fascinating tales-within-tales, *The Panchatantra*. Then I chanced upon Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar In A Sieve* and *Some Inner Fury*, both of which I devoured with insatiable appetite.

That feeling of oneness

With maturing years, I find that many of the questions which were clamouring for answers in my own life, were actually the selfsame ones which engaged the characters in these books too. I find a deep connect with the quandaries which these characters find themselves in. Let me explain. Meera Bai's poems drenched in love for her divine paramour



Chitra Divakaruni's interpretation of Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* is fascinating

are well known to most Indians, and I am no exception. Kiran Nagarkar's *Cuckold* lets you peep into the mind of the much maligned Bhojraj aka Maharaj Kumar, husband to Meera Bai. His initial fascination for the enigmatic Meera, turning into frustration, fear, revulsion, then graduating into acceptance, understanding and perhaps finally into the realisation or dawning of a selfsame devotion in himself, is marvellously portrayed. The Mewad of those times and the compulsions of the Rajputs to conform to the heights of valour and bravery that is glorified in innumerable ballads of the region is most vividly and movingly caught. The Maharaj Kumar ponders on the many inexplicable acts of Krishna much like we are wont to do. He is devastated by the senseless loss of lives that masquerades as Rajput valour and is foiled when he attempts to introduce strategy and guerrilla tactics to diminish the mortality toll of war, the widely held perception being that he lacks the Rajput valour as amply proved by his wife's cuckolding of him. His final merging with his one-time adversary leaves me deeply satisfied with how this beautifully told tale ends.

Another aspect which has made me such an ardent fan of Indian writing is that I am fascinated by the cultural contexts that I come across here. The anguished introspection of Chitra Divakaruni's Draupadi, in *The Palace of Illusions* is searing in its intensity. Sometimes she is overwhelmed with horror at the scale of destruction and destitution that the war has brought about....a war she knows, incited by her desire for revenge. At other times she is overcome with a deep bitterness at how not one of her kinsmen and the illustrious upholders of Dharma come to her assistance when she was brazenly dishonoured in open

court. It is impossible not to empathise with this impetuous, fearless and deeply wronged queen. The agonised attempts of Gurucharan Das' mild-mannered Yudhishtir to conform to Dharma as he perceives it, holds me spellbound. His is a solitary endeavour, for none understand his single minded devotion to that elusive concept Dharma, which is too subtle to be defined by mere words. The chilling metamorphosis of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candyman* can even now raise goose bumps all over me.

The lonely isolated lives of the Kodavas in the sylvan surroundings of the Coorg is most evocatively portrayed by Kaveri Nambisan in her books especially in my favourite, *Hills of Angheri*. It is because she and Khushwant Singh, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri and Anita Nair and others write in English, that today, I have some comprehension of the lives that my fellow Indians live, the terrain (both physical and mental) they inhabit. It is fascinating to know that though we live in different corners of this vast land, speak different languages, wear different costumes, and have perhaps very differing histories, there is an underlying identity in the values, ideas, thoughts and thought processes to which we all subscribe, no matter the superficial diversity. It is through the books of these writers that I have been able to travel all over India, the busy crowded cities, the far flung villages of rustic India, the lonely mountain hamlets, the coastal fishing towns, and even into her hoary past of kings and warriors and feuds, and to converse with my kinsmen who speak in tongues I cannot comprehend.

The pristine quality of the language they write in, the enthralling imagery....oh, it is altogether a veritable feast!! I would be remiss if I concluded this piece without invoking the innumerable Indian poets and playwrights who graced the English language with their scintillating poetry and captivating plays. Girish Karnad's plays hold you captive as much on the printed page as when performed on the stage. When speaking of poetry, I must pay my special respects to the inimitable Bengali trio of Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and Harishchandra Chattopadhyay, whose amazing poetry is as sweet and mesmerising as the Divine Cowherd's melodious notes on His flute. They have been on my lips from adolescence onwards...and I sincerely hope the Bard's magical lines "... I have tasted the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light.....my parting words.." will be the ones I utter with my last breath.

For me these wordsmiths are like the ushers in a theatre who lead you silently by the hand to a comfortable seat in a darkened hall. You settle down luxuriously, to watch the fascinating human drama of what could be parts of your very own life, unfold before you. What more could one ask for!



Lakshmi Viswanath is an avid reader of fiction and poetry. She also often dabbles in writing poetry.

Not a drudge!

English literature may be a reviled subject, given the way it is taught in Indian schools, but youngsters must still attempt to read voraciously, exhorts Ketaki Nair. How else will they get a sense of the wider world awaiting them?



Pick up that book! exhorts the writer

Literature? Could there be anything more boring? That's the impression most students have of literature, and of their literature classes in school. The mere idea of yet another year of listening to their teachers drone on about Shakespeare, and the million hidden meanings behind a simple word, is exhausting. It could easily be the most boring part of school for some kids.

This is just unacceptable. The influence that great literature can have on people is amazing, but many students dismiss literature as shockingly dull, and shut their minds, thus preventing themselves from imbuing any of that magic — because it really is magic. What else can really make you feel what living in Victorian England was like, or what it was like being a young Jewish girl during the Second World War? Movies and history books can only do so much, it takes literature to be able to see through the eyes of these people. It takes literature for students to really understand the world, and have a strong sense of empathy. Yet, plenty of students don't even try to take advantage of this incredible subject.

The fault lies in the teaching?

The biggest reason for this is the way that they have been taught literature. All children will be at least relatively open to reading in the second or third grades, but if their teachers decide that the way to tackle literature is by forcing children to memorise facts like it's a science, instead of taking a more creative approach, they'll soon decide that they hate it.

Overanalysing literature is a dangerous move as well. Picking a beautiful poem or story to pieces can ruin it beyond recognition, and no child can be expected to enjoy it. And this distaste for literature is just an unnecessarily sad consequence, because studying literature can be one of the most enjoyable parts of an education. When the teacher's skilled and the writing's good, literature classes can seriously cultivate a love of reading in a student, and anyone who has spent hours and hours absorbed in a book, oblivious to everything around them, knows how much fun reading can be. Moreover, we need more students who love to read. Those are the students who grow up and grow into talented authors, novelists, playwrights, poets and even screenwriters, creating more and more worlds for future generations to immerse themselves in.

Even for students who choose not to enter these creative fields, a lot of exposure to good literature can really shape them as people. Think about it. Every time you open a new book, a new world is being unravelled before your eyes, and these worlds are filled with interesting, relatable people, with stories that leave you sitting at the edge of your seat. Reading can be like peering into a culture that's miles away and centuries past. You can see every perspective, real or fictitious. You can find new role models and new inspiration. These books can transform the way you think. At its best, literature can strengthen your values, change you for the better. For instance, reading Enid Blyton's beloved Mallory Towers books at a young age certainly engendered a healthy hatred of dishonesty in me. And an unhealthy love of midnight feasts!

However, while it's a substantial roadblock, bad teaching isn't the sole reason for the lack of attention being given to literature by students. Even the ones who were blessed with good teachers who showed them how wonderful reading literature can be, often let their story books collect dust as they focus their attention on more profitable subjects. Studying literature doesn't make much sense, does it? There's not much money in it, is there? Hadn't we all better close our novels and just study business and biology?

This attitude is actually a little disturbing. Even the students who genuinely love reading and writing above all else, are forgoing literature in favour of more 'practical' subjects. Slowly, no one's reading anymore. Is this going to be a world overflowing with uncultured, narrow-minded people? Are we going to have to keep recycling old stories to

tell our children because no one has written any decent fiction in decades? Or worse, are novels and poems just going to go extinct? Will we soon have a world where the concept of a bedtime story doesn't exist?

You don't need to get your degree in literature, but give it a chance. Even if your teacher was a bore and your books real drudges, I promise you that there are better teachers and better books out there. Just enrol in a few courses or take your English classes seriously. At the very least, just pick up a decent book, because by dismissing literature entirely you are only doing yourself a disservice. Not only are you missing out on a huge opportunity to enjoy yourself, but your life, your opinions, and what you have to give to the world will improve so tremendously, if you just open yourself up to this.



Ketaki Nair is a student in the 12th grade at the Cathedral and John Connon School, Mumbai. Words are her weapon of choice, and she enjoys writing on subjects varying from socio-political and cultural behaviour, to fashion and make up.

(...continued from page 6)

Explaining that Shakespeare wrote to entertain, and be watched, making him more akin to Spielberg doesn't help, because all that just adds to their sense of injury ("Why on earth are we studying it for an exam, then?"). The only thing to do is focus on the whys of the story, highlighting the clever magic of a master of human psychology... and hope that a spark of interest will be kindled.

But perhaps the worst thing we do as a system, ensuring that most kids will develop a mild distaste for literature at some point, is teaching it in isolation. As an educator, I was disappointed (but not surprised) to learn that my son in the 7th grade was memorising the different crops that are grown in the southern states of the USA and the Caribbean, notably tobacco, sugar and cotton, but had no clue that it these plantations were inextricably linked to the growth of slavery as a profitable business in that part of the world. He also had no clue of the creole culture and jazz music that was produced as a result of this period in history, or of the fascinating process of the emancipation of these slaves or of the turmoil of the civil rights movement, and the fact that Martin Luther King Jr. was inspired by our very own Mahatma Gandhi, as was that other famous pacifist and rebel, Henry David Thoreau. Perhaps this was the point at which to insert some of the writings of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King junior and Maya Angelou and Sarojini Naidu. Ideally, without rote memory testing.

Personally, I learnt more about the cotton planta-

tions, slavery, and the American Civil War from reading *Gone With the Wind*, than a text book. The right piece of fiction can lead to interest and discovery and learning which is fun and not forced. African Geography and History can and should be paired with *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* or Willard Price's *African Adventure* for the younger reader, just as a fillet of fish should be paired with a crisp white wine. They complement each other beautifully, with a heady bouquet of basic psychology, and notes of adventure and daredevilry.

And closer to home, there's the surreal experience of seeing India through Western eyes to highlight its aura of oriental mystery and romance. Reading *The Far Pavilions* in my teens gave me a fascinating, and undoubtedly highly romanticised idea of India during the British Raj, and suddenly, the banal and familiar became exotic and desirable. Lest you get carried away, you have Nehru, E.M. Forster and Jim Corbett to add a real flavour to what one's imagination cooks up.

What it boils down to, is getting the idea across that books are about life, and not exams; and let's face it, that's a tough row to hoe. Sometimes one is just throwing bits of books at young minds and hoping that something will stick. It can be as comical as Jeeves playing the puppeteer to Bertie Wooster, but that's another author whose whimsy I've been able to share with just a few. Those few, however, make all the craziness worthwhile, for they are willing to enter the great modern unknown in India – the world of words.



An artist and an educator, Deepti Nair tries to keep the art alive in teaching, and hopes to continue her education in Art. For her, words can be a highly visual medium which finds a balance in her love of art that communicates wordlessly.

Tomorrow is here

A round-up of all that's new, happening, and trendy in the world of children's literature. Vinitha Ramchandani also writes about what's in store for 2019.

When I serendipitously found Katherine Applegate's book *Home of the Brave*, a children's book of loss and longing, immigration, forced migration and family and so much more, I knew all was right with the world. That there are authors — and publishers — who are talking, saying what needs to be said, doing it in a format (poetry) that conveyed stories in powerful ways. The fact that they were doing it, with the risks of what comes with doing anything different, is as stupendous as it is heartening.

And *Home of the Brave* may have been released in December 2008, but it still tells that we are at a time where we respect children enough to tell them what is happening around them, in the world. The space of children's literature may still be looking for its Harry Potter replacement, but not having found it, has not waited around. We have moved on.

The trends in literature, for 2019 are:

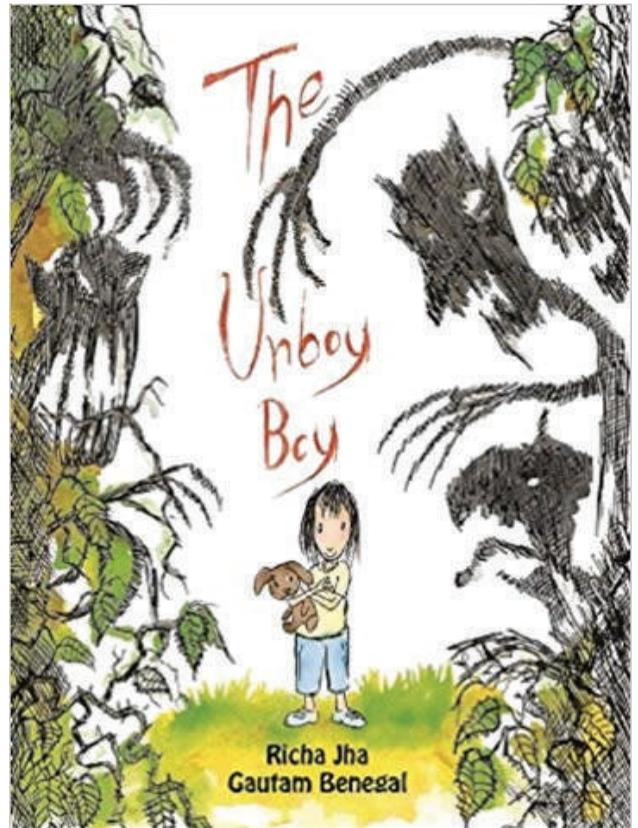
1). We are talking of sensitive, real issues more: Richa Sethi, co-founder of Writers' Bug and children's reading app GetLitt, says, "What is touching is how children have responded to books that deal with sensitive topics on gender, disability, death. It proves the premise that books can be the medium for many honest conversations with our children."

On reading *The Unboy Boy* by Richa Jha, a story of a boy called Gagan who is at ease being what he is and who wants to show the world that there are no boy boys and un-boy boys; just boys and girls—one child says, "This book represents me when I was unboy myself and when my friends used to bully me. I felt connected to Gagan."

After reading *Boo* by Neil Smith, a story of Oliver, who wakes up in heaven to find out that he did not die of a heart defect, but was murdered when he was shot and that his killer might also be in heaven, another member of GetLitt says, "This was a very emotional and heart-warming book."

Similarly, after reading *Gone Grandmother*, a young reader says, "I cannot imagine the devastation of losing my grandmother who is essentially the only person in the world who truly dotes on me. The illustrations perfectly capture the setting in the text. I think it would be worse for a younger child who does not understand the concept of death and will keep wondering where his or her grandmother has gone to. I also respect the way Nina copes with her grandmother's death."

I remember in 2007 when my book *When the Mountains Laughed* (a story about a child who was so unhappy and unloved for being bullied because of his dark



skin colour), came out, the publisher took off/edited the part where the boy decided to kill himself. Ten years ago we did not talk of death and dying and the fact that sometimes children feel like dying. Children's literature meant happy stories, and definitely happy endings. That we can talk of death, of unworthiness, of the utter sadness and homesickness of immigration, of loss... is fantastic. The future of children's literature will be more such stories that deal with multiracial experiences and are in touch with times. While Applegate broaches the subject of immigration, *The Red Pencil* (a verse tale of a girl's experience in Dafur genocide), *Escape from Aleppo* (dealing with the tale of a Syrian teenager felling the war-torn city) and *I Am Still Alive*, are stories that present opportunities for the child to understand the politics of today. Diversity is another trend we keep seeing more of; whether the characters are people of colour, LGBTQ, females filling traditional male roles or having some sort of handicap...

We need to contextualise our today for our kids. Swati Popat Vats, director of Podar Jumbo Kids and president of the Early Childhood Association has been creating new content for young children. "We have rewritten the classic tales like *The Red Riding Hood*, We've rewritten old rhymes, and we are also writing fresh content."

2). We will continue to have series: Like I said, we are still looking for another Harry Potter literature storm to happen. But until then we are doing series. Books that do well, are long stories with continuity in theme and their central characters. Bad Guys, WeirDo and Treehouse books are dominating the children's bestseller charts, while Hunger Games, Cassandra Clare's The Mortal Instruments Series as well as her The Infernal Devices, The Twilight Saga, the Divergent series, the Uglies Trilogy along with The Lord of the Rings and the Percy Jackson series, will continue to stay popular. The Fart Monster series was released last month and later this year we can expect new instalments in a number of hit series including Dork Diaries and Polly and Buster. As a parent of two Harry Potter fans, when my kids (who simply stopped reading after they finished all the Harry Potter books, for the longest ever) find a series that draw them into another world, where they hunger for the next book, it is a huge relief. Storytelling, just as it is for adults who look forward to their favourite show on TV, that lures children into complex imaginative worlds and make them stay engaged with characters they care about, while the clever plotting reveals just enough story in each episode to leave us satisfied and still keen to discover more, is going to thus, stay. Everyone is happy—the publisher, the reader and parents and other care-givers. Nirupama Kaushik, librarian at the Somaiya School, endorses this when she says children still borrow the Divergent series, Hunger Games, *Shatter Me* by Terah Mafia, while the little ones read books by Tulliak and Pratham.

3). Graphic novels will grow: We are discussing difficult subjects. In India, as in the rest of the world, the graphic novel genre is doing well and growing. Gravity Falls, Pashmina, The Baby Sitters Club, PopularMMOs Present a Hole New World, Smile, Supernova, Drama (Raina Telgemeir's works are enduring), Narwhal, El Deafo (which is an autobiographical novel of the author's childhood and her living with deafness, won the Newbery Medal), Real Friends, Frazzled: Everyday Disasters and Impending Doom... are only some of the books that are being read and loved by kids in the 9 to 12 year old age bracket. In the young adult space too there is amazing content being built in the graphic novel space. This is one format to look out. It is already the next big space.

4). Girl power stories will grow: More books will have strong female character. Girl books will no longer be about gossipy school girls, and romance and princesses, and other giggly things. Fiction and creative non-fiction will have more stories with strong female main characters (and side characters), within compelling stories that have been written consciously and purposefully for both boys and girls. *The Only Fish in the Sea* (picture book), *Princesses Wear Pants*, *Eloise* (again for young kids), *Malala's Magic Pencil*, *Dory Fantasmagory*, *Escape from Aleppo* (which can also

fall into the category of 1, dealing with the tale of a Syrian teenager fleeing the war-torn city), *Guardians of the Taiga: Wild Rescuers*, *May B.* (a moving account of a girl's struggle to survive), *Hattie Big Sky*, *The Apothecary*, *The Breadwinner* (a story of a girl defying the Taliban) are some of such stories that already big on this trend. Thus we will keep doing books on notable women in history who were change-makers.

5). The demand for child-friendly, non-fiction will continue to grow: We Indians love books for kids that will increase their 'knowledge' and thus, in India, as elsewhere, non-fiction will continue to be the genre that will grow. The difference will be that non-fiction will no longer be dry. It will be better written, more child-friendly, and definitely accessible. Publishers will use more colours, characters who will take the content forward in an engaging, interactive manner; the graphic novel format will be used more and more for this. Thus, here are books (and this will continue to grow) that children, in their world of sometimes-dull textbooks and term papers, will actually gravitate towards. From *Vegetables in Underwear* (picturebook) to *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, to *On the Road* (A brilliant blend of fiction and autobiography), to *The Lego Ideas Book: Unlock Your Imagination*, to *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and *The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion, and the Fall of Imperial Russia* by Candace Fleming (an award winning book where Fleming writes about Russia's last royal family and its downfall in a gripping way, covering every spot of doom in its gilded halls (while also tending to the lives of the poor Russian masses), to DK's *The Movie Book* (where in a do-it-all compendium of movie history and look at how films have fit into society that will have any teenager interested in films riveted) you will find a universe of amazing nonfiction works that are equally captivating, thought-provoking, and even worldview-affecting. This will continue to grow. As will books on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and in civic education and media literacy.

6). Parallel, fantasy worlds will continue to grow: And this is across genres and reading-age groups. We love magic and strength, adventure and adventurers, science and technology, so much that we will continue to build worlds of witches, warlocks, mermaids, fairies, werewolves, multiuniverses with portals, shadowhunters and fallen angels. It has already happened, and will continue to happen: Young adult fiction has crossed the thin line between adult fiction and adult fiction. The writing is sharper, there is sexual tension, romance and tight plots, often in parallel worlds. And while stand-alone books are slowing down, kids will continue to love books that make them laugh and we will continue to look for a strong character to latch on to.



Vinitha Ramchandani is an editor and published author of more than 20 books for children. Four of her stories are part of the English school curriculum in both the CBSE and ICSE Boards. She is associated with children's content and writes a fortnightly column, 'Mumbai for Kids' where she reviews children's spaces in the city. A content strategist, an advocate of children's right to play, she is working on an Empathy Project with schools and publishing houses and looking for empowered ways to re-introduce empathy into children's learning and interaction.

Multiliteracy is here to stay!

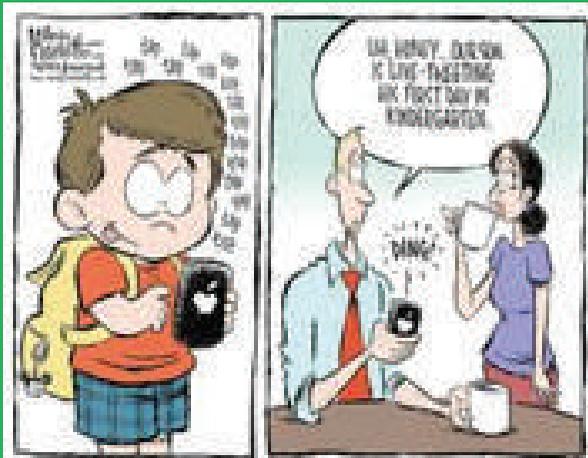
The traditional meaning of literacy has undergone a massive change. No more can the term literacy be confined only to books and structured language. The talk now is of 'multiliteracies', an art which the Millennials seem to have mastered. Can the rest of us afford to be far behind? asks Vinitha Ramchandani.

In a country of over 1.2 billion people, when a book sells 5,000 copies (0.007% of the population) and we call it a bestselling book, we ought to wonder if we are a population (and this is a global phenomenon) that is gradually becoming illiterate.

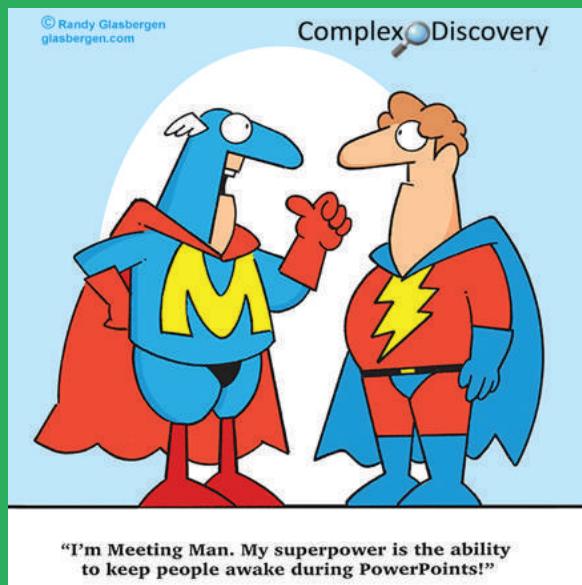
The irony is that the generation that will NOT understand the above cartoons are also the generation who can and probably do, read tomes. Yet, they are the same generation that will contact an agent to get an appointment at the passport office, and pay ₹700 to the agent, who is a young

Fact 1: Today's generation is not picking up a book to read as much as their parents (and their parents' parents) did.

Fact 2: There is a whole set of people who will not be able to understand this image:



Or this image:



Or get the humour in this one:



kid who has downloaded the form online, free, and is making a tidy income from this very set of people who are no longer able to steer themselves in today's tech-savvy world.

Just to make this point clear, here is another example. For instance, a text message sent that said: "...my friend and I whatsapped last night and talked about a video that had gone viral on youtube and then shared it on FB", may not be understood by a whole generation of people. To understand this simple line that many of do comprehend, (and many may not) one would need to cognize:

- 1). new technology, especially the social media
- 2). the role of these new technologies in our society
- 3). the language used to talk about these new technologies and;
- 4). to come to terms with the fact that some nouns are now used/transformed as verbs. (I 'googled it', stop 'whatsapping' me! and — I 'xeroxed' all the notes, etc.)

Has the definition of literacy changed?

There was a time, when literacy meant the ability to read, write and tell time. Today, the meaning of literacy has evolved to mean linguistic diversity and multi-modal forms of linguistic expression in response to globalised environments. Translate that to mean new ways of communicating in an era of internet and technology. Fact is, that while the English language is gradually becoming the global language of communication, different cultures use English differently, thus giving rise to new English words that are being contextualised and used in accordance. Thus, words like 'mother promise', a 'bhelpuri/kichadi' of something, bungalow, cushy, juggernaut, prepone, pukka, pundit, dinghy, verandah so on and so forth — are words we may use in India regularly, but if we use these words elsewhere, in another country, chances are they won't know what you are saying.

Multiliteracy also includes the use of text combined with sounds and images; images being combined into

billboards and movies and almost any site in the Internet and on TV. All these ways of communication require us to understand the multi-media world, and has resulted in the formulation of the pedagogy of new vocabulary that one needs to understand this world. In one word, this is what we call, multiliteracy. Literacy now is the use of socially, historically, and culturally situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationship between textual conventions and their contexts of use, and ideally the ability to reflect critically on these relationships. Because it is purpose-sensitive, literacy is dynamic — not static — and variable across and within communities and cultures. It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge. (Kern, Richard, 2000)

Multiliteracy is about the way technology and multi-media is changing the way we communicate. So while a whole generation of people have immaculate prowess in a language of their choice and have impeccable grammar and spellings, they will not necessarily 'get' the humour in the above cartoons. (For that they will need to understand technology, the politics of each of the references made, as well as the contexts within which they are made). On the other hand, a whole generation of young people—who will spell love as 'luv', and don't know the difference between lose and loose, and are annoying about emojis, and have created a universe of SMS abbreviations (LOL and IKR, so on and so forth) — are the same set of young people who will be totally clued in on how to hire a cab, do their banking and investment online, and be successful entrepreneurs at the age of 14!

So, who is literate? What does literacy mean in today's time? How have our ways of communication, expressing and living changed?

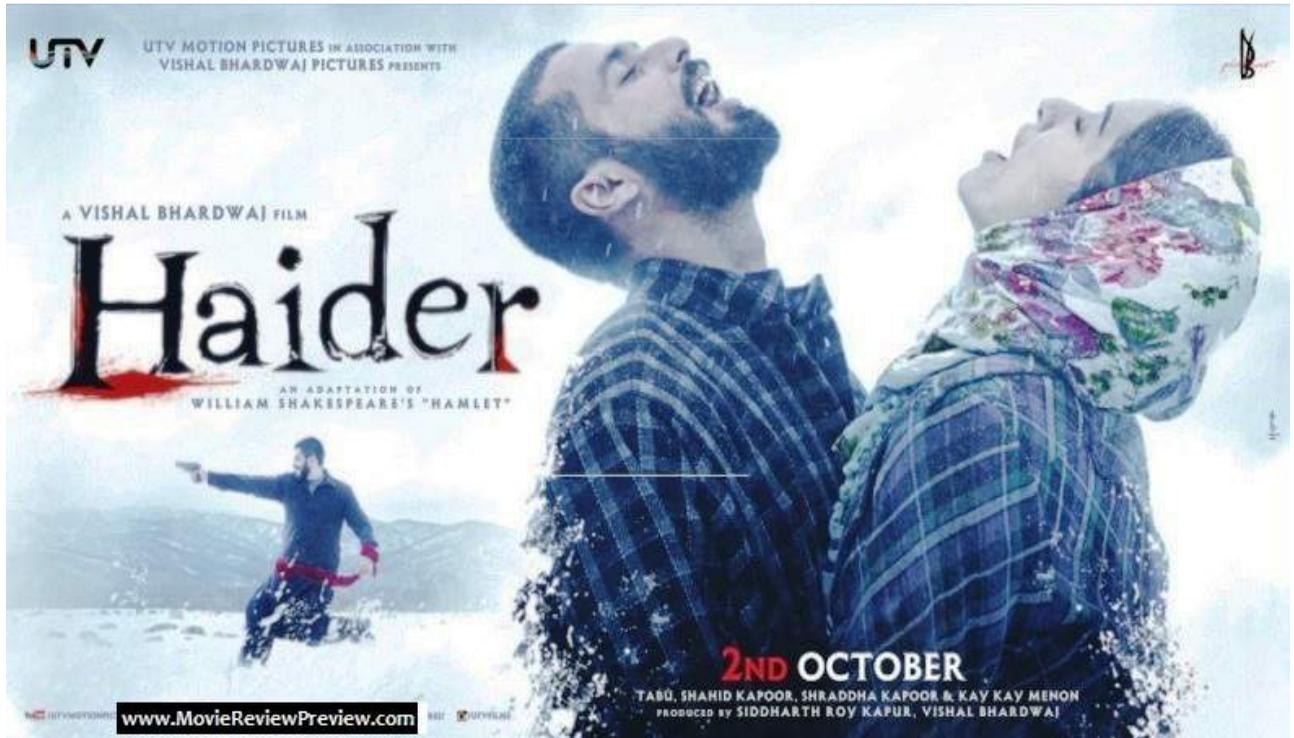
(continued on page 28...)

WHO AM I?



A controversial alliance

Cinema based on literature, and how much justice cinema does to the written word, is an endless debate. Shoma A. Chatterji analyses some such iconic films made in India, and how the two mediums differ, and yet collaborate.



The movie *Haider* is based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but with an Indian twist

Cinema is a director's medium. Literature is a writer's world. How can these two worlds be brought together in harmonious unity? How much freedom does a director have, to toy around with the literary source he has chosen? Does he need to stick to the original literary work? Or can he interpret it differently, or, question the basis or the morals of the characters therein? Perhaps, the time and spatial differences between a literary work such as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* written more than 400 years ago, and *Haider*, the cinematic adaptation of *Hamlet* done in the 21st century will change the director's and the audience's perspective of the original drama. All this comes into play when any literature, classical, modern or post-modern, is taken up by a filmmaker to turn into a film.

Bringing the story to life

Cinema brings words to life through visuals, sound, music, dialogue, acting and splicing or mixing of shots generally known as editing. This, very simply, is the basic difference between literature and cinema. Cinema, an eclectic art form, has borrowed generously from earlier art forms like music, poetry, painting and architecture. Film scholar and critic Chidananda Dasgupta insists that a film

adapted from literature "would contain something of the chemistry of the mind of the filmmaker." He says that not only would some aspects of incidents and characters undergo a change, "but the very composition of the elements, the molecular structure if you like, would undergo a transmutation." (Talking About Films)

Literature gives the reader the freedom to imagine how the characters and the objects would actually look in real life. But cinema needs to invest characters and objects with three-dimensional physicality, thereby restricting the viewer's imaginative freedom. We generally tend to overlook the basic difference between literature and its adaptation on celluloid. This lies in the physicality of the celluloid interpretation versus the lack of physicality in literature. A film is a composite of concrete images. This sets it in a completely different class from the novel or the play composed of abstract written or spoken words. A film is a kind of writing, but picture writing. It can even express completely abstract ideas, provided they are adapted to the nature of the medium, and formulated in concrete, pictorial terms.

(continued on page 27 ...)



**WORLD CLASS
QUALITY MEDICINES
AT AFFORDABLE PRICES**

BLUE CROSS LABORATORIES PVT LTD.

PENINSULA CHAMBERS, LOWER PAREL, MUMBAI - 400 013,
INDIA.



CHETTINAD

A wedding and a grand tour

This was a trip to beat all trips - getting to see the splendours of Chettinad palaces and temples, while attending a wedding at a Chettinad mansion. Mansions, temples, churches and dargahs, Chettinad has a lot to offer for tourists, and one can only hope that this way of life will be preserved for future generations to see and enjoy too, even if only as tourists.

Text & Photos: Nivedita Louis



Warrior on horse overlooking the *mandapam*, Avudaiyarkoil

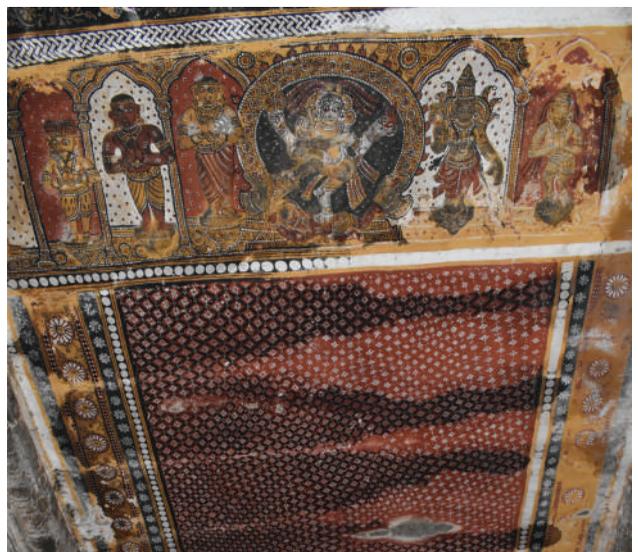
There are some occasions in life that leave an indelible mark in our lives. A wedding, a birth, a meeting - anything can get imprinted in one's heart. When my dear friend Uma invited me over for the wedding of her son in Karaikudi, little did I know that it would be one such soul-stirring experience. Ask any Tamil about the grandeur of a Chettinad wedding, and his eyes will take on an immediate sparkle. As we would be staying there for the extended week end for the wedding, friends came up with a tour plan. The sites to be visited or deferred to the next trip were discussed, analysed, a time plan worked out, and all was set. Phew! That itself was tiring, though the eight-hour journey to Karaikudi by train in the night went smoothly.

The morning sunrise was splendid, so was the roadside *chai* we had at the famed 'tea kadai bench', as we women sat basking in the sun, drinking *chai*, reading the daily newspaper and chatting. The van arrived, loaded with breakfast. This hostess knew how to spoil her guests!

Avudaiyarkoil, the heritage town

The first place we landed in was Avudaiyarkoil, the 'heritage town'. The temple is also known as Avudaiyarkoil, the main deity being Athmanadhaswamy. As we entered the front pillared *mandapam*, we saw a set of fine pillars, in which are carved 1000 miniature pillars! It is very usual to see 1000 pillared *mandapams* in temples of the South, but this one was spell binding. As we walked in further, we could see huge sculptures of warriors seated on horses.

The temple has an interesting connect to horses. It is the famed Saivite Saint of the eighth century, Manikkavasagar, who built this temple. Manikkavasagar was a minister in Pandya King Arimarthana Pandiyan's Court. The King had sent Manikkavasagar to buy horses for the army. Manikkavasagar saw his Guru under a tree at Thiruperundurai, and overcome by his love for Shiva, built the magnificent Avudaiyarkoil temple with that money.



The Madurai Sungudi pattern saree with border and *pallus*, and a painted mural on the ceiling of the outer *mandapam*, Avudaiyarkoil

When the King asked for the horses, Manikkavasagar in his divine trance sent a message that the horses were on their way. Lord Shiva himself converted a pack of foxes to horses and rode majestically into the city of Madurai. The King was overwhelmed with joy at seeing the fine horses. But when night came, the 'foxes' started howling, and Manikkavasagar was imprisoned!

You can still find here the original handwritten palm leaf manuscript of "Thiruvasakam" written by Manikkavasagar in the eighth century! As we went further in, we found the ceilings bedecked with beautiful mural paintings, like Madurai's famed 'Sungudi' sarees with borders and pallu. A mandapam full of Nayak period paintings show the 'Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam'- divine plays of Lord Shiva and the happenings in the life of Manikkavasagar. The Gandaberunda – double headed eagle painted in the ceiling, its claws clutching an elephant, looked amazing. As we loitered around the inner *prakarams* of the temple, we saw the unique Navagrahas, sculpted on the tall pillars, three or four of them on each pillar. We moved out to the outer *praharas* and were amazed to see the stone chains hanging from the ceilings, the wafer thin chiseled sunshades carved out of fine stone. The zephyr roof work of this temple *mandapam* is simply unparalleled, so much that it is said the Britishers fired and bored holes through the roof to see how thin, yet sturdy the roof work was! We wondered at the Kurundha tree – the temple's *sthala-vruksha* and moved on to our next stop, after devouring Chettinad's famous fluffy *idlis*, *vadas*, onion *chutney*, *sambhar* and the red rice speciality - *kavuniarisi*!

The next stop was the Viruthapureeswarar Temple at Thirupunavasaal. This Saivite temple has the largest *linga*, only next to Gangai Konda Cholapuram and Tanjore's Brahadeeswara. The sight of the nine feet *linga* and the

82.5 feet Avudaiyar (the seat for placing the deity) around it, was just so ethereal! The temple itself is set very close to the sea – about three kilometres away, and near Pambar river. The Kaliyamman (female Mother Goddess) of this temple is so special, said to be in eternal anger that anyone praying to her must only see her through the tall mirror placed at the entrance of Her shrine. Outside the shrine are trees with bangles and small cradles hung all around, as offerings for children born or request to the Divine for a child.

A church called John De Britto

We continued our travel towards Oriyur John De Britto church. John De Britto, a missionary of Roman Catholic Church, came to India for spreading the word of God. He found Marava country – the areas to the South of Madurai ideal for his missionary work. However, the local king whom he had converted to Christianity by name Thadiya Thevar, sent back all his wives except one, as bigamy or polygamy was not allowed in Christianity, trouble started brewing. The Setupati King of Ramnad, whose niece was one among those sent back, reported to the Ramnad King of her ill-fate and then started the general persecution of Christians in that area. The King of Ramnad ordered the execution of Britto, We moved out to the outer *praharas* and were amazed to see the stone chains hanging from which was carried out in Oriyur in 1693. Two centuries after his death, Britto was beatified by the Pope as a Saint. The sand atop the hill where he was murdered turned red, as his blood fell. A small church was constructed in Oriyur, in remembrance of the martyr, on the land donated by the later king, Vijaya Renganatha, in 1734. The beautiful Portuguese façade, buttresses holding the arches and circular dome at the center, makes this one of the most beautiful churches of the area.



The Oriyur John De Britto Church



The impressive edifice of the Chettinad Palace, Kanadukathan

A beautiful Chettinad Palace

Our van next travelled to the Chettinad Palace, a beautiful mansion built by Annamalai Chettiyar in Kanadukathan village. The impressive palace constructed in 1902 has three *mithams* or open thresholds, Burmese teak windows and doors, colourful *athangudi* tiles on the floor, and embellished with amazing furniture ranging from ornate ivory candleabras, to massive carved wooden columns. The dining hall is said to seat 250 people, and the kitchen has a long range of mud stoves for cooking. The adjoining bathroom has an inbuilt well to draw water. The courtyard is massive and so are the mirrors and corridors. The underground garage is another beauty, and so is the small balcony at the first floor, specially designed for the women of the house to enjoy some fresh air. We found a 'kili josiyaam' expert – a fortune teller with parrot and hamster at the gates of the palace, and took turns listening to our fortunes being told, amidst peals of laughter.

A short visit to Sirukoodalpatti, the birth place of Tamil moviedom's famed song writer Kannadasan, and the day was wrapped up. But wait! The fun wasn't over yet. We went to the bridegroom's house for dinner and chit-chat. Refreshed, we set out on Day 2, for sight-seeing. Our first stop was Piranmalai Kodunkundreeswarar Temple. This temple was once situated in the area ruled by one of the last

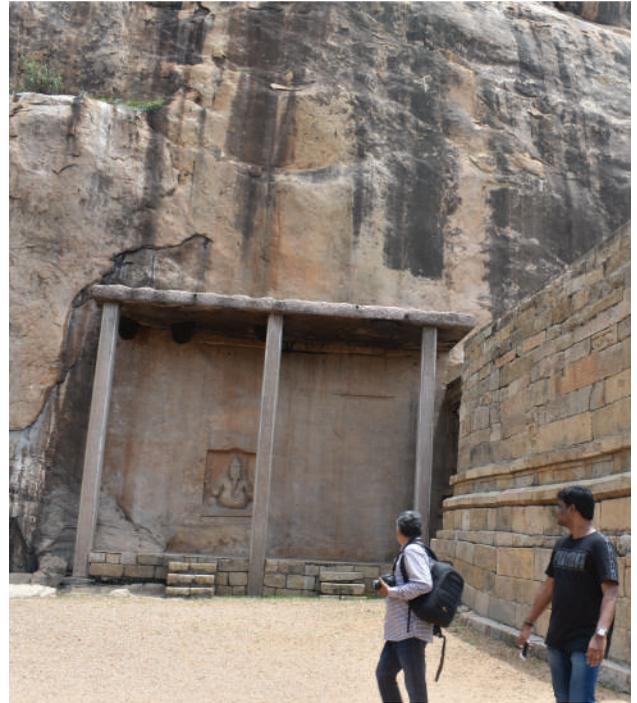
seven kings of Sangam era – “Kadai ezhu valla!” Paari. Legend of King Paari goes this way - the king is said to have donated his chariot to a *mullai* (jasmine) plant which was longing for some support to grow! The flight of steps leading to the temple are splattered with fragments of inscriptions, and the temple on top is a rock-cut cave temple and Lord Manganabagar resides there, holding the hands of his consort Thenammai. The ceiling of the cave is decorated with scenes from Tiruvilaiyadal – including the wedding of Lord Shiva and Parvati. The three-tiered edifice has a temple for Viswanathar and Visalakshi in the middle section, and the ground level is the temple of Kodunkundranathar. The bell atop the temple has astounding audibility, it is said the sound from it is heard even from miles away!

We gobbled up the *idlis* and *sambhar* and continued our journey to Kudumiyanmalai Temple. We were misled enroute, but it had a happy ending – we ended up bang at the doors of another beautiful rock-cut cave temple complex – Malaiyakovil. The hillock has two caves, one on the southern side- that houses Lord Okkaliswara and the eastern side houses Malaikolundeeswarar. The cave on the southern precipice is in a well designed mandapam, whereas the eastern cave is a cellar with rock-cut extension in the front. The period of construction of these temples can be roughly estimated to late Pandya period. Conjoining these two caves lies a beautiful tank with steps, but it is dry.

Of monkeys and bees!

We rushed to our next stop – Kudumiyamalai Temple. The moment we alighted from the van, we were surrounded by an army of monkeys. Shooing them away, we rushed inside, to have a quick glimpse of the Lord Siva, who is called “Shikanathar”, because of the unusual *kudumi/shikha* – a head bun! The earliest inscription of this temple is an interesting musical treatise in Pallava Grantha script belonging to the seventh century! As we made our way to the musical treatise inscription attributed to Pallava King Mahendra Varman I, which is inscribed on a hillock, we were scared away by a horde of bees. Bee hives adorn the inscription mandapam pillars. The main cave temple atop the hillock is said to have been constructed before the Cholas by Mutharaiyars, the vassals of Cholas and Pallavas. The *maha mandapam* has been built during the reign of Kulothunga Chola. The Soundaranayaki Amman shrine to the south of the cave was built by the danseuse Umaiyalvi Nachi, the Devadasi of Kudumiyamalai, who bought the temple lands for 73,300 gold coins! There are almost 100 inscriptions in the temple, and it took all our might not to sit there reading the lines and relishing the puzzles hidden therein. We moved through the Raasi *mandapam* and the 1000 pillared *mandapam*, our eyes feasting on the sculptures. The life size sculptures of Rati and Manmadha in the outer *mandapam* are spellbinding!

Our next stop was Sithannavasal – the rock-cut Jain temple that is equivalent to Ajantha. The climb to the top of the hillock was as always arduous, and by the time we arrived at the top, tired and hungry, the sight of the beautiful mural paintings done with pure vegetable dyes on the ceilings of the small cave, offered solace to the eyes, the cool air inside the caves gave us respite from heat, and the soul wandered in silent prayer, as we entered the small sanctum.



The famed musical treatise inscription, Piranmalai

For over a thousand years the paintings have withstood time and weather in this dry part of the country. Five Thirthankaras adorn the inner sanctum and the ‘Om’ sound given by the guide reverberated inside us. As we moved out to the *mandapam*, we literally opened our mouths wide, gazing at the marvel. A pond. Lotuses. Pairs of Andril birds. Colourful fishes. Gods plucking lotuses. The painting is said to recall the “Samavasarana” faith in Jainism. Though the period of construction is not known, there is an inscription attributing repairs to the cave temple complex during the period of early Pandya King Srivallabha during ninth century.



Soundaranayaki shrine, built by Devadasi Umaiyalvi Nachi, Piranmalai Temple



The Kattu Bava Dargah

And then, a *dargah*

We returned to Karaikudi for a sumptuous lunch and relaxed, roaming around the humongous mansion of our hostess. A short break, and we hit the road again, this time to a beautiful *dargah*! The Kattu Bava Pallivasal was built about 500 years ago, in the traditional Dravidian *kallu-palli* style. It looks like any Hindu temple, with pillared *mandapams* and sanctum housing the deceased saints. In this *dargah* is

entombed Bava Fakruddin, the grandson of Nagore's saint Shahul Hameed. Classes were on, and we waved to the bunch of children deep in religious learning. As we moved out of the *dargah*, we were greeted by iridescence in the sky, a hundred colours scattered above us. We settled for a cup of *chai* on the steps of the nearby pond, wondering at the setting sun and iridescence flanking the *dargah*, quietly chatting.

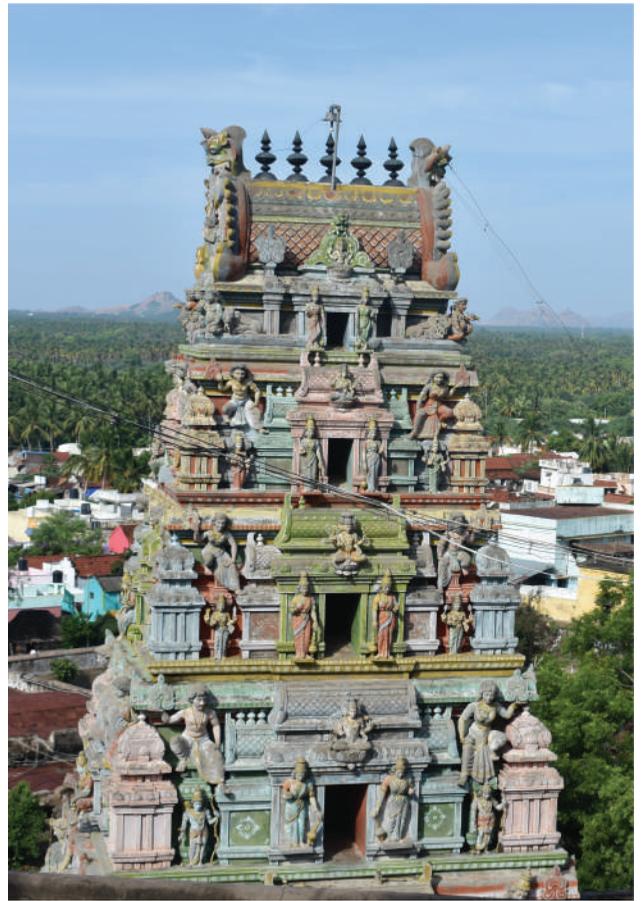


The Nagarathar bride's *thali* or *mangalsutra* is truly unique

The grand wedding

Our night was marked by merry making – the *mehndi* function and the *kazhuthooru korthal*. The *kazhuthooru* is the massive gold ornament the groom ties around the neck of the girl in Nagarathar (Chettiyar clan) weddings of Chettinad. It has 31 (three more pieces are added after consummation of marriage) pieces of gold strung on two twists of 21 strings, hand-coated with turmeric. Interestingly, the Nagarathar weddings are affairs at home, the men taking the lead in almost all the functions involved with the wedding. We watched the men of the house clad in white veshtis and shirts going in circles, twisting the yellow twine, and then the chief jeweler sitting down to place them together and compile the *kazhuthooru*. The line for *mehndi* was longer than the Great Wall of China, and so we made our escape from the mansion soon, to catch some beauty sleep. The next day was the grand wedding, and we didn't want to look tired and haggard.

We freshened up in the morning, and after a heavy dose of makeup, jewelry and in Kanjeevaram saris, made our way to the groom's house. The cavalcade left soon for the bride's house, which was about 40 km away, and we joined the party. We were seated in a separate ladies dining hall in a huge house and after devouring the breakfast feast, we left for the temple where the groom's family waited before starting the 'groom's procession'. After prayers, the party started the procession, with the groom hoisted atop a horse which was bedecked with colorful pompoms. Crackers shook the town, the crowd shook a leg, and we entered the bride's house with much pomp and show.



The Piranmalai Kundrandar Temple



The groom's side in all their wedding splendour!



Not an inch of space left; the house of antique collector Mahadevan, Karaikudi

The wedding ceremony began, a simple ceremony at home, but again, segregated halls for men and women with air-conditioners blasting cool air. The Nagarthars tie three *thaalis* (*mangalsutras*) – a simple one in gold for regular use, a diamond *thaali* for formal occasions, and the *kazhuthooru*. Once the *thaali* is tied, the couple fall at the feet of the elders for their blessings. The women and men clamber up a narrow staircase to ‘see’ the array of gifts on display, being exchanged between both the bride and groom, given by their respective families. Lunch time, and we feel gluttonous, and relish the heavy meal.

On the way back to Karaikudi, we had arranged to see a private collector’s house which he had turned into a beautiful museum of interesting artefacts. G.R. Mahadevan is a passionate collector of toys and various knick-knacks, and his house is a living museum. Not an inch of the lovely bungalow is left free, the kitchen to the bathrooms to the balcony – all house amazing displays of antiques. Biscuit boxes, tin toys belonging to the 1940s, magazines, cigarette

boxes, wine bottles, calendars, tin chocolate boxes, prams, radios, dozens of cameras, lanterns, kerosene stoves, tens of old phones, cooker of 1930s, oven of 1950s, vintage posters of actresses, movie posters, ice-cream maker of the 50s, the man has anything and everything. Heavens, he even has a *maattu vandi* (cow cart) of yesteryears parked in his lawn. The house can take you to altogether another world when you enter. I was already feeling like Alice in Wonderland, jumping from room to room, admiring the antiques and getting chided gently by the group for my childish anxiety.

We took leave, reached our rooms and geared up for the grand dinner hosted by the groom’s family. We accompanied the couple on a *nagar valam* – a procession along the streets of the town, reached the groom’s house and feasted again. The last couple of days had been a kind of eat-a-thon! With heavy hearts we took leave and packed for our return journey. As the train chugged through the dark night, all I could wonder was, “Dear God...when is the next trip?”



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

Our Last Six Issues

To order copies Call: 022-23534400 / E-mail: oiopfoundation@gmail.com

| India: Past Forward | NGO | Indian Summer | Judiciary | Modern History | Theatre |
|---------------------|-----|---------------|-----------|----------------|---------|
| | | | | | |

“The act of writing itself is an addiction for me, and I cannot think of a life beyond words.”

Supreeta Singh is young, pretty, and a very successful communication entrepreneur. She began her career as a fearless journalist, to switch over to a photographic NGO, to managing public relations at several leading hotels in Kolkata, to then quit and become completely independent.

Within the first year of founding the Supreeta Singh P.R. Consultancy with a handful of loyal staff in her own flat, Supreeta has rounded up not less than 100 clients of top companies including individuals in the fashion trade, in films and authors of books. The latest feather in her cap is the launch of her debut novel *Grace*, a rapid fire read on love and relationships. Supreeta spoke to **Shoma A.Chatterji** about her journey.



How did the adventurous journey begin?

I began my career as a journalist having worked with Drik India and Bangladesh, *The Times of India* and *The Bengal Post*. Following that, I became a hotelier and held the position of PR Head in renowned hotels like Swissotel, The Astor, and The Park Hotel, Kolkata. My motto in life is to create success stories for each person and organisation I work with. I aspired to be a writer, and my first book called *Grace* has been published by Partridge Publication.

Are you single by choice?

Not really. Actually, I have never managed the time to think about marriage at all. I have my share of friends, men and women, and some of them I am quite close to. But

marriage has not quite occurred to me till now because I was, and am, too busy finding out what career I wanted to pursue, and once I took the decision, it was a question of running to reach the finishing post.

You are quite a celebrity now, aren't you?

I am no judge of that, but it is true that in the process of my work, I am always rubbing shoulders with high profile celebrities myself. The publication of the novel *Grace* has kind of, given my image a boost with the media flooding me with interviews. I was featured in *India Today* as the leading party planner in the city. *Pot Pourri* Magazine featured me as a woman of words.

I won the award of 'Woman with a Voice' by KolEvents and Hope Foundation on International Women's Day in 2018. But I take this in my stride and also as a part of my vocation that places high value on a person's high visibility in the media. So for me, it is a professional requirement that is being fulfilled by others, and I thank them for that.

What is your first novel *Grace* all about?

It is a novel about the relationships of a single woman, Kavita, revealed over conversations with an old friend Rana. I have chosen an unusual structure. Kavita, the protagonist, engages in several conversations with Rana, an old friend she chances upon after a long time. They begin to talk and over several such sessions over coffee, Kavita opens up on her relationships with different men, each of who become part of her emotional evolution and also, a learning experience unto itself. It is not as if Rana and Kavita fall in love. It is about their conversations that brings out the several relationships with men Kavita went through.

How did the novel proceed once you began the actual function of writing?

The actual process of writing evolved into an understanding that did not demand any concrete answers or any realisation of Kavita to justify herself. I just wanted to let go and remain spontaneous, so that nothing seems forced. The name 'Grace' appeared spontaneously too. I look upon it as an act of surrender without trying to analyse the script of life. I did not feel that Kavita needed to justify herself. Love does not necessarily have any rhyme or reason. It just happens and to me, love is Grace.

This switching over from journalism to creative fiction. How do you explain this?

As a journalist, I used to write about a slice of life by collecting smaller but significant stories from all around us. I always knew that I wanted to write more, share more. A novel allows you the space to take your reader through an emotional journey by an intimate connection with the characters and their destinies, and I wanted to explore and establish that personal moment with my readers.

Have you explored creative fiction before this novel?

My poems, short stories and translations have been published on various platforms like *Muse India*, *The Daily Star*, *Bengal Lights* and others publications and portals. But I always wanted to write a novel and *Grace* is the result of years of dreaming.

What difference do you find between fact and creative fiction writing?

For me, both are equally fun and exciting. When you are writing factual experiences, you need to add a bit of imagination and intuition too so that it becomes an interesting and engaging read. And when you are writing creative fiction, you need to add some factual foundation too so that

it's believable. The act of writing itself is an addiction for me, and I cannot think of a life beyond words.

You keep on saying "love is universal." How do you explain this vis-à-vis *Grace*?

Grace has five love stories that Kavita unravels to her friend Rana. *Grace* is as much my story as it is everyone else's man or woman. Many of my friends felt they could identify with one of these stories that is supposed to be Kavita's experience. Never mind how personal and "different" our romantic experiences are, basically, all these experiences are linked in some way or the other. That is why I believe that love is universal. All of us go through the same highs and lows, but under different conditions, time, and place, and with different people. *Grace* is most certainly a major part of my growing up. The stories have been generously borrowed from my private life.

The structure - Then and Now, is novel. How did you get it and why?

This idea came to be spontaneously. I did not want to place *Grace* in any particular time frame. The year, time, day etc are not important. What is crucial is the narrative and the journey of Kavita and Rana. The book is written in a conversational format, which can happen anywhere and anytime. I would want any reader from any background to be able to relate to the stories. That's why I kept it to "Now" and "Then" – because the main narrative cuts across the five stories.

What do you think, is the USP of *Grace*?

Grace is a fast-paced novella and is meant to hook readers from the first page. It is a very temporary book written in a manner to reflect the nature of the relationships and flow of the story. I did not want to make it too complicated because it's meant to feel like a companion and not a philosophical tome on love. I hope my readers will enjoy it!

Hints on time management you might want to share?

It is difficult, but it all depends on doing what you love to do rather than what you must do, whether you like it or not. PR is not only my source of sustenance, but also gives me immense satisfaction as a creative and professional person. I get to meet so many people, ideate for them and build their brands. I love to create success stories for the companies that I work for. Writing is my life. I cannot see myself doing anything else. Even as a PR professional, I get to write. So it helps me to maintain the balance between the two. And most importantly, it might be a cliché, but we will always find time for what we love to do!



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.

(...continued from page 15)

In a seminar on Literature and Cinema organised by the Department of English at Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, in collaboration with United States – India Educational Foundation, Kolkata, Amitava Nag, Editor of *Silhouette* film magazine, drew parallels between the characters of Iago in Shakespeare's play *Othello*, and Langda Thyagi from Vishal Bharadwaj's celluloid interpretation of the play in his 2006 film *Omkara*. With video clips and stills and posters, Nag brought out the character-centric differences between Iago and Langda Thyagi, pointing out how Bharadwaj underlined Thyagi's villainy with a lot of rationale, showing his sympathy to the character, very different from the way Shakespeare had delineated Iago as a black villain without justification for his villainy, and without shades of grey. So, perceptions differ, and whether we agree with it or not, does not really matter, because in the final analysis, the cinema will stand independent of the literature it is based on, while the literary work will remain unchanged through time and space.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas*, Guru Dutt's *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*, Vijay Anand's *Guide*, Shyam Benegal's *Sooraj Ka Saatvan Ghoda*, Mrinal Sen's *Oka Oorie Katha*, Satyajit Ray's *Sadgati*, Bimal Roy's *Sujata*, are bound by the common thread – they are all celluloid adaptations of original literature. *Devdas* has had around 18 cinematic versions in several Indian languages over the years. It was authored by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee who found a publisher for the book many years after he first wrote it. *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* was based on a classic novel by Bimal Mitra from his personal experience of having lived through the zamindari system in West Bengal. *Guide* was based on R.K. Narayan's novel of the same name, but the author was very angry with the celluloid version of his work because the original story, in his opinion, was needlessly glamourised with big stars, lots of music, and chutzpah. But commercially, *Guide* turned out to be a very good film that pulled the audience again and again to the theatres, and was a big box office success. But critic Arati Rajan-Menon does not agree. She writes: "Read the book and you find the cinematic version only a shadow of Rosy, the character portrayed by Waheeda Rehman, read the book and you find the cinematic version only a shadow of her literary genesis, devoid of the many textures and nuances that make her one of the most enthralling characters in literature."

Dharamvir Bharati's *Sooraj Ka Saatvan Ghoda* was a novel that did not lend itself at all to a celluloid interpretation. But Shyam Benegal decided to make the film precisely because it was assumed that it could not be made into a film. Sen's *Oka Oorie Katha* and Ray's *Sadgati* were both based on the works of Munshi Premchand. Though Sen was roundly criticised by Premchand scholars for taking away a very significant segment of the story, *Sadgati* remains a memorable film till date. *Sujata* was taken from one of the earlier works of Subodh Ghosh. Bimal Roy took a lot of cinematic liberties with the original novel, but the results were excellent. He did not glamourise the story, and it was shot in black-and-white with marvellous performances by the lead actors. *Sujata* remains archived as the best film on



A still from *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*

Celluloid adaptation from literature offers the filmmaker a challenge to pick the writer's work and through this transposition, make it as powerful, credible, popular and appealing on film as it is in its printed form. It offers infinite scope for argument, discussion, debate and questioning among spectators who have read the novel, and also accept the challenge the director throws up to come and watch the film, compare it with the original literary work, comment on it, criticise it and so on.

Sooraj Ka Saatvan Ghoda is considered to be one of the foremost instances of metafiction in 20th Century Hindi literature. The film version is not only a classic example of the transcription/interpretation of literature on celluloid, but is also one of the few celluloid explorations into the lost art of storytelling. He weaves the literary qualities of a novel in print and the art of oral story telling seamlessly through word-pictures to place them aesthetically and form a cohesive and harmonized whole in another medium and language – film. *Sooraj Ka Saatvan Ghoda*, a lyrical and poetic film, rich in its imagery and its characterisation, not always a part of Benegal's oeuvre, is Benegal's best film till date.

How a piece of literature is to be treated while placing it on film, is best left to its interpretation by the one who wishes to transpose it from word to visuals, sound and music. It need not remain confined to celluloid 'translation' of an original piece of written work. It is for the filmmaker to judge and decide on whether a particular piece of literary work (fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry) in any genre or language or form, that inspires his creative energies should be a translation of the original work, an interpretation, a critique, a comment or a question.

Cinema expresses the private vision of the filmmaker, be it in accurate imitation, political propaganda or visual abstraction – and the critical emphasis should be on the work of art – the film – itself, and not on its comparison with the literature it springs from. The basic edge that cinema has over the written word is that the viewing,

understanding, experiencing and identification (of characters) within a film are not based on the essential presumptions of literacy and basic education. Cinema, by its very presence, makes itself available to a much wider viewership than the readership a literary work can ever command.



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.

(...continued from page 14)



The drawbacks of traditional literacy

The problem with the traditional definition of literacy is that it views the end product of instruction, rather than seeing literacy as an ongoing complex process. It is text-centric rather than reader-writer-centric. It makes literature the emperor, while looking down upon other genres of communication.

Literacy, or rather multiliteracy, today, is about understanding the multiple discourses and forms of representation in public and professional domains. It includes oral and vernacular genres, transforming the definition of literacy to also include not just reading and writing, but communicating, by collaborating and making connections.

Those who can steer through social emotional literacy, financial literacy, digital literacy, environmental literacy, visual literacy, media literacy, cultural literacy; the people who understand "purpose, point of view and persuasion", are those who will survive in this bewildering world. Because being literate in a language is no longer as simple as it used to be. Literacy now requires ability and knowledge, and the capacity to situate that knowledge in a particular context. It is linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural. Which also means we have to be careful how we use words; how politically correct and people-sensitive our preferred use of words need to be. After all, at no other time in the world has so much content been produced.

Changes in digital communication technologies have impacted society so rapidly that educational researchers, policy makers and teachers are challenged by the application of these changes for curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment. The multimedia facilities of digital technologies, particularly mobile hand-held devices and touch pads, have brought about a culture and set of people who process several modes of communication, simultaneously. Gaming and social networks have added to this. Thus the traditional concept of literacy as reading and writing has changed as these rarely occur in isolation within digital communication. Many students are engaged in more sophisticated use of technologies outside school, than they experience at school. Which is perhaps why more and more schools have adapted to the times and introduced laptops, iPads, or students' own devices in the classroom. Moreover, participation in gaming and social networking has created significant social and cultural change. Multiliteracy is the reality of today. The game is on!



Vinitha Ramchandani is an editor and published author of more than 20 books for children. Four of her stories are part of the English school curriculum in both the CBSE and ICSE Boards. She is associated with children's content and writes a fortnightly column, 'Mumbai for Kids' where she reviews children's spaces in the city. A content strategist, an advocate of children's right to play, she is working on an Empathy Project with schools and publishing houses and looking for empowered ways to re-introduce empathy into children's learning and interaction.

What did Dr. Ambedkar want?

While India follows the Parliamentary form of democracy, would the Presidential form suit it better? asks Jashwant Mehta. In fact, the architect of our Constitution Dr. B.R. Ambedkar would have ultimately preferred the latter, he avers.

While most of us have regarded Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as having played a major role in the drafting of the Constitution which provided for the Parliamentary system, it is significant to note that just seven months prior to his being appointed Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, i.e., in March 1947, Ambedkar had himself strongly endorsed the Presidential system of democracy.

As mentioned by him in the memorandum to the Constituent Assembly's sub-committee on fundamental rights, "The British Cabinet System has undoubtedly given the British people a very stable system of government. Question is, will it produce stable governments in India? The chances are very slender. In view of the clashes of castes and creed, there is bound to be a plethora of parties and groups in the legislatures in India. If this happens, it is possible, nay certain, that under the system of Parliamentary democracy like the one that prevails in England, under which the Executive is bound to resign upon an adverse vote in the legislature, India may suffer from instability of the Executive. For it is the easiest thing for groups to align and realign themselves at frequent intervals and for petty purposes, and bring about the downfall of the government. The present solidarity of what are called major parties cannot be expected to continue. Indeed, as soon as the problem of the British in India is solved, the cement that holds these parties together will fail away. Constant overthrow of the government is nothing short of anarchy." He had further added, "Taking all these considerations together, there is no doubt that the British type of the Executive is entirely unsuited to India. Indians who are used to the English form of the Executive forget that this is

not the only form of democratic and responsible government. The American form of Executive is an equally good type of democratic and responsible form of government."

Why the U-turn, then?

While Ambedkar had wholeheartedly endorsed the Presidential system upon being appointed Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he seemed to have changed his viewpoint in support of Parliamentary democracy.

Ambedkar's advocacy in favour of the Parliamentary system later on mainly revolved around the concept of 'responsibility versus stability.' According to him, if there was a guarantee of tenure (as in the Presidential system), the government could be prone to behave arbitrarily as against the Parliamentary system, wherein the government would behave more responsibly on account of a fear of losing the majority in Legislature. Says Bhanu Dhamija in his book, *Why India needs The Presidential System*, "According to Ambedkar, it was not possible to have a system that guaranteed both, a government staying in power, while at the same time staying responsible. Therefore, one has to choose. The choice they had made is to have a government that was more responsible at the expense of it being less stable. The reason all executive and legislative functions were fused into one centre of power was to ensure that the entire government fell if it behaved irresponsibly. He argued that multiple centers of power diluted the government's accountability, and therefore it was best to deny the President any powers."

Some members were astonished at how Ambedkar had



Dr. Ambedkar, the main architect of our Constitution

relinquished his long-held views against the Parliamentary system. Hussain Imam, a member of the Constituent Assembly from Bihar, took exception to the fact that in his presentation to the Assembly, Ambedkar was less than forthcoming about the strengths of the US Presidential system. He noted that he was "surprised that a learned *pundit* of constitutional law like Dr. Ambedkar should have skipped over the fact that the responsibility of the non-parliamentary executive is not less than that of the parliamentary executive. If it is examined, it will be found that the committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate in USA exercise far greater control than the control exercised by the House of Commons."

"I was really surprised to hear Dr. Ambedkar while he was introducing the Draft Constitution," said a bewildered Kazi Syed Karimuddin, "praising the system of parliamentary executive, while in his book *States and Minorities*, he has advocated that the system of non-parliamentary executive is best suited to protect the minorities..."

Another member reminded Ambedkar what he himself thought of legislative bodies. 'I will use his own words,' said Z. H. Lari. "It was wiser not to trust the legislatures to prescribe forms of administration." With respect, I say he is mainly right.

Our experience of the actual performance of the system in the last seven decades has clearly established that the founding fathers of our Constitution had failed to visualise the ground realities that were likely to occur in the model adopted by us. There is neither accountability nor responsibility; instead, the lust and greed to grab and enjoy the fruits of power have been the hallmarks of the system adopted by us. In fact, separation of powers along with the direct election of the Executive heads of government at all levels (city, state and nation), in addition to a freedom to induct the best talent, provides for far better assessment of the Executive by the Legislature than our model, where there is neither the accountability nor the responsibility of either the Executive or the Legislature.

Ambedkar disowned the Constitution?

Within three years of the adoption of India's Constitution, Ambedkar seemed to have expressed his own frustration in no uncertain terms when he spoke in the Rajya Sabha on 2nd September, 1953. "Sir, my friends tell me that I have made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody." There is an aura surrounding Ambedkar as the framer of India's Constitution. His own clarification of the role played by him in this regard is quite significant. In this very speech in Rajya Sabha, he has reported to have said: "People always keep on saying to me: 'Oh, you are the maker of the Constitution.' My answer is "I was a hack. What I was asked to do, I did much against my will." As the House was brought to order, K. S. Hegde, who was also a Supreme Court judge in the latter part of his career, expressed shock: "It came with ill grace from Dr. Ambedkar when he said that his heart was

not in the Constitution, that he was merely perpetuating a fraud, to put it in the mildest form."

Within seven years of framing India's Constitution, Ambedkar passed away in 1956. Had he lived long enough to watch the performance of the system and the political developments that took place in the subsequent years, his frustration would have reached such a level that in all probability he would have taken the lead to revamp the Constitution in favour of the Presidential System, which he had strongly endorsed earlier.

Within three years of the adoption of India's Constitution, Ambedkar seemed to have expressed his own frustration in no uncertain terms when he spoke in the Rajya Sabha on 2nd September, 1953. "Sir, my friends tell me that I have made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody."

In fact, apart from Ambedkar, Dr. K.M. Munshi, a leading member of Constituent Assembly who had endorsed parliamentary democracy had also changed his mind in favour of presidential democracy. As stated by him (in 1964), 'If I had to make a choice again, I would vote for the Presidential form of Government so that, whenever the politicians fail the country there is at least one strong

organ of the State capable of tiding over the crisis.'

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was India's first President and was also President of the Constituent Assembly, after having watched the performance of our legislature, had commented: "It often happens that (in the U.S.A.) the Democrats support the (Republican) President not only by their votes, but also by their speeches. Similarly, it also often happens that the Republican members vote and speak against proposal by the President who belongs to their party. It means that the members are elected like the President on party tickets but after election they cease, in practice, to belong to the party and act in a way which they consider best for the nation. It may therefore be said truly that they have always a national Government and not a party Government in office. We must investigate and find if this analysis is correct. If so, we must then consider how far we are right in copying the British party system in all its details."

Ex-President Dr. Venkataraman, who was also a member of the Constituent Assembly, had in fact moved a resolution in an AICC session in 1965 to change the Constitution in favour of Presidential democracy. The object of the move as narrated was "considering the increasing instability and weakness in administration caused by the growth of dissidents and groupism in the legislative parties in the country, considering the tendency towards the multiplicity of parties springing up like mushrooms incapable of giving the country an alternative stable government, considering the grave dangers to the territorial integrity of India from the threats of aggression from our neighbours and realising the imperative need for stable governments, both at the Centre and States, the All-India Congress Committee resolved that the Congress Working Committee may be requested to constitute a Committee to examine and report whether the present Cabinet form of Government at the Centre and States may be...

(continued on page 36...)

Faux nature, fake wildlife?

Most of us enjoy visiting the zoo, don't we? But have we ever paused to think whether these are really doing the animal world any good, even if zoos are increasingly positioning themselves as conservation centres. Harshad Sambamurthy examines the issue.

Throughout its past, the zoo has — even in its original form as a private garden — been a powerful symbol of dominion, projecting the archetypal image of humans as the rulers of nature. Eventually, after being converted into public menageries, the role of the zoo was predominantly that of an entertainer. Ironically, the contemporary zoo has metamorphosed into an emblem of conservation policy, with humans playing the role of wildlife saviours, rather than rulers. Zoological institutions are now justified and legitimised as havens of wildlife protection that rescue the animal kingdom from the consistent encroachment of industrialisation and urbanisation. Audaciously, the modern zoo positions itself as a brush with the wild!

Lopsided relationship?

Zoos are demonstrative of our lopsided relationship with nature. Our desperation to bridge a 'nature gap'—born from the alienation of a rapidly urbanising humanity — has instead led to intervention efforts, like zoos, that hopelessly aspire to re-establish the human-nature nexus, and with it, invariably, promote a false conservation ethic. This alienation is what allows for the continued pervasiveness of zoos; used as mediums by which humans may re-develop a connection — albeit illusory, and unequal — with animals.

As monuments of 'fake nature', zoos are morally wrong; and as supposed edifices of conservation, essentially paradoxical, and nothing more than a microcosm of our collective frantic need to attempt to conserve animals by containing them within boxed enclosures for inspection, implanting an outlook of human primacy. In zoos, the structure of the

human-animal encounter is organised in accordance with human interests; how humans are able to observe and inspect their 'objects' of investigation. The interaction sought becomes an impossibility when the 'real' animals disappear — disrupted by their artificial conditions of living — and the conditions for viewing them are undermined.

A major reason for the existence of zoos is that they preserve species that would otherwise become extinct. In New York not too long ago, I learnt of the Bronx Zoo's successful snow leopard breeding programme (started in the 1960s) that has since produced 75 surviving cubs, more than any other zoo in North America. Wild animals in zoos — especially endangered ones — are marketed as champions for their species, helping raise public awareness and funds to support education, research and on-ground conservation activities. In the Bronx Zoo, Leo the snow leopard serves as an ambassador for snow leopard conservation. The exhibit's interpretive panels tell Leo's story and the major issues threatening snow leopard populations to the zoo's two million annual visitors. Moreover, a children's publication; 'Leo the Snow Leopard: The True Story of an Amazing Rescue' chronicles Leo's early life; aimed at inspiring coming generations to care about snow leopard conservation.

With hundreds of millions of visitors each year, accredited zoos are unique among conservation organisations because they have a direct connection to the public. At the Bronx Zoo, the snow leopard exhibits are claimed to furnish the animals with mental and physical stimulation, offering the cats some choice and control over their environment; allow-

ing visitors to observe the animals as they would otherwise appear in their natural habitat. This is misleading, for in being taken from the wild and confined within zoos, animals are prevented from gathering their own food, developing their own social orders, and behaving in ways both natural and instinctual. However intricate or detailed the exhibition is in its imitation of the wild, it will in reality, always fall short of 'real' nature.

Human intervention at the Bronx Zoo serves the purpose of perhaps raising awareness on snow leopard conservation amongst its visitors, however, it is difficult to ascertain with exact precision how much the public has learnt about snow leopards and their endangered status. A literature review commissioned by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association concluded that "little to no systematic research has been conducted on the impact of visits to zoos on visitor conservation knowledge, awareness, affect, or behaviour". Scholars have found the average person "only marginally more appreciative, better informed, or engaged in the natural world" following a visit to the zoo. The packaging of nature for the entertainment of humans erroneously places us at the top of an imagined hierarchy that further instills an incorrect sense of our place in the natural order. A clear — and unnecessary — distinction is made between humans and other animals, and this is unfortunate, for such education is grossly fallacious.

Captive and miserable

Certain scholars justify the existence of zoos by claiming that the artificial environment offers some of the "accoutrements of the wild" whilst



Penguins are bred in captivity too: Does this affect the genetic and behavioural patterns of the animals?

providing shelter and safety from some of its main stresses such as predation and starvation. Mainstream animal welfare advocates contend that the welfare of wild animals is diminished under human care, and that it is inconceivable for zoos to provide for or replicate the richness of experience, freedom of movement and quality of life animals would otherwise experience if left in nature; for there is no duplication of the wild. Sadly, after a few years in captivity, animals begin to diverge both behaviourally and genetically from their relatives in the wild. Dolphins and orcas for example have miserable records in captivity; lousy breeding success, shorter life spans and overall poorer health.

As humans continue to develop, deforest and urbanise, animals are forced to live in fragmented worlds. The intervening human solution to save these animals through zoos is unethical and unsound. In this sense, perhaps the animals themselves can be deemed 'fake', commodities for the purpose of entertainment; their natural capabilities and capacities hindered by the artificiality of their setting. Insofar as zoos provide recreational opportunities for the public, human intervention in the

guise of entertainment or conservation does not warrant sufficient justification for the existence of zoos or for holding animals in captivity. Amusement was certainly an important reason for the establishment of early zoos and it remains an important function of contemporary zoos as well. Entertainment invokes interest, and thus makes education possible, but what is it that we want people to learn from visiting zoos? Surely the educational or entertainment-driven benefits of zoos can be obtained through videos, lectures, or computer simulations? Being centres of synthetic and fabricated 'nature', are zoos even required?

'Fake' nature, and the replication of 'nature' as a concept demonstrates a falsehood; human authority and mastery over the animal world. As zoos brand themselves as saviours of wildlife, the only option for continued survival of wildlife that concurrently ensures and safeguards human progress is in a world that is regrettably real, where tigers — or any other species — may only be able to survive in manufactured environments of human design. This is a scenario where the tiger itself is but an asset, an object of entertainment, a

captive-bred entity as unnatural as its environment.

If all tigers in the wild went extinct, we are reassured by the fact that there are some left in zoos which can be used for captive breeding purposes. The species is not entirely gone. However, and macabrely so, this nonchalant attitude very much echoes the proverbial "can't have the cake and eat it too"! Keeping species isolated in 'sheltered' zoos only serves to postpone extinction; allowing for the continued existence of endangered species in an 'artificial wilderness' which thereby curtails, in some regard, progress made in the direction of conserving those same species in 'actual wilderness'. Zoos are like a moral insurance against extinction! Our alienation from nature, coupled with an extrinsic view on how we can solve a conservation or endangered species issue (i.e., captive breeding) only provides a short-term solution; there is no fundamental intrinsic change in how we both view nature and execute conservation initiatives. Perhaps, we must then ask ourselves whether it is really better for tigers, or any animal for that matter, to live in artificial surroundings, or to go extinct?



Harshad is an environmental educator with a strong foundational background in sustainability. A recent graduate of NYU's Environmental Conservation Education Programme, Harshad is striving to develop an environmental consciousness that recognises the inherent link between culture and nature by using creative educational and pedagogical tools like storytelling and folklore. He is based in Chennai. He can be reached at: harshad.samba@gmail.com

A timeless play

Every once in a while, a play from ancient literature makes its appearance in contemporary theatre, and charms us with its storytelling and relevance. Prof. Avinash Kolhe reviews the play *Mrcchakatika* which was performed in Mumbai recently.



A still from the play *Mrcchakatika*

Ancient Indian literature is full of meaningful, classic plays, ranging from *Shakuntalam* to *Mrcchakatika*, which portray a wide range of human emotions, right from romance to political revolution. The connoisseurs of theatre should thank the Nehru Centre, Mumbai, for hosting every year a festival of musical plays. This year the festival was flagged off on 8th August, and concluded on 11th August, 2018. This was the 26th edition of this festival in which one got to see perhaps the first political play of ancient India, 'Mrcchakatika'.

The ancient play

The play *Mrcchakatika* (The Little Clay Cart) is attributed to Sudraka, generally thought to have lived sometime between 3rd century BC and 5th century AD. Scholars hold that of all the Sanskrit dramas, *Mrcchakatika* remains one of the most celebrated and widely performed plays in the

West. It is a play in ten acts. The most noteworthy feature of this play is that it departs from Sanskrit Natyashastra, which argues that a play should be based on the lives of nobility. Instead, this play depicts the lives of ordinary peasants, slaves, and poor people. The play is supposed to have been derived from an earlier Sanskrit play *Charudatta in Poverty* by playwright Bhasa. Unlike other Sanskrit plays, this does not borrow its storyline from epics or mythology, another huge departure from the tradition of Sanskrit plays. This is generally regarded as model of *prakarana* plays, as opposed to *nataka* plays like Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam*. More often than not, a *prakarana* play depicts middle-class concerns and conflicts.

The play staged at the Nehru Centre's festival was based on a Marathi adaptation by Govind Ballal Deval (1855-1916), who reduced the original ten act play into seven acts.

This adaptation was ready in 1887, and was staged by the Kirloskar Natak Mandali. The modern version staged at the Nehru Centre festival was an edited version in two acts, and was produced by a Pune-based drama group 'Bharat Natya Sanshodhan Mandir'. It is a musical play that was highly popular in the heydays of musical plays in Marathi, which entertained generations of Maharashtrian audiences in the closing decades of the 19th century, and early decades of the 20th century.

The plot

Charudatta is a young, rich man of Ujjaini city, the locale of the play. He is generous to a fault, and in the process of charity, has impoverished himself and his family. Despite the poor conditions he is living in now, his reputation as an honest and intelligent man remains intact. People still flock to him to seek his advice on many matters.

The play opens when Vasantsena, a courtesan of wealth and beauty, is chased by Samasthanaka, a half-mad brother-in-law of King Palaka and his retinue. Vasantsena seeks shelter in Charudatta's residence when soldiers try to get physical with her. Vasantsena is already enamoured of Charudatta whom she has seen in the temple of Kama. Charudatta is already married and has a son, Rohasena who does not come on the stage in this version of the play, neither does Charudatta's wife. Despite this, their love blossoms and she entrusts Charudatta, her new lover, with a casket of jewelry to ensure more meetings.

Unfortunately, Vasantsena's plans come to naught as a thief Sharvilaka steals this casket from Charudatta's home. Sharvilaka is not a full-time thief. He steals these jewels as he wants to buy the freedom of Madanika, who is Vasantsena's slave and confidant. Vasantsena immediately recognises her jewelry when presented to her as payment, and yet decides to let Madanika go. Vasantsena wants to inform Charudatta of this new development, but before that Charudatta sends her a very expensive necklace to make good the loss of her jewelry. Maitreyaa, a poor Brahmin and a close friend of Charudatta,

warns him against sending expensive necklace to Vasantsena as he fears that the courtesan is really after Charudatta's remaining wealth.

As their love progresses, Samasthanaka reappears in the plot, and wants to kidnap Vasantsena. His feelings are not reciprocated by Vasantsena. Enraged, he strangles Vasantsena and hides her under a pile of leaves. Still seeking vengeance, he promptly accuses Charudatta of this crime. Charudatta could have been hanged, but for the timely arrival of those jewels that nullifies the crime. As per the tradition of almost all ancient Indian plays, all is well that ends well.

The performance

The version presented by the Bharat Natya Mandir, Pune, is an edited version of the play adapted by Deval in Marathi. In the original play, Charudatta's crime is pronounced guilty and is to be executed, and his wife is about to throw herself onto the funeral pyre. Both are saved. Meanwhile, Samasthanaka is arrested and the good prince Aryaka deposes the wicked king Palaka. Aryaka's first order is to restore the fortunes of Charudatta, and he also gives him an important post at his court. The play

ends on a happy note when Charudatta, true to his character, pleads with the King to forgive Samasthanaka. It is interesting to note that plays like *Mrcchakatika* still hold sway over audiences. The huge hall of Nehru Centre was almost full, thanks to the popularity of *Mrcchakatika* through the ages.

The lead role of Charudatta was essayed by Charudatta Aafale, a singer of repute, and was ably supported by Gauri Patil (Vasantsena), Dr. Ram Sathye (Maitreya), Sanjeev Mehendale (Sharvilak), Kavita Tikekar (Madanika), and Anand Panse (Samasthanaka). They all are competent singers and actors who hold the audience in thrall. Director Ravindra Khare has properly set the tone of the play. The stage decoration was taken care of by Vishwas Pangarkar and costumes by Rakesh Gholap. In musicals like this, music is an integral part of the show. Here Rahul Gole was on organ and tabla was played by Prathmesh Deodhar and mrudung by Manoj Bhandavalkar.

A historical play like *Mrcchakatika* demands a lot of detailing to carry conviction with the audiences. Khare ensured that these details were taken care of.



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

(...continued from page 30)

replaced by an Executive, directly elected by the people for a fixed term of years; and if so, to recommend consequential changes in the Constitution of India as appropriate".

Our parliamentary model has failed to provide for better governance due to its inherent weaknesses. We

have mind boggling scams such as 2G Spectrum, Coalgate, Common Wealth Games and many others where even an honest Prime Minister, in the absence of an absolute majority in the Parliament, remained a helpless and mute spectator as he had to 'compromise in coalition politics' as candidly agreed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. On the other hand, a Prime Minister belonging to the ruling party

having an absolute majority tends to behave in an autocratic manner. He enjoys far more powers than the President of U.S.A. where even the members of his own party are in a position to provide required checks on the President because of the freedom and separation of Executive from the Legislature. It is time now to seriously consider the truly democratic Presidential system for better governance.



Jashwant Mehta is an Architect and Consulting Engineer. He is a Convener for Forum for Presidential Democracy, a registered political party. He has authored several books like Presidential System – A better Alternative?, Quest for Better Democratic Alternative, Electoral Reforms, Presidential Democracy – The Need of the Hour, Eye Donation And Eye Banking in India, Vegetarianism, etc. His organisation website is: www.presidentialdemocracy.org

my HANUMAN CHALISA

The book 'my Hanuman Chalisa' by Devdutt Pattanaik re-introduces us to one of the most favourite chants of Hinduism. G. Venkatesh reviews this lovely interpretation.

Writer : Devdutt Pattanaik
Publisher : Rupa Publications India
Pages : 167
Price : ₹178
Year of Publication : 2017

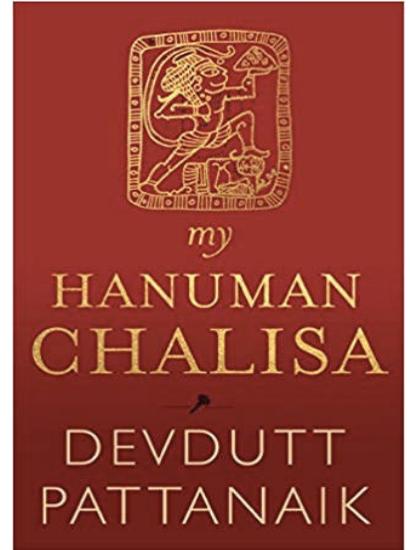
Devdutt Pattanaik, using the Tulsidas-creation Hanuman Chalisa, as his medium, portrays Hanuman not merely as a Vedic/Puranic metaphor for an embodiment of virtues, but rather as a secular demi-god with a celestial-cum-mortal parentage, inspired by and inspiring other mythologies and religions. In lucid English prose, which also expands the reader's vocabulary of Sanskrit terms, the author digs deeper and fans out wider at the same time, to try to understand the mind of the poet, Tulsidas. While doing so – verily a bold attempt to read between, behind and through the words of the couplets and quatrains, so to speak – he presents a convincing exposition of the 'idea of Hanuman' propounded by the poet as a prayer which may have been chanted a zillion times by several Indians over time, in times of anxiety, stress, fear, sadness and worry. These 'negatives' that attack all human minds invariably as long as Homo Sapiens walk the earth, can be converted to positive energy – hope, strength, fortitude and calmness – by the grace of Hanuman.

Chanting with true faith in one's heart is a sine qua non. Having entrenched a high degree of faith free of the risk of being corrupted by intellectualism, devotees of the Monkey-God can venture out to interpret the lines with the help of a book like *my Hanuman Chalisa*.

Illustrated by the author himself with great assiduousness (this is a highlight of the book), the interpretation of the Chalisa provides a complete 'darshan' – one sees, reads, thinks, understands and believes at the same time.

Apart from its philosophical and 'symbolical' nature, the book also provides information from folklore and different variants of the Ramayana, which may make many readers react with an 'Aha' expression on their faces. Intellectuals may tend to debunk myths and folklore and demand scientific and rational explanations. But the trick here for clever and wise readers is to try to look for and appreciate the underlying truths – the messages for good living, which religions ideally must propagate among adherents. The skill of any reader is in being able to grasp the writer's intentions. Just as Pattanaik has attempted to unearth the intentions in the poet's mind for his exposition of this 'idea of Hanuman', readers ought to make an attempt to find out what Pattanaik wishes to achieve by interpreting the Chalisa. In my opinion, succinctly, the message is this – Lord Hanuman is the embodiment of all possible virtues which humans could aspire for during their lifetimes. There are references to several of these in the book.

One would never associate a



monkey with restraint, stability and discipline, let alone obedience and respect. The mind has often been likened to a monkey, unable to remain focused. Using the Monkey God as a medium, the Chalisa promises what seems utterly impossible to a 'thinking man' – taming the monkey-like human mind, by appealing to Hanuman.

It was my original intention to quote from the explanations of each of the 40 quatrains, but I will desist from doing that. And yes, if readers are seeking to enhance their general knowledge of the Puranas and Vedas, they will stand to gain from this book – of course, this is not a tome, but nuggets of knowledge and wisdom are strewn around this 167-page must-read (for all devotees of Hanuman who have been chanting the Chalisa). Get a copy, read, pass it on as a gift, and let it keep moving on from reader to reader, as a blessing which ought to keep flowing.



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

DADA J.P. VASWANI

A spiritual journey of love (1918-2018)

Meeting Dada J.P. Vaswani (2 August 1918-2 July 2018) to many, was like meeting a living rainbow, a human being who shimmered with myriad colours, bringing joy into the lives of everyone who encountered him.

Ever-loving, the non-sectarian spiritual leader headed the Pune-based 'Sadhu Vaswani Mission', founded by his Guru, Sadhu T.L. Vaswani. It is a non-profit organisation headquartered in Pune, India, which is involved in social work and charity, and runs educational institutions and hospitals in the city, with centres around the world.

Dada spent 99 years in total sacrifice, strict discipline, and complete devotion, and as a result, achieved the status of an universal icon, a humanitarian, philosopher, educator, and orator, a visionary, an educationist, a celebrity, a crusader for animal rights, a spiritualist, a poet and writer, and above all, a 'Guru'.

World-renowned for promoting vegetarianism and animal rights, he captivated the hearts of millions of people worldwide. Dada lived by the ideal in letter and deed, of reverence for all life. He felt there would be no peace on earth unless we stop all killing. Animals he felt were our kindred, our kin, and it is the duty of man to protect them from the cruel knife of the butcher.

Regarded as a great inspirational writer and an apostle of non-violence, he has written over 150 self-help books on spiritualism and other topics. He also edited three monthly journals – the *Excelsior*, the *India Digest* and the *East and West* series. His writings gave practical tips on happy, successful, spiritual, and non-violent living. Running into several editions, several of his books have been translated into Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Kannada, Papi Mento, Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish, French, German, and Indonesian languages.

Though his conclusions were in divergence, the originality of his thesis, *The scattering of X-Rays by Solids*, impressed the eminent Indian scientist and Nobel laureate

C.V. Raman. His numerous speeches included venues like the British House of Commons in London, the Global Forum of Spiritual Leaders in Oxford, the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, at the United Nations in New York. He was also the recipient of the 1998 U Thant Peace Award, given by the United Nations, for his dedicated service to the cause of world peace. His birthday is celebrated as a Global Forgiveness Day. He initiated 'The Moment of Calm', a global peace initiative when people observe two minutes of silence, and choose to forgive one and all.



Born in Hyderabad, Sindh, into a pious Sindhi family, as one of seven siblings, Vaswani took two double promotions, to join High school much earlier. His father's death, however, plunged the family into a severe financial crisis, forcing him to move to a government school. He later did his M.Sc. in Physics and also worked as a teacher at St. Mira's College in Pune for some time, where he set a living example for teachers and students.

Though a brilliant student, he later gave up a career in academics in 1966, to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious uncle and guru, Sadhu T.L. Vaswani, who had set up the charity organisation. He symbolised the true spirit of the India of the rishis as a harbinger of love, peace. Dada died of old age related issues at the Mission, aged 99.

He succinctly put it. "Happiness, true happiness, is an inner quality. It is a state of mind. If your mind is at peace, you are happy. If your mind is at peace, but you have nothing else, you can be happy. If you have everything the world can give – pleasure, possessions, power - but lack peace of mind, you can never be happy".

A.RADHAKRISHNAN is a Pune based freelance writer who also dabbles in poetry and short stories.

MUTHUVEL KARUNANIDHI

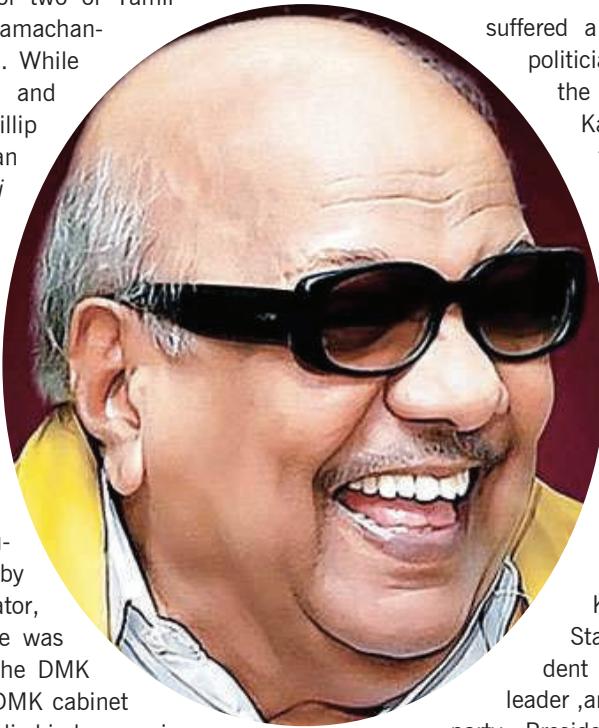
A revolutionary leader and a man of the masses (1924-2018)

A film script writer par excellence, a political wizard who wielded power as the Chief Minister (CM) of Tamil Nadu for five terms between 1969 and 2011, and a champion for the rights of the poor and downtrodden, Muthuvel Karunanidhi, who passed away in Chennai on 7 August 2018, strode the political firmament like a colossus. Born in an Isai Vellalar family on 30 June 1924 in a small rural hamlet, Thirukuvvalai in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, Karunanidhi evinced keen interest in the arts, especially writing. He was later to turn into a very successful scriptwriter in films, and was to play a pivotal role in the success of two of Tamil cinema's greatest stars M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) and Sivaji Ganesan. While his scripts for *Manthirikumari* and *Marudhanaatu Ilavarasi* gave a fillip to MGR's career, Sivaji Ganesan made his debut with *Parasakthi* released in 1952. This film stirred a hornet's nest as it lashed out at social evils of the time like untouchability.

Karunanidhi was highly influenced by rationalists like E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (EVR), and later by the founder of the Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) C.N. Annadurai, and was in turn mentored by them. A silver tongued orator, Karunanidhi or 'Kalaigarnar' as he was better known, steadily rose in the DMK and was a minister in the first DMK cabinet headed by Annadurai. The latter died in harness in 1969, and though Karunanidhi was lower down in the pecking order after frontline leaders like Nedunchezhan and Natarajan, he took over as the Chief Minister with a little help from his old friend, actor MGR. This was the first of his five stints as CM.

His connect with the masses was established with a single daily column in the family owned newspaper *Murasoli*, titled *Udanpirappe* (Brothers and sisters). As a Chief Minister he also waged a relentless battle for the rights of the states in a federal structure. The right of a CM to hoist the national flag on Independence Day too was secured by Kalaigarnar who became the first CM to do the honours on 15 August 1974. Karunanidhi opposed the Emergency imposed in 1975 by Indira Gandhi, tooth and nail, and many DMK leaders were jailed under the Maintenance of

Internal Security Act (MISA). The government too was dismissed. Karunanidhi was elected to the state Assembly thirteen times and at the time of his death, represented Tiruvarur in the assembly. In his long and eventful career he didn't taste a single defeat at the hustings. Although he never evinced any interest in embracing politics at the national level, he ensured that the DMK remained a force to reckon with in the national arena. Karunanidhi also played a significant role in the installation of three Prime Ministers, V.P. Singh, I.K. Gujral and H. D. Deve Gowda.



Karunanidhi's political career suffered a severe setback when actor politician MGR quit the DMK to form the All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). MGR, the eternal do-gooder on the silver screen, proved invincible, and till his death in 1987, Karunanidhi and the DMK could not unseat him. MGR's successor Jayalalitha too proved a formidable opponent for the DMK veteran, and though he could defeat her in the elections, she too, like MGR died in office with her party in power and the DMK in the opposition. Karunanidhi's younger son, Stalin, the party's Working President is the heir apparent of the leader, and is likely also to take over as party President, a post that Kalaigarnar occupied for over five decades.

The prolific scriptwriter also wrote novels, stories and plays. His novels *Romapuri Pandian* and *Thenpaandi Singham*, also made it to the small screen. Kalaigarnar's autobiography *Nenjuddku Needhi*, came out in six parts and turned out to be a best seller. Rich tributes were paid to the departed leader by among others, the President and the Prime Minister. But the outpouring of grief from every quarter of Tamil Nadu and the lakhs of mourners who bid him adieu by attending his funeral proved beyond doubt that he was really a man of the masses.

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

COL. MAGOD BASAPPA RAVINDRANATH, VRC

An ardent and brave patriot (1959-2018)

Aol. Magod Basappa Ravindranath was born on 15 May 1959. He hailed from Davangere district of Karnataka. His father, Magod Basappa, was a school teacher. Ravindra studied at Sainik School, Vijaypura. He was good in elocution and showed qualities of leadership early. He joined the National Defence Academy, and was commissioned into 2 Raj Rifle in 1980. His first posting was in Arunachal Pradesh, and later he was instructor in Infantry School, Mhow. He was commanding 2 Raj Rifle Battalion in 1999.

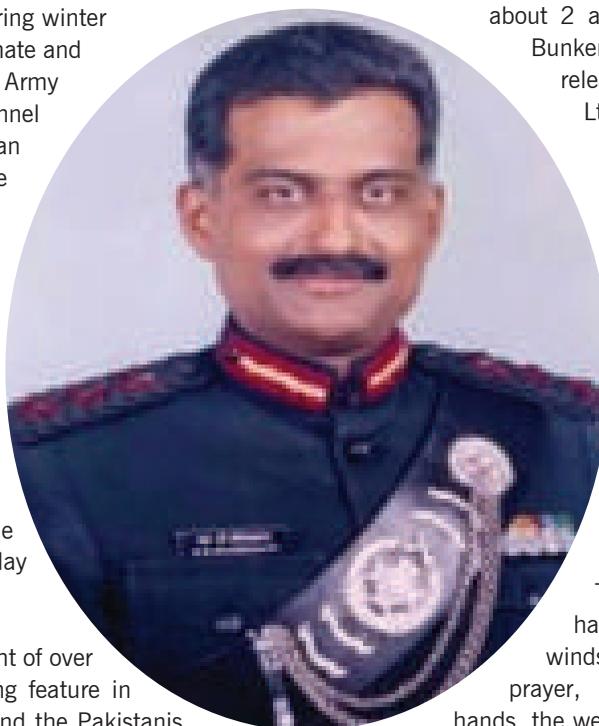
The Indian Army used to vacate certain posts in the heights of Kargil during winter due to extreme conditions of climate and terrain. In 1999, the Pakistan Army and para-military personnel occupied these posts. The Indian Army came to know about these intrusions when the shepherds reported about them, and a few patrols did not return. This intrusion was a threat to the supply line of Indian troops in Ladakh. India moved units located outside Kashmir for regaining control of the area. This was to ensure that posts in Kashmir were not weakened. The operation to push the intrusion was launched in May 1999.

Point Tololing at a height of over 15,000 feet was the dominating feature in the area. There was no cover, and the Pakistanis could observe the entire track. They brought heavy artillery fire on traffic on the National Highway NH 1A. It had to be cleared. The enemy was lodged in crevices and bunkers with artillery support. The attack on the feature commenced on 21 May 1999. It was a hard fight, and in three weeks, it was possible to consolidate at three points, 300 metres below the enemy positions. These points provided a base to launch further operations. 2 Raj Rif was given the task to capture Tololing Top and Black Rock.

Ravindranath went about the task in a meticulous manner, and personally led the reconnaissance teams. The teams were constantly under enemy fire from machine guns and artillery. Ravindranath made three teams to attack from multiple directions. The attack commenced at 0630 am on 12 June after intense artillery fire. Major Saxena was able

to get a foothold on the objective. Ninety volunteers under Major Vivek Gupta had assembled for the final assault. Amongst them were 11 Tomars who have a tradition of not returning from the battlefield defeated. They must do or die.

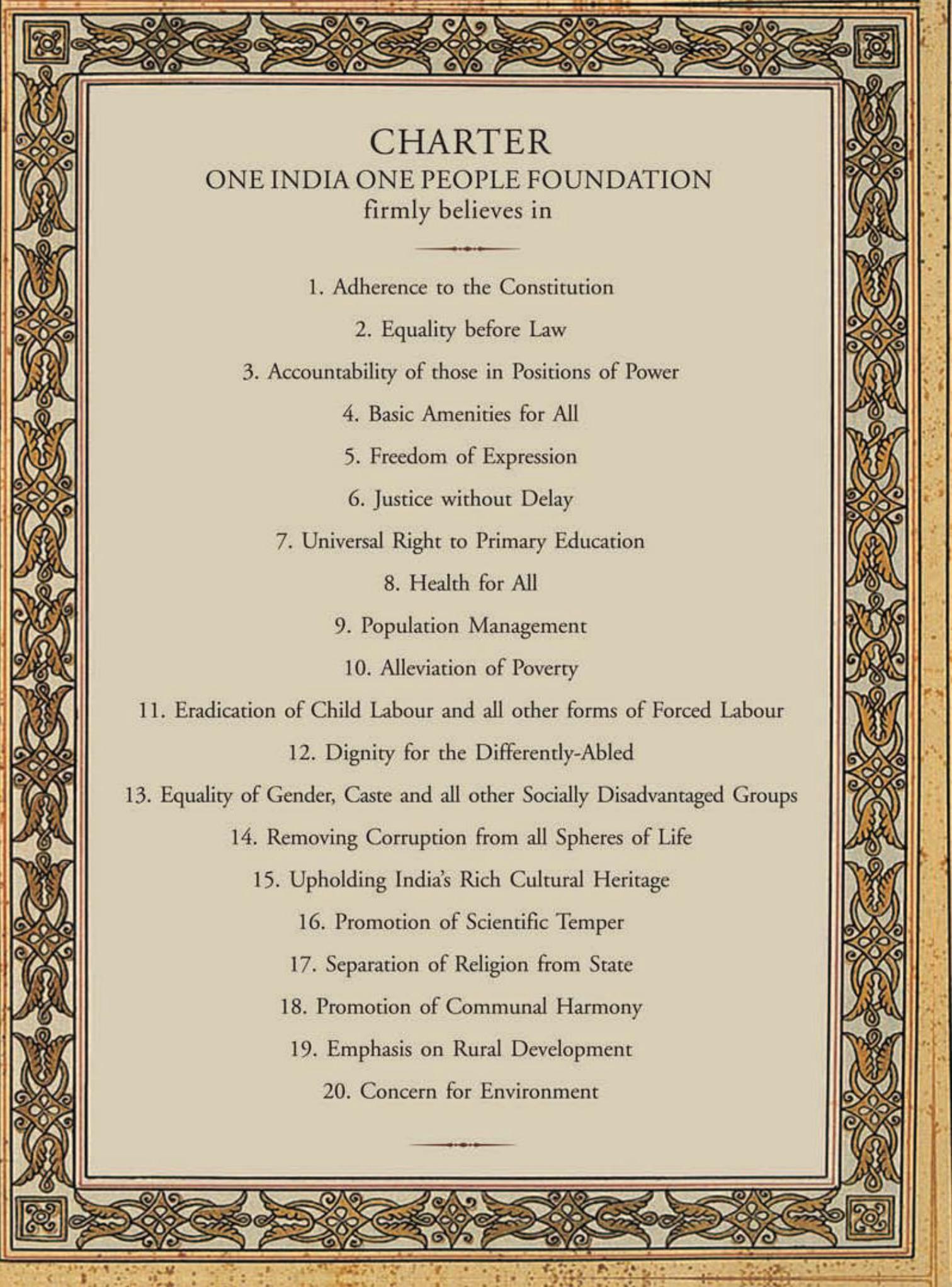
The progress was slow due to enemy fire from well built bunkers. In the attack on Black Rock, both the officers were casualties and Ravindranath rushed to the spot to encourage them. Major Vivek Gupta attacked a bunker and shot the three enemy soldiers, but he too was cut by enemy fire. The Top was captured by about 2 am, but a post called Barbed Bunker still remained. Ravindranath released the reserve company, and Lt. Thapar and 22 men attacked the bunker, singing songs from the movie Border.



By about 5 am, the entire feature was cleared. His personal influence ultimately led to beating back the counter-attacks and consolidating the position. In the morning of 13 June, he called the GOC Major General Mohinder Puri over radio and informed him the he was on Tololing. It was a hard fought, hand-to-hand battle, on the windswept icy slopes. Cover was a prayer, and bayonet, courage and hands, the weapons. On 14 June, his father received a much awaited call from Ravindranath, "Operation successful. We have captured Tololing." Ravindranath was awarded the Vr C (Vir Chakra) for his gallant leadership. Later in the day, he wept in his bunker when he saw the bodies of soldiers lying around him. The unit lost 4 officers, 2 JCOs and 17 soldiers.

The unit was one of the seven battalions to get a citation for Kargil war. Four MVCs were awarded to personnel for outstanding bravery. Col. Ravindrath settled down in Bangalore. He passed away on 8 April 2018 due to a cardiac attack while jogging in a park near his residence. He was cremated with full military honours.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



CHARTER
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION
firmly believes in

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

WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I the President of India first or an Indian first?

Am I the Prime Minister of India first or an Indian first?

Am I the Commander-in-Chief first or an Indian first?

Am I a supporter of any 'ism' first or an Indian first?

Am I a white-collar/blue collar worker first or an Indian first?

Am I a youth/senior citizen first or an Indian first?

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor
(October 9 १९३० – February 23 २००७)
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE