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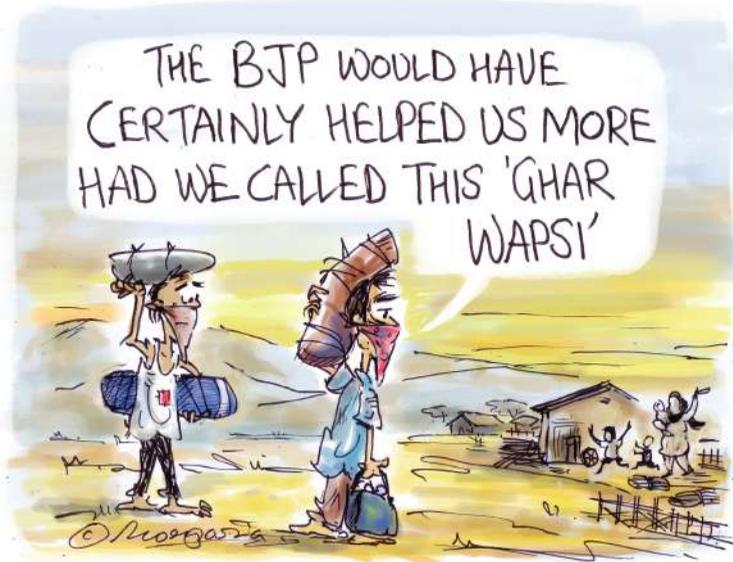
The war against COVID 19



Childhood interrupted
Death in the time of Corona
Stepping into the new normal

Know India Better
An organic tour

Face to Face
Bhooshan Kanani



CONTENTS

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THEME:
**THE WAR AGAINST
COVID 19**

Morparia's Page 02

COVID-19 takes lives, heals nature 04
Manu Shrivastava

Migrants and domestic labour 06
worst hit by COVID-19
Sonal Aggarwal

Surge in domestic violence during lockdown 08
Manu Shrivastava

Childhood interrupted 10
Mamta Gupta

Death in the time of Corona 12
Shoma A. Chatterji

Stepping into the new normal 14
Anuradha Pittie

Battles within the four walls 16
Gajanan Khergamker

Innovations to fight a pandemic 30
Dr. Rina Mukherjee

Know India Better 17

An organic tour
Manjira Majumdar

Face to Face 26

with Bhooshan Kanani
A. Radhakrishnan

General

D-Days for two legends 32
G. Venkatesh

India's mango story 34
Hiren Kumar Bose

Great Indians 36



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COVID-19 takes lives, heals nature

Human actions and profit-driven industrial activities over decades have ravaged the Earth beyond repair. Even the most powerful nations seemed helpless in the battle to save the planet and, in turn, human lives. However, the lockdown initiated to control the spread of COVID-19 is healing the Earth in more ways than one, says **Manu Shrivastava.**



Mumbaikars were thrilled to see peacocks sauntering in some of the residential areas of South Mumbai.



too, is witnessing some of the most significant and vibrant environmental changes because of the lockdown and decreased human activity, leaving humans awestruck. “The visible changes, that too in such a short time span, show how responsive nature is to humans and human activity,” says amateur wildlife photographer and Pune-resident Amritha S. “It is an indication that this planet can and must be saved.”

The positive environmental changes witnessed globally have humbled even

the most materialistically-driven individual as the ‘new earth’ is simply too beautiful to resist. “Nature, in its full glory, has touched each one of us and has made us realise how important it is in our day to day lives,” concludes Amritha.

Human action has ravaged all

Human actions and profit-driven industrial activities over decades have ravaged the Earth beyond repair. International conventions, treaties and agreements – between countries facilitated by the United Nations and between ‘well-meaning’ nations - to preserve nature, save environment and control climate change have failed to protect the planet from these destructive activities. Even the most powerful nations seemed helpless in the battle to save the planet and, in turn, human lives.

Human actions can impact the sustainability of the planet and, in turn, improve human lives --- purer air, cleaner water, greener trees and proximity to wildlife. The Corona-virus pandemic has achieved what decades of international negotiations and ‘cooperation’ couldn’t. While the changes may not last once life reverts to ‘normalcy’, even with new benchmarks, they are too significant to be ignored.

“The way nature has responded is miraculous. I have never experienced so much calm and that subtle

When residents of a house in Powai area of Mumbai heard a loud thud at about 1.30 am on 10 May 2020, during the lockdown, they woke up to an unusual sight – a deer, on the run being chased by a leopard, crashed down their roof. The incident is a testimony to the fact that the lockdown has changed fates of humans and animals – the former locked in and the latter free to roam, ‘in nature’.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed one thing without an iota of doubt - the vulnerability of nations’ systems and global infrastructure, especially those dealing with critical sectors of economy, public health, commerce, etc. With the pandemic spreading in unexpected regions and evading the best of control measures, it is only a matter of time before the complete impact of the crisis unfolds. The risks are aplenty and human lives are at stake. However, among all the chaos, there is one ‘positive’ emerging from the lockdown that doesn’t scare - the positive impact on the environment.

The Earth is healing

The lockdown initiated to control the spread of COVID-19 is healing the Earth in more ways than one. And nature couldn’t be more ‘aggressive’ in displaying its beauty to humans, even to urban residents who were denied nature’s spectacles between the concrete jungles. India,

happiness that one feels only amidst nature in this city, ever!” says Mumbai-based writer Kavita Singh. “I have spent my whole life in this city and have always craved for getaways that would bring me closer to nature. Who would think a deadly virus outbreak would provide this opportunity to the residents? My mother in Lucknow was surprised when I told her I heard a koel in the morning in Mumbai, for the first time in my life!” she grins.

Pollution has been the biggest bane of modern human existence, especially in bigger towns, cities and metros. Every year, millions of people die of pollution of air, water or land. However, since the lockdown, the pollution levels across these cities and metros have plummeted to record lows.

Rare sights on Mumbai's roads

A constable, currently posted at a South Mumbai police station, could not believe his eyes when he saw a peacock dancing on one of the service roads in the area. As it meandered its way out of the parked cars, he hurried to the spot to click a picture of this once-in-a-lifetime-moment, probably historic, holding his baton in one hand and mobile phone in the other. As he took off his face mask momentarily to “live in the moment completely,” he experienced a rare kind of happiness. “It’s a shame because back in our village, my mother and grandmother would spot peacocks on trees like we see dogs on Mumbai roads. When I tell my mother how I ran to shoot a dancing peacock, she will have a hearty laugh.”

“It’s because of the decreased human activity and even lesser noise pollution levels that birds and animals have been making their appearance felt in ‘human’ zones,” says activist Sudha Krishnan. “Even urban birds like crows and pigeons are being spotted in record numbers across the city.”

The flamingoes are back and how!

Navi Mumbai and Thane – areas adjoining Mumbai and seasonal home to the migratory flamingoes - had been witnessing a gradual drop in the number of winged visitors every year, for the past few years. However, now because of the lockdown, thousands of flamingoes have begun flocking the creeks of Navi Mumbai. The birds are visiting in record high numbers despite the ‘delay’ in registering their ‘annual migration to wetlands’ in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) this year.

According to the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), there has been a 25 per cent increase in flamingo migration since 2019, and in the first week of April itself. Lower human and construction activities in Sewri, Thane Creek and adjoining areas, owing to the lockdown, has led to the increase.

Lockdown cleaned up Delhi's air too

In the meantime, in New Delhi, ranked the most polluted city in the world by the World Health Organisation

(WHO) in May 2014, the air quality (AQI levels) fell below 20 when the 11 million registered cars went off the roads. The sound of birds chirping in the mornings, even evenings, is like icing on the cake. The usual AQI levels in Delhi used to be 200 (25 per cent above unsafe level as deemed by the WHO) and would also reach 900 on the worst days. The average concentration of PM 2.5 dropped from 91 micrograms per cubic meter on 20 March 2020 to 26 micrograms per cubic meter a week later on 27 March, after the lockdown began – a drop of 71 per cent. The drop in PM or particulate matter is attributed to no construction activity, no vehicles on the road and factories ceasing production. “Delhi skies were never this pristine and blue!” says resident Dinesh Kumar.

Ganga's waters turned fit to drink

Ganga, ironically, always slated to be the most polluted, couldn't be far behind. The Uttarakhand Pollution Control Board tested water from Har-ki-Pauri in Haridwar and the results revealed the water was ‘fit for drinking after chlorination’, for the first time in decades. Officials involved in the ‘Clean Ganga Project’ said the pollution levels in the river decreased due to the stopping of industrial waste drainage into the river that came to a halt during the lockdown.

In Jalandhar, the residents woke up to a spectacular sight of the picturesque Dhauladhar mountain range in Himachal Pradesh, over 213 km away, and after three decades. “I could not believe my eyes when I woke up that morning. I used to tell my son that as kids we could see the mountains in the backdrop of the city...gradually losing out to the air pollution that became the new normal. I am so happy I can show him how I saw the city as a child,” quipped shop-owner Amandeep Bakshi.

...And elsewhere too, nature responded

Several other instances have been reported and recorded across the country that show how nature is responding, positively, to decreased human activity amid the lockdown: Dolphins spotted in Mumbai along the coast at Marine Drive and Breach Candy; Ganges Dolphins surfacing at the ghats at Kolkata; monkeys frolicking in dozens on commercial roads in Ahmedabad; deer bolting through a residential area in Assam and other places; etc.

Coronavirus has taken an unprecedented toll on the world, in general, and India, in particular. Humans known to go close to nature found, for the first time, a reversal in roles.



Manu Shrivastava is a media legal researcher with DraftCraft International, and co-convener of ‘The Woman Survivor’ initiative that documents abuse of women and children within families.

Migrants and domestic labour worst hit by COVID-19

*Migrant workers including daily wage labourers, domestic helpers, hawkers and marginalised groups are the worst hit by the Coronavirus crisis. It's the responsibility of the state and even their employers to ensure they make it through these trying times, says **Sonal Aggarwal**.*



Migrants walking home has been a heart wrenching sight

The national lockdown has severely affected lives of millions of people in the country. However, the worst hit are those who belong to the lower economic strata of the society, migrant workers including daily wage labourers, domestic helpers, hawkers and marginalised groups, whose fringe existence is threatened with the restrictions that have come along with the lockdown.

These groups of people were living fragile lives in the first place. Living and working thousands of miles away from their families and homes, the poor of the country have been hit badly due to the COVID-19 crisis. With little or no savings, pending dues and closure of 'economical' options for food, the Coronavirus outbreak has wreaked havoc in ways more than one.

Resident of a temporary shanty in an 'illegal' settlement in Bandra, 34-year-old Rashmi Dash came to Mumbai ten years ago with her husband and two toddlers. The lack of opportunities to make a living in her native village in Balangir district in Odisha had compelled her husband,

Ramesh, to leave the village and migrate to a big city to survive. Mumbai seemed a good option as Ramesh knew many people in the city who had already migrated and were working in Mumbai.

It still wasn't easy for the couple to leave behind their ailing parents but staying back would have meant abject poverty, even death. When the couple reached Mumbai, their lives changed for the better. Rashmi started working in homes as a domestic maid and Ramesh got a job as a waiter in a South-Indian restaurant in Bandra. "We were fortunate that the village brothers helped us settle in this big city, it would have been very difficult otherwise," says Ramesh.

Migrant house-help unsure of future

Rashmi gradually increased the number of houses for work. "I have always done my job with utter honesty and hard work. Otherwise how will memsaab trust me? It's only through word of mouth that I got other big houses for work," says Rashmi. "We were a happy family, able to teach our children in decent schools and send money back home for our parents." Now, with the lockdown, the couple is, unsure of their future.

When the lockdown was being announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 25 March 2020, Rashmi, her husband, 11-year-old son and 13-year old daughter were watching television together in their tiny 'homely' shanty. The announcement left the four confused, as they looked at each other, wondering what it meant for them, like thousands others in the city.

Rashmi immediately called all her memsaabs, also

clueless, to ask if she should come to work in the following days. Ramesh also called his restaurant manager and was almost certain the restaurant will be open despite the lockdown as “where will people with no other provision for food eat during the lockdown!”

Unable to grasp the severity of the situation and the uncertainty of their future, the family decided to take each day at a time. “That’s what we have done all our lives anyway, taking each day at a time. We cannot afford to plan for long-term anyway,” Rashmi murmurs in a shocked stupor. The siblings were just happy that they weren’t supposed to go to school for a ‘few days’ now!

Distress migration is the rule

Things are not different for thousands of other women who have spent decades in Mumbai and other big cities across the country, working in homes, offices, schools, malls, hotels, hospitals, etc. as cleaners and domestic help. Most of these women belong to the poverty-stricken states such as West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh where distress migration is a commonplace occurrence.

Within a week of the lockdown, Beena, a 22-year-old maid cleaning homes in a posh society in Delhi, was already worried about her diminishing savings. “I didn’t have much saved to start with as I was sending money home every month to my ailing mother.” With an alcoholic father at home, in a village in Coochbehar district in West Bengal, Beena would send a portion of the money to a trusting neighbour. “My neighbour kaka would then give that money to my mother, in the absence of my father.”

With the ‘Stay At Home’ order, Beena is worried about earning money for herself; forget sending it to her parents. And, even if she survives the lockdown, she isn’t sure if she’ll get any work after things return to normalcy. “It was so sudden and so stringent that I had no time to prepare,” she says.

In rural areas, the situation is not that bad as the local government has been providing ration at home, cash assistance, health care, even food with support from the civil society and donations. So, the lockdown hasn’t disrupted their lives to a great extent. With state-assisted provisions for food and health care, the rural Indian is better equipped to endure the lockdown.

The urban pockets in the country, especially the highly-urban metro cities, primarily have ‘citizens’ and ‘migrants’. Those engaged in private or government jobs, have ‘secure’ jobs. They have been given ‘moratorium’ by the banks to defer payment of loan installments, credits, etc. Most of them also have decent investments and savings to pull through such critical times.

Urban poor hit the worst

It’s the urban poor who have been hit the hardest.



Caretakers living with patients in their home have been left in the lurch

For the likes of Rashmi and Beena, while the lockdown is important to save lives, their fragile existence is equally at risk because of the lockdown. The dependence of the urban poor on the ‘urban ecosystem’ has been completely dismantled with the lockdown. Their hand-to-mouth existence has only added to their woes.

Fifty-two year old Anna K, who was working as a personal nurse and caretaker to a lonely 80-year-old woman -- her children in Singapore -- didn’t know the lockdown will leave her jobless when she needed it the most. The daughter of the octogenarian called her within a few days of the lockdown announcement to inform her that she had been ‘relieved’ of her duties. The fact that COVID-19 is a highly-contagious infection and Anna’s job involved a lot of handling and touching the patient meant she was a big risk to the health and well-being of the patient. “Just like that they told me to leave...without thinking where will I go and how will I survive in these tough times,” says Anna, a native of Kerala and working in Jaipur.

Like Anna, many nurses and care-takers, working and living with the patient or with the families have been left in the lurch. Not only are they without a source of income but also without a place to stay. “I was told to make arrangements for myself within seven days and leave the house. I cannot even take a train to Kerala because the train services have been suspended,” says Anna wiping tears from her face as uncertainty looms over her future. The lockdown has been much worse for the migrant workers in urban centres of the country. With little or no liquidity, some are selling their jewelry, other taking loans from their ‘masters’ some even borrowing money from their slightly better-off friends. Their problems are real and now, right in their face. It’s the responsibility of the state and even their employers to ensure they make it through these trying times. In the absence of both, it’s their resilience that will pass them by.

Sonal Aggarwal is a dedicated volunteer and rural activist with www.thewomansurvivor.com – an initiative of DraftCraft International to protect and empower women by bringing on one platform the latest on rights and issues, strategic case studies, state initiatives and informed legal opinions

Surge in domestic violence during lockdown

*The national lockdown has been a nightmare for many women, who are trapped inside their home with their offenders. The sharp rise in domestic violence forced the National Commission for Women to launch an emergency WhatsApp number, in addition to the available and operational options of complaining online and through email, says **Manu Shrivastava**.*



Rise in violence during lockdown

These are some of the many cases of domestic violence, sexual abuse and sexual violence against women that have seen a sharp rise during the lockdown in the country.

In April 2020, the National Commission for Women (NCW) received 315 complaints, only of domestic violence. These were received online and on a dedicated WhatsApp helpline / complaint number and not by the commonly-used postal services owing to the lockdown restrictions. Still, the number was the highest since August 2019 as per NCW records. In another part of the country, in a crowded chawl in Mumbai's densely-populated Dharavi area, Laxmi Phule is worried about the well-being of her daughter and herself. Her husband, an auto-rickshaw driver who is an alcoholic, is making frantic calls to arrange for his daru - the wine shops, liquor stores and bars being shut during the lockdown.

She had become accustomed to the occasional beating by her husband when he would come home late, drunk and extremely angry. Very often, her daughter would also face the wrath of her violent, enraged father. And now, with her husband sitting at home all day, doing nothing but drinking, Laxmi is not certain if she would survive the lockdown at all.

Women facing threats at home

Laxmi isn't alone because the nationwide lockdown that started after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on 25 March 2020 to save Indian lives, unfortunately, endangered the lives of lakhs of women in the country.

"When I was getting married, I had not imagined my life will turn upside down with the abuse perpetrated by my husband and his father. I had made peace with the violence. Now, the mere thought of having my husband and his wayward father 'in the house' for days and no chance of me stepping out of the house, gives me the shivers," says a petrified Aarti Pawar, a saleswoman in Pune. Her husband, an alcoholic and a small-time gambler has been abusing her physically and sexually since they got married five years back.

As the nation braced the strict lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the country, many women were being subjected to another kind of confinement.

In Delhi, in the second week of April 2020, a man contacted a government-licensed shelter home for women survivors of violence and abuse to seek help for his sister. The woman, a mother of two toddlers and a resident of Uttam Nagar in Delhi, had allegedly suffered physical abuse at the hands of her husband and his family. The woman was suffering abuse for the past few years and that worsened during the lockdown.

In another incident in Telangana in May 2020, a 22-year-old woman was raped by her 80-year-old relative after he offered to help her with accommodation during the lockdown. The woman had recently separated from her husband.

In a shocking incident in Rajasthan, in April 2020, a 40-year-old woman was allegedly gang-raped by three men in a government school premises. The survivor had gone to Dausa to visit her son, but was stuck in Sawai Madhopur for more than a month once the lockdown started. She had taken refuge in the school premises where the men, taking advantage of her situation, raped her.

Order to protect women from violence

The division bench of the Delhi High Court, in an order in April 2020, directed the governments at the Centre and Delhi and the Delhi Commission for Women 'to deliberate measures to curb the increasing instances of domestic violence and protect the victims during the nationwide lockdown'. The intention of the court was clear that women need to be protected from the clear and apparent threat at home.

The order was in response to the petition filed by the All India Council of Human Rights, Liberties and Social Justice (AICHLS) that detailed 'the extensive threats to the safety of women, particularly during the lockdown period, when they are locked down with their abuser'. The petition also quoted statistics as evidence: In the month of January, they received 1,462 complaints, out of which 270 were cases of domestic violence. In February, there were 302 cases of reported domestic violence. In March, out of 1323 complaints, 302 were cases of domestic violence.

The uncertainty over opening of liquor shops in the country as the restrictions were eased during the second and third phase of the lockdown only made the situation even worse. Chaotic scenes of men gathering at liquor stores in different parts of the country proved how desperate people had become to buy alcohol.

Frustration being vented on women

"The men are frustrated sitting at home and women are facing the brunt of their anger and frustration. Many of these complaints have come from North India," states NCW Chairperson Rekha Sharma. The number of actual cases is presumed to be higher as the data available only comprises 'emailed' complaints. The State Commissions have also reported an increase in the number of cases of domestic abuse.

To help these women during these extraordinary times and in the absence of a working office, the NCW launched an emergency WhatsApp number for women facing domestic violence, an option in addition to the available and operational options of complaining online and through email. With the abuser at home, a victim is unable to make a call, send an email or register a complaint through post. The lockdown has turned into a virtual trap for vulnerable women and most are even scared to complain to the police fearing the harassment will increase.

"The police and other law enforcement entities are diverting all their resources and personnel to handle the COVID-19 outbreak. Also, because of the lockdown, government agencies, NGOs, women organisations handling domestic violence cases are all closed leaving limited options for a victim. And, because of the restrictions on movement, women are unable to step out of their homes and away from the abuser. This further emboldens the perpetrator," says Meenakshi Sharma, a Delhi-based activist.

Global rise in violence

The increasing number of cases of violence against women who are confined in homes with an abusive partner or husband or family member can be seen all over the world. Most countries – South Africa, China, Italy, Spain, UK, France, USA - have reported increased instances of distressed women calling helplines as the COVID-19 pandemic spread to these nations. The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also called for a "ceasefire" to address the "horrifying global surge in domestic violence."

Organisations and women groups working closely on issues related to women rights, domestic violence and safety of women have been receiving complaints of abuse of women from across quarters. Mumbai-based NGO Sneha has seen a four-fold increase in calls with women reporting abuse from their husbands after they lost their jobs or received salary cuts.

Authorities are trying to find viable options such as phone counselling, hostels, shelter homes, etc. to support the victims. "With all the resources diverted to tackle the deadly Coronavirus pandemic, it's very difficult for victims of domestic violence to seek help as the systems are reeling under immense pressure to keep up with the Coronavirus outbreak," says Meenakshi.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the government has even started "fifty-two helplines in different parts of the country to help women facing domestic violence during the lockdown".

'Stalker' father emboldened during lockdown

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot also announced that his government is determined to stop domestic violence during the coronavirus lockdown and women facing any kind of atrocities can lodge a complaint on the 1090 helpline. He said, "In the present circumstances, the state government will not neglect its responsibility to take care of women." That notwithstanding, Pradeep Khare, a habitual offender and stalker in Jaipur, has once again begun to stalk his 'daughter', who left her criminal, dysfunctional family five years ago and now lives in another city. Fully aware that the system is busy tackling the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown, under the guise of 'fatherly concern' the stalker continues to harass her.

The threat to women lurks outside and within the 'safe' confines of their homes.



Manu Shrivastava is a media legal researcher with DraftCraft International, and co-convener of 'The Woman Survivor' initiative that documents abuse of women and children within families.

Childhood interrupted

The lockdown imposed by the Indian government was an absolute essential to keep the Coronavirus at bay. But, the effect it has had on children has been heart-rending and dramatic, says Mamta Gupta.



A child looking out on empty streets from her home

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit nations brutally. Coronavirus sneaked into our lives and exploded right in our faces to disrupt lives in a most unprecedented manner. It has not only shaken the biggest of economies, but changed the very face of earth and the way humans live life and socialise now and in the future. Besides the health impact of the infection on adults and children, often the psychological effects of COVID-19 on adults has been discussed widely. Sadly, children, the most vulnerable in times like these, have been left out of this discourse.

According to a recent survey conducted by Child Rights and You (CRY) among parents to understand the effects of the 'home quarantine' in effect due to the COVID-19 lockdown in the country – 88 per cent of the respondents said exposure of their children to screens had increased during the lockdown; 45 per cent reported their children's exposure to screens increased 'to a great extent' during the lockdown; while 43 per cent said they were constantly supervising the child whenever he/she was logging time 'online'.

Survey helps understand the impact

The survey brought out very important facts and observations that help in understanding the impact of COVID-19 crisis on children. It also reported 'more agitation, a change in eating pattern and increase in the screen exposure time' among children during the national

lockdown imposed to control the spread of the Coronavirus in the country. On the positive side, the uninterrupted and stress-free quality time with children resulted in an 'increased bond between the parents and their children'.

With the availability of time where parents and children do many things together, such as household chores, watching television, playing indoor games, reading together, eating together, etc. has helped families come closer and form a stronger bond

with their younger ones.

When the lockdown was announced, no one had anticipated the period of home quarantine would last this long. A period of two weeks in the beginning seemed like a lifetime. And then, there was Lockdown 2.0, Lockdown 3.0 and more. So families prepared for a limited quarantine time initially. Now, they don't know if life will ever revert to normalcy. In fact, they have been left with little option but to adopt a new normal itself.

Life not less than dramatic

For children, life has been dramatic so to speak. No longer can Vadodara-based eight-year-old Swati chat with her building friends in the compound – an activity that she would look forward to every evening back from school. Now Swati not just cannot go to school that has been shut since March end, she stays cooped up at home all the while with her tab. And, she isn't happy at all.

"In the beginning, she would sit for hours on her tab, watching videos on YouTube and share links with friends despite our yelling and hollering to drop the gadget and join us," says mother and accountant Vaishali Shah. "Her personality underwent a drastic change after the first fortnight of the lockdown. By mid-April, she would sit for hours listlessly and follow me around everywhere at home. She would refuse to let me out of her sight and if I did, she would throw a tantrum," recalls Vaishali.

The behavior isn't unique to children exposed to such situations, feels Chennai-based general Reiki practitioner Ms. Venkataswami. "There seems to be a lot of insecurity among humans owing to the unpredictable nature of the virus and what it has fetched us...an unpredictable lockdown. Children, naïve and unable to voice their fears, tend to react in odd ways," she adds.

So, in the beginning Swati would fight for hours when resisted from going to the building compound 'only to chat' but soon relented when she realised that all her friends too were not allowed to come out of their homes. "She is so sensible and understands that there is the fear of contracting the virus. She even tells us to take us to wear our masks and wash our hands each time we collect a parcel from a food delivery or grocery agent. But, something seems to be really off for her," says Vaishali. "Why, just the other day, when her younger brother didn't pass her the TV remote, she broke down inconsolably. I am so worried for her," recalls Vaishali, blaming the authorities for "being so strict with the lockdown."

Some children have given up

Going to a park a block away, even if it were for a bit, meant the world to five-year-old Roli. So, when the lockdown nipped the activity in the bud, she wailed at first feeling that, unable to watch her cry, her granny would relent and take her out to play. Granny did, unable to take Roli's tears, but took her to the terrace. Roli wasn't amused and turned cranky for days on end. Now, all of a sudden, Roli has stopped crying and become quiet. "After days on end of throwing a fit to be taken out, she has given up," says sexagenarian Madhuri Hegde, equally irate and waiting with bated breath for the lockdown to end.

Now, almost two months later and more to go, Roli talks of her visits to the Park fondly but with a sense of resignation to the fact she can't go there again. Now, each time she asks her mother, "When will I go to the park again," her granny struggles to stop her tears. "This lockdown is robbing our children of their childhood," says the Mumbai-based retired bank employee. "How long will they sit at home? It just isn't fair. Not fair for the young, not fair for the elderly like me. If it wasn't for her, I'd get absolutely no exercise at all," she says.

Rules too odd to follow

"To worsen things are rules like you cannot go to your own terrace and if you do, you break the lockdown rules and risk being jailed," says Nagpur-based pharmacist and father to two Piyush Jain. "It really makes no sense preventing members from going up the terrace if they manage to maintain social distancing. Simply banning them from using open spaces especially when you have children, who need to spend their energy, is cruel to say the least," he adds.

The lockdown imposed by the Indian government was an absolute essential to keep the coronavirus at bay.



On the positive side, the lockdown resulted in parents and their children spending quality time.

But, the effect it has had on children has been heart-rending to say in the least. Like the elderly who have developed medical issues owing to lack of exercise in the open, its effect on children has been nothing less than dramatic.

Some slip into depression

While some have conceded with a sense of dejection, others have taken it really badly and slipped into abject depression. The effect, the lockdown has had on children through their forced dependence owing to the surge in screen time – a move that may become synonymous with their lives considering the dependence on online classes, is unavoidable yet drastic. The State in general, through policy, the schools, through processes and parents, through sensitised approaches, have to tackle this scourge.

Children not just lose their childhood, risk losing their innocence, land in trouble on the internet even develop medical issues with the new scheme of things. And, that will have to be addressed.

Mamta Gupta is a Research Associate with Maverick – A DraftCraft International initiative to further reach, accountability and the law in Pre-Primary, Primary, Intermediary and Secondary Education.

Death in the time of Corona

Death is a democratic leveller that does not distinguish between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the weak, between men, and women and children, between the Hindu and the Muslim. Shoma A. Chatterji writes how this has been amply illustrated through the deaths of some of the famous people during the pandemic.



Death is the most definite answer to any questions on life or beyond life. Death hounds us all during a pandemic, a natural calamity, a war or an industrial accident like the one that happened in Andhra Pradesh recently. But what happens when a celebrity dies during a lockdown initiated by this intriguing and very scary pandemic called Covid-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) or Corona?.

Death and the rituals around it, never mind which faith the person belongs to, the very intense emotions of grieving and lamenting over a person his family will never set eyes again does not have any poetry or music around it. It is just too brutal, cruel and real from which there is no escape.

Too many famous personalities passed yonder during the lockdown and none of them, except one, died due to the disease that has forced us all into a small cocoon of the home. Their families, in deep distress, could hardly grieve which means that the very reality of death is being culturally redefined. "Social distancing" one of the most important rules to prevent the spread of the pandemic, means that a wife cannot weep close to her husband's body as touching is no longer *infra dig*. So, when internationally renowned footballer P.K. Banerjee passed away at the age of 82 in a Kolkata Nursing Home, his two daughters sent out a condolence message informing all who knew him or

were his fans, to refrain from attending the very restricted funeral ceremony. The earlier arrangement for 150 persons to attend with special permission from the Kolkata Police, was brought down to ten close family members. While it is true that the person who passed away had moved to another world, beyond his family and his friends and his fans, for the immediate family, this must have spelt an emotional shock that reached beyond pure grief. Due to the COVID-19 scare, his funeral was conducted in a low-key manner and his body was not taken to the maiden clubs where he spent most of his life as player and coach. "My father was a socially-responsible human being and in such a time of crisis we cannot just ignore the lockdown appeal made by the head of the state and country," Paula, his daughter, said.

Passing away in isolation

One of the most famous lady editors of two Indian magazines, namely Gulshan Ewing, passed away in isolation in a London care home at the age of 92. She was the outstanding editor of *Eve's Weekly*, a woman's magazine with a wide circulation which was the nurturing nest for many latter-day woman journalists helped in their career by Mrs. Ewing. She also edited a film fortnightly from the same publishing house called *Star & Style* which, like its "sister" also created film journalists who made a name for themselves later on when the two magazines closed down.

Writes Meher Castelino, journalist-turned-model-turned beauty queen, “Gulshan Ewing was decades before her time. The subjects that the present day magazines cover were visualised by her along with fashion features years ago. For me, Gulshan Ewing will always be the ultimate editor who had elegance, style, grace and above all a personality, which was not only friendly warm and memorable but also unforgettable.”

She migrated with her British-Indian husband Guy Ewing to UK a little after the two magazines closed down. She withdrew from journalism completely and led a peaceful life. But her death was far from a peaceful one. She lived in a care home in London's Richmond, following coronavirus-related complications on April 18. But her daughter Anjali Ewing said that the family received the news only 24 hours after she had passed away. Why? Is it because she was an Indian? As per media reports, Indians and South Asians are not being taken proper care of in the UK. Her daughter's grief had turned to anger when she was informed so late about her mother's demise.

Over her illustrious and very successful career that spanned three decades, Ms Ewing interviewed Hollywood legends like Gregory Peck and Cary Grant, many politicians, members of the royalty, and other such eminent personalities across the world. According to the Daily Mail report, she even enjoyed a glamorous life in her native city of Mumbai, where she was quite known in celebrity circles.

Her daughter had to plead with health officials and send out tweets to Health Secretary Matt Hancock and Prime Minister Boris Johnson, for her mother to be tested for COVID-19 and receive the necessary treatment. In an interview, "For more than a week we had no confirmation that my mother was affected by the coronavirus, and this just added to our worry. And when we eventually got it, she had already passed away. It was a case of too little, too late". This is one more picture of death and grief and loss during a pandemic when practically the whole world is in lockdown.

Death a democratic leveller

Irfan Khan's story is very sad. He was diagnosed with a very rare form of cancer and shifted to London for treatment around 2018. He came back with a clean chit from the doctors and had all but readied himself to face the camera. Just when we all felt that he was back to his cheerful and healthy self, disaster struck and he passed away a few days after he had addressed the press in absentia. His wife of 30 years and two sons are left to mourn this irreparable loss just when the man had met with great success in his career almost after struggling for two decades though he had a degree in Drama from the National School of Drama (NSD). The immediate family and Vishal Bharadwaj, a director who was very fond of him attended the funeral. But in complete isolation. What kind of death is this? What kind of mourning? The complete flooding of the media with clips of films he had acted in, song sequences from his films, his very aggressive and active participation in a panel

discussion where he officially and publicly gave up his family name “Khan” because he wanted to free himself from any communal or religious appendage telecast again and again, intensified the grief of his immediate family with two very young boys, Babil and Ayan. He was only 53 and had so much more to give to the film industry. His wife, Sutapa Sikder, could hardly find words to express the vacuum he has left behind for her to live with. This is no ordinary grief though no grief is “ordinary.” This is death when touching is not allowed, when close friends, associates, brothers and sisters who live in other cities, and cannot come down as the transport system is also in lockdown, is something the wife and children must live with for the rest of their lives.

In a very unethical gesture, we saw a video clip on a social networking site showing Rishi Kapoor smiling away and joking while a young paramedical, a man, sang a Hindi film song in camera. Kapoor stretched out a hand to bless the boy. But we think this was in very bad taste when we know that a man is about to pass on to the other world. Is that grieving? Or, is that a clip to be stored as a memoir by the boy to show his wife and children on the morrow? He was not even wearing a mask inside the hospital. How did the hospital staff permit him to do this? But as I have been saying again and again, Rishi Kapoor, who passed away of complications resulting from cancer, died right in the middle of a complete lockdown. His only daughter Riddhima, tried her best to fly down from Delhi but could not as flights were closed. What does a daughter feel if she cannot attend her father's last rites because of reasons beyond her control?

As they grapple with grief, family members of a person who died from the Covid-19 are also facing a logistical issue: lack of private transport or ambulances to ferry the body to the crematorium amid the current lockdown. Rules on the lockdown specify that attendance at funerals should be as low as possible, with only close relatives and friends attending. Not more than 10 people. But as even private ambulances don't have permission to ply, families of the deceased have no means to reach the crematorium for the last rites.

Death is a democratic leveller, an equaliser that does not distinguish between rich and poor, between the powerful and the weak, between men, and women and children, between the Hindu and the Muslim and during this massive pandemic, this has been amply illustrated through the deaths of these famous people.



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.

Stepping into the new normal

Our entire way of living has been disrupted following the lockdown triggered by Covid-19. Anuradha Pittie tells us how practical lifestyle changes along with psychological resilience and adjustments will help in keeping one's sanity in these insane times.

In the twinkling of an eye, everything changed. The world as we knew it came to a grinding halt, quite literally. The extension of the lockdown triggered by Covid-19 has left many floundering on how to manage in a chaotic environment, devoid of familiar routines and predictable outcomes.

Ironically, clues on coping are found in the Chinese proverb "If you work hard enough at it, you can grind even an iron rod down to a needle." This implies enormous reserves of psychological strength, stamina and flexibility.

Let us explore a few ways to develop a mindset that can help us remain afloat in troubled waters:



Technology has skyrocketed

1. Face the unpleasant

It's necessary to take stock of reality, however disagreeable, that we are in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis, with an invisible enemy called Coronavirus, and that no amount of wishful thinking will make it disappear.

2. Accept changes

Our entire way of living has been disrupted. Every area of our daily activity has been severely impacted, starting from our homes and offices to shops and schools, from theatres and restaurants to public spaces and beyond. This is truly disconcerting and overwhelming. We have no control over the socio-economic landscape whatsoever, but we do wield full power over our responses to the outside events. Recognise this and make intelligent choices.

Depending on the intensity and extent of the damage, fear and panic may also arise. Acceptance of the untoward developments and awareness of our emotional triggers to them, will help pave the way to solutions.

3. Be proactive

Boost your immunity by physical fitness regimes including 'yogic pranayama' to strengthen the respiratory system. Increase your circle of competency, by stepping out of your comfort zone and learning new skills. Summon the courage to adapt to whatever the situation demands. For instance, this may require a CEO of a multinational, to do mundane domestic chores and a housewife to make an

unfamiliar investment decision.

4. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude

An overload of news about disasters leads to an oversaturation of dismal feelings, and stressful overthinking. Gratitude helps us to gravitate towards balance and positivity.

We can start by being grateful for simply being alive and safe, and then move onto counting our blessings for all the things we took for granted pre-covid, such as freedom of movement and travel, the joy of sharing hugs, the carefree gatherings at parties, weddings, conferences and temples.

Gratitude will make us look for the silver lining in this lockdown period. It could be an opportunity to bond deeper with our family, have the free time to indulge in a hobby, reconnect with an old friend, or avail of a special online masterclass offered during this pandemic period only.

5. Strengthen your faith

It is essential to be anchored to 'source' and be nourished by grace, because external turbulence can only be countered by inner stillness. Prayers, meditation, reading a sacred text, chanting or any other spiritual practice on a daily basis would help us remain calm and centred.

Armed with a strong mind, we can step out into the



Human warriors have reached out to the migrants with food supplies.

'new normal' with equanimity.

The beginning of a new normal

These past few weeks bear witness to the 'work from home' culture and homebound lifestyle, using webinars, net banking, e-commerce and a gamut of online services and digital portals. The month of May began with a news channel holding its first virtual pan India conference, followed by a premier business chamber going live with its 'change of guard' ceremony. The dependency on technology has skyrocketed.

A wide range of entertainment, has been aired for free public viewing for a select period, such as Shakespearean plays, Russian ballets, European operas, stellar shows from Las Vegas and African Safaris.

Modern age 'gurus' have reached out globally with messages of hope and love, through daily guided meditations, words of wisdom on raising one's consciousness and spiritual ways to handle the pandemic effectively.

The human warriors

It's heartwarming to see the collective efforts by NGOs, Trusts, Corporates, Chambers of Commerce and religious institutions, towards the mobilisation of food towards the needy. A Kolkatta-based women's group reached basic supplies to the poor in the Sunderbans area. Enterprising youngsters have launched schemes wherein you pay in advance towards a natural product like honey and receive delivery at a later date, to collect funds for tribals in the remote corners of India. Talented children and professional artists are performing in charity concerts to raise funds for displaced daily wage earners. In every city, doctors have offered free telephonic consultation to anyone with medical doubts and the police force is working tirelessly to keep law

and order, besides taking active care of senior citizens who live alone.

Stock markets are at their volatile best with an ongoing clash between Bulls and Bears. Pharma, Healthcare, FMCG, Technology and Telecom sectors are gaining attention. Aviation, Tourism, Real estate and the Hospitality industry are at a standstill. Auto, NBFC and Banking sector have taken a severe beating. Corporates are struggling to stand on their feet. A few factories have begun their operations adopting all safety measures to minimise risk, such as compulsory wearing of masks, sanitisation of hands and maintenance of social distancing by the work force. Unless unemployment is arrested, the chasm between the have's and have-nots will widen.

Home delivery services for food and medical supplies have become indispensable. Hundreds of online workshops on cooking, diet and exercise, have suddenly mushroomed. Beauty and personal care has shifted to self-help kits.

These transitions will continue to grow in the 'new normal' in multiple subliminal ways. Infact, further economic downslide coupled with social distancing, may accelerate the need for Mental Healthcare in our society. The government is doing its best to strike a balance, juggling lives and livelihoods, by introducing incentives, cash inflows and policy reforms.

We shall overcome

I believe that the Covid crisis can act as a catalyst for us to become better human beings, with an humbled awareness of our finitude and insignificance on planet Earth; and give us a better understanding of being part of a global community that needs to respect and co-exist peacefully with Nature. All attempts to preserve our eco-system, such as organic farming, rainwater harvesting and solar energy units will gain prominence. A shift from uncontrollable material consumerism to a 'back to basics' lifestyle may emerge. Emphasis on prevention of disease through natural and herbal remedies along with superior technology at our fingertips, would be the norm of the day.

To wrap this up, the human spirit is indomitable and slowly but surely, we will overcome this pandemic by reinventing ourselves. Practical lifestyle changes along with psychological resilience and adjustments will definitely help in keeping one's sanity in insane times. Life, no matter how shattered, is too precious to be surrendered. So let's follow the advice expounded by St. Francis of Assisi: "Start by doing what's necessary, then do what's possible; and suddenly you're doing the impossible."



Anuradha Pittie is a freelance interior designer, floral decorator and creative arts enthusiast.

Battles within the four walls

*We are living in uncertain times. The isolation, fear and stress during lockdown have adversely impacted the mental health of many -- young and the old in many ways. And each one is fighting an individual battle for survival within the confines of their home, says **Gajanan Khergamker**.*

There are myriad wars being fought and at fronts other than across the nation against COVID-19. Some battles are fought within the four walls of a house.

So, when India geared up to listen to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on 14 April 2020, expecting the 21-day lockdown enforced to combat the COVID-19 threat to end, 19-year-old Mansi Bhanushali sat with bated breath and her fingers crossed hoping for it to end. "Not again...not again," she muttered under her breath in abject fear, eyes clenched as if to change the inevitability.

And, within moments of the PM's announcement, as her family got up to return to their routine, all set to repeat their lockdown activities in confinement, Mansi rushed to the bathroom for that moment of privacy to break down in isolation. It was simply heart-wrenching to stay away from her beau Sanjay who she had been seeing for over five years since they met at a coaching centre in her locality for SSC.

Sanjay lives three blocks away from her ground-floor apartment at Navrangpura in Ahmedabad West and would, inevitably, pass by her place to reach the main road. But she had not been able to see him since the lockdown was announced. She had to be content with WhatsApp messages, phone calls and Zoom calls through the day, while all the time, dodging her strict parents, brother and a pesky cousin at home. A depressed Mansi would "have had nothing short of a nervous breakdown" by her own admission.

All outdoor plans get foiled

"And now, with the lockdown being extended and with an end to the whole Coronavirus episode nowhere in sight, I am scared she may do something drastic," says Sanjay who is always accessible to Mansi as a rule. The two had made plans to visit Goa over the first long weekend of May 2020, since more than two months, "with friends of



course," but had to drop the plan following the lockdown extension. "I was disheartened but Mansi was heartbroken. She was really looking forward to spending time away from her orthodox parents for the first time with friends. This extension has really hit her hard."

Their friends have now been planning on meeting at a common friend's house – on a terrace large enough to accommodate them all with the social distancing in place too – after the lockdown ends. "But, this time around," says Sanjay, "we aren't telling Mansi. If the lockdown continues and the date may have to be extended further, she won't be able to handle it." And, while Mansi and Sanjay have been hoping for the lockdown to end and meet as usual, miles away, at Nagpur, Namrata Gosai too has been waiting with anticipation for things to mend.

"It was a love marriage, and everyone knew how her husband Vinod was simply too possessive of Namrata for comfort. As Namrata resumed work at her office after marriage, much against her in-laws' wishes, Vinod's mother added fuel to the fire even cast aspersions on Namrata's character. She even ensured Vinod force Namrata to leave her job and stay at home says Namrata's sister Vaidehi, also married and living in Mumbai.

(continued on page 29...)



AN ORGANIC TOUR

Besides the many historical monuments that Delhi is famous for, the capital city of India now draws tourists to its organic market at the Sunder Nursery—the green hub, which is now a valuable part of Delhi's urban heritage. Similar eco parks are also being developed in metro cities of India like Kolkata for people to have an interactive experience with nature.

Text & Photographs : Manjira Majumdar



Regular as well as exotic vegetables are sold at the Sunday Market at the Sunder Nursery, Delhi

February is one of the best times to visit Delhi. The bitter winter has bid adieu and the 'lohari' songs have been sung over bonfires. The temperatures start rising. The flowers are all in bloom and the verdant greenery with wide open spaces and monuments, along with lovely sunshine, make certain tourist hot spots, ever so enjoyable.

A walk in and around Janpath, lazily gazing at curio shops or eyeing the colourful bags and cushions spilling over from the pavements; a quick bite at Wenger's confectionary located in colonial Connaught Place, are worth a thousand emotions. In addition, hanging out at the art and cultural centre at Triveni Kala Sangam, bargain hunting for crafts and textiles at Dilli Haat are perennial favourites. So are a visit to the Qutub Minar, the Humayan's Tomb, Lodhi Gardens and Jama Masjid areas for a feel of history and heritage. For gastronomical delights, there is always the Parathe-wali Gali, the meaty fare at Karim's, and Nathu's for sweets. But all this is part of our old associations with a city that is changing beyond recognition.

The modern Delhi of the glitzy malls, the swanky eating joints offering a mind boggling variety always prepares you for something new. The various walks – heritage, gastronomical, nature --that are conducted by guides acquaint you to the city; almost like old wine packaged in new bottles. Added to the list today are the organic markets with their mindboggling fare.

Growing organic

Organic markets are of two types: one where you get exotic type of vegetables and fruits for which a more controlled temperature is required; and the other where you get the regular kind of vegetables like potato, cabbage, cauliflower, ladyfinger, etc., but grown organically without using chemical fertilizers -- just compost made of natural matter like dead leaves and natural waste.

Terms such as farmers' markets and organic came to be first associated with foreign exotic vegetables and fruits not all of which were grown here or easily available in India; vegetables such as asparagus, zucchini,

kale and before that broccoli and Brussels sprouts that was available only at select outlets in metro cities. More and more items were being added to the ever-growing list --kiwi, avocado, aloe vera, quinoa, desi moringa and tulsi tea. Now, the good news is that we can organically grow anything. Or maybe we were growing it but did not have an easily recognisable name or an organic tag for the products. And New Delhi being our capital city is always a step ahead when it comes to introducing anything new. The northern states of India -- Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarkhand which are blessed with cool climate are the major producers and suppliers of some of the exotic vegetables and fruits available in the metro cities in India.

UNESCO-Sunder Nursery

The Sunday organic market at the Sunder Nursery behind Humayan's Tomb in Delhi provides you with an amazing experience to see, feel and buy a large variety of organic products. Formerly known as Azim Bagh, it is a 16th-century heritage park complex housing 15 heritage monuments. During the British rule, the nursery was established to grow experimental plants, which gave it its

current designation as Sunder Nursery. The "Sunder" part of the name comes from the Sunder Burj tomb located in the same premises.

One can get lost in the history of the Mughal ruins, the fine architecture of the mausoleum, when not soaking in the heritage park's natural beauty and bounty. It is an excellent urban park with a distinct micro-habitat trying to restore Delhi's ecological diversity as also flora from other parts of the country, brought in for experiments. The experience here leaves you invigorated and refreshed for the entire day!

Open from eight in the morning, one can combine the two trips; one immersing in the Mughal history by visiting the ruins and tombs in the vicinity. And the other a nature trail that includes the Sunder Nursery and its organic market. The beauty of exploring the place is to do so in the lap of nature fast vanishing from our earth.

Sunder Nursery has an interesting history. It was set up by the British in 1913 in what was the legendary Grand Trunk Road. This once neglected garden has



The prestigious TIME magazine mentions Sunder Nursery as one of the 100 must-visit places in the world



A Somali refugee family settled in Delhi has set up a stall selling interesting food items which are gluten-free

received a beautiful makeover since UNESCO declared it as a world heritage site in 2016. Sunder Nursery was opened for the general public after a decade of restoration work by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Today, even the prestigious TIME magazine mentions it as one of the 100 must-visit places in the world.

“The Aga Khan Trust for Culture had signed a memorandum to redevelop Sunder Nursery in collaboration with Delhi’s Central Public Works Department, the Archaeological Survey of India and the South Delhi Municipal Corporation in 2007. After a decade of work and patience, the 90-acre Sunder Nursery is now dotted with historical monuments, two amphitheatres, 280 tree species, 36 butterfly species, and a bonsai enclosure among other features” (source: Aga Khan Development Network), which has taken the responsibility to maintain the heritage park for 10 years.

About 20 acres is devoted to the nursery. A large variety of beautiful flowers are a testament to the painstaking efforts of the Trust. It serves as the biggest nursery to the people of Delhi. Now that it has become ticketed, it is very well maintained.

Rows and rows of flower beds – petunia, phlox, azalea -- among many other exotic flora are in bloom in a riot of colours around this time of the year. With the cuckoo calling, it seems to herald the advent of spring. To make children aware of the environment, busloads of school children arrive to enjoy the unadulterated joy of the fresh morning air and a lovely mild day spent in picnicking at this heritage site to know about plants and birds.

One can combine the tomb visit and nursery sojourn on the same day and decide which to do first. The walk through the nursery first is a better option for the organic market is not only ideal to get your weekly organic supplies but also a good exercise to tone up your muscles. History can wait till you have had a wonderful breakfast by choosing from a number of healthy options on offer.

Breakfast in wonderland

Every Sunday morning this organic market within the nursery turns into a wonderland. Tables and chairs set up randomly; stalls selling a variety of exotic fresh fruits, vegetables and other products spoiling you for choice -- all of these make a delectable picture amidst acres of verdant

beauty. It is a pet-friendly zone and people are seen walking their dogs who seem to enjoy the wide open space as much as their owners.

The breakfast arena offers an interesting variety of Indian snacks. For instance, crispy dosas, in a whole different range of cereals and not just the regular mix of rice and urad daal batter. Semolina and ragi varieties too tempt you, and one can wash it down with cold pressed fresh fruit (seasonal) juices. One cannot dream of a better breakfast – tasty, healthy and nutritious. There is chole bhature too, with bhature made with whole wheat flour.

A Somalian refugee family (Delhi is home to Somalian, Syrian, Afghan, Burmese and Tibetan refugees), has set up a stall selling interesting items of food including what they call gluten-free Anjeero or Somali dosa. Everything is gluten free at this stall. Different kinds of herbal and caffeine free tea and coffee are available in some stall or the other; either as a hot beverage or packaged. What is a pleasure to note is there is no compromise in the taste.

A walk amidst ruins

After a sumptuous Sunday breakfast, it is time to saunter into the Humayan's Tomb Complex for which you have to walk a bit or take your vehicle around. The Complex has always been known as a garden complex as the Mughals were known for their well laid out gardens. The garden here is a typical Persian Char Bagh layout,

with four causeways radiating from the central building dividing the garden into four smaller segments.

The causeways sometimes are adorned with water features. According to Persian architectural landscaping style, this symbolizes the Garden of Paradise, which according to Quranic beliefs, consists of four rivers: one each of water, milk, honey and wine. The garden has always housed trees serving a host of purposes like providing shade, producing fruits, flowers and nurturing birds. Therefore, this heritage complex with the Mughal garden and nursery exist in perfect harmony and peace.

Humayan's Tomb has always been a big draw for tourists and now with the heritage park in all its finery being thrown open to the public, one can look forward to spending an entire day exploring the complex. This splendid tomb built in the memory of the second Mughal emperor is an architectural beauty, which the Aga Khan Trust for Culture has also helped to renovate.

This tomb constructed of red sandstone has two domes, which are covered with pearly white marble. Lattice work so common in Mughal architecture forms a part of the style inside. It is an amalgamation of Turkish, Persian and Indian (small canopies or chhatris) of architectural styles.

In Delhi, Dastakar too holds Nature's Bazaar but these are seasonal in nature. A range of organic and natural products make their way here. But what Sunder



Every Sunday morning the organic market within the nursery turns into a wonderland. The breakfast area offers a variety of healthy snacks, as well as many other interesting organic products



Heritage pathway to Humayun Tomb

Nursery provides is an interactive experience of enjoying nature amidst ecological and heritage trails. Cultural events are being planned making it an all-encompassing experience that other cities may just find hard to replicate due to lack of space.

The urban farmers of Kolkata

Even if Kolkata, my hometown lacks a heritage park the kind that Delhi has, various ecological hubs have been built to make way for birds, bees and flora to co-exist in harmony. The Eco Park in New Town is worth a mention as a new picnic spot spread over 480 acres along a beautiful lake. Consisting of separate subsections of flora and butterflies, the cactus and rose gardens add to the exotic charm of the Park.

More than a dozen varieties of birds, including the stork-billed kingfisher, white bellied woodpecker, Bengal bushlark, Malabar whistling thrush, striated babbler, black bitter, plaintive cuckoo and pied cuckoo have been spotted in the Eco Park.

In addition, very small but typical no-frill

farmers` markets have sprouted. These are held typically over the weekends resembling the concept of a `haat` where villagers bring their wares to display and sell. Even seedlings and saplings are sold in these markets.

In Kolkata, a farmers` market, basically selling organic produce, is held in a place called Ultadanga, in the eastern part of the city. The sellers display their goods for a few hours every Sunday morning. The vegetables are small in size as they are produced by small farmers but are great in taste. So are the mushrooms and various herbs. The produce gets sold out fast. The market is held in association with the state government and other organisations that help small producers grow and sell their organic products.

There are several organisations in our metros that not only grow organic vegetables and fruits but help you to start organic vegetable garden in your home. These could be anywhere - rooftops, terraces, balconies and even on wide window sills. The best part of growing these products is they are all organic, using natural compost rather than chemical fertilizers and service these gardens with earth, saplings of your preference. One such city



Eco Park in New Town, Kolkata

outfit is called 'Harri Mitti'.

Its motto is “grow organic herbs and vegetables in your home garden without any hassle”. It offers a choice of over 40 varieties of herbs and vegetables (different gourds, spinach, ladyfinger, cucumber, tomatoes, bell pepper) according to your taste and weather, providing the crates with plants; their staff comes and set them up for you and continue to supply the required composts. Their only advice is to maintain your modest garden by watering them twice a day and keep them protected from birds, squirrels and rats.

In each of our metros, there are similar markets and suppliers, which have encouraged the urban farmer in some of us. Discounting the initial cost of setting up the garden, it can prove to be quite cost effective in the long run. Perhaps this trend may increase in the days to come for a better quality and more sustainable way of life.

Similarly Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune, Chennai too have their share of urban farmers producing organic fare locally or even to the rest of the country.

Embracing change in the future

One of the biggest lessons of the corona virus pandemic has been reconnecting us with nature. We went to bed one night peacefully and woke up the next day in another world that forced us to remain indoors and go out of our homes, only when absolutely necessary.

As we humans started devising all kinds of methods to sustain, we began to increasingly feel the fresh air, notice that the sky was bluer and the leaves more green and fresh. Organically grown vegetables have huge health and environmental benefits. We could perhaps return to this concept of growing our daily produce. The basic theory in organic gardening is that nature is our best nurturer. . The organic gardener takes care of the soil, and by not resorting to chemical pesticides, the products are more earth-friendly; rich in vitamins, nutrients and needless to add, full of flavours. The emphasis is on to boost immunity and body metabolism. And if these come up near heritage sites, perhaps tourism can also get a boost.

The small farmers' markets are usually known



Brinjal and ladyfingers growing in the writer`s terrace garden

through the word of mouth and even though some organic products like jam, jelly, relish, and sauces are branded, they cannot yet boast of huge markets. There is greater need to popularise these products than treat them like an expensive fad.

A small step for us individuals to save our planet but when it becomes a collective effort, it is a big leap!



Having worked as a full-time journalist, Manjira Majumdar today is an independent journalist combining writing with part-time college teaching and media advocacy. She is also the author of 3 children's books: Ten of Us, The Story of Anjana and Ghost

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Bhooshan Kanani in conversation with A.Radhakrishnan.

Can you tell us a little about your work?

I am a Marketing Strategy Consultant, running my very own Marketing & Advertising Studio named Augmenting Times. After a decade with top companies like Hyundai, Atlas Copco and Forbes Marshall, I finally decided to go solo, an enormous leap from being a client to a service provider. Being a Gujju, my love for marketing began thanks to our family business. Perhaps enjoying learning new methods and implementing new techniques helped me carve my new role.

How difficult it is to build a brand?

It's a challenging role, as now I work with various industries, each with its own marketing algorithms. Implementing one rule for all will not yield the same results, though we can implement common strategies once we know what to tweak. Opening of new vistas is fascinating and the good brands I am lucky to have with me are ready to experiment and try new strategies.

Who are your big clients?

We have been working and catering to many brands from various industries like food, travel, retail, manufacturing, medical, etc.

I would like to mention two clients who have had faith in me since my initial days. Daga Brothers, famous dry fruit brand in Pune and Kishor Pumps Pvt. Ltd.

What do you feel about the standard of marketing and brand communications in India?

Thanks to a huge audience, marketing here has great scope. Also with the boon of having enormous data and net connectivity, digital marketing has been an important factor in any marketing strategy.

We have the younger generation in marketing departments of top brands, who are social media savvy. Hence new strategies are easy to experiment. People are now using Instagram and TikTok as well.

But to be honest, there is tough competition also within marketing agencies and I think this benefits the client a lot.

How has Covid19 affected your business?

Everything has its pros and cons and it has been the same for



Bhooshan Kanani with his wife and travel companion Bhavika

us, having lost clients. Marketing in India has always been a cost-centric one and therefore the cost-cutting starts first. But on the positive side, we have learned new alternatives and with sharing benefits of digitalisation, new opportunities and clients as well, have emerged.

My team, has readily adapted itself with the WORK FROM HOME culture.

Now every business wants to go digital and so we are raring to give the right solutions with social media marketing, website and App development and, online brochures. Offering competitive rates, we are focusing on volume and new clients right now.

What makes you a travel buff?

I have always loved travelling across various countries, learning new cultures, and getting a break from the daily routine.

My first trip at the age of 22, made me realise that spending on travel was worth more than buying fancy products or gadgets. I still prefer to own a normal mobile phone within a budget of Rs. 15,000 and use a regular bike. The spare money helps me explore one more new country.

Do you have to be rich to travel the world?

No! You just need to be a smart planner and eager to explore. I have been to Europe for a month across several countries and have spent just 1.5 lakhs over all inclusive of my travel, food, and stay.



Travel photos from the couple`s journeys

What's the most interesting thing you've learned?

There is never a language barrier when you travel. People will help you even if you use sign language. Also, you can have Google Translate with the local language to help you. Google Maps downloaded in advance will save net charges and help find easy ways to reach your destination. Stay away from voice calling and instead use the internet for a month.

Would you call yourself a traveller or a tourist?

Traveller for sure! I am okay staying at small places enjoying my time rather than going to tourist spots, wait in line, and just have a look for a minute or so.

How many gadgets do you normally carry? Do you use social media effectively?

I have my Quechua – 60 L bag which fits all for 2- 4 weeks weeks travel. Gadget wise, one good phone and power bank for an emergency, is sufficient. I generally post very few pictures on social media when travelling, as I don't like to show off.

Do you have a strict schedule or go with the flow?

Yes, you can say that I follow a schedule as I always plan my days; book my return tickets and do hotel bookings in advance; but day-wise activity can be shuffled as I generally stay for 3-4 days at least per city. But of late, in case I enjoy someplace a lot, I go with the flow. Apart from exploring popular places, we also scout hidden gems, for even a place of no tourist value, can be beautiful. I like to rest and enjoy vacations at a slow pace and avoid covering maximum places.

How do you pack a suitcase?

I always travel with my Quechua Backpack and one small side bag during local travelling. The backpack is divided into 3 sections for clothes and shoes, food and daily need items. The small bag is for documents and also for books, glares and water bottles. Just travel light as much as possible and you can fill the bag with souvenirs and clothes while returning. I recall memories of Europe when I had only one-two pairs of jeans and 6 t-shirts for a one month trip. You can reuse and wash them if you begin to live locally.

How many foreign languages have you learnt so far?

None! I learn local greetings and phrases to use them for particular travel and then go ahead.

Do you plan to become a travel writer?

Yes! I want to be a travel blogger.

I believe you are a foodie too? Do you cook or only eat?

I eat and eat everything. Try to explore new things. But cooking is not for me. My wife is a wonderful cook and enjoys it and I am always there for all her experiments. I prefer to do cleaning, after cooking so you can say, that is my specialty.



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

Battles within the four walls

(continued from page 16...)

“Why, her in-laws had issues with her talking to me too regularly. It’s only after the lockdown began that I put my foot down and started to call her daily as a routine,” says Vaidehi. “And, thank God for that. Namrata reveals to me how she wishes the lockdown ends soon. She has made peace with the fact that she can’t do a job any longer but has another demon to deal with at home during the lockdown.”

Lockdown triggered domestic squabbles

Forced to stay at home too, her suspicious-as-ever husband fights endlessly with her over small, inconsequential things while her mother-in-law, after triggering the situation, keeps away. Frustrated than ever, during the lockdown, Vinod has even started to physically assault her over the smallest of things.

“Now, following the lockdown, it’s clear that they cannot live together and we’re looking for a legal solution to work out a separation between the two. However, owing to the situation now, there is little we can do but wait it out for things to normalise,” says Vaidehi, worried for her sister. “I even approached a lawyer in Nagpur but he maintained that the issue was a Civil one and needed a resolution through court,” she says. So, once the lockdown ends, a separation seems inevitable for the disillusioned couple.



Lockdown offers no legal solutions

While a separation is the preferred option for many, the lockdown simply does not offer the space or structure for a legal separation as in the case of Namrata who will just have to wait it out and hope things don’t get worse, at home than what it is. And, when the lockdown is over, the two can – after a mutual process - hopefully head their own ways. While love, for some, moves things, a peaceful separation of ways, holds the key for others.

And things aren’t exactly hunky-dory if you’re a kid either. Life is as tricky if not worse for four-year-old Fizan, stuck at his home in Colaba, Mumbai. The child attended

just a day of school, for the first time in life, before it shut down following the onslaught of COVID-19 and has been closed since. But that isn’t an issue for Fizan who has been struggling to understand why he is prevented from stepping out of home. He cycles, rides a battery-driven motorcycle with his brother Dayan sitting pillion, plays cricket with his father even football with the rest of his family but all...indoors!

“I want to play,” he says in utter exasperation to his father, meaning to say, “play outdoors.” His businessman father Faheem Khan stuck indoors too during the lockdown, picks him and cajoles him, “Bas, Id ke baad bahar khelenge,” hopeful that the Coronavirus threat will be a thing of the past by the time Id arrives towards May end. “Insha Allah,” quips his brother and insurance consultant Wasim Khan.

Like Fizan Khan, millions of children across India await a change in ground reality and an end to the lockdown just so they can run like they did, in parks, play on swings and fall, even hurt for a bit, just like the good old times. Parents have been caring for the elderly and the young in small homes, too cooped for comfort and need a break themselves. The stress is killing and tempers flying as they have poor little by way of respite from each other’s tantrums and the space to move, grow and evolve as they did. After all, it is a lockdown and everyone is stuck...at least for

now.

In comparison to the rest of the world, India has reacted well in time to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic by locking down the nation. And, while social distancing may well keep the virus at bay and provide enough time to ‘flatten the curve’, millions across the nation are fighting wars within the four walls of their homes. And, mostly, winning them too!



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Innovations to fight a pandemic

A major concern in the battle against Covid 19 has been the high risk of infection for healthcare providers who have to work in close proximity with patients. The last couple of months have seen a few medical innovations from Indian startups, which should make us proud, writes Dr. Rina Mukherji.

While organisations and individuals have come forth to help strengthen the hands of the government through charity, especially serving food and arranging shelter for the poor and those rendered penniless owing to the lockdown that has followed the coronavirus pandemic, a multiplicity of innovations has marked the fight against Covid 19 all over India. Of course, this is not surprising in a land known for frugal or “jugaadu” innovations, wherein improvised solutions hammered out of scant resources has always been the norm.

A major concern in this fight has been the increased risk of infection for healthcare providers, since they get exposed to infected oral and nasal secretions, particularly when handling patients on ventilators. Bangalore-based Innacel Technologies has come up with Vapcare, which is the world's first automated system that can automatically remove oral secretions from ventilators catering to infected patients. This enables automated clearance from the oral, oropharyngeal and subglottic regions and helps save on time spent to manually remove oral secretions from ventilators. This, in turn, protects patients from Ventilator Associated Pneumonia (VAP), which is often linked to the deaths of patients in intensive care units (ICUs). VAP Care has already received approval from the US FDA, and is a shining example of a medical innovation designed, engineered and manufactured in India.

With the shortage of ventilators a worrisome problem worldwide, several manufacturers have stepped in to deal with the current scenario. Innacel, for instance, has come up with SaansPro, a non-invasive portable ventilation system that can work without uninterrupted electricity. Equipped with flow and pressure control, and oxygen blending facilities, Saans Pro is especially useful for the transport of the critically ill to referral centres, since it operates on batteries that can provide a backup mounting to six hours. The Skylark Group has gone a step further in developing a motorized ventilator which is suitable as a back-up in emergency situations. This portable ventilator does not use batteries, but a small motor to operate. The ventilator is also equipped with a screen to facilitate monitoring, as Skylark Director Dr Vikas Dhull points out.



Mumbai-based Imaginarius has come up with several low-cost medical and other innovations too. Imaginarius has come up with low-cost face shields that are far more effective to protect individuals (particularly health workers) from infection, as compared to a single mask. Of course, the ideal situation would be the use of a face shield along with a mask. Explaining the idea of the face shield, CEO Nishant Shah explains, “A face shield prevents infected secretion from coming in contact with any part of the face. This can be especially useful for health workers and the police, who are exposed to infected persons during the course of their duties.” Priced at just Rs 100, these face shields are being distributed free in bulk by Imaginarius to the police. It has also developed aerosol boxes for being used on patients confined to ICUs. These low-cost devices made up of medical grade plastic can fit over the patient's chest and neck, and are equipped with two openings on the opposite side for medical personnel to insert their tubes through. This helps doctors to shield themselves from any aerosol particles that may be released from the patient's airways during medical procedure. Although aerosol boxes had been around for quite some time, they were expensive. Imaginarius's aerosol boxes, however, are 40 per cent cheaper compared to what is available in the market, and priced around Rs 5000.

A major concern is the spread of the Covid 19 virus through surfaces that people need to touch all the time. To

prevent people coming in contact with door handles that end up transmitting the virus, Imaginarium has invented bio-compatible polyamide door handles. This prevents individuals from touching door handles in the course of their work, and hence reduces the risk of infection, particularly in hospitals and offices. Currently, the company has eight different versions of these handles to fit into doors of all sizes and types.

At a time when active Covid 19 cases are rapidly spreading throughout the country, it is important for places outside containment zones too, to be secure from infections. For this purpose, frequent handwashing is an imperative. However, one cannot have soap dispensers or sanitizers touched by people, lest infections spread among members of the community. This is where Fortune Retail's modestly-priced, foot pedal-operated automatic soap dispenser can be a blessing anywhere. Made of mild steel, and available in two models-standard and height-adjustable, this soap dispenser can be easily set up anywhere with the help of screws that can be fixed to any surface. Once the pedal is pressed, the movement is transmitted to the arm above and the soap is dispensed to the user's palm held underneath. There is hence, no contact with the individual's hand, doing away with any risk of infection. Priced at just Rs 1500, this soap dispenser is fast catching on in and around Delhi for use outdoors and otherwise, in spite of lockdown-related transportation issues.

The spread of Covid 19 has especially made it

difficult for households to consume foodstuff bought outdoors, since the virus can adhere to surfaces and spread the infection. The problem also extends to cash and other necessities handled by us. A collaborative effort by two startups-Gtarang Energy and Manastu Space, seeks to solve this problem through a virus-free cabin that uses Ultraviolet C light technology. The object to be sanitized can be placed inside the cabin/container for five minutes, and once it is sanitized, a small light bulb placed outside glows indicating the completion of the process. One can then remove the duly sanitized product.

(See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1N5sRtHpqKQ#action=share>)

Developed by startups, each of these products tells us a great deal about the entrepreneurial and innovative genius embedded deep within our national psyche. It is high time we acknowledged the same, and set India on the path of true self-reliance.



A senior journalist, Dr. Rina Mukherji specialises in all aspects of sustainable development, with special focus on the environment and climate change. She has been a UGC doctoral fellow, and holds a doctorate in African Studies, with specialisation in Third World conflict and developmental issues. She is currently an independent journalist based in Pune.

WHO AM I?

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



Earth...



D-Days for two legends

We lost two fine actors Sahabzade Irrfan Khan(53) and Rishi Kapoor(67) to cancer in April 2020. **G. Venkatesh** pays a tribute to them while hoping that the medical fraternity finds a cure for cancer that has been taking away so many lives, year after year.



Irrfan Khan



Rishi Kapoor

“Perhaps man has a hundred senses, and when he dies only the five senses that we know perish with him, and the other ninety-five remain alive,” wrote Anton Chekhov. Very true. It is only that we are not really equipped to comprehend the other 95 so easily. One needs to evolve higher into the spiritual plane, and transcend the materialistic distractions to qualify.

Cancer is a nasty scourge. It took away Varshita, this writer’s wife in January 2020, and then a month later, a close friend and colleague of yours sincerely, Hans-Petter, from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, who succumbed to prostate cancer.

While I was grieving and trying to cope as a bereaved widower wondering what lay in store for me, with the help of music, literature, writing (for this magazine, inter alia) and art – not religion or prayers, I must specify – an artiste par excel-

lence succumbed to colon infection brought about by complications due to neuroendocrine cancer treatment. Irrfan Khan. Just 53 years old. A man who would have added many more feathers to his cap, if God’s ‘injustice’ had not intervened. Before one could digest this travesty of all that is believed to be ordained by God, his D-Day co-starrer Rishi Kapoor met his D-Day the very next day, succumbing to leukaemia. God takes the good first, they say, and expect you to believe that, while also acknowledging that you are not good as you are still surviving. Well, this outpouring may provoke some hyper-religious readers who perhaps have not yet been at the receiving end of sheer injustice in their blessed lives, or tempt those who are very spiritual to dub me as a frustrated 48-year-old, and lecture me on life and death and the afterlife.

Irrfan Khan (1967 -2020)

“They say if life throws

lemons at you, make lemonade out of it, as if it is always very easy to do so,” Irrfan had said recently, while alluding to his condition. There is this thing with actors like Irrfan. They make you laugh when they are alive, through the roles they enact in their movies. Sample ‘Andar se bhi gareeb lagna chahiye’ as Raj Batra in Hindi Medium, or ‘Mera faalt nahin hai’ as Thomas the chaiwala in Mumbai Meri Jaan. The lines uttered with a poker face, absolutely expressionless, would make viewers laugh heartily, and forget their worries for a while. And to think that the person who did this for millions of viewers, had to digest the fact, in 2018, that he had to ‘get off at an earlier railway station than he had envisaged’ from the train of life.

Sharing screen space with Tom Hanks in *Inferno*, and rising to international renown through a clutch of unforgettable roles – a policeman in *Slumdog Millionaire* and *A Mighty Heart*, the older Pi in the *Life of Pi*, an Indian-American in *The Namesake*,

and a widower in *Lunchbox*, Irrfan strode like a colossus, and did what none would have expected him to do. He worked hard and fought his way up, to bag his first lead role in a movie at the age of 38. The pensive mountain-goat, a man of few words, and largely silent expressions which at once said a 1000 words, just like a picture is worth that many. He blended Nana Patekar's naturalness and fast-speaking (minus the vitriol), with Rajesh Khanna's 'talking with the eyes' to great effect. Paan Singh Tomar was an offbeat role which he played with effortless ease. My schoolmate Amber neatly summed it up on WhatsApp – aadhi zindagi mein poora picture dikha gaya! His 53-year-old journey from Jaipur to Mumbai, took him all around the world, and ensured that he made a home in the hearts of millions of film-lovers.

Rishi Kapoor (1952-2020)

In an episode of *Aap ki Adalat* on television, Rishi Kapoor was extremely down-to-earth in confessing that all that he did as an actor was to try to convince viewers that he could do different things – play the guitar, dafli etc., like a pro. Having made his first appearance in a movie as a two-year old boy (in 1955) in the movie *Shree 420*, Rishi Kapoor went on to play the role of a 90-year-old man in the movie *Kapoor and Sons* a few years ago. It took some time for movie-makers to utilise his versatility, by his own admission, as he was looked upon as a guitar-playing romantic, who would traipse with over two dozen heroines, till he himself would realise that, that department of entertainment had to be handed over to the likes of the three Khans who had emerged on the scene in the late-80s. If I have to select one memorable movie, it would be *102 not out*. He and his co-star Amitabh Bachchan both shared screen space equally, and brought back the wonderful chemistry they shared in their earlier films like *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Naseeb*. Amitabh, in his *shraddhanjali* (tribute), observed that he never visited him in the hospital because he never wanted

If mankind has been able to counter a host of ailments, will a day come when a cure for cancer will emerge from some laboratory somewhere in the world?

to see distress on his smiling cherubic face.

Win, Insha'llah...quit, Deo Volente

Irrfan Khan's life teaches us many things, most importantly, that the cliché winners never quit, and quitters never win, is undeniably true. One quits from the earthly plane, when it is Insha'llah, so to say...and must try to do so, as a winner, having never ever given up on his/her goals! Rishi Kapoor was more flamboyant than Irrfan, a man who grew up amidst actors and had it in his genes, if one may say so. But without hard work and dedication, even one who gets to make his debut courtesy his father at the age of 20-21, could not have risen to the heights which he managed to.

"Cancer ka koi ilaaj nahi, lagi sharth?" Johnny Walker says in the movie *Anand* released in 1971.. And then appeals to Allah, Jesus, and Lord Ganesh for miracles to cure Rajesh Khanna, the protagonist who plays the terminally ill patient Anand. Yours sincerely was appealing to Lord Hanuman and Sai Baba everyday over the last seven years ever since Varshita was first diagnosed with cancer, to extricate it from her body, magically. Nothing of that sort happened. We take recourse in God's will, and learn to accept the fact that we are mere puppets on the stage of 'life' being made to dance around as per His whims and fancies, which are beyond our comprehension.

A cure for cancer?

If mankind has been able to counter a host of ailments, will a day

come when a cure for cancer will emerge from some laboratory somewhere in the world? The ultimate conquest! Much greater than landing on the Moon or mapping the surface of the exoplanets in the solar system.

Well, now we are tackling the corona virus, thanks to the indefensible taste of the palate for the meat of 'exotic wildlife', and all attention has been diverted to finding a vaccine. Even automobile companies are having to produce ventilators and masks! A momentary roadblock en route to major discoveries in the field of medicine? When I was in Trondheim, there were rumours of a 'vaccine for cancer', which would guard against genetic mutations. Science fiction or something really far-fetched, I do not know, but I did think that a lot of money has surely been poured into cancer research...but oftentimes, the 'sunk funds' component of the cumulative investment is quite high. You pat a thousand scientists on the back, for one of them to come up with something stupendous someday.

God cannot cure cancer. God cannot drive away the corona virus. Human will and ingenuity and the desire to cooperate and collaborate is what God (depending on how one wants to picture and visualise Him) wishes. Then, serendipitously, things happen. That is how the world has moved on.

Of course, we would all say 'Rest in Peace', but must strive to learn from the life-lessons that have been left behind by departed souls. Nothing ends; it is a stream of ever-flowing consciousness...of the 95 senses which Chekhov referred to.



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India's mango story

*India's mango diversity is the envy of botanist the world over. According to historians, the king of fruits, whose botanical name is *Mangifera Indica* originated in India, having been cultivated in the Assam – Burma region before travelling to other countries. The flavour and quality differs from region to region depending on the location of the orchards. **Hiren Kumar Bose** help us know our mangoes.*



Mango grower Syed Ghani Khan of Kirgaval village in Mandya district in South Karnataka has mangoes in his orchard which were the favourite of the 'Tiger of Mysore' Tipu Sultan, the 18th century ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore. The 116 mango varieties growing in Ghani's orchard has been registered with the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources—a unique achievement. Here you will find mango smelling like a *mosambi* (sweetlime), called *mosambi ka aam*, the one that looks like an apple is called *seb ka aam*. There are other varieties too, like *moti ka aam*, *aate ka aam*, *meethe mian pasand* and *nanhe mian pasand*. Then there is 'Farha', which matches the Alphonso in taste and pulp quality. Ghani's

favourite is *manjhe bi pasand*, the mango that shrinks with time.

We, mango lovers, sadly are aware of a just handful of them namely Alphonso, Banganapalli, Langda, Dussehri, Himsagar, Jardalu, Malgo-va and few others; having known them because these have acquired market acceptability over the years. In fact, around 30

varieties are sold in major cities and about five to eight varieties exported, such as Alphonso, Totapuri, Dussehri, Banganapalli, Kesar and Suvarnarekha—which has its lovers in South Korea, USA, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Oman and Japan. Rich in tropical aroma and flavour, Suvarnarekha is cultivated in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. Another variety, Surma Fazli, which is endemic to Malda in West Bengal and is entirely exported to neighbouring Bangladesh. So much so that even the locals are unable to lay their hands on them.

India has a 1000 plus varieties

India's mango diversity is the

envy of botanist the world over. Mango (*Mangifera Indica*) originated in India having been cultivated in the Assam – Burma region, historians believe. Scientists of the Lucknow's Birbal Sahnii Institute of Palaeobotany, have traced the origin of genus *Mangifera* from 60 million years old fossil compressions of carbonised mango leaves near Damalgiri in west Garo Hills of Meghalaya in the North-east.

It's said that Buddhist monks are believed to have taken the mango on voyages to Malaya and eastern Asia in the 4th and 5th centuries B.C. The Persians are said to have carried it to East Africa around the 10th century A.D. It was commonly grown in the East Indies before the earliest visits of the Portuguese who apparently introduced it to West Africa early in the 16th century and also into Brazil. It was the Portuguese who introduced vegetative propagation methods of mango and over the centuries it has reached 89 nations of the world. The most important mango cultivars of India, namely Alphonso, Dussehri, Langra etc. are selections made during the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar. After it got established in Brazil, the mango was carried to the West Indies, being first planted in Barbados about 1742 and later in the Dominican Republic. It reached Jamaica about 1782 and, early in the 19th century, reached Mexico from the Philippines and the West Indies. Interestingly, in November 2019, Alphonso mangoes grown in Malawi in southern Africa came to Mumbai covering a distance of over 5,600 km. Although the international trade in mango has been increasing rapidly, India continues to lag behind in total mango exports as compared to other

exporting countries like Mexico, the Philippines and Venezuela.

The number of varieties of mango found in India is very large. In fact, there are far too many to count. Experts believe there are nearly 1000 plus varieties growing in orchards and gardens in India. The number of commercial varieties each differ in size, shape, colour, texture and taste. Different varieties are suitable for growing in different climatic conditions. Each is grown according to the purpose, like for pickles, *aamras*, making *aamchur* (powder), *aampapad* and as table fruit. The name of the mango variety varies from region to region. The same variety may be known by a different name in a different location. For example, Himsagar of South Bengal area is known as Khirsapati in Malda; Banganapalli, introduced by the Nawabs of Banganapalli in Kurnool district is also known as Benisan in other areas and Laddu Pasand and Suvarnarekha which originated in Andhra Pradesh. It is also called as Sundari in North India and Latsundari in Orissa.

The mango season in India starts in March-April from the South West and moves towards the North East in June-July, similarly as the rain season moves up the continent from Kerala towards New Delhi and Kolkata. Especially, South and East India are affected by a second smaller monsoon in October-November (North-East monsoon). Mangoes need hot and dry weather to ripen and with the hit of the monsoon, the mango harvest season ends. If too little or too much rain has fallen during monsoon, this will influence the mango crop next year.

Quality depends on the soil and climate

Each village and region in the country have its own popular variety as mango trees are “GxE sensitive”, meaning that the soil and climate have a great influence on performance and quality. For example, the variety Alphonso (named after Afonso de Albuquerque, Portuguese conqueror of Goa) originates from Ratnagiri in Maharashtra on the

Konkan coast, where the best quality of this mango is found. It makes a significant difference in quality if you purchase the so-called Western Alphonso or Southern Alphonso from Karnataka, as Brix and pulp density is superior in the Konkan coast.

If you're a mango aficionado the best quality Dussehri is found in Malihabad near Lucknow and for Totapuri (meaning 'parrots beak' in Hindi due to its shape) look at the border zone of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Knowing where your mangoes and orchards are located, means knowing their quality!

For more than 4,000 years — ever since the *Mangifera Indica* was domesticated in eastern India — the mango has inspired love, poetry, art, ritual and cuisine. Even when varieties like the Langra, Chausa, Himsagar, Hapus, Banganapalli and Neelam are not in season, there are plenty of references to enjoy. From the auspicious leaves hanging from doorways and *ambi* motifs in fashion and art to gourmet delights such as *kaliya amba* and *aamras*.

If your family is made of people from different regions of the country, battles often break during the mango season over the inherent superiority of the Langra, the greenish, juicy Banarasi mango, or the sophistication of the sweet Nawabi Dussehri from Malihabad. Friends have hotly debated the virtues of the Himsagar from Murshidabad over Alphonso, while others believe in the virtues of the Gir Kesar, so dubbed by the Nawab of Junagadh.

So far we have spoken about the heirloom or traditional varieties



but there hybrids which need to be mentioned developed by horticulturists and institutions like Indian Institute of Horticulture Sciences and Indian Council of Agriculture Research, like Mallika, Amrapali, Mangeera, Ratna, Arka Aruna, Arka Puneet and Arka Anmol which all have the qualities of your favourite variety and need to be tried to be believed, like Arka Puneet, a regular and prolific bearing hybrid of the cross between Alphonso and the *Banganapalli*.

Constraints like suitability of a few varieties for export, pests and disease problems have restricted the expansion of exports from India. Research efforts are also needed for prolonging the shelf life of the fruit so that it could be made available for a longer period in the international market. The existing scenario reminds us of the importance of frontier sciences like marker-assisted breeding and their integration with conventional fruit breeding for obtaining desirable results with more precision.



Hiren Kumar Bose is an independent media professional who writes on development

issues.

DR. VISHNU SHRIDHAR WAKANKAR

Father of Indian Rock Art (1919-1988)

In the summer of 1957 while travelling in a train from Nagpur towards Bhopal, Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar overheard a conversation of hillocks nearby with huge boulders and paintings. Curious to find out if such a place existed Wakankar, then studying the painted rock shelters which were likely to be submerged under the proposed Gandhisagar Dam jumped out of the moving train in search of the grottoes with paintings. Hidden by a dense, almost impenetrable forest inhabited by wild animals, he came across shelters which had long existed in aboriginal folklore and even found mention in the popular culture of the tribals. He chanced upon stupas built in the vicinity which had led to the region becoming associated with Buddhist lore.

Spread over 10 kilometres, Wakankar's serendipitous discovery of the 700-odd rock shelters and the stunning paintings south-east of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, came to be known as Bhimbetka Rock Art, meaning the baithak (a sit-down) of Bhima, the warrior-prince from the Mahabharata.

For six long years, beginning 1971, Vishnu Wakankar conducted excavations at Bhimbetka discovering a continuous sequence since the pebble tools to the 17th century. In 2003, the UNESCO declared Bhimbetka as a World Heritage site due to its cave paintings, the earliest of which are about 10,000 years old, corresponding to the Indian Mesolithic age. The Mesolithic Age is understood to be the transitional age between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic ---ages, when traditions and religious beliefs based on nature and ecology began to take shape. The Bhimbetka paintings bear witness to how a great civilisation came into being, how its foundations were laid in crude line drawings and how later generations enriched them with their lively imagination.

Born in Neemuch in Madhya Pradesh and belonging to a Maharashtrian family, Dr Shridhar Wakankar, an artist by education having done a graduate diploma in art, switched over to history/ prehistory, archaeology and numismatics. Being an artist, he reproduced almost all figures the prehistoric man had painted on the rocks of the shelters,

studied them analytically, enabling him to classify their styles and dating them chronologically. These sketches, photographic slides, antiquities, statues, ancient pottery pieces, manuscripts, books along with 5000 ancient coins reside at Ujjain's Wakankar Archaeological Museum, run by the Wakankar Bharati Sanskriti Anveshan Nyas.

Excited by the discovery of Bhimbetka, Wakankar initially considered it as his dissertation for a doctorate degree, but went on to document and conserve diverse evidence of rock art spread all over India covering 36 regions—enumerating 1532 rock shelters mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Karnataka, which earned him the sobriquet of being the “pitamaha” of rock art in India.



Dr. Wakankar carried out archaeological excavations at several sites in India and abroad. Besides his umpteen discoveries, he is credited with deciphering two Brahmi inscriptions outside India, namely Qussein on the Red Sea and a tablet at Babylon.

Sought after by institutions abroad due to his immense knowledge and expertise on rock art, he travelled to countries like Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, France, Greece and Egypt either to deliver lectures, participate in archaeological excavations or to study ancient collections held in museums. He was involved in numerous archaeological surveys; he explored the ravines of the Chambal and Narmada rivers, as well as tracing the basin of the now - dried-up Saraswati River, said to hold secrets to much of the Indian civilisation.

Awarded the Padmashree, Dr Wakankar died in 1988 at the age of 69. Incidentally, the year 2019 was his centenary year. The MP Government has instituted the Dr VS Wakankar National Award in his memory and which is given to an eminent scholar in the field of Indology. So far the award has been given to five eminent Indologists.

- Hiren Kumar Bose is an independent media professional who writes on development issues.-

AIR MARSHAL RANDHIR SINGH

An outstanding officer (1922 - 2018)

Air Marshal Randhir Singh was born on 1 January 1922 and was commissioned into the Royal Indian Air Force on 21 December 1942. He was posted at Risalpur airbase, Naushera near Peshawar, presently in Pakistan. He saw active service during World War II. At the time of Partition, he along with 21 other officers opted to serve in India.

A few days before Independence, some officers including Randhir Singh, shifted their 12-aircraft Tempest fleet to Palam airbase, Delhi. On 15 August 1947, he was member of the fleet that flew past the Red Fort in New Delhi under the command of Group Captain Arjan Singh.

During a flight on 26 October 1947, he confirmed that Srinagar-Baramulla road was clear and the raiders had not reached the Srinagar airfield. I SIKH was transported by air to Srinagar. The aircrafts were not equipped with radio or headphones then and the pilot was given some landmarks for target identification. The raiders could not reach Srinagar due to the blocks set up by I SIKH and few but effective air attacks. He flew 185 hours of operational flying in Tempest aircraft and set a magnificent example, engaging targets with vigour and zeal even though his aircraft had been hit by enemy fire on several occasions. He would gently describe the damage to the aircraft and carry on with the mission.

Once, while crossing the border on a flight, he noticed smoke rising from a location. He saw Pakistani soldiers getting ready to attack. He bombed the site and foiled the attack on India. This was the first major air attack by India after Independence. By September 1948, the raiders and Pakistani soldiers had tightened the ring around Poonch. Enemy build up around Poonch indicated likely assault on the town. The local population faced massacre. Singh carried out bombings on the enemy build up and helped to save the city and its population. He acted with confidence, zeal and courage which inspired other pilots of his unit. He was awarded Vir Chakra for his outstanding service and leadership. He held several command and staff appointments with distinc-

tion. He brought a squadron from number plate condition to fully operational status in a short time. Similarly, he took over the command of an important flying squadron in 1959 and developed it into a unit fit for operations, in a short time.

In 1962, the political leadership in the country had decided not to use the air force to avoid escalation. Randhir Singh was commander of 106 Squadron which had been recently equipped with Electric Canberras for strategic reconnaissance. He flew some missions and reported that China had no aircraft in Tibet. Use of air force would have greatly helped the ground troops. It could have stopped the disaster which occurred. He himself flew some sorties with commendable results until the end of the Chinese aggression.

During the 1965 Indo-Pak War, Singh successfully directed the operations for defence of the air base under his responsibility. He completely disregarded his personal safety or comfort. He was later awarded AVSM (Ati Vishisht Seva Medal).

In 1965, Pakistan had carried out pre-emptive air strike on some of the airfields. Similar attacks were launched in 1971 also. Adampur air base had two squadrons of Sukhoi 7 and one squadron MIG-21. It could have been a prime target for pre-emptive strike by Pakistan. During the 1971 conflict, Singh was the commander of Adampur airbase. He organised the defence around the base well, converting it into a fortress. The supporting services at the air base were organised so well that the desired flights in support of ground troops continued. Singh was also a recipient of PVSM (Param Vishisht Seva Medal).

After his retirement on 30 April 1978, Randhir Singh settled down in Chandigarh where he took active interest in civic and veterans' welfare. After a brief illness, he passed away on 18 September 2018 and was cremated with full military honours.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



RAJU BHARATAN

A multi-talented journalist (1934 – 2020)

Raju Bharatan was a multi-talented journalist and prolific writer on Indian cricket and Bollywood films and music. He retired as Assistant Editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (after more than four decades) and was also with an Indian film weekly newspaper, *Screen*. Columnist for *The Hindu* and *Sportstar*, he also wrote a very popular column on film nostalgia for *Mid-Day*. Son of A.S. Bharatan, the first General Manager of PTI, Raju began his career as a sports journalist when he was a teenager, by commentating on radio for India's tour of England back in 1952. Soon, he became one of the more recognised names in radio commentary.

Known for his encyclopaedic and voluminous knowledge of the history of cricket, his undiluted love for cricket led to him writing his first book, *Rivals In The Sun* (1952), based on the first series that he covered. He also wrote *Indian Cricket: The Vital Phase* (1977), analysing the changing nature of the Indian game. During his long tenure with the *Weekly*, he produced two cricket specials which hit all-time high circulations of 4.05 lakh and 3.8 lakh.

He also directed *The Victory Story* (1974), the first full-length cricket documentary for Films Division, which chronicled the first-ever maiden series victory of the Indian cricket team over England during the tour of 1971 and ran to packed houses across the country on its release. Bharatan also possessed in-depth knowledge of cinema, a passion he shared with his late film journalist wife, Girija Rajendran. He wrote a number of books on Hindi film music personalities, with whom he had a close association during his career.

Raju's deep knowledge of film music and its structures is one of the highlights of his book, *Naushadnama: The Life and Music of Naushad*, which was published in 2013. He comes through not only as an observer and chronicler of Naushad but also his trusted friend and confidante. He describes Naushad as 'The Last Mughal'. He depicts the world of film music of the time, which, like a typical Mughal court, was full of intense rivalries, jealousies, ego clashes, intrigues, deceptions, betrayals and ruthless executions.

His other film books include the highly controversial, perhaps scandalous and blunt *Lata Mangeshkar - A Biography* (1995); *A Journey Down Melody Lane* (2009), and *Asha Bhosle- A Musical Biography* (2016).

On the flip side, followers of old film music had problems with Bharatan's omnipresence, and his key role in history. Often his credibility was questioned and worse still charged with propagating many of the 'lies' circulating about film music personalities.

Two generations however, still remember and respect his writing on cricket and films. His books were meticulously researched and fact checked even though he had personal first-hand knowledge of many of the events described in his books. His writing style was lively and easy to read. I knew him as the master of the perpendicular 'I', as he generally spoke more about himself and remember his fun with the English language when he gave voice to numerous cricket matches, bringing them to the common man's radio. A gem, among his commentaries... e.g. this Ian Redpath... his path is really red!

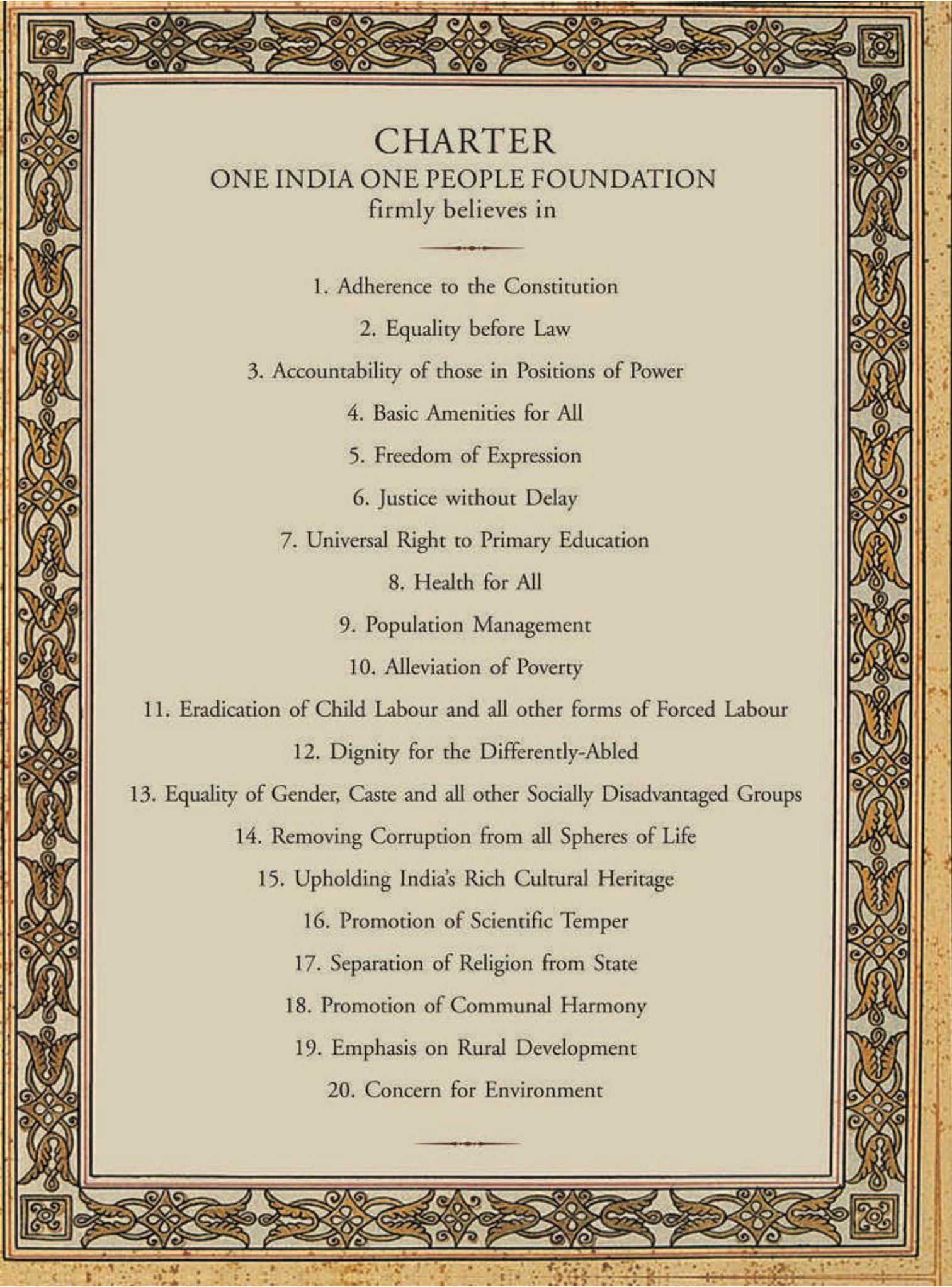
A man who wore many hats, Bharatan at 17 years, was also the originator of the 'Sunday Cryptic' crossword in *The Times of India*, where he set over 5,000 crosswords. He also watched history unfold, and retained a keen interest in politics. He interviewed Ramkrishna Hegde, Morarji Desai and Atal Bihari Vajpayee for the *Weekly*.

In his personal life also, his sober demeanor belied a sense of humour and a love of pulling the legs of those whom he knew. Generous with his time, he appeared on radio and TV interviews with gusto.

Raju Bharatan passed away on 7 February 2020 following a prolonged illness. He was 86.

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





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firmly believes in

1. Adherence to the Constitution
 2. Equality before Law
 3. Accountability of those in Positions of Power
 4. Basic Amenities for All
 5. Freedom of Expression
 6. Justice without Delay
 7. Universal Right to Primary Education
 8. Health for All
 9. Population Management
 10. Alleviation of Poverty
 11. Eradication of Child Labour and all other forms of Forced Labour
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 20. Concern for Environment
-

WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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