

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

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## Know India Better

The Kumbh Mela - A spiritual carnival

A Himalayan trek -To Hampta Pass and back

## Face to Face

Manohar Subbiah

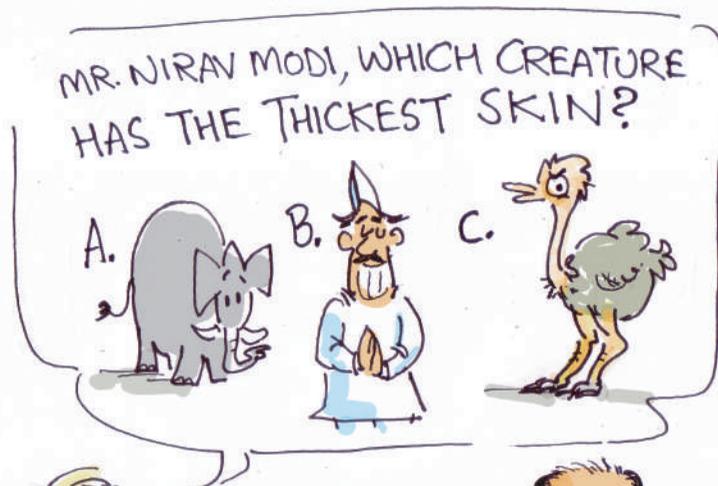
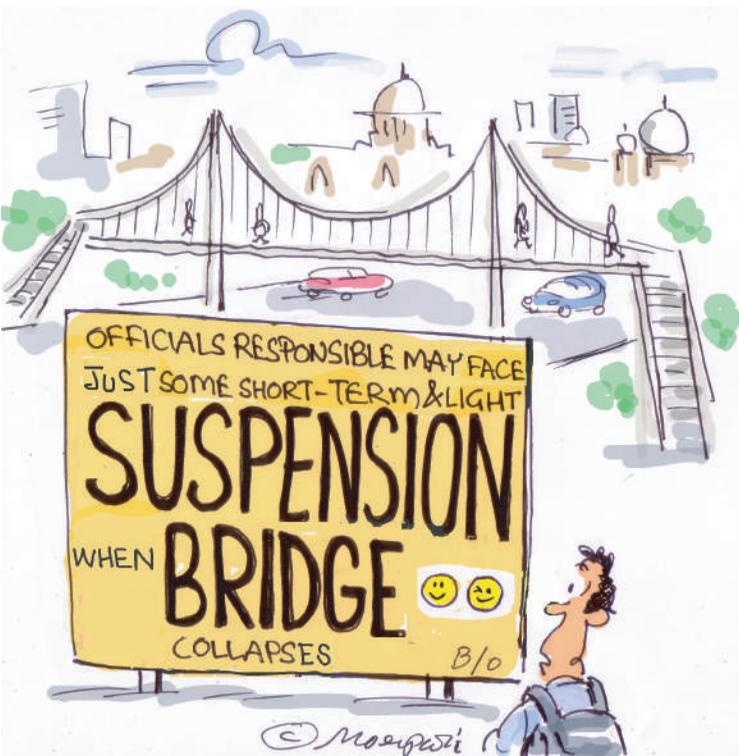
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Did 'Acche Din'  
finally dawn?



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# Did acche din finally dawn?

*While we may be living the reality of the Modi government, given the imminent elections, it's good to get a sound feel of how well this current dispensation has done on various fronts. C.V. Aravind does an in-depth analysis.*

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi assumed office at the centre on May 26, 2014. While the BJP on its own had a simple majority in the Lower House by winning as many as 282 seats, its tally along with its alliance partners stood at 336. The Indian National Congress which had ruled the country as a constituent of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) for ten years with Dr. Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister (PM), suffered one of its worst electoral reverses, and ended up with a measly 44 seats.

For PM Modi, it was baptism by fire, as his political career until then had been confined to his home state Gujarat, where he had risen to occupy the office of Chief Minister. His national ambitions had not been manifest as he had not even had a stint in either houses of Parliament. However, it was his speeches and rallies that turned the tide in the BJP, and in turn, the NDA's favour. The multiple scams that the UPA 2 government found itself enmeshed in, and the anti-incumbency factor too were factors, that paved the way for the NDA's emphatic victory.

## The highs and the lows

Much water has flown under the bridge since then, and the Modi government is now seeking a fresh mandate as the nation goes to the polls in April and May to elect a new government. The time therefore is opportune to debate the highs and the lows of the government, the plethora of poll promises that were kept, and those where there has been no progress to the desired level. At the outset, however, it has to be stated that this government unlike its predecessors took impactful decisions on various fronts, not shying away from biting the bullet when the need arose. The dilly dallying attitude of the

previous UPA government was clearly a thing of the past, as Prime Minister Modi led from the front in ushering in a series of reforms involving various sectors of the economy, and while some have been outstanding successes, more groundwork should have been done on others to make them more effective.

Demonetisation, which with a single stroke of the pen removed as much as 80% of the liquid cash in circulation by withdrawing the legal tender status for the ₹1000 and ₹500 notes, was a drastic step intended to purge the economy of black money. However, the move caused untold hardship to the citizens who had only limited access to the funds in their own accounts, and the main aim, viz., to cripple the black money economy, was largely unsuccessful. As per an RBI report, as much as 99% of the banned currency made its way to the banks within the specified time limit, clearly indicating that on this score, 'demonetisation' tasted only limited success.

The opinion of the economists on the efficacy of demonetisation as a tool to revive the economy too has been divided, and while some have appreciated the drastic and daring move, others have been less enthusiastic in their assessment. However, the general refrain is that demonetisation will begin to show

results in the future.

Another measure initiated by the Modi government that has considerably raised its stock, but has been roundly criticised by the opposition more for its rather shoddy implementation, is the Goods and Services Tax (GST). For the first time in the country, the tax on goods and services has been centralised, and uniform rates have been fixed for all goods and services across the country.



FARZANA

The government had taken a considered view while fixing the rates and has also shown a great deal of flexibility in the matter, and the highest tax bracket of 28% today exists only for a handful of items. The cumbersome procedures involved in filing GST returns too have been taken note of by the government, and steps have been taken to ease the procedural norms. The opposition have gone hammer and tongs against the government with regard to GST, and have alleged that thousands of small businesses have had to down their shutters after its introduction. More streamlining is certainly required, but there is no denying the fact that GST has turned out into a money spinner for the government, and the proceeds will be shared with the states as well. The government has also claimed that around one crore taxpayers have registered under GST. However, one drawback of the scheme is that commodities like petrol, diesel, alcoholic drinks and real estate, remain outside the purview of GST.

## For our soldiers, and end of a Nehruvian policy

The government also addressed a forty-year-old demand of war veterans with the introduction of the One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme which was welcomed all around, though here again a few anomalies are yet to be set right. Another gesture that warmed the hearts of the forces was the inauguration of a War Memorial in Delhi, a fitting tribute to the memory of all our brave 'jawans' who laid down their lives for the nation.

A government decision that raised several eyebrows was the dismantling of the Planning Commission that had been in existence since the Nehruvian period. The Modi government instead set up the Niti Aayog, with a mandate to function as a policy think tank that would enable the achievement of sustainable development goals, and enhance cooperative federalism by fostering the involvement of state governments. By choosing the right men for the job, the government has ensured that the Niti Aayog has been functioning like a well-oiled machine.

Another feather in the government's cap was the success of the Jan Dhan scheme, which was introduced to bring every family into the ambit of the banking sector. Often dubbed as 'Modi' accounts, these accounts could be opened in all state owned banks with nil balance, and beneficiaries of governments schemes including MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) would have the sums due to them deposited in the account. However, the government's assurance of depositing a specified sum into these accounts is yet to be implemented. Among other achievements the comparative growth in GDP over the years, success in keeping inflation in check, rise in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), rank among the positives as far as the government's progress is concerned.

Rural electrification, construction of roads etc., have ranked among the priorities of the Modi government. When the NDA took over in 2014, around 18,000 villages remained to be electrified, and the target has been achieved.

The construction of roads have also been intensified and around 27 km of new roads are being laid every single day. The 'Ayushman Bharat' insurance scheme which seeks to bring medicare within the reach of the poor is slated to benefit as many as 50 crore Indians who qualify for the scheme by satisfying the stipulated criteria.

Another novel experiment the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has been implemented throughout the country, and more than 7.25 lakh toilets have been constructed, and as many as 17 states and all the Union Territories have been declared as open defecation free. Several awareness campaigns stressing on cleanliness have also been launched.

The concern of the incumbent government towards women has been pronounced, with schemes like Ujjwala Yojana, wherein LPG connections are being made available to women in villages and other centres, and as against a set target of 8.0 crores, the achievement has been to the tune of 3.8 crores. The 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' initiative that provides security and caters to the welfare of the girl child, is also a major intervention and the existing laws have been tweaked to provide for the death penalty for rapists of girls under 12 years of age, and the punishment for rape of girls under 16 has been increased from 10 to 20 years.

The government's promise of providing two crore jobs a year has not materialised in a big way, and unemployment data has revealed a rise in the number of unemployed, and the growth has at best been sluggish. Statistics available in the public domain have revealed that as many as 10 million jobs have been lost between December 2017 and 2018.

## Modi and India's global image

On the international front, the Prime Minister has persevered to turn India into a fast growing and developing superpower, and his frequent foreign visits have earned the country considerable goodwill, and have also brought in a wealth of investment. India's battle against terrorism from across the border, resulting in the Uri air strike, and the more recent air strike in Balakot undertaken to avenge the deaths of 40 jawans in Pulwama in Jammu & Kashmir, have drawn no adverse reaction from any country in the world including Pakistan's strongest ally China, and this is ample testimony to the fact that the world stands as one in supporting India's moves to crush terrorist forces.

The failure to rein in fanatics who belong to the violent fringe and have been indulging in lynching of innocent men under the garb of 'gau rakshaks' has been a sore point, though the Prime Minister has in his speeches come down heavily on these miscreants. Targeting beef eaters too has hardly brought any credit to the country, which is the world's largest exporter of beef. The government should ensure that the long arm of the law reaches these anti-social elements who not only disturb the peace but also the communal harmony prevailing in the country.

The rising popularity ratings of PM Modi after



nearly five years at the helm are an indication that he has been able to touch a chord in the hearts of millions. The 'Mann Ki Baat' discourses over the radio and TV have always been a great success, and their reach has been phenomenal. Many of the government's priorities have been aired in these speeches including inter alia the war on corruption, the elimination of middlemen in defence and other deals and the steps taken against tax evaders. Although the PM has often come under fire from the opposition with the accusation being that his government caters largely to the upper crust and the crony capitalists, the grassroots man has never failed to impress on the fact that

he and his government have the interests of 134 crore Indians at heart.

The progress achieved on multifarious fronts vouchsafes the fact that the NDA government has largely delivered on its promises, and though a lot more needs to be done, 'acche din' might not be really far off. As PM Modi has observed, the years from 2014 to 2019 constituted a period of providing basic needs, and the next five years would concentrate on realising the ambitions of every Indian. This of course will hinge on the outcome of the elections, but it is certain that the NDA will seek a fresh mandate with a great deal of confidence, and with the PM himself slated to address as many as 150 rallies in the run-up to the elections, the stakes will certainly be high, and the battle hard, with no quarters taken or given.



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

## WHO AM I?

*I am a proud Indian,  
citizen of the world community,  
inhabiting this lonely ...  
but lovely little ... ★  
planet ...*



*Earth...* ★



# Upping the ante in Kashmir

*The Kashmir conundrum continues to be, and it is interesting to see what the current dispensation under PM Modi has wrought in the last five years, says Lt. Gen. Vijay Oberoi.*

**M**uch water has flown down the Jhelum in recent months. The government of Mehbooba Mufti in Jammu & Kashmir was sacked, Governor's Rule was imposed, and the military neutralised a record number of insurgents/militants, despite the sword of Damocles suspended over their heads in terms of lodging FIRs against them! It only happens in India! The internal situation has worsened, as reliance only on the operations of the army, without any changes in strategy to win over the populace, have resulted in further radicalisation, especially of young persons. While South Kashmir has seen maximum violence, other parts of the Valley have also been affected.

Panchayat elections held by the Governor without any preparatory perception management, turned out to be disastrous! Neither were discernable changes visible in the functioning of either the administration, or the central government interlocutors.

## The Pulwama attack, and what it revealed

In this milieu, the militants kept increasing their activities, despite the high level of their neutralisation by the army. They have now upped the ante considerably by the suicidal terror attack at Pulwama. The attack by one suicide bomber has revealed many lapses, which include inadequate intelligence; non-adherence to SOPs by the convoy; not clearing the road methodically; and a blasé attitude by the hierarchy of the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force), who did not cater for contingencies in the prevailing insurgency environment, where the initiative is always with the insurgent. The result was loss of precious lives, as the persons in the bus were like sitting ducks.

The Modi government mulled for some days, and under intense pressure as it was, to show purposeful resolve, seems to have acted decisively. The Indian Air Force carried out attacks on a major training camp of the Masood Azhar-led Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) at Balakot, inside the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). The government hailed this as a decisive victory, saying more than 300 terrorists being trained, including some senior leadership of JeM, were wiped out in this dawn attack.

This notwithstanding, many other mistakes of the last few years are now sought to be erased by jingoistic calls of revenge, emotional outpourings of the people, promises to the families of those killed, threats by political leaders, and initiating a few diplomatic retaliatory actions. All these have their place, but what is needed is a robust and well-articulated strategy for stabilising Kashmir. Public memory being

short, the coming general elections will overtake this major terrorist act. Simultaneously, in-house corrective measures must be taken immediately, and those accountable for lapses must be punished. This does not mean that the axe falls only on low-level functionaries, while the fat cats get away, as has been the norm in our country.

## A nemesis called Masood Azhar

One needs to recall how clumsily the hijacking of Flight IC 814 to Kandhar was handled by the then NDA government under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in December 1999. Besides succumbing to the demands of the hijackers and releasing three militants, including Masood Azhar, the Crisis Management Group in Delhi failed to handle the situation effectively on account of extraneous pressures. Lack of accountability was also glossed over on the acts of many senior officials of RAW and IB, who were instead rewarded, whereas three low-level persons were sentenced to life imprisonment! The then Joint Director Intelligence Bureau, now the NSA, did not win any laurels even then.



**The Pulwama attack holds bitter lessons for us**

Reverting back to the Pulwama massacre, we need to act against both external and internal players. Externally, it is Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and its leader Masood Azhar, who must get multi-pronged attention from all possible directions. Simultaneously, the policy-makers in Pakistan who continue to fund, support and arm JeM, and many other terrorist groups, calling them state assets, need to get maximum attention from us as well as from the international community, especially our so-called strategic partners. We must also invoke multilateral organisations like UNO, EU, OIC and others, and ask them to take stern action against Pakistan and countries exporting terrorism.

Internally, actions are needed both within J&K, and by the central government. By resorting to suicide terrorism, the insurgents have grossly increased the threshold. We need to meet the challenge squarely and with increased tempo in all spheres – political, economic, administrative, security related, and military. While inflicting pain on all types of militants/insurgents is a priority task, it cannot be done without a manifold increase in our capability to acquire actionable intelligence that reaches the security forces in an adequate timeframe for them to take action. Intelligence is also needed by other institutions of the government to enable them to gauge the mood of the populace; their aspirations and actions needed to meet them. Faith in the good intentions and fairness of the government needs to be restored effectively.

The central government has poured in a lot of money in J&K, but the bulk has been hijacked by political leaders and officials. Now that Governor's Rule has existed for a few months, funds must reach their intended destinations to improve the people's living standards; quality of life; access to good education; health facilities even in remote areas, and so on. In villages, towns and cities, non-political and non-official persons of good social standing must be co-opted for ensuring that funds for various works are correctly spent, and not siphoned off by corrupt leaders/officials. Such measures and increased economic activity will win over the people and reduce/eliminate militancy.

## Tackling fundamentalism

A root cause of militancy has been the villainous part being played by fundamentalist religious teachers, either by the Wahabi elements from Pakistan, or on account of their own motivated convictions. This needs to be ruthlessly tackled by the state government. In a democracy, religion must not be allowed to spread falsehoods and treasonous behavior. The vast number of Madrassas funded

from across the border and beyond must be gradually closed and/or converted to efficient schools.

Overt militant groups, like the different factions of the Hurriyat and others are operating with impunity in J&K, and are poisoning the minds of young persons. They get their funds, encouragement and motivation from Pakistan, but are not only permitted to carry out their heinous activities openly but the government provides them security and safe houses! They have never taken part in elections and have little mass following. All these traitorous individuals should be moved out of the state and curbs need to be placed on their movements and utterances.

Some local media houses are overtly pro militants. The reports they publish are slanted and are meant to boost militancy and taking up arms against the state. They do so out of either fear of violence by militants or because of their convictions. Strict check on what they publish is needed.

Finally, the actions of the political leadership in J&K have been anti-national consistently. The two dynasties that have wielded power in the state – the

Abdullahs and the Muftis, have held on to power and funds, not for the people, but for themselves. National parties have joined one or the other for electoral reasons, and closed their eyes to their anti-national and nefarious activities. This, as well as constitutional safeguards like Articles 370 and 35A are perhaps the biggest reasons for the continuing decline of the state. Since Governor's Rule now prevails in the state, a concerted effort needs to be made to find young leaders who are not corrupt, are committed to democracy and the rule of law. They need to be nurtured and groomed so that they take over the leadership of the state in future.

The impending general elections should not be made an excuse for inaction, on the grounds that it should be the successor government that should take action. This will mean a continuation of instability in the state. Bringing good governance, social changes and people's perceptions back on an even keel, will then become difficult.

**The central government has poured in a lot of money in J&K, but the bulk has been hijacked by political leaders and officials. Now that Governor's Rule has existed for a few months, funds must reach their intended destinations to improve the people's living standards; quality of life; access to good education; health facilities even in remote areas, and so on.**



**The writer is a former Vice Chief of Army Staff.**

# The governance gap

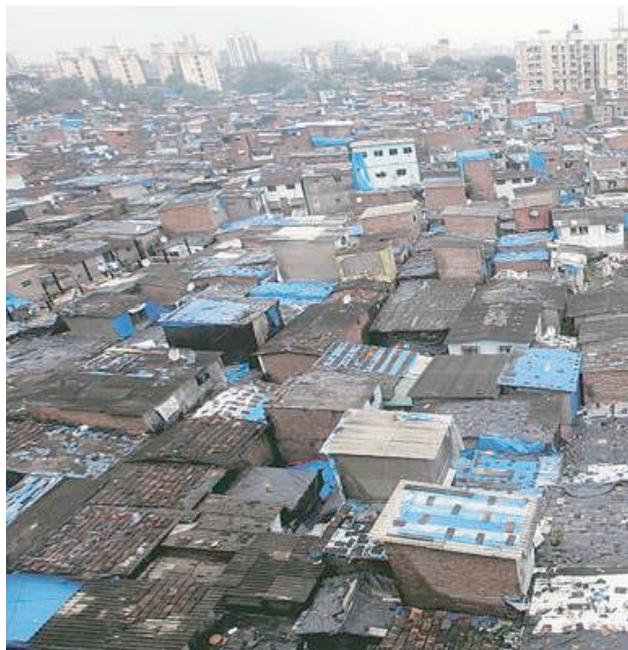
*In India, there has never been a dearth of intentions and good policies. Yet, we fail miserably at implementation, says **Mahesh Zagade**. Why do we have this implementation deficit, he asks, as he tries to analyse the basics of governance in India.*

**A**n article of a few hundred words won't do justice to the topic of good governance, in the context of the current scenario in India. However, let's understand broadly the landscape of the topic, and leave the detailed intellectual deliberations to the larger public and academic platforms.

The contextual relevance of governance depends upon the tangible outcome of the intended role. In a democratic set-up, the intended role of governance is specified in the Constitution of that country, and it is further elaborated through the statutes, policies and welfare programmes. The principles laid down in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the fourth chapter of our Constitution, are considered to be the beacon, guiding the Centre and the state governments to apply these principles in designing the laws and programmes to establish a just society. It clearly mandates that "the government shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may, a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life, strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals, but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas, or engaged in different vocations. Therefore, the mandate assigned by the people to the government is very clear and explicit.

## Seven decades of governance

A quick scan of the statutes, policies and programmes promulgated by the government with reference to the Directive Principles indicates, in my personal view, that the country has done wonderfully well during the last seven decades on this front, with some exceptions. And therefore, political leaderships have performed amazingly well by giving appropriate laws and programmes. Of course, there are some areas where governments could make better laws to alleviate the suffering of the people. To cite examples we can look at a few such failures. As per a survey of an NGO, about 66% litigations in the country are land related. This is a humongous number as a very large number, of litigants, mostly the peasants bear the brunt of it, and it has economic and societal ramifications, including unnecessary expenditures in litigation, pressures of heavy load on the judiciary, and more important, social conflicts and tensions. The government has definitely failed to appreciate the enormity of the problem. There could be similar examples of governmental failure regarding conceptualisation of appropriate policies and programmes too.



**Proliferation of urban slums shows laws are being flouted**

One thing, though, is very conspicuous. Those at the helm of governance always claim that it's good governance, in contrast to those outside the government who hold an extremely wide spectrum of opinions ranging from some people lambasting it to be very bad, to some suggesting improvements. However, the people are still generally unhappy about the societal and economic status, or the governance system.

The major ill in the country in the context of governance is the successive governments' monumental and unforgivable failure to mainstream the culture of rigorous implementation of the statutes and the programmes. On the one hand, the laws and the programmes have been designed by taking all possible care, however, the same care appears to be grossly missing while overseeing their implementation. The requirement of those at the helm of affairs to resort to announcements of emotionally driven slogans like "Garibi Hatao" or "Acche Din", is the clinical manifestation of the failure of implementation. Howsoever may be the desperate urge of the political leadership to secure ultimate public good, at least as a tool to retain power, it falls short of its intended impact due to lacunae or deficit of implementation. We may, for brevity, name it as a new syndrome called an 'implementation-deficit syndrome'.

## The implementation deficit syndrome

Let's explore the anatomy and physiology of the implementation-deficit syndrome. Anatomically, there doesn't appear to be any handicap leading to this syndrome, as the country has one of the largest bureaucratic apparatuses in the world. The quintessential problem with the Indian administrative machinery lies in the fact that it has been consistently failing in the implementation of the governance tools, namely, the laws enacted by the Parliament and the state legislatures, and also programmes announced by the governments. The implementation-deficit has almost taken away substantial benefits accruing from the governance tools in every sphere of social activity including economic progress, income equality, health, nutrition, transparency, employment, income security, social justice, infrastructure, education.... the list is endless.

The landscape of implementation failure is so vast that it will be a mockery to cite one example. However, to give a small glimpse into this, we can look around to see how blatantly laws are being flouted and we simply take that as a fait accompli. For example, we see sprawling slums and illegal constructions dotting the urban areas all over the country and we, once in a while, come to know about slum clearances, demolition of illegal constructions because of proactive stance of some no nonsense officer. We eulogise such officials. However, the basic fact that is always missed out is the failure of officials to prevention of slums or illegal constructions ab initio. The laws in this respect are very robust in the sense that no one can construct anything without the permission of the Municipal Commissioner or any other officer who is the chief administrator of that city or town. It only means that these officials have historically failed in implementation of building permission laws. No officer in the history of independent India has been penalised for allowing such illegal constructions except in rare cases, wherein lives were lost because of illegal and faulty constructions.

This eloquently tells the sordid affair of non-implementation of major statutes across the country and passive acceptance of it by the general public. Similarly, because of non-implementation of Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994, the girl child ratio is still falling in spite of dedicated official machinery from national to grass-roots level and apurtenant budgetary provisions. The same is the case with very well meaning and well-crafted social welfare schemes. The country can't forget former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's famous remarks that only 15 paise of every rupee for the welfare of the downtrodden reaches them. This state of affairs has become mainstream accepted fact due to the non-implementation syndrome that has been hunting us for seven decades.

## Remedy for corruption

The nation is incessantly busy in debating as how to combat corruption. My experience shows that corruption is inversely proportionate to the levels of implementation of

laws and programmes. The higher the level of implementation, lower incidence of corruption and vice-versa.

Is there any remedy or panacea for this malady? Yes, of course! But the question is whether we really want the solution? As per the quote attributed to the philosopher Joseph de Maistre "Every nation gets the government it deserves". It's not just the government, but the same is true for the bureaucracy too. There is necessity for the people to wake up from the deep slumber of seven decades to this major syndrome if they at all want to see any transformation, or otherwise, it's going to be business as usual!

The Indian bureaucracy is more like a pyramid rather than a brain. The pinnacle of pyramid sitting on the huge structure below, it simply has no control or functionality over it. It has been reduced to being just a decorative piece, rather than being a control centre of a brain. The cabinet secretary and the chief secretaries of the states have to revisit their role in the state craft as the leaders to secure implementation of parliamentary, legislative and policy mandates and use all the resources at their disposal to not only secure good governance but also to eliminate the forces that act as hindrances. This is not at all a tall order to ask for as I have myself experimented during 34 years of my career and found that it's not just doable for any post that one holds in government but one can really achieve tangible impact in a short time-frame.

We need to introduce audit of implementation through a third party independent organisation, and the country should be kept apprised of the levels of implementation deficits in all the statutes and programmes.



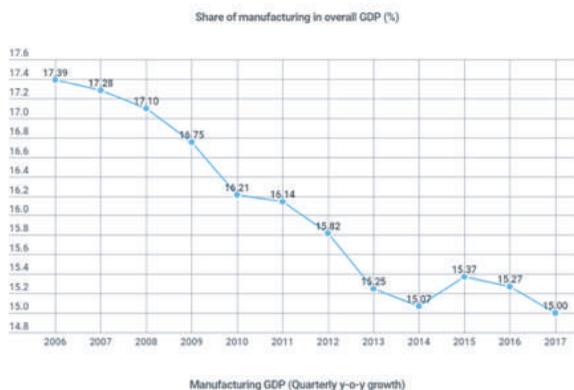
**Mahesh Zagade, an IAS officer, retired as Principal Secretary to Government, had a very tumultuous career spanning over 34 years. As a firm believer in transparency, he introduced Right to Information seven years before the government enacted the law for it. His notable**

**contributions include rigorous implementation of laws for patient safety, and ban of *gutkha* and *paan masala* during his tenure as Commissioner for FDA, establishment of Pune Metropolitan Regional Development Authority, and strict implementation of land laws to control nefarious activities of unscrupulous elements. He is a recipient of international awards like WHO No-Tobacco Day Award, Prime Minister's Gold Award for e-Governance 2012-13, and President's Silver Medal for Census 2011. Currently, he shares his experience, vision and knowledge in diverse subjects with all segments of the society, including farmers, students, corporates, health professionals, government officials, people's representatives and academics, through lectures and organised meetings.**

# India and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

*India may have missed the bus with regard to the first three industrial revolutions, but she is in a unique position to grab the opportunity with what is touted as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, says **Raj Nair**. She has no choice, as she just can't afford to be left behind if she has to achieve her Make in India goal, he avers.*

We finally have a Government which wants to boost manufacturing in India after decades of neglect, and successive governments being oblivious to this being a means to creating employment. As India becomes increasingly urban, people are moving away from the farm sector. However, without a strong manufacturing base, the scope for far reaching innovations would be limited. The share of manufacturing has dropped year after year from 17.6% of GDP in 2006, to 15% by 2015.



Some argue that the fact that it is still in the 15% range four years after the current Government took over, and that it has not fallen further, could indicate that something good is coming out of the 'Make in India' policy. They argue that we are at the cusp, and that the graph will turn upwards. Whether this is true or not, does not really matter in the context of a huge change that is happening in the global manufacturing scenario. If India gets it right, we could even end up with the share of manufacturing crossing 20% of GDP by 2025, and if we mess up, the share could plummet below 10%. Hopefully it will creep up to 20% since the Government is seized of the big issues that need to be confronted, because the Fourth Industrial Revolution is upon us, and it is for us to seize the opportunity, and not lose it by lack of foresight and neglect.

## Looking back to understand the way forward

India lost out during the First Industrial Revolution, when a combination of steam powered textile mills in the UK, and vicious colonial masters conspired to wipe out India's world-famous but largely manual textile manufacturing sector. A lot of other traditional sectors also fell prey. Later in

the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, India lost out in the Second Industrial Revolution when mass production in factories with assembly line production systems that used electric power, changed the manufacturing landscape. The Third Industrial Revolution followed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with micro-electronics and computers helping automation to cut labour input, and increase productivity. Labour was not just a cost item which had to be reduced.

While it was an important factor of production, it was a source of much consternation in the capitalist world because it was on the factory floor that the battles between the two opposing socio-economic ideologies were fought. The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and a little beyond, were the glory days of labour unions. As the world entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital technologies, the Internet, and smart phones changed the world as we knew it. From consumer applications, this triumvirate moved swiftly into the manufacturing domain. Labour's relevance was further reduced drastically with the arrival of industrial robots. India lost out again, in the Third Industrial Revolution, but managed to pick up some revenue from coding software and systems integration, but the industrial backbone of India's manufacturing, the SME (Small and Medium Enterprises) sector, still remains stuck in the Second Industrial Revolution, barring a few notable exceptions. In the meanwhile, with the coming of age of the multinationals, and with it the economic concept of global supply chains, manufacturing started shifting eastwards to low wage countries, slowly at first, and in a big way in the last two decades, as China's grip became firm.

## The China effect

Germany watched with concern, the shift in manufacturing away from the West to China, and other parts of Asia. They realised that they cannot reduce labour cost beyond a point by using automation, and even if they deployed robots. If German automobile companies could deploy robots in their factories, the Chinese could do that too. So, what next? It was clear that manufacturing was beset with some constraints, which everyone accepted meekly in the past. In the supply chain from procurement to manufacturing to delivery, there were so many silos and broken processes that led to inefficiencies and high cost. Cost of avoidable inventory, cost of delays, cost of sub optimal machine utilisation, etc. Human systems have, per force, accepted these limitations.



If these costs could be eliminated, the factories in the West could even beat manufacturers in low cost countries. But for that, the factories would have to be smart. Smart enough to rise above human capabilities.

## What is Industry 4.0?

In what started as a German initiative, Bosch and SAP came together and announced at the Hanover Trade Fair in 2011, what they called Industry 4.0, to make German manufacturing competitive in a world, in which manufacturing was slowly but steadily moving from the West to the East. Several countries like the US, Japan and the UK to mention a few, have joined the bandwagon to build their own version of essentially the same thing. Imagine a layer of digital technologies sitting on top of a layer of conventional manufacturing systems comprised of machinery, systems, raw materials and manpower, whereby the physical layer is optimally controlled by the cyber layer – machines could behave like autonomous cars, to decide when and what to produce, and in what quantity, as per the demand signals from the market. Would that not be very smart?

That is the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the age of Smart Factories.

You can let your imagination run wild about how smart the factory could be. Imagine you have a factory shed with 20 machines. For some reason four machines are going to be idle next week. What if your factory could on its own (without human intervention) contact some website on which another factory has posted that it needs production capacity of exactly, the same type for a day, and agrees to

fulfil that unmet demand at a preset price, all without you even knowing, how smart would that be? It is possible today.

Imagine you are in a rush to fulfil a big order and a critical machine breaks down. All hell breaks loose. If only you had inspected the machine during the last holiday and replaced the faulty part, you would not have had a break down. But how would you know unless you had opened-up, that machine during the previous holiday? Check every machine every week? Not possible. Do periodic preventive maintenance? That would be better than breakdown maintenance, but still not optimal in terms of cost because you will be replacing parts before their life is almost over. In a smart world, the machine would have told you, that such and such a part would break within 96 hours on its own while it is running. You could replace just that part at the right time. Smart, right? Possible? It is already happening in India, but these examples are few and far between.

Industry 4.0 is the new buzzword for creating such factories. The combination of the physical world of manufacturing with the cyber world of interconnected digital technologies which enable the deployment of data to optimise the supply chain within the factory and the external environment of vendors and customers, predict outcomes that can impact output, input and demand pull, autonomous actions being taken by machines in situations that used to require humans involvement, etc. Smart Factories, as they are called, have big advantages over conventional factories in terms of cost competitiveness, flexibility to serve individual customer needs better, lower cycle time, better utilisation of capacity by accessing markets effectively, and by lowering down time through predictive maintenance.

Across the developed world, there has been a rush during the past two years to make their factories smart. MNCs with factories in India, like Siemens, Hyundai, etc., have started the trend in India. Some Indian companies too, like Mahindra and Mahindra, Tata Motors, and a few others. More of it will happen in the next few years. They have success stories to talk about better quality, higher production, greater flexibility, etc., and now the ability to meet stringent export standards. By adopting Industry 4.0, Indian manufacturers can be serious contenders for becoming the global production hub for many products. Conversely, if Indian manufacturers ignore this galloping trend, India will witness the shift in manufacturing to the West or to other low wage countries which adopt the systems required in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, because India's low labour wage advantage will be more than offset by the benefits that manufacturing in the US, UK, Germany, etc., and even China will provide. In some sense, Industry 4.0 is not an option; it is going to be a basic necessity.

## Whither Indian SMEs

SMEs, are the engines for growth and employment in India. The Government is acutely aware that this sector cannot be allowed to be killed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Hence, the Government of India is launching many new novel and effective initiatives, just like the German Government played a role in facilitating Bosch, SAP, Siemens, etc., to pioneer the Cyber-Physical Integration of Manufacturing to drive efficiency, innovation and competitiveness of German manufacturing. Four centres are being contemplated in India by the Ministry of Heavy industries and Public Enterprises, which is facilitating the establishment of India's first Smart Factory in Bengaluru. It will feature networked data flow, analytics, the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, AI (Artificial Intelligence), Augmented Reality, etc.

If the goals of Make in India have to be fulfilled, it is important that the large Indian manufacturing sector adopts Industry 4.0 and also helps SMEs who are their vendors to adopt the same, because they need to be connected with the plants of vendors as much as they need to be internally connected and connected with their customers.

It would do a lot of good for the Indian SMEs to learn best practices from the German Mittelstand (German SMEs which aim to be world beaters in whatever little they do), which is going through this change. Mittelstand companies think long term (not quarterly), and invest accordingly. Indian SMEs need to evolve a model that suits India by

combining those lessons with relevant aspects of Industry 4.0. They don't have to start with a fully integrated smart factory, but at least start using the concepts in critical areas using standard software, analytics, and AI. Start with a low cost but effective ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning), use open source CRM (Customer Relationship Management), and then sensibly integrate relevant digital technologies to convert existing factories into smart factories.

If anyone wants proof that it can work in India, he should visit the diamond cutting industry. What used to be a sea of sweatshops where workers worked in sub-human conditions, is today a shining example of Industry 4.0. Their factories look like 5-star hotels, their deployment of technologies ranging from B2B ecommerce and CRM, to processes using Augmented Intelligence, where cyber systems and human judgment work in sync, to make those companies world beaters. There are reportedly 65 such companies in Surat, each with a revenue in excess of US \$1 billion. All of them were small and rather basic, a few decades ago. They understood what their customers needed and what their competitors in other countries were doing. Today, the

Cyber Physical Systems they use will fill an observer with pride. Hence the question is not whether the Government's Make in India policy is successful, but how can the captains of industry, industry associations and the Government take this as a mission to accomplish.

**If the goals of Make in India have to be fulfilled, it is important that the large Indian manufacturing sector adopts Industry 4.0 and also helps SMEs who are their vendors to adopt the same, because they need to be connected with the plants of vendors as much as they need to be internally connected and connected with their customers.**



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**companies are known for innovation, quality and creative use of technology. He is a strategy consultant who has worked across sectors for clients in India, South East Asia, Middle East, USA and the UK to develop ways to win in competitive markets, transforming organisations to cope with changes happening in the business environment. Digital Transformation is his passion.**

# A report card for the economy

*As the 2019 general elections loom large, stocktaking has to include in a large measure, the economic report card of the current government. Arvind Pradhan dispassionately analyses the current economic scene, and lays out the way forward.*

India is a nation which was once the envy of all – a ‘sone ki chidiya’, which because of its wealth and well-being, was coveted as a prize by all the unscrupulous invaders. It took the country a long era of enslavement, destruction of its domestic economy, its arts and crafts, and plunder of its resources, when after almost 200 years of British rule, the country emerged free. But India’s economy fell in terms of GDP from 24.4% of world’s share in 1700, to 4.2% in 1950.

After Independence, the Nehruvian economic model of mixed economy and scientific socialism, which was targeted to reduce poverty and want, could not spur growth as the key economic sectors were held under state control.

It was only in 1991 under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, that the Indian government could shake-off the legacy and go for economic reforms. These reforms paved the way for a vibrant economy. Yet, the country and the economy were saddled with red-tapism and corruption, which stifled enterprise.

In 2014 BJP came to power, showing a ray of hope to the country and promising “acche Din”. It has been almost five years since then, and the elections are looming. Let’s take a stock of the government’s work in the economic sector to see whether the promised ‘acche din’ have indeed arrived.

## A mixed bag?

It must be said that during this period the government took some unprecedented measures, some worked, some didn’t. But the government had the courage to take tough decisions. Today India is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest economy in the world in purchasing power parity, and the fastest growing economy at 7.3% growth rate of its GDP. Its fiscal deficit is contained at 3.4%, and its inflation is in check at around 4% on average.

Among the notable achievements of the BJP government are:

**GST (Goods and Services Tax)** – This tax ensured that India became one common market, instead of several different entities. It is a major economic reform which the trade and industry were pitching for, and its introduction has made a sea change in the way business is being

conducted. Apart from easing business transactions, it also provides a transparent platform, which ensures that a true picture of trade and business volumes are noted for taxation purposes, avoiding corrupt practices.

**Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code** – This is another landmark reform which helps banks to take action against companies who default in payment of dues. It vests power with the banks for recovering their dues, and in the process ensures that loans do not become non-performing assets or NPAs.

**Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act** – This Act is against the benami properties amassed by corrupt people. A number of such cases have been unearthed where properties were in the name of domestic servants or drivers, with or without their knowledge.

**Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna** – This helped the unbanked population. There are around 310 million new account holders especially in the rural areas. The scheme ensures that the Direct Benefit Transfer of subsidies or any other financial benefit goes directly in the account of the beneficiary, avoiding any middleman.

**RERA** – The Real Estate Regulation Act is a major reform in the real estate sector. This Act makes it incumbent on the builder to be responsible about the project undertaken, especially its completion, and record of its financial accounts. It’s a great help to the home buyers who were earlier at the mercy of builders.

**Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act** – The amendment of this Act helps to ensure that Arbitration must end in a defined time and the arbitral award has the force of law. A great help to the business community which wanted a fast and cost effective means for resolving disputes.

**Road Infrastructure** – 60% of freight is transported by road. There has been major improvement in road building. At present, over 27 km of road is being built every day. While in 2014-15, 4,410 kms of highway stretches were constructed, this figure went up to 9800 kms in 2017-18.

**Aadhaar Act** – The Aadhaar has been institutionalised as an Act. This ensures that the card has legal validity.

**Revival of stalled projects** – It is estimated that there are projects both in the public and private sector worth around ₹13 trillion which are stalled for some reason or the other.



**The Bogibeel Bridge, the longest rail-cum-road bridge of India on the River Brahmaputra in Assam was completed in December 2018**

These have received government's attention. Some projects like the Bogibeel Bridge is the longest rail-cum-road bridge of India on the Brahmaputra River in Assam, which started in April 2012, and finally was completed in December 2018. Similarly, a number of hydro power projects are stuck, and the government is trying to revive them.

**Waterways** – Though still in its nascent stages, the government has started the waterway transportation on the Ganga. Soon this river water transportation will give a big boost to trade and business by cutting cost, and reaching goods to the required destination.

**Digital Infrastructure** – Government actively aided the digital revolution by actions such as the digital payments interface, JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile telephony), and PFMS (Public Finance Management System). Through the PFMS, the government connects directly with households and businesses, and transfers financial subsidies directly to the beneficiaries account.

These achievements are noteworthy, though still much needs to be done for the country to achieve its past glory.

## Some trying areas

Among the major reforms required for private investment to take place is the ease in acquiring land for establishment of factories. Despite its best intentions, the Modi government has not been able to make land acquisition laws industry friendly. This is one of the reasons that inhibit industrial infrastructure and investments by private sector.

Another is labour reforms. This is a touchy subject for all political parties, and has not been adequately addressed. Large factories require labour laws which allow them to hire and fire based on the requirement of labour. Unfortunately, as the state does not provide a social security net, lot needs to be done to solve this issue in the best interests of both industry and labour.

Although government spending has increased in recent years, the private sector investments have not kept pace. More needs to be done in the 'ease-of-doing-business' to bolster business sentiment and get capital investments from the

private sector.

Youth unemployment is another problem. As per OECD estimates, 30% of Indian youth are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). This is especially an acute problem considering that India is slated to be the youngest country with the maximum number of people between the ages of 30 to 40 years in 2050. The demographic opportunity needs to be utilised by skill development. Although the government has formed a Skill Development Ministry to take requisite measures, the country still needs institutional support to skill development on the lines of the German model, so that the youth is productively employed.

Demonetisation of 500 and 1,000 rupee notes as a measure to curb black money had limited success, as almost all the old notes (98.96%) were deposited back to the RBI. Yet it had a salutary effect in as much as it made digital money transfers more popular. Today small shopkeepers and fruit vendors readily accept money by digital wallet, rather than cash. This has made money trail transparent and tax avoidance difficult.

In a nutshell, the Indian economy at the current juncture is strong and moving in the right direction. But it requires careful handling to ensure that the animal spirits of our entrepreneurs are unleashed to take on the world.



**Arvind Pradhan, a former Director General of IMC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has over forty years' experience in international trade and development. He has a post graduate degree in Management and a post-graduate diploma in International trade from IIFT, New Delhi. He has actively helped the industry in business development including market penetration, capacity development, interaction, and inputs to the Government for policy formulation. Currently, he advises small and medium enterprises in international trade and development.**

## A hundred years since Jallianwala Bagh

*It is exactly a century since the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, one of the lowest points of British rule in India. Lt.Gen. Vijay Oberoi recounts the events, to better understand our history.*



The Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 (right) and today

April 13, 1919, marks the centenary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. On this day, soldiers of the British Indian Army, on the orders of Brigadier Reginald Dyer, massacred peaceful and unarmed civilians, including women and children, who having prayed at the Golden Temple, were celebrating the Punjabi spring festival (Baisakhi), at the garden. This massacre was one of the deadliest attacks on peaceful civilians in the world. Some call it the beginning of the end of the British colonial rule in India.

### Background

During World War I (1914-18), when Britain and its allies were on the verge of losing the war, it was the Indian Army and forces of Indian princely states, which had turned the tide against the British. About 1.3 million Indian soldiers and workers served in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, while the Indian government and the princes contributed large supplies of food, money, and ammunition. It was generally believed that on account of the overwhelming

support to the war effort, India would be given more political autonomy when the war ended.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report, presented to the British Parliament in 1918, did recommend limited local self-government in India. However, this was negated by the promulgation of the Rowlatt Act next year. The Act gave the Viceroy's government great powers, which included censoring the press, detaining political activists without trial, and arrest without warrant of any individual suspected of treason. This Act sparked a wave of anger within India. In early April 1919, there were widespread protests, especially against the restrictions on a number of civil liberties, including freedom of assembly, and banning gatherings of more than four people.

The law and order situation, especially in Punjab, deteriorated quickly. Many rail, telegraph and communication systems were disrupted, along with processions and protests. By April 13, the British government had placed most of

Punjab under martial law.

### Events leading to the massacre

Following a protest at the residence of the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar on April 10, 1919, wherein the release of two popular leaders, Satya Pal and Saifuddin Kitchlew was demanded, the crowd was shot at by British troops, resulting in more violence. Several banks and other government buildings, including the town hall and the railway station were attacked and set on fire. The violence continued to increase and resulted in the deaths of some Europeans, including government employees and civilians.

For the next two days, the city of Amritsar was quiet, but violence continued in other parts of Punjab. On 13 April 1919, Brigadier Dyer reached Amritsar from Jalandhar Cantonment, and virtually occupied the town, as the civil administration under the Deputy Commissioner, had come to a standstill.

(continued on page 29...)



## *The Kumbh Mela*

### *A spiritual carnival*

*The Kumbh Mela is perhaps the largest and most peaceful human gathering on earth, and attracts visitors of all hues, from ash-smeared holy men, to tourists, and men and women looking for moksha. It is indeed a spectacle like no other, when millions of people, not just Hindus, take a dip in the holy confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati, to wash away their sins, and attain moksha. The many aartis light up this humongous gathering, while the massive security and other arrangements ensure that this event has a safe passage.*

*Text and Photographs: Gustasp and Jeroo Irani*



Necklaces of *rudraksha* seeds drape the body of an ash covered naga baba

It was like a blockbuster movie, directed by a divine hand, to which we had ringside seats. The Kumbh Mela 2019 held at Prayagraj (formerly called Allahabad), unfolded with a sense of pageantry, unscripted and brimming with a raw energy and deep piety.

It commenced with the Peshwai, a splendid parade of saints and holy men of the different akharas (holy orders), who arrived on elephants, camels and horses, chanting Vedic shlokas and prayers, as they wended their way to the mela grounds to set up camp for the duration of the fair. En route, devotees rained the seers with flowers as the magnificent procession journeyed its way through the city, and the spectators were in turn blessed by the holy men. One of the last akharas to set up camp at the mela this year, Shri Shambhu Dashnaam Avahan Akhara, celebrated their arrival with much pomp – with an orchestra band, and even a disc jockey, followed by hundreds of seers and ‘naga babas’ (naked, ash-smearing holy men).

We missed this dramatic start to the mela, but even so the Kumbh turned out to be head turner of a spectacle on several levels. There was blinding colour and non-stop action everywhere. Sari and dhoti-clad pilgrims with bundles on their heads walked barefoot or in flimsy slippers, with little children in tow. They stoically braved the bitter cold as did sadhus in flowing orange robes, foreheads daubed with sandalwood

paste, who mingled with naga babas, jean-clad city slickers, believers, and cynics...

## Kumbh, the great leveller, moksha, the ultimate prize

Many had trudged from far-flung villages yet had a spring in their step; the very old with rheumy eyes confirmed that they had attended multiple Kumbhs, hoping that it would ease their passage into the next world. Indeed, the Kumbh is a great leveller as the haves and have nots, humble villagers, yuppies and the rich in flashy cars... all footslog there, propelled by an overriding desire to take a dip in the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers. The dunking would throw up the ultimate prize – moksha – a blessed release from the eternal cycle of life and death. As an octogenarian, leaning on his son’s arm, said: “If I die tonight, I will be liberated!”

The crowds mingled with peddlers hawking sun glasses, floral garlands, rudraksh malas, chillums (joints) and sundry things, while barbers who cut the flowing locks of holy men offered to chop ours for ₹100! All of them coursed along the 45-sq km of mela grounds like a river in spate. Indeed, a temporary mega city had sprung up to accommodate the multitudes, and was dotted with 1,22,500 toilets!

Loudspeakers blared, urging devotees to move towards the bathing ghats; names of wives and children separated from their families were constantly being announced so that they could be re-united with their loved ones, waiting anxiously in the 'Lost and Found Tent'. The sound of pounding drums and conch shells, and the low hum of Vedic mantras was a soundtrack that thrummed in the background. The air was scented with incense and it was like stepping into a gigantic temple. In one tent, a couple of holy men danced like they were in a trance, while nearby, weary pilgrims sat in a row like obedient children, waiting to be fed by good Samaritans who were ladling dal and rice onto outstretched platters.

We were mere tourists in search of searing colour and fiery optics, but found ourselves being swept away on the Tsunami-like tide of devotion, buoyed by the knowledge that we were part of a spiritual carnival, the largest peaceful gathering of human beings on earth. Our attempts to view it

solely through the prism of our viewfinders proved futile, so powerful was the pull of the mela where the burning intense eyes of holy men, and the innocent simplicity of the believers yanked us back to an ancient time, the origins of this spectacle itself.

The story of the Kumbh is embedded in cosmic time; a time when the Devas and Asuras set aside their eternal differences, and churned the oceans with the help of a giant serpent to retrieve the nectar of immortality. When the ocean, after many false starts, finally yielded its prize, the two sides reneged on their fragile truce, and resumed hostilities. In the scuffle that took place, a few drops of nectar fell in the rivers that flowed through Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh, Nashik in Maharashtra, Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh and Haridwar in Uttarakhand. Every three years, when the planets are auspiciously aligned, the Kumbh is celebrated in rotation between these four locations. It is believed that those who bathe in the river waters at the time, attain moksha.



**An orange river of devotion**



The holy dip on Mauni Amavasya

## The bath to beat all baths!

A mind-boggling five crore people had gathered to participate in the Mauni Amavasya Snan (4<sup>th</sup> February 2019 – the day of our visit). On this day, Rishabh Dev, considered the first sage, broke his long vow of silence and bathed in the holy waters at the sangam. Devout Hindus believe that the planets were aligned in the most favourable way on February 4<sup>th</sup>. (During the Kumbh, there is generally a total of three Shahi Snans)

The Mauni Amavasya Snan was in a way one of the photogenic climaxes of the Kumbh when the naga babas, dreadlocks flying, stampeded into the water in the wee hours of the morning; the mighty splashing in the timorous half-light, bodies and faces glowing with droplets of water, all had an unmistakable aura of divinity and magic. Devotees, with eyes turned heavenwards, had gathered on the banks of the sangam and in boats, waiting for their turn to plunge in. After the naga babas, the holy men of the 13 akharas (religious groups), and their followers, took a dip, marching, humming, and dancing along the way... it all resembled a surreal ballet un-scrolling on a giant stage.

Soon the pilgrims dove in – women in their saris, kameezes and even thermals – splashed around like mythical mermaids, shivering in the early morning chill, and emerging to deftly don fresh garb, wringing out their long wet tresses, faces radiating like they were new borns! Indeed, there are no boundaries at the Kumbh; nothing is private as there is a collective desire for moksha. Post a dip, many sat on the banks of the sangam, lips moving silently in prayer; seeming to see the light within and staying open to this most moving of experiences. Did they perhaps feel a sense of oneness with the rest of humanity, just as we did?



A naga baba with dark glasses and floral headgear

We splashed our faces with holy water even as we had an epiphany – the Kumbh makes you feel insignificant in the vast and eternal scheme of things; and your troubles seem to become a mere chimera. “Let the spirit of the Kumbh reach inside you; take it in and let it heal and transform you,” Swami Chidanand of Parmarth Ashram in Rishikesh had said, when we attended his soulful aarti at the Kumbh. “There is a sangam inside us too. Dip into the sangam of introspection and you will find yourself.”

The Kumbh is all about attaining oneness – of mind, body and soul – and hence, this congregation has become widely associated with the naga babas, holy men who have gone beyond the limitations of their bodies, and are supreme examples of mind over matter. They emerge from their caves in the Himalayas to be at the fair, and are perhaps the protagonists of the mela – not only because of their rather outré or unconventional appearance, but because

they epitomise men who have overcome the challenges of the physical world. Some have stood on one leg for decades; others can stay submerged in water for hours, or lie buried in sand for days and emerge alive...

The Juna Akhara has the maximum number of naga babas and one of them flaunted sunglasses that hid a fiery, hypnotic gaze. He sat with a 22 kg crown on his head, and his body was smothered in hundreds of rudraksh malas, all of which reportedly weighed 70 kg! Kabutar baba flaunted a pigeon, while another brandished a trishul at a gent who got too close to him to take a photograph; and a third chased a tourist and threatened him with a stick and a peacock feather because he did not drop some coins in his bowl, which was his charge for clicking his photograph! Another took out a bunch of snakes, draped them around his neck and started to dance. Pilgrims fell at their feet for their blessings as the holy men fed and stoked a sacred fire.



The river aarti at Kumbh by the Parmarth Ashram akhara



The naga babas add a lot of mystic colour to the Kumbh

When we left the Kumbh, we felt ignited; the sangam reminded us that though the Ganga, according to the scriptures, is the younger sister of the Yamuna, once the two rivers merge, the river is called the Ganga. “How beautifully Yamunaji surrendered to oneness,” observed Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati of the Parmarth Ashram at the aarti held at the Kumbh. “The sangam reminds us to merge our minds, bodies and souls with the divine. When you leave the Kumbh, make a pledge to preserve the oneness of creation.” And that is exactly what we did!

### The nitty gritty

The 2019 Kumbh which started on 15<sup>th</sup> January and ended on 4<sup>th</sup> March, saw unprecedented crowds. An integrated command control centre and 1,100 CCTV cameras kept vigil on the tidal waves of people that streamed into and out of the grounds. There were 43 fire stations, 15 sub-fire stations, 40 fire watch towers, and 96 control watch towers. Over 100 ambulances were on

standby, while vending zones, food stalls and 35 outlets of Café Coffee Day fed the gargantuan appetites of the multitudes. Parking space for over five lakh people had been created as well.



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

## Our Last Six Issues

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March 2019	February 2019	January 2019	December 2018	November 2018	October 2018



## ***A Himalayan trek - To Hampta Pass and back***

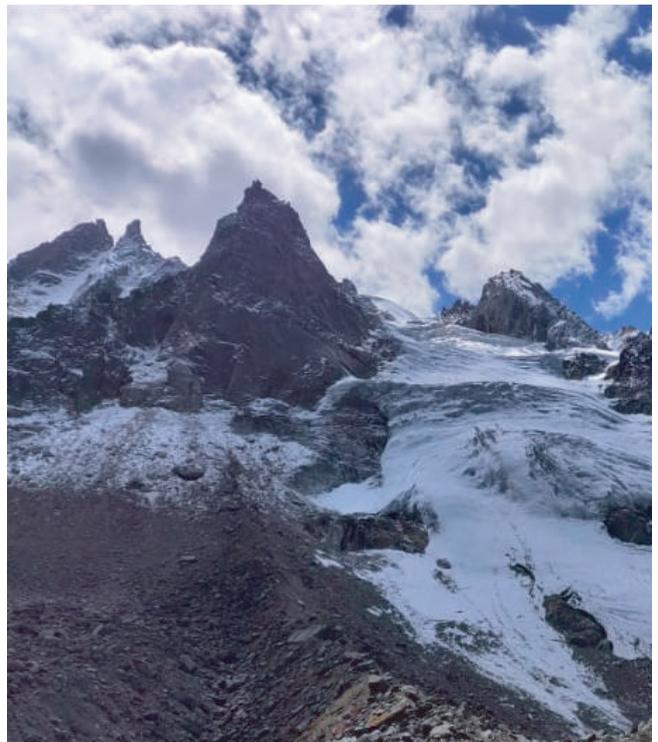
*A trek in the Himalayas is not just a hike through some of the most majestic sights in the world, but it also tests one's endurance to the limit. Such treks can be life changing, and life affirming. Here's an account of a trek to Hampta Pass through Kullu in Himachal Pradesh, and the deserts of Lahaul-Spiti.*



**The gushing river Rani from where we would quench our thirst**

I felt a wave of excitement, when my best friend and partner declared jubilantly that “I have booked the trek for us”. We had discussed and debated on various trek options, and finally settled for Hampta Pass, a trek that takes you from the lush green valleys of Kullu in Himachal Pradesh, and crosses over to the deserts of Lahual-Spiti. The pictures on the website of Indiahikes, through which we had booked the trek, looked exotic. and the next couple of months were spent preparing for the trek and working on fitness.

We were excited as we took a flight to Delhi early morning, a couple of days before the trek. We did some sight-seeing in Delhi, visited the Qutub Minar and Humayun’s Tomb, drinking in the majestic architecture, and late evening boarded an AC-sleeper bus to Manali. We woke up to a beautiful sight of the bus riding along the Beas River, gleaming and shimmering in the morning sunlight. We quickly reached our hotel, freshened up, and had breakfast. We had the entire day to roam around the small town of Manali, and we wanted to make the most of it. We rented a two-wheeler for the day and made our first stop at a small Tibetan monastery in the heart of town. There was a sense of quiet and peace here amongst the hustle and bustle of the town. Next we proceeded to the famous Hadimba Temple, and indulged in some shopping. We ended the day driving till the banks of the River Beas, and listening to the water gushing, as darkness enveloped the town.



**The peak of Indrasen as seen from our second campsite Jwara**

## The trek dawns

The morning of the trek was a sight to behold as the sun rose above the mountains, setting a precedent of how picturesque the next few days were going to be. We reached the base camp and met with our fellow trekkers who had arrived from Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and as far as Kolkata. In a very inspiring initiative, we were handed garbage pouches by Indiahikes. The purpose was to collect any kind of waste on the trail, and carry it back with us to the base camp to be disposed of properly. Post lunch we were ushered into our vehicles as we set about climbing Manali towards our first campsite. After negotiating some giddy forty plus U-pin bends, we reached a point from where we began our trek to Hampta Pass.

Bright sunshine, cool winds, lush greenery and towering mountains on either side of us greeted us on our way to Jobra, our first campsite. It was barely an hour long trek, but we were gasping for air by the time we reached. The diligent Indiahikes trek team had already set up tents and had started cooking, as our trek leader explained that the ascent meant our body had to acclimatise to the lower level of oxygen. We were allotted tents in groups of three, and everyone unloaded their gear and got refreshed. A quick medical check-up was followed by dinner. Soon, we snuggled into our warm sleeping bags, and were asleep to the sounds of water flowing in the nearby River Rani, along which we would be trekking for the next couple of days.

The morning at Jobra was cold, and everyone clasped their steaming mugs of tea for some warmth. Fitness is a must to enjoy the trek, and the trek leader ensured our fitness levels were high. Stretching exercises

were a part of our daily routine, and we were monitored three times a day medically. The trail from Jobra to Jwara was longer than the previous day. Soon the sun was out, and our jackets went in. Slowly, but enthusiastically, we ventured on our rocky trail along the Rani river. We made several stops along the way for rest and to help trailing members catch up with the rest. By afternoon, we had reached Jwara, our second campsite on sloping grounds from where we could see the valley stretched in front of us and the view of the Indrasen Peak at a distance. Here we were taught how to set up our tents and everyone got busy. After lunch, our leader insisted we acclimatise to the weather by suggesting a game of catch to avoid lazing off. Many of us spent the evening playing Frisbee. After a scrumptious dinner, we were asleep as logs under the blanket of twinkling stars, in the clear night sky.

The morning at Jwara began on a sombre note. After our routine medical check-up, two people were deemed unfit to proceed, as their blood pressure was inching higher with the ascent each day. They were advised to return to the base camp with the help of a guide. And so, after bidding our goodbyes to them, we continued on the trail towards our next campsite, 'Balu ka Gera' (Bed of Sand), a campsite right next to the banks of Rani. Along the way, the mountains towered on both sides and we often came across flocks of sheep grazing on the mountains, usually accompanied by fuzzy dogs. We stopped at intervals to take pictures of the breathtaking view. By afternoon, we had reached Balu ka Gera where the mountains rose steeply in front of us. We knew the next day would be a massive test of our fitness and endurance. We were at higher altitudes, and the temperatures had dropped to below five degrees.



**The crescent shaped Chandratal Lake, a sight to behold**



Entire group at the summit of Hampta pass

## Finally, Hampta Pass

I woke up early the next day to greet my partner a happy birthday. We were scheduled that day to climb the mountains to cross Hampta Pass, reaching a height of over 14,000 feet. The ascent was steep, and the air was getting thinner with height. It was a difficult climb, but we kept walking to reach Hampta Pass by afternoon. The view from here was majestic with a clear view of Indrasen Peak, and the valley spread below. After days of climbing we had finally made it to the summit of this trek. The feeling was a mix of exhilaration and awe. We celebrated with lunch and took some more pictures.

Soon we were on our way down towards our fourth campsite, Shea Goru. It was a steep climb down. A snow-storm could be seen in the far distance between two mountains. It started snowing, and our anxious guide pushed us to climb down faster. Soon we reached a level ground and started walking tiredly towards the campsite. A climb up and a climb down really tests your stamina. Eventually, we reached Shea Goru, and were greeted with hot refreshments. We were asked to wrap ourselves in layers of clothes as Shea Goru was the coldest campsite, with temperatures dipping below zero at night. Dinner was a special event as our trek team surprised my partner by baking a birthday cake for her. Soon we were wrapped in our sleeping bags, as the moon rose high in the sky.

The last day of our trek dawned, and our very first task was to cross the Rani river bare-foot to reach Chhatru, our final campsite. Crossing was the easier part, but our feet became numb with cold as we crossed the river. We jumped up and down trying to get the blood flowing in our legs. After nearly fifteen minutes of jumping, we proceeded on the trail.

It was a fairly straightforward descent as we had reached our final campsite by noon. A quick lunch followed, and we were ushered into the waiting vehicles for the final part of our trek – a trip to the crescent shaped Chandratul Lake. The roads were very dusty and rocky as we proceeded into the valley of Lahaul-Spiti. We finally reached Chandratul, and the lake was a sight to behold. The crystal clear waters simply reflected the sky and hence the lake appeared completely blue.

After another long, arduous ride back to our campsite, we got into our tents one last time. The skies had opened up the next morning, as we packed our bags and loaded them into our vehicles. We were being transported back to our base camp in Manali and the route was through the Rohtang Pass. By the time we reached Rohtang, the rains had gradually turned to snow. We stopped briefly at Rohtang Pass, which was blanketed in white completely. We had experienced bright sunshine, light drizzles of rain, and beautiful snow, all, in this one trip. We reached Manali and it was time to say goodbyes to everyone. My first expedition to Himalayas made me value a lot about the little things in life, made me feel grateful to the things I already have rather than crave for something I do not have, and has definitely made me want to go and explore another part of it sooner than later.



**Srikanth Chandrasekhar is an engineer by profession, introvert by choice, and traveler at heart.**

*“The days when I used to slap students are gone. Nowadays parents don’t like even the teachers raising their voice.”*

**Manohar Subbiah, 66**, is a private Mathematics tutor since nearly five decades, apart from being a voracious reader, and health enthusiast. With a B.Sc in Statistics and Mathematics, he also teaches French.

In conversation with **A.Radhakrishnan**, he talks about his rich experience in teaching, and the mettle of students today.



**Why did you decide to become a tutor? How long have you been tutoring?**

Teaching always interested me since my schooldays. I began giving tuitions since October 1974, as I was not in a position to do my B.Ed., due to financial constraints. You needed that degree to get jobs in schools; so the next best thing to do was what I liked, take private tuitions. My personal satisfaction and happiness were more important than just making money. I wanted to do what I loved to do. I am happy with it and never harboured a desire to take up a comfortable, corporate job.

**Which would you root for, home education or standard school education?**

Both have their strengths and weaknesses. When attending school is not possible, home education is better than no education. As we have to live in a society, however, school education would be advisable. The child has to learn how society functions, how one should work as a team and take decisions, interact with others and make friends who are always a support system in their later days. No man is an island by himself/herself is a famous adage.

**Does the Indian education system need an overhaul?**

There are a lot of problems. Though rote learning in some

cases is necessary, insistence on the student to answer ad verbatim, should be discouraged. In many state board schools, the number of students in each class is large and unmanageable. There should be more schools, smaller classes, and more teachers.

**What is the major reason for and the solution for dropouts from school?**

Poverty and girls’ sanitation happen to be the main reasons. Tackling these problems through providing free education could reduce this problem, and of course recruiting dedicated teachers, and not the ones who look upon it as a job, would be essential.

**How does online tutoring differ from normal tutoring? How do you stay aware with the latest educational trends?**

It is the same, except that the students are miles away. Students normally update me with new trends in education and I am also a voracious reader.

**What subjects do you teach? Do you believe in team-teaching or co-teaching?**

I teach Mathematics up to the 12<sup>th</sup> standard for all Boards, Statistics to undergraduate students, and French up to the 10<sup>th</sup> standard.

I was always a loner and have no experience about other methods like group teaching, co-teaching or team teaching.

### **What's your philosophy of teaching?**

I have always worked according to the student's strength or weakness, for everyone has a different level of understanding. I always explain the basic points by solving some problems, mostly the difficult ones, and then make the student solve the problems without any help, but am always there to help with their further questions and doubts.

### **What's your biggest challenge as a tutor? What are the skills to implement to make teaching more effective?**

The biggest challenge has always been to remove the fear the student has of the subject. After patiently explaining all the questions, I move ahead only after the student has understood everything and is confident. This requires a lot of forbearance. It takes time to build up their confidence to eventually make them like the subject. A tutor should be friendly, patient with his ward and be able to allay the student's dread of the subject. He should be regular and punctual, though very often punctuality suffers because of traffic snarls.

### **What is your greatest strength?**

I guess my greatest strength is the patience I exhibit while teaching; trying to explain something till the student understands and is able to grasp it. I have always encouraged my students to help their friends to solve problems, so that they themselves understand their own strength and weakness.

### **How can you make teaching effortless?**

An excellent command over one's subject is a must always for the tutor. One has to keep the students' interest in mind, always encourage them, and teach them to think. The student should always be able to openly ask his doubts and he or his feelings should never be hurt.

### **What are the exploratory classes you prefer for a student and why? How do you prepare students for standardised assessments?**

I would prefer students to exercise, join yoga classes and take part in some sport. They should always have good health and learn things which not only buttress studies, but also make them good human beings. As for standardised assessments, I first make them solve all the problems from their textbook, and then solve additional ones from other books.

### **How would you handle a 'weak' student? Your approach if he/she does not do well?**

Lack of interest, disobedience, and unwillingness to do the homework are paramount issues. Weak students take more time than other students, but if they are willing to work

things out, it's just a matter of time.

### **Which is the best way to deal with students?**

It varies from student to student. There's no best way as such. Just tell the parents about the problem. The days when I used to slap students are gone. Nowadays parents don't like even the teachers raising their voice.

### **What are the challenges in handling the modern day students?**

Although better informed, present day students are more distracted and reluctant to undertake certain norms which are necessary for studying and understanding a subject. High achievers are sometimes difficult to handle and you have to listen to a lot of what they have to say. However, they take less time to learn new problems.

### **How can you generate interest among students for the subjects you teach? How would you engage a reluctant student?**

They do get interested once the trepidation disappears. However, it is difficult to din interest in a disinterested and reluctant student. There is no choice but to convey it to their parents, as there is no point in wasting their hard earned money, as well as time.

### **What would you advise students regarding exams?**

Study, work hard and smart, and do not repeat your mistakes. Be calm. Don't rush to finish your question paper. Better to lose two marks than twenty in a hurry.

### **What do you think of the role parents hold towards their wards? How can a teacher involve parents in the students' progress?**

Parents hold the most important role. Discipline is one thing which should be taught and strictly enforced by parents. They should always be informed about the child's progress and made aware of the child's strength and weakness.

### **What are your other interests?**

Apart from reading and exercising, I regularly attended the gym till osteoarthritis set in. I have also learnt German, and am an exponent of Gojurio karate and Tai Chi, and was into stick fighting, yoga and jogging.



**A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune-based freelance journalist.**

# A hundred years since Jallianwala Bagh

(...continued from page 16 )

On the same day, convinced of a major insurrection in the offing, Dyer banned all meetings. However, this notice was not widely disseminated.

## Massacre by the British

The Jallianwala Bagh, located close to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, derives its name from that of the family of the owner who was a noble in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839). In 1919, the site was an uneven and unoccupied space, an irregular quadrangle, indifferently walled, approximately 225 x 180 meters. It was surrounded on all sides by houses and buildings, and had a few narrow entrances, most of which were kept locked. It had only one entry/exit leading from a narrow lane. It was here that Dyer deployed his troops.

On April 13, 1919, thousands of people, both locals and from surrounding areas had gathered at the Jallianwala Bagh to celebrate the Baisakhi festival, which was also the Sikh New Year. There were also a small number of protestors who were defying the ban on public meetings, and had come to pass a protest resolution to condemn the arrest and deportation of their national leaders, Satya Pal and Dr. Kitchlew; and the repressive Rowlatt Act. The entire assembly was peaceful and unarmed. In the afternoon of that fateful day, at about 04:30 p.m, Dyer, on hearing that a gathering had assembled at Jallianwala Bagh, went with 90 soldiers to a raised bank near the entrance to the Bagh, sealed off the only exit, and without giving any warning, ordered his troops to shoot at the crowd indiscriminately.

Everyone ran helter-skelter, and many tried to climb the walls and escape this attack, while others were trampled to death. Many jumped into the only well inside Jallianwala Bagh, from where 120 bodies were later

taken out. Dyer continued the firing for about ten minutes, until the ammunition supply was almost exhausted. The soldiers withdrew, leaving behind the dead and wounded.

It was later stated that 1,650 bullets had been fired. Official toll was 379 identified dead, and approximately 1,200 injured. The number estimated by the Indian National Congress was more than 1,500 injured, with approximately 1,000 dead. It was a most dastardly and cowardly act that can be classified as the lowest point of the British rule in India. The incident fueled anger among people, leading to the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22.



**Udham Singh (second from left) being taken from 10 Caxton Hall after the assassination of Michael O'Dwyer**

## The aftermath

The shooting, followed by the proclamation of martial law, public floggings and other humiliations, enraged all Indians as news of the shooting and subsequent British actions spread throughout the subcontinent. The Bengali poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore renounced the knighthood that he had received in 1915. Mahatma Gandhi began organising his first large-scale and sustained nonviolent protest (Satyagraha) campaign, and the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), which thrust him to prominence in the Indian freedom struggle.

The Government of India ordered an investigation of the

incident (the Hunter Commission), which in 1920 censured Dyer and ordered him to resign from the military. Reactions in Britain were mixed. Many condemned Dyer's actions — including Sir Winston Churchill, then secretary of war, in the House of Commons, but the House of Lords praised Dyer, and a large fund was raised and presented to him. In July 1920, Dyer was censured and forced to retire.

## The denouement

Udham Singh (26 December 1899 – 31 July 1940), a Punjabi revolutionary assassinated Michael O'Dwyer, former Lieutenant Governor of Punjab on 13 March 1940, in Caxton Hall in London. The assassination was in revenge for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as Dwyer had supported the action of Dyer. Singh was subsequently convicted of murder and hanged in July 1940.

He is well known as Shaheed-i-Azam Sardar Udham Singh. A district (Udham Singh Nagar) of Uttarakhand was named after him in October 1995.

On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, all Indians need to pay their tributes to those wantonly killed by an egoist colonial army officer, without any compassion for the dignity of human beings. The indomitable spirit of all Indians who had fought the British Colonial Raj and ultimately gained Independence for us needs to be remembered and honoured, for they had sacrificed their lives for our freedom.



**The writer is a former Vice Chief of Army Staff**

# Corbett, a hunter or a conservationist?

*Jim Corbett is an iconic figure in the world of wildlife and conservation. But his legacy is a slightly muddled one, says Harshad Sambamurthy. Corbett was as much a conservationist in his later years, as he was an avid hunter in his salad days. And he left us with much to muse about.*

Edward James Corbett, remembered, and celebrated for his writings that chronicled fantastic tales of “man-eating” tigers and leopards in the region of Kumaon, was born 25th July, 1875, in Nainital.

## A proficient marksman

Growing up embedded in his local surroundings, he developed early-on, an acute curiosity for the environment. A keen observer of nature, it was only through everyday experiences that he acquired the necessary skills for tracking, and eventually hunting. As a young boy, returning from school, fearful of walking through the jungle alone, Corbett was compelled to learn the art of soundless perambulation, of tree-climbing, of adjusting his eyes for surveying the dense thickets, and of calibrating his ears to listen to the mellifluous modulations of the forest. He could read the signs, mimic the sounds and ascertain the differing warning signals of various animals.

A proficient shooter since his youth, he coupled his skills as a marksman with the deep knowledge of the jungle to train military personnel in jungle-warfare. Corbett himself served in the British Indian Army in France, and fought in the Third Afghan War in Waziristan in the 1920s. Yet, it was Corbett’s adventures in the forests of Uttarakhand, on the trail — quite literally — of “man-eating” tigers and leopards, that established him; enshrining him as the archetypal author — alongside Kenneth Anderson — of jungle lore.

The roots of his environmentalism, however progressive and

evolved for the time, were nevertheless paradoxical, for though he revered the tiger as a “large-hearted gentleman with boundless courage”, he did, as the historian Vijaya Ramadas Mandala writes, “pursue and kill them with purpose, and for prizes”. Though he claimed to hunt only to decimate

**A proficient shooter since his youth, he coupled his skills as a marksman with the deep knowledge of the jungle to train military personnel in jungle-warfare. Corbett himself served in the British Indian Army in France, and fought in the Third Afghan War in Waziristan in the 1920s.**

the looming and spectral threat of a “man-eater”, his remorse for shooting these animals separated him from the presiding discourse that pitted the imperial hunter against monstrous vermin: a woefully ignorant and cruel term used by the colonial government to categorise tigers and leopards; vindicating their slaughter.

## The killer of “man-eaters”

Between 1907 and 1938, Corbett executed nearly a dozen “man-eaters” in the Garwhal and Kumaon regions of the United Provinces. These tigers and leopards were estimated to have killed at least 1,500 people. One of his spectacular feats — coincidentally, Corbett’s first “man-eater” — was slaying the notorious Champawat tigress, responsible for 436 documented human deaths. He received a commemorative plaque for this achievement. Such recognition, Mandala argues, was perhaps what spurred Corbett to pursue other such cases. He was responsible for extinguishing the Panar leopard, that allegedly killed 400 people, and the infamous leopard of Rudraprayag, who, between 1918 and 1926, preyed on 125 people across several villages on the pilgrim route between Rudraprayag and Kedarnath, and along the road to Badrinath.

His first book, *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, documented some of these early adventures, catapulting Corbett to celebrity. His narratives were enthralling, but, as the late conservationist Billy Arjan Singh insisted, were a major “disservice to tigers... emphasising the innate savagery of a hard-pressed animal.” Corbett always maintained a devout respect for tigers and leopards, never explicitly describing these hunts as sport, yet, his photographs illustrate a man who seemed to attain some gratification hunting animals worthy of the kill. In one image (pictured here), Corbett looks relaxed, almost indifferent, with a quiet swagger and air of condescension, towering over the lifeless, gargantuan Bachelor of Pawalgarh,

# JIM CORBETT



## MAN-EATERS OF KUMAON



**Jim Corbett standing beside the Bachelor of Powalgarh (Source: Wikipedia)**

sought-after not for his “man-eating” or cattle depredations, but purely for the novelty of his colossal size. Corbett even admitted to the thrill of “securing a magnificent trophy” when on the trail of the Pipal Pani tiger.

The general presumption that Corbett only killed “man-eaters” is, as Mandala similarly contends, erroneous. During this time, the widespread and consistently increasing press-coverage on “man-eaters” perhaps enabled hunters — and Corbett, alike — to justify the extermination of what they deemed troublesome animals. The phenomenon of the “man-eater” was equally a construction of the hunter; who, through narrative, engineered and exaggerated the panic and devastation caused by these animals; thereby substantiating reasons for their elimination. Corbett the imperialist hunter, was, in actuality, only an arms-length away from Corbett the conservationist.

### The transformation

His complete transformation nonetheless, manifested and concretised itself as a result of the hunting excesses he saw in others, coupled with the wonton and rapacious exigencies of the Empire that destroyed Indian forests. He stood against the thoughtless, indiscriminate eradication of wildlife and believed adequate measures were required to save the

tiger and other fauna. His first step, inspired by his friend; the writer, naturalist and photographer F.W. Champion, was to take up shooting with a camera. For him, conservation was not so much an abstract idea, but something deeply personal; a bond between himself and his own immediate environment. This Thoreauvian outlook “introduced interesting inflections into any simplistic dichotomy of coloniser and colonised, powerful and feeble, hunter and hunted” casting Corbett in an utterly unique meld of hunter-turned-conservationist.

Ironically, Corbett’s baffling methodology as a conservationist was to organise shoots for Governors and Viceroys, where he inveigled these high-officials to subscribe to a philosophy of preservation. Nevertheless, it was through this puzzling medium that Corbett played a pivotal role in the establishment of India’s first National Park — what is now Corbett National Park — in 1936. The Park’s legislation served as an antecedent to later, more comprehensive wildlife laws, and was fittingly selected as the venue for the launch of Project Tiger in 1973.

Some critics have branded Corbett a green imperialist. But, instead of being a “cog in the colonial machinery”, Corbett was an original, and in spite of his nuanced imperialist sympathies, devoted his life — most notably his later years — to the conservation of India’s wildlife. His

methods, however abnormal or anomalous, separated him from the dark shadowy phantoms of colonialism as a beacon, however faint, in his desire to — as Edward Said articulated — “induce a change in the moral climate”, and shift attitudes towards wildlife conservation. He succeeded in his endeavour, and it is the consequence of his efforts and legacy — and in the countless other, perhaps brighter lights that followed him — that conservation has so energetically entered, and continued to relentlessly thrive in public consciousness.

After India’s Independence, Corbett retired to Nyeri, Kenya, with his sister Maggie. He never married, and passed away, a few days after the completion of his sixth book *Tree Tops*, on April 19, 1955.



**Harshad Sambamurthy is an environmental writer. Through the written word, he hopes to develop**

**an environmental consciousness that recognises the inherent link between humans and wildlife using creative educational and pedagogical tools like storytelling and folklore. He is based in Chennai, and can be reached at [harshad.samba@gmail.com](mailto:harshad.samba@gmail.com)**

# A reality check

*Much as we may want to deny it, it's true that caste-based oppression is still very much rampant in India. A new film focuses on this and forces us to face up to this deplorable situation once again, says **Shoma A. Chatterji**.*



A poster of the film 'Life of an Outcaste'

**L**ife of an Outcaste is not a documentary film. It is an 80-minute-long feature film that will keep you glued to the screen. It will neither move you to tears, nor make you want to look away. It will shock you by the long tracks of silence dotted with the natural soundscape of chirping birds, crowing chickens, the chanting of the Ramayana floating in the distance, a single song playing of the tragedy of being born a girl; highlighting the tragedy of being born an outcast that you cannot wipe out across two generations, or with education, or with your silent rebellion.

## The story

32-year-old Pawan Srivastava who comes from an upper-caste Hindu family, offers a deep insight into the tragedy of being born Dalit. The three main characters – a middle-aged man, his wife and their son are not given any names as a sign that the

names of the Dalit do not matter because their lives don't. Yet, we see the father trying to untangle fishing net from the waters that probably do not belong to him, or, carry head loads of human shit to unload it somewhere in the distance, or, cycling through the winding roads lined with trees on either side to reach the city to cut wood to eke out a living if one can call it 'living'. He works on construction sites too.

The wife spreads red chillies on a mat to dry, grown on the land that they have taken on rent from the landlord, but the produce is again taken away by the same landlord. The wife keeps grumbling about the scarcity of water not resolved by the installation of the pump, but the husband keeps quiet because he has no money to install a pump.

And thus the film rolls on, never showing the older Dalit's face clearly as if

he is a microcosm of all Dalits everywhere whose faces do not matter, as they are faceless and nameless among the upper caste village they live in. The entire film was shot in Usri which is in Unnao District of Uttar Pradesh, and is 100 km from Lucknow. It is an upper caste-dominated village with a segment of Dalits who live in inhuman conditions. Brahmins have a stronger voice there.

"As a person I strongly believe in social justice and am unconditionally against any kind of discriminations, so when it comes to films I believe that Indian cinema should be inclusive, and it should include all the voices. In Indian cinema Dalits are marginalised, so as a filmmaker I took it as my responsibility to raise their voice through cinema," says Pawan, who struggled for two years to collect funding, till he found enough resources through crowd-funding to complete the film.



A scene from the film 'Life of an Outcaste' (left); Pavan Srivastava (right)

### "The poor have no caste"

Life of an Outcaste fluidly moves back to small flashbacks, coming back to the present, each of which sheds light on the varied shades of oppression, torture, and insults the Dalits must live through. One of them shows the farmer as the newly married young husband having brought his wife who arrives in a palanquin, and recedes to the inner quarters of the house. But when she hears that her first night must be spent with the village landlord, according to "custom" which ordains that her virginity belongs to the landlord, she comes out of the sanctum sanctorum and puts her foot down, saying that she will not sleep with the landlord, never mind what the consequences are. They are told that in that case they will have to leave the village. The camera cuts to a long shot showing the young couple in silhouette in the distance, walking away from the village.

Another flashback shows the son, now a Mathematics teacher in the local school, as a small child being taught in a pathshala. As he grows up, he has to work on the farm and do other mundane work, and then sit down to study. The soundtrack fills up with what the teacher tells him, "Go

sweep the compound, it will strengthen the muscles of your arms. What will you do learning English?" He comes home tired, but his father, then a younger man, tries to drill into him the power of education. Later, the boy is seen sending up a prayer stating, "Please make my teacher understand that learning English is very important for me." He then asks his father, "What is our caste, Daddy" and his father says, "The poor have no caste, my son." This spells out the philosophy of the film. It passes judgement on the fact that running away from the ancestral village to carve a new life, or getting the son educated enough to become a teacher of Mathematics in the local school, have worsened their human condition, instead of improving it.

While the father has tried to make peace with the condition, his life is reduced to nothing, he has taught himself the magic of survival – silence. He hardly speaks at all when the young boys tease him and poke him on his rides to the city to find work. He keeps silent at the corner tea-shop everyday on his way back for a cup served in an earthen pot, but does not comment on anything that the chaiwallah says. The chaiwallah is the self-appointed political commentator on Trump and the government, and the tussle

between China and Japan, and the moral decay in girls wearing tees and trousers, and also on how Facebook and WhatsApp are destroying the moral fabric and the culture of the society. But the older man is always silent. The tea-shop has another regular customer, a crazy young man who feeds, plays with, and enjoys the company of imaginary birds that do not exist. This is a small surrealistic touch that enriches the humane texture of the film.

The son who has joined as Mathematics teacher in the local school, is arrested within a month for not writing "Om" on the blackboard before beginning his lessons, and is also accused of his students against the Ramayana! His father works doubly hard to earn the bail money. He gets bail but loses his job and says that it is more complex to understand caste than to teach Mathematics. When placed behind bars, the son keeps quiet when the policeman lectures him on the need for "adjustment", and his retort is – "You people are jealous because we are educating ourselves to break away from the dirty work you force us to do."

(continued on page 35...)

# A play called ‘Menghaobi’

Playwright Shanta Gokhale’s play ‘Menghaobi: The Fair One’, is an inspired, and an inspiring take on the life of Manipur’s Iron Lady Irom Sharmila. Interestingly, while Irom has moved on in life, this play highlights the struggle which is still so very pertinent, says **Prof. Avinash Kolhe**.



A still from the play

Writers, dramatists, poets, respond to life around them in their own manner. When Mumbai-based playwright and critic Shanta Gokhale read about Irom Sharmila from Manipur, and her fast-unto-death against the dreaded Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), she felt that she must tell Irom’s story to the entire world through a play. Thus was born *Menghaobi: The Fair One*.

## The story of Irom Sharmila

Irom was on fast for nearly 16 years, and was force-fed by the security forces. And when on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2016, she broke her fast, Gokhale was ready with a play on this theme to show her solidarity with Irom. Gokhale had to relook at her play in light of this development and

also some subsequent developments like Irom contesting and losing an assembly election, and her marriage to her British boyfriend.

It is well-known that after breaking her fast, Irom contested assembly elections in her home state Manipur, in which she got less than 20 votes! This sent shock-waves among her fans all over the world. She got married in August 2017 to her British boyfriend, and today, the Iron Lady Irom is married and has settled down in South India.

Gokhale situated her play in a middle-class home in Delhi where a middle-age woman is blissfully unaware of Irom, her struggle, and the atrocities heaped by Indian armed forces on the hapless people of Manipur. This woman happens to be the

elder daughter of an army colonel, and was brought up to believe that Indian armed forces can do no wrong. This lady represents the middle-class India, happy and safe in their cocoons. She is visited, probably in her dreams, by a story-teller from Manipur, who tells this lady the story of Irom and her fast of 16 years! Her younger sister Sheela also visits her and shakes her out of her middle class complacency and ignorance. This creates a highly dramatic situation where the siblings find themselves on different sides of the ideological divide, the younger one pleading for the cause of justice to the Manipuris, and the older one taking the side of the armed forces and the establishment, in general. The debate and the reality presented through this debate, opens the eyes of the senior sister, the Delhi-based homemaker.

It is more than obvious that Gokhale penned a political play with the undertones of conflict between freedom and the desire to maintain the system. In such a situation, one automatically becomes a hero (in this case Irom), and the other villain (the armed forces/Indian government). This is too simplistic a treatment of an immensely complicated socio-political situation.

### The production

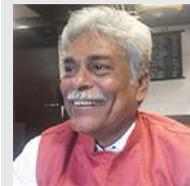
This English play has been produced by the Playpen Performing Arts Trust, and is directed by Mahesh Dattani, who has written some of the most widely staged English language plays. He finds directing someone else's text perhaps more creatively liberating and inspiring. Dattani has extensively used songs and dances from Manipur to lend credibility to the presentation and the theme. This, though very attractive, works against the theme of the play, which is quite serious in intent. The visual and audio impact of the song and dance makes the play visually appealing and pleas-

ant to watch, but it also takes the audiences away from the plight of Manipuris living under the dreaded AFSPA for many decades now. Consequently, the play does not touch the audiences with the tragedy it is supposed to portray.

It is quite tempting to compare Irom with Antigone from the Greek tragedy, as both these women fought heroically against the might of the state. The comparison should end just here as there is nothing more common between them. Irom fought against the AFSPA which has been in force in Manipur from 1980 onwards! In other words, it has been there for the last 38-odd years during which the country was led by the likes of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral, A.B.Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh, and now Narendra Modi. None of these honourable prime ministers thought it fit to revoke this Act, as it is so needed to keep peace in Manipur. The play just does not take this aspect of the story into account, and as a result, it becomes a highly

one-sided affair. It is not a bio-drama, nor is it meant to give an account of what has happened in her life.

The play has an impressive cast with Padma Damodaran playing the role of the elder sister. Unfortunately, she does not fight fiercely as could be expected from an army officer's daughter, when her younger sister argues against the army rule in Manipur. This was the moment in the play where first class ideological conflict could have been presented to the audience. Without such ideological clash, 'Menghaobi' reduces itself to a story of well-meaning woman, who fought, and lost.



**Prof. Avinash Kolhe** retired as Associate Professor in Political Science from D.G. Ruparel

College, Mumbai.

# A reality check

(...continued from page 33)



Explaining whether Pawan went through any ideological conflict as he was making a film on the Dalits being upper-caste himself, he says, "I do not believe that only a Dalit should make a film on their community. I take it as my social responsibility as a filmmaker to talk about their agony and their struggle. When people across the community show their solidarity with the oppressed class, then alone can we dream of a casteless society. The film is fictional, but the ground it is laid on is very much real."

The desperate poverty the family lives in is suggested rather than told. The backdrop shows the onset of winter, but the older man wears a sweater filled with holes, an old pair of baggy trousers, and sometimes his wife hands him a shawl before he sets out before daybreak, and the fog still dogs the landscape. The home is an apology of living space where in one touching scene, the wife gets up from her narrow bed and squeezes herself beside her sleeping husband and draws the covers on herself. The daughter-in-law who never utters a single word during the entire film has a skeletal frame, and her mother-in-law mutters to herself whether the girl eats at all. Why, doesn't she know?

The film is open-ended because Pawan believed in not forcing a closure and allow things to flow organically in the film. "I did not want

to influence the story in any way, so I allowed it to be organic and as close to reality as possible. The oppression and struggles of the Dalits are organic in nature, so I thought that an open-ended story could do more justice to the subject," he sums up.



**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.

## KRISHNA SOBTI

A bold, literary pioneer (1925-2019)

**K**rishna Sobti, born on 18 February 1925, was a Hindi language fiction writer, essayist, and personality profiler. Often called the grande dame of Hindi literature, writing to her was a conversation with oneself, taking place in language, which captured both the sound of one's soul and the outside noises. Finding creativity in the mysterious silence of the dark night, it helped her suddenly to find words, revealing themselves to her in new ragas, rhythms, beats and meanings.

Sobti made the readers themselves reach for the truth, and understand it, through a plethora of issues ranging from partition, relationships between man and woman, changing dynamics of Indian society, and slow deterioration of human values, and bold themes like female identity dysphoria and sexuality. Her amalgamating idiomatic Punjabi, Urdu and Rajasthani, while writing in Hindi, enhanced her language. Though translated into multiple Indian and foreign languages, her works attracted criticism, because of excessive profanity, and sex-obsession. Colloquial words, made it difficult for the Hindi purists to swallow.

Her short stories included *Lama* (about a Tibetan Buddhist priest), and *Nafisa* in 1944, and *Sikka Badal Gaya*, her famous story about the Partition of India, and *Badalon ke Ghare*. A selection of her major works are published in *Sobti Eka Sohabata*. *Mitro Marjani* (1966), was a novel set in rural Punjab that concerned a young married woman's unapologetic exploration and assertion of her sexuality. Her other novels include *Zindaginama*, *Daar Se Bichchuri*, *Dar Se Bichhadi* (1958), *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* (1972), *Ai Ladki*, *Tin Pahar and Yaaron Ke Yaar*, a fictionalised autobiography, titled *Gujarat Pakistan Se Gujarat Hindustan Taq*, *Dil-o-Danish* and *Channa*.

Subscribing to the Indian concept of *ardhanarishwara*, occupying both masculine and feminine traits, as a writer, in the 1960s, under a masculine pseudonym Hashmat, she sketched vivid profiles of her contemporary writers in three volumes, written over 15 years, and it was published as *Hum Hashmat* in 1977. Somewhat of a maverick, she loved to wade into controversies.

After she submitted the 500 page manuscript of her first novel, titled *Channa*, the story of a woman born into a farming family in pre-Partition India in 1952, to the Leader Press in Allahabad, she found it had made textual linguistic alterations that altered her use of Punjabi and Urdu words, to Sanskrit words. She withdrew the book from publication, and paid to have the printed copies destroyed. She kept the novel in cold storage, before it was finally republished in 2017, just as she had drafted it 65 years ago, as *Channa*. Her epic magnum opus in 1979 *Zindaginama* composed in unique Hindi, offered a realistic portrayal of the culture, customs, mutual jealousies, envy and animosity of Punjab's countryside, as well as the Sikh community's history of valour.



Soon after, Sobti filed a suit against the poet, novelist and essayist Amrita Pritam, claiming that her book titled *Hardatt Ka Zindaginama* violated her copyright title. Litigated for 26 years, it ultimately was decided in favour of Pritam, six years after her death, in 2011. She declined the offer of the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in 2010, stating that, "As a writer, I have to keep a distance from the establishment." She returned her 1980 Sahitya Akademi award (one of only three women to win the award for Hindi literature), which she received for *Zindaginama*, and also relinquished her much-esteemed 1996 Sahitya Akademi Fellowship in 2015, citing governmental inaction following the Dadri riots. In 2017, she received the Jnanpith Award, only the second woman writer in Hindi, after Mahadevi Varma, but gave away the prize money of ₹ 11 lakh, as also one crore of her personal money to the Raza Foundation, for the development of language and literature.

At the ripe age of 70 years, she married Dogri writer Shivnath who, by a remarkable coincidence, shared her birth date and year, but after his passing away lived alone in her east Delhi apartment, till her death on 25 January 2019, at 93 years.

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

# Anna Rajam Malhotra

Gutsy pioneer and trailblazer (1927-2018)

**A**nna Rajam Malhotra, born on 17 July 1927, was a gutsy, determined, and stubbornly honest woman, didn't let anything hold her back from succeeding in life. She created history by becoming the first female IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer of independent India. Born in Niranam village in Kerala's Thiruvalla district, she obtained her Master's in English literature from Madras University in 1949, and in 1950, passed the civil services examination.

In 1951, opting for the Madras cadre, she was however discouraged from joining the service by the board consisting of four ICS officers, and was instead offered the Foreign Service and Central Services because they were 'more suitable for women'. But, she argued her case and was allowed to join the IAS. This was her first victory.

The first Chief Minister under whom Anna worked for, C. Rajagopalachari, was in principle, against women entering public service as they would be unable to handle arising law and order situations, take important administrative decisions, or even use discretionary powers as a magistrate. Instead of the charge of a District Sub Collector, he offered Anna a post in the Secretariat instead. She had to fight a second time for a chance to prove herself, arguing that she was equally competent to men in handling any situation. Anna, who had undergone training in horse riding, rifle and revolver shooting, and in using magisterial powers, did not comply, and was eventually posted as the Sub-Collector of Tirupattur, Hosur, in Madras State, again becoming the first woman to do so.

Anna successfully battled all gender prejudices, and carved out a new identity and path for herself. She attributed men's bias to the conservative patriarchal mindset that prevailed, and proved her mettle like no other. She not only shattered the glass ceiling, but never bowed down to anyone. A steely resolve, straight-forwardness and integrity, were traits she was associated with, and had the courage to stand up to what was right. However, despite her pioneering role, Anna wore her achievements lightly and warmly, and recalled how her finest hours as a bureaucrat were spent with villagers in rural India.

Anna worked under seven chief ministers, and worked closely with Rajiv Gandhi in the Asiad Project, and also accompanied the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on an eight-state tour, in her capacity as an agricultural secretary. After retirement in 1996, she was a board member at the Leela Group of Companies.

One of Anna's biggest achievements was overseeing the successful construction and execution of the country's first greenfield computerised port, Nhava Sheva (Jawaharlal Nehru Port), as the Chairperson, in May 1989. Concern over congestion at India's ports necessitated the need to augment handling. Hence the government identified Nhava Sheva as the location for India's first container port. Anna had to start from scratch in what was then marshy, salt pan land, as she had not handled such a project before. She was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1989 for this achievement.

Fighting conventions all through her life, was her strong point, except when it came to her own life. Incredibly in 1951, the civil service rules in her appointment order mentioned, "In the event of marriage, your service will be terminated."

However, the rules were changed thereafter. She had fallen in love with her batch mate R.N. Malhotra (later the RBI Governor from 1985 to 1990), but the two of them decided to bide their time as he was a Hindu from Punjab and she, a Christian from Kerala. They kept their relationship tucked away for 25 years, before getting married in 1985 at the age of 50.

Anna, who retired in 1996, was a board member at the Leela Group of Companies. She passed away on 17 September 2018. In death, Anna didn't want to be put in a coffin, but as per her wish, was cremated and the ashes floated 'in a good place'.

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



# VICE ADMIRAL MANOHAR PRAHLAD AWATI, PVSM, VRC

A unique and honourable naval officer (1927-2018)

Vice Admiral Manohar Prahlad Awati was born on 7 September 1927, in Surat, in a family of academics. His father had studied zoology at Cambridge. He had his schooling in King George's School, Mumbai, and the Maharashtra Education Society School, Pune.

He was commissioned into the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) in November 1945, after completing the training in the ship Duffrin. After his training at the Royal Naval Colleges at Dartmouth and Greenwich, he underwent training with the British Mediterranean Fleet, and the Naval Specialist School at Dartmouth. He specialised in Signals and Communications. On return to India in March 1950, he commanded the cadet training ship INS Tir, the destroyer INS Ranjit, and the ASW frigate, INS Kamorta. He carried the colours at a ceremony when the Royal Indian Navy was re-designated as Indian Navy (IN).

In the Indo-Pak War in 1971, he was the commander of the unit of the Eastern Fleet comprising 31 Patrol Vessel Squadron and INS Kamorta. He operated within enemy waters, constantly facing the danger from mines and enemy. He forced a blockade and captured three enemy vessels carrying war material. He was awarded the Vrc for gallant leadership and commitment to duty. Two Pakistani officers had handed over a .38 Webley revolver to him as a token of surrender. He presented it to the NDA as a souvenir.

In 1973, there was a mini-mutiny in INS Mysore. It was a rare event, and Captain Awati was sent to handle the situation. He took charge of the ship and soon restored the situation to normal. He attended the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, and the Royal College of Defence Studies, London. He was posted as Commandant, National Defence Academy (NDA). A strict disciplinarian, his personality inspired the cadets towards excellence. Many cadets take pride in claiming that they were Awati-trained. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was invited by him for taking the salute at the Passing Out parade.

Fond of horse riding, he ensured that encroachments on Academy land were cleared. He was a keen nature lover and during his tenure, all the final term cadets planted one tree

each. On 1 April 1979, he assumed the chair of Chief of Personnel at Naval Headquarters at New Delhi. He described the tenure at New Delhi as one of despair due to uncomprehending bureaucrats. His old friend, Col. V.P. Singh, then Commandant of the President's Body Guard, offered a horse driven buggy to him. He started going to the office in the morning with a flag on the buggy, and a smartly dressed daffadar in attendance. He could not get it for the return journey due to uncertain office hours. He used to drive along the Rajaji Marg.

In January 1980, Indira Gandhi came to power and enquired from the Naval Chief about the naval officer driving in a buggy. So, he changed the route and drove along the Aurangzeb Road. All went well till one day she happened to pass his buggy in her car, and again rang up the Naval Chief as to why this officer did not use a car like everyone else. So he was deprived of the pleasure of a ride in a buggy.

His next assignment was as Flag Officer Commanding in Chief of the Western Naval Command, from where he retired in March 1983. He was spartan in his habits and a teetotaler. He retired to live in his home village, Vinchurni, and made significant contribution in the fields of environment, sports, and adventure.

He created the Maritime History Society in Mumbai, and instilled awareness about the rich maritime traditions of India. He is known as the father of IN's circumnavigation adventures. He played an important part in circumnavigation projects of Commander Dilip Donde and that of the all women crew on INS Tarini. He authored three books on nature and environment. He passed away on 4 December 2018, in his native village.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)





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