

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

## Atmanirbhar Bharat

*A clarion call for a new self-reliant India*



**Steering 1.3 billion Indians ahead**

**'Vocal for Local', India's new mantra**

**Self-reliance as a potent weapon'**

**Know India Better**

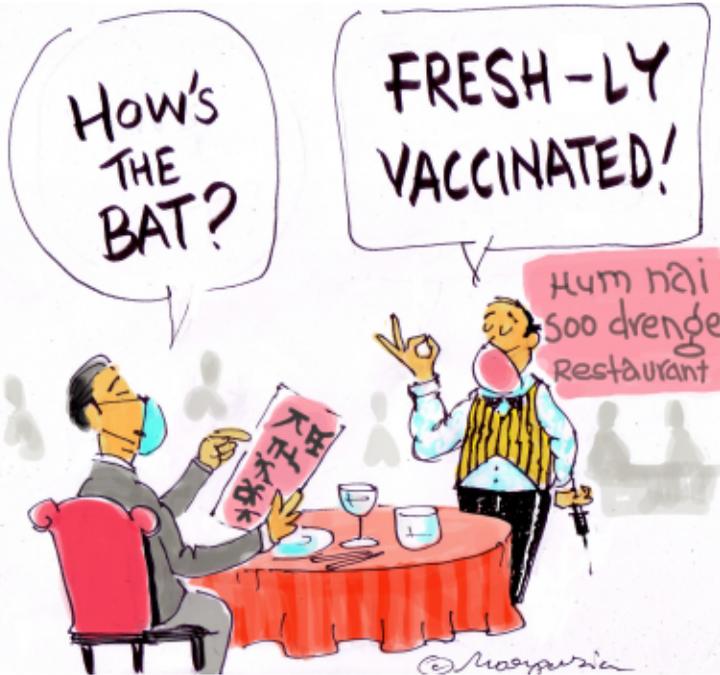
**Fortified History**

**Face to Face**

**G. Nagraj**



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1<sup>st</sup> WAVE?... 2<sup>nd</sup> WAVE?... 3<sup>rd</sup> WAVE?...



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# Steering 1.3 billion Indians ahead

*With the country's economy taking a beating along with its attendant setbacks in the wake of Covid 19 crisis, the Prime Minister has heralded a reversal by issuing the call for Atmanirbhar Bharat. The reforms rolled out with economic stimuli will go a long way in making India self-reliant, feels Gauravi Patel.*



**PM Narendra Modi unveiling the vision for Atmanirbhar in May 2020**

**T**he fear of the Covid-19 pandemic and its adverse economic impact was palpable among Indians. Plummeting economy triggered by the lockdown as also the disrupted supply chains were the main cause for concern in households. Reducing sources of income generation, loss of jobs, health crises and rumours of shortage of food and other essential supplies were rampant triggering panic and fear among Indians.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on 12 May 2020 brought much-needed relief to the citizens. He assured them that the country is well stocked in terms of food grains and other supplies and advised them to stay safe and keep moving forward. He also announced a special economic package and gave a clarion call for *Atmanirbhar Bharat* – a milestone in the journey of a new self-reliant India!

The call out for Atmanirbhar Bharat or self-reliant India was a turning point in India's success story in handling the Covid-19 crisis. The package along with previous announcements by the government during the crisis and decisions taken by RBI was to the tune of Rs 20 lakh crore -- equivalent to almost 10 per cent of India's GDP. PM Modi emphasised the package would provide a much-needed

boost towards achieving Atmanirbhar Bharat. The economic crisis triggered by the 2020 novel coronavirus gave birth to the Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission.

## The elements of Atmanirbhar Bharat

The Atmanirbhar Bharat package focussed on land, labour, liquidity and laws. The idea was that it will cater to various sections and sectors such as labourers, cottage industry, MSMEs, industries, the middle class, etc. It was time for the country to embrace bold reforms to become self-reliant and to negate the impact of the Covid-19 crisis in the future.

The reforms that were rolled out with the announcement of this package were path-breaking. These included simple and clear laws, supply chain reforms for agriculture, capable human resource, rational tax system and a strong financial system. The aim of the reforms was to promote business, attract investment and further strengthen the 'Make in India' initiative that was launched in September 2014.

The Atmanirbhar Bharat concept has been conceived to improve efficiency in various sectors, ensure quality and prepare India for the competitive global supply

chain. The Covid-19 crisis wreaked havoc but also taught the country that it is important and critical to protect and promote local manufacturing, local markets and strengthen local supply chains.

To achieve self-reliance, India must empower labourers, migrants and the poor from organised and unorganised sectors both and the current government reforms are taking the country in that direction.

## Covid-19 crisis bred new opportunity

The global supply chains were badly hit due to the lockdown in several countries and the compromised transportation channels. It was then that India's domestic demands were met 'locally', and the nation realised the importance of a local economy, manufacturing and supply chain. To meet the demands of the 21st century India, the only way is to become self-reliant.

India's self-reliance in times of the Covid-19 crisis is not complete without the mention of how a country that was importing medical kits and health care essentials before the lockdown, increased local production to such an extent that not only were all domestic demands met but India also started exporting the same to other nations: Case in point being, the production of PPE kits N-95 masks, whose production in India went up from being almost negligible to 2 lakh each, on a daily basis, during the lockdown.

## Defining a self-reliant India

During his announcement, Prime Minister Modi observed that in the globalised world, the definition of self-reliance has changed. It is not about being self-centred but being progressive and contributing to the progress of the world as well.

He spoke about the devastating earthquake in Kutch that brought the region to its knees and recalled the grit and determination of the people that revived the state. He invoked the resolve and determination of the people in Kutch and said 'similar to keep determination is needed to make the country self-reliant.' A self-reliant India will also need to strengthen all stakeholders in the supply chain to increase and to fulfil demand.

A self-reliant India will stand on five pillars: Economy which brings in quantum jump and not incremental change; Infrastructure which should become the identity of India; System based on 21st century technology driven arrangements; Vibrant Demography which is our source of energy for a self-reliant India and Demand whereby the strength of our demand and supply chain should be utilised to full capacity.

## Need for collective efforts

A goal of such proportions can only be achieved with the collective efforts of all segments of the society. PM Modi appealed to spiritual leaders of the country to help

popularise the government's initiative of 'Vocal for Local' and to campaign for the Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission. He urged the leaders to promote the mission in their preaching and interactions with their followers across the nation. Consequently, several spiritual leaders such as Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Baba Ramdev, Swami Awadheshanand and Devaki Nandan Thakur came out in support of PM Modi's call and pledged the same.

A statement read: "Sentiment of support and appreciation for the call for Atmanirbhar Bharat resonates through the messages of the spiritual leaders. They are not only supporting the call on a personal level but are offering to coordinate the response of the sant samaj, calling upon their supporters to adopt the ideals of 'Vocal for Local' also they are pledging their infrastructure and resources to the cause."

And, the support is pouring in from all segments of the society. Youngsters are creating apps and promoting the concept through word of mouth, reaffirming their support to the mission and to nation building. Many people are actively embracing local products of daily use to contribute to the initiative.

Business-owners, entrepreneurs, industrialists and manufacturers are also making sure they promote and support local manufacturing processes, products and local supply chains to build a robust local economy that is completely self-reliant and self-sufficient. The Covid-19 crisis was an eye-opener as global market chains crashed and disrupted global supply chains on a massive scale.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced several stimulus packages throughout the lockdown as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission. The third tranche of the Atmanirbhar Bharat package announced by the minister in November 2020 has some schemes that are time-bound while others with a medium-term focus. The package also has a multi-sector focus across the labour market, stressed sectors, social welfare, manufacturing, housing, infrastructure, exports and agriculture.

The five phases of Atmanirbhar Bharat are: Phase 1 focussing on businesses including MSMEs; Phase 2 focussing on the poor including migrants and farmers; Phase 3 focussing on agriculture; Phase 4 focussing on new horizons of growth and Phase 5 focussing on government reforms and enablers.

Reiterating the importance of 'vocal for local' PM Modi requested just like India's freedom struggle, the country can attain 'Atmanirbharta' (self-reliance). It is the best way to support the country by supporting the local economy!

**Gauravi Patel is a researcher with The Inclusive Tourism Project – A DraftCraft International Initiative to document tourism, state needs and interests of stakeholders and industry players, balance issues objectively with local needs while ensuring inclusion as laid down in law and in spirit**

# ‘Vocal for Local’, India’s new mantra

*The positive side of Covid-19 crisis has been the call to promote local products. By pushing and pitching the “Vocal for Local” India has effectively demonstrated that it can withstand and brave the situation with remarkable resilience, asserts Trisha Sharma.*



*Vocal for local, India`s new mantra*

2020 was an extraordinary year in more ways than one. The pandemic sparked off an unprecedented crisis disrupting the lives of billions of Indians. At the risk of jeopardising their own lives, frontline workers put their best foot forward to emerge as heroes in tackling the pandemic and protecting citizens. It could aptly be summed up as unity in diversity as the crisis brought the nation together in myriad ways. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative to strengthen and sustain the nation’s manufacturing sector. And, it grew and how!

During his Independence Day speech, the Prime Minister reiterated India’s vision of ‘Vocal for Local’ and emphasised on the government’s vision for the same.

India, a country of more than a billion people, is probably the only nation that has managed the Covid-19 crisis so effectively despite the constraints of an astronomical population, shrinking healthcare personnel and the lockdown that lasted months. However, it was PM Modi’s timely call for Atmanirbhar Bharat and the push for ‘Vocal for Local’ that ensured livelihood and supplies for Indians throughout the lockdown.

## Independent India’s new slogan

The call for ‘Vocal for Local’ from Red Fort on India’s 74th Independence Day was a moment in history as the nation was in sync with the leader as one. Prime Minister Modi spoke of the country’s resolve to become self-reliant and explained how large companies from around the world are finding India a promising ground for business and enterprise and turning towards India in big numbers. He said, “We have to move forward with the mantra of ‘Make for the world’ along with ‘Make in India.’”

And, the nation realised the importance of being ‘Vocal for Local’ especially after the Covid-19 crisis that shook the foundation of the strongest regimes and establishments. When the novel Corona virus was ravaging nations across the world, India resolved to self-reliance and pledged to be ‘Vocal for Local’. Prime Minister Modi explained it well when he said, “This dream is turning into a pledge. Atmanirbhar Bharat has become a ‘mantra’ for the 130 crore Indians today. I am confident of the abilities, confidence and potential of my fellow Indians. Once we decide to do something, we do not rest until we achieve that goal.”

## India epitomises 'Vocal for Local'

It was only a few months ago that India was importing PPE kits, ventilators and N-95 masks. It was an extremely challenging time for the country when in times of a health crisis; some of the most essential items needed to combat the infection were in short supply. The Indian government took it as an opportunity to make the country self-reliant.

Within a span of a couple of months, India became self-sufficient in the production of N-95 masks and PPE kits. Production, in India was scaled up to such an extent that she even started exporting these essential items of healthcare to other countries too. It was a tremendous feat given the global competitiveness of the sector and the challenges involved in achieving the desired goal. And quite graciously, the Prime Minister gave all credit to the crores of Indians who worked together to find a solution to a grave situation. The 'Vocal for Local' movement is urging Indian to develop a 'Vocal for Local' mindset in buying and all things related. The idea is to appreciate local products and encourage and promote local products so they get the right opportunity and environment for development and commerce.

"Indians are an enterprising community. The 'Vocal for Local' initiative has given just the right impetus to promote and sustain local economies and cottage industries. I am so happy and am sure it will affect people in going local, sooner than later," feels Mumbai-based shop-owner Bhavin Joshi. "This push will encourage many people to make and sell things in local markets and will boost trade and commerce."

The constant efforts by the current government and the policies that they have implemented are to promote locally-made products and create markets for the same. It started with the Make in India movement that has matured into the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. It's no surprise that last year India witnessed a record 18 per cent increase in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

These developments indicate that the world is showing confidence in India and want to promote trade and commerce ties with the country. The government is working on framing the right policies, stabilising the political scenario and strengthening the foundation of the country's economy to further the initiatives.

## Message is loud and clear

In late October, during his monthly radio programme *Mann ki Baat*, PM Modi urged the citizens to go 'Vocal for Local'. He said, "When you go shopping, do remember our resolve of 'Vocal for Local'. While purchasing items from the market, we have to accord priority to local products." India's heritage is a product in itself. For example, Khadi that was once considered old-fashioned has gained popularity in recent times and has found a prominent place in the fashion industry. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Khadi again gained popularity when self-help

groups (SHG) and similar entities started making Khadi masks at several locations in the country.

"We were really impressed with the 'Vocal for Local' initiative and realised how important it is to make and buy local products and be self-reliant. So we started making Khadi masks and there is a huge demand for these masks now, even in urban set-ups," offers Delhi-based Malati Devi who supervises work of a few SHGs in the area.

In fact, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) supplied 60,000 high quality Khadi cotton face masks for school children in Arunachal Pradesh as the schools were reopening for the first time after the lockdown in November 2020.

## Festivals too promoted 'Vocal for Local'

Diwali was different this year and it was not just because of the Covid-19 crisis. After months of lockdown gloom people were just waiting for a reason to celebrate and Diwali was just the right occasion. Additionally, the 'Vocal for Local' mantra had caught on well and people had realised the importance of promoting and buying local products.

"I am all for 'local for Diwali' just like our PM said and I even bought all local products this festival season. I think it's our collective responsibility to promote local make items to boost the economy that took a hit during the pandemic," offers Panjim-based social worker Shweta Malvankar.

The 'Vocal for Local' mantra is striking a familiar chord with every Indian today. Diwali was just a glimpse of how India is embracing the new mantra. Indians went overboard buying local products and wares with a new-found pride. Indians are now talking about local products, promoting them, spreading the message and are being part of the initiative. This is encouraging local makers and producers too who are now confident that there is a market for their wares that won't be affected by 'competitive' foreign products.

This time around, in Diwali, surveys revealed that almost three-fourth of Indians profited purchased only Indian goods giving their Chinese counterparts the go-by. Nationalism had assumed newer, brighter colours now.

People are identifying with the cause and adopting a more proactive role in the entire process. India is changing swiftly, for the better and...for good!

**Trisha Sharma is a media researcher with The History and Heritage Project – A DraftCraft International Initiative to document details, analyse facts and plug lacunae generated by oversight or to further national or foreign agenda in History and Heritage Across India and Beyond Borders**

# Self-reliance as a potent weapon

*By asserting authority at borders and in digital space, India has sent clear signals to the Red Dragon that it will not take the latter's belligerence lying down. The government has played a master-stroke by banning Chinese apps and denting their pride and hurting them where it hurts, contends **Renuka Goel**.*



## **Banning 56 Chinese apps was the first step towards self-reliance in digital space**

**W**hen the Indian government announced on 29 June 2020 that it was banning 59 apps developed by Chinese firms, the country was in shock. Not only was this an unprecedented move by India, it was also a first in the series of steps to confront Chinese aggression and tame the Red Dragon. It was the first step towards India turning Atmanirbhar, particularly so, in digital space.

The move not only garnered global attention, it triggered similar actions by several nations including the United States of America. India had strengthened its position as a global power as more nations were now looking up to India for leadership and direction in geo-political and strategic affairs.

In 2020, relations between India and China took a hit following the military skirmishes between the two nations. The soldiers of both the countries had engaged in multiple aggressive face-offs and melee at multiple locations across the border in Ladakh, Sikkim and along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). What followed was an aggressive stance by the Indian government at the border and beyond. It was the beginning of a new self-reliant India.

### **The big ban**

Among the apps that the Ministry of Electronics

and Information Technology ordered to ban was Tik Tok – Byte Dance's popular video-making social media networking app with India as its biggest overseas market. The list of banned apps also included Community and Video Call apps from Xiaomi –one of the top smartphone vendors in India; two of Alibaba Group's apps UC Browser and UC News (Alibaba is a Chinese multinational technology company specialising in e-commerce, retail, Internet, and technology); Shareit; ES File Explorer; CM Browser and Club Factory that claims to be India's third-largest e-commerce firm.

According to the Ministry statement, the apps were engaging in activities compromising the "national security and defence of India, which ultimately impinges upon the sovereignty and integrity of India." This was the first time that India had banned so many foreign apps. Being the world's second largest internet market and a country where nearly half of the billion plus population is online, India made an unprecedented and a tough move. And, this was also a significant step in the standoff between the world's two giant nations.

Even though the Indian government implemented the ban citing risk to national security, data security and privacy, it was clear to everyone that the action was essentially a retaliatory measure against Chinese military incursions in Ladakh. The fact that India's digital economy is one of the largest markets in the world, the ban was set to dent

the financial standing of Chinese companies by impacting their valuations. But, it did more than that and became a point of contention and discussion in the simmering Indo-China border dispute.

## India's bold step

The Ministry had invoked its power under section 69A of the IT Act read with the relevant provisions of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules 2009 for the order. The Ministry had received many complaints and reports that were directing towards the misuse of a few mobile apps that were available on Android and iOS platforms. The reports indicated theft of users' data in an unauthorised manner and transmission to servers located outside India. The apps were threatening the country's sovereignty and integrity, defence, security of state and public order.

"The compilation of these data, its mining and profiling by elements hostile to national security and defence of India, which ultimately impinges upon the sovereignty and integrity of India, is a matter of very deep and immediate concern which requires emergency measures," read the statement. Ministry of Home Affairs' Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre had also sent an "exhaustive recommendation for blocking these malicious apps." The Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) had also received several citizen representations regarding security of data and breach of privacy issues, further impacting the public order. Not only this, even public representatives within and beyond the Parliament and across party lines were raising concerns and demanding strict action against the apps harming the nation and threatening the privacy of billions of Indians.

It was on the basis of concerns and reports from several sectors and upon receiving credible inputs regarding the misuse of these apps that the government decided to safeguard interests of Indian mobile and internet users and that of the Indian cyberspace and banned the use of these apps on "mobile and non-mobile Internet enabled devices."

## The Indo-China dispute

The Indian government's retaliatory move of banning Chinese apps followed unwarranted aggression from the Chinese at the borders between the two nations. On the night of 5 May 2020, the People's Liberation Army and Indian Army soldiers clashed at Finger 5 in the northern flank of the Pangong Lake in Ladakh.

A few days later, the violent confrontation between the two armies repeated near Naku La in Sikkim. Soon after, on 15 June 2020, China moved about 6,000 PLA soldiers to strategic locations in the Indian claimed areas of the Galwan Valley in Ladakh.

The Indian army moved in more troops and Indo-Tibetan Border Police personnel to the Line of Actual

Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh to maintain the positions. "India is committed to the objective of maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the border areas with China and our armed forces scrupulously follow the consensus reached by our leaders and the guidance provided. At the same time, we remain firm in our resolve to ensuring India's sovereignty and national security," said India foreign ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava.

## Indian aggression continues

India's foreign and trade policies have turned a new leaf. Not only is India more aggressive in safeguarding interests of its citizens, it has been proactive in tackling China through myriad channels.

Amid the strenuous relationship and the standoff at India-China border, the Indian government has made it hard for the Chinese investors to invest in India. For example, funds like Shunwei Capital from the founders of Xiaomi and Bace Capital backed by the Ant Group are now shifting focus from India to Indonesia.

In September 2020, India banned 118 more apps created by Chinese companies and in November 2020 the government banned 43 more Chinese apps on the grounds of national security. The banned apps included big names such as PUBG, Weibo, etc. taking the total to 220 Chinese apps banned by the Indian government.

PUBG Corporation, the South Korean game developer, is reportedly planning to return to the Indian market by cutting ties with the Chinese company Tencent that was used to publish the PUBG mobile game in India.

## India leads the way

The new India is no longer relying on passive diplomacy in dealing with other nations and particularly historically belligerent neighbours such as China. The series of bans was a clear message to China that India will no longer sit and watch but will change the norms of engagement. The bans that followed the border skirmishes at the border also decelerated China's ambitions to become the digital superpower.

The face-off sparked anti-China sentiments across the country and the nation called for a boycott of Chinese goods and products and pushed the "vocal for local" movement. Even before the clashes, India had already introduced restrictive measures to check Chinese foreign direct investments into India. And, at a local level, within borders, the anti-China sentiment was emboldened at grassroots by the Indian PM's call of 'vocal for local'.

**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.**

# Shot in the arm for health-related products

*From nowhere being close to self-reliant, the Mission Atmanirbhar Bharat sprints off in India even in the thick of the raging pandemic to make it a leading player in the export of PPEs and masks to the world, explains **Jyothi Menon** with facts and figures.*



**India to export Khadi face masks in Coronavirus hit global markets**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat has lent a new vigour to the country's manufacturing sector that, like most other sectors, had received major setbacks during the Covid-19 pandemic. Manufacturing is a significant economic catalyst in India and PM Modi's call for a self-reliant India has given the sector the necessary impetus to make India self-reliant especially in the country's fight against Covid-19.

In the months following the spread of the novel coronavirus India not only increased the manufacturing of health-related products that were necessary to combat Covid-19 infection particularly Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and face masks, it soon became a global exporter of the same.

In March 2020, when the deadly pandemic hit India, the country had zero PPE production facilities. Soon after, within a span of two months, there were over 600 companies that had been certified to manufacture PPEs. In a span of sixty days, India became the second-largest producer of PPEs in the world.

## Mission to look outwards

Speaking at the inaugural address of a webinar series, Union Minister for Railways, Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal said the government's goal of Atmanirbhar

Bharat i.e self-reliant India aims to look outwards and not inwards. He said Modi government's vision of this mission is 'not to turn inwards or protectionist' but it's about 'opening India's doors wider so that India engages with the world from a position of strength, on equal, fair and reciprocal terms.' He further stated that the government was focussing its energies on creating 'what we can within the country, learn from experiences across the world,

bring best of technologies to India, attract capital, skills and high-quality education and healthcare.'

India's response and efforts in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic in the second most populous country in the world has been splendid to say the least. When the most advanced of nations and their state-of-the-art infrastructure failed to contain the spread of the deadly virus, India shone in its understated pursuit of managing the worst pandemic to hit the planet in the 21st century. It was then that the nation also realised how important was it to be a self-reliant economy.

According to the Union Minister, the 'Janata Curfew followed by the total and complete lockdown in the country were the initial steps in building the nation's capabilities as it bought the government time to ramp up testing, labs, production of face masks, PPE kits, ventilators, setting up Covid-19 wards, more ICUs, etc.' He further added that it was the stellar success achieved in scaling up indigenous capabilities on all these fronts that gave India the confidence that 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' can indeed be achieved.

## Meeting domestic and global demands

The Covid-19 pandemic wreaked global economy and that of India badly. It hit the world hard and extremely

fast before nations could gear up to protect their citizens or even cushion the economic impacts. However, on a positive side, it also opened doors of promising export opportunities for Indian businesses. The pandemic created new markets and growth opportunities for multiple product categories especially medical equipment and gear including PPEs, face masks, sanitisers, disinfectants, test kits, etc. and experts believe export of these products will continue to rise in the coming years.

In the period spanning from January till July 2020, India reported total export revenue of an estimated USD 532 million from 14 medical-related products. According to a report by Drip Capital, 'the largest component of the USD 150 million in growth comes from the textile sector, specifically a class of impregnated and coated fabrics used in the PPE equipment for medical professionals, as well as masks.'

As countries were building up their health infrastructure to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, India also saw significant growth in classes of rubber used for gloves, surgical equipment and medical equipment. India has been exporting these products to USA, Canada, Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, UK, China, UAE, Vietnam, South Africa, Singapore, Thailand, Turkey, etc.

'Over the last four years, on average, India exported around USD 539 million annually in these selected categories. From January-July of 2020, India exported USD 532 million, and could come close to doubling the average if the pandemic worsens' as per the report.

## Gearing up for the future

The Covid-19 pandemic challenged human capabilities and preparedness. Countries such as the US and those in Europe are reporting the second wave of the novel coronavirus and are beefing up their healthcare system to address the issue. The handling of the situation will depend on the preparedness and effectiveness of the governments in procuring medical kits and gear such as PPEs.

And the demand is not restricted to PPEs and masks. With countries racing to produce Covid-19 vaccine, there is a need to ensure sufficient production of materials such as syringes. The All India Syringe and Needle Manufacturers Association (AISNMA) wrote to the Central Government offering an additional capacity of over 350 million syringes per month to meet the entire demand for mass Covid-19 vaccination through domestic production. The Association informed this additional capacity has already been built up by its members, in advance, keeping in mind the initial shortage of masks and PPE faced by India and the world.

## India straightened up and led the way

The Covid-19 infection was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March 2020. It was

estimated that the world would need 89 million masks, 76 million gloves and 1.6 million goggles every month to combat the infection. This meant the need to spruce up global PPE manufacturing by at least 40 per cent. The critical shortage was felt by several nations, including India, and soon India rose up to the challenge by increasing manufacturing despite the constraints of the lockdown.

India leveraged its existing manufacturing set up that is low cost and robust and world-class research facilities to increase the PPE production. Major manufacturing and textile centres such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are accounting for 70 per cent of the total export value of these products.

In March 2020, India had no PPE production facilities. But the nation beefed up its efforts and in a span of two months there were over 600 companies that had been certified to produce PPE. Not only this, the domestic market alone was worth INR 10,000 crores. India boosted up production in a systematic and planned manner and in no time became the second largest PPE producer in the world, after China.

The Ministry of Textiles in a statement said steps were being taken to ensure only certified players across the entire supply chain are allowed to supply body coveralls to governments. It further added that measures were undertaken to ensure both quality and quantity of PPE overalls reach the desired levels.

Secretary, Textiles Committee and Additional Textile Commissioner, Ministry of Textiles, Ajit Chavan explained how the committee tackled the non-availability of reputed domestic manufacturers of PPE testing equipment in the country. "We faced the humongous challenges of non-availability of domestic manufacturers of repute and incessant delay/long gestation period to import machine from China as also challenges of ever-increasing prices by the opportunist companies in China due to demand for such equipment the world over. We therefore decided to do it indigenously," he said.

The PPE ecosystem could not have been created without timely government assistance and intervention by identifying the right manufacturers, testing facilities and setting up an effective supply chain mechanism for timely deliveries. These combined efforts catapulted India into the world's second- largest manufacturer of PPE overalls in a very short period of time.

**Jyothi Menon is a health law activist working with [www.HealthAndTheLaw.com](http://www.HealthAndTheLaw.com) – A DraftCraft International Initiative to spread awareness among patients of legal rights and position in law, boost medico-legal awareness, initiate legislative change and enforce accountability among healthcare players.**

# Zeroing in on its own vaccine

*The Covid Suraksha Mission has taken off and India is almost there without having to knock at the doors of other nations. With right logistics, the country can meet the WHO's estimate that a 65-70 per cent vaccine coverage rate is sufficient to reach population immunity, evaluates **Aarti Asthana**.*



Mission Covid Suraksha

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic provided India the perfect opportunity to play leader to the world that is rushing to find a 'safe' vaccine for the dreaded infection. India is not only leading the R&D of the Covid-19 vaccine, it is a crucial cog in the vaccination development process needed the world over.

On 12 November 2020, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced Rs 900 crore funding for Covid-19 vaccine research in the country. This was a stimulus as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package. The union minister clarified that the funding will be released only for the research and development of Covid-19 vaccine and the actual cost of the vaccine, the distribution cost, etc. will be accounted for separately.

The minister said, "Rs 900 crore would be sanctioned for Covid Suraksha Mission for research and development of the Indian vaccine to the Department of Biotechnology." At present, there are three candidates involved in the development of the Covid-19 vaccine in India and are at different stages of the human clinical trials. The human clinical trials of vaccines developed indigenously, one by Bharat Biotech and the other by Zydus Cadila Ltd. are under underway presently.

## Proactive PM boosts morale, funds

The government too is leaving no stone unturned to ensure the timely development of the vaccine. On 28 November 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Pune in a day-long programme to review the coronavirus vaccine development work. The Prime Minister wanted a first-hand perspective and understanding of the preparations and preparedness of the vaccine development programme. He also wanted to understand the challenges and the roadmap of the programme when India reaches out the vaccine to its citizens. He visited the three biotechnology firms whose vaccine candidates are in advance stages of human trials.

He first visited pharma major Zydus Cadila manufacturing unit in Ahmedabad and reviewed the process at their research facility and interacted with the scientists and the vaccine developers. The company aims to complete the vaccine trial by March 2021 and is in the process of producing up to 100 million doses a year.

He also visited pharma major Bharat Biotech at Hyderabad and reviewed the progress of the vaccine Covaxin, a vaccine candidate being developed by the company. This

vaccine is being developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and National Institute of Virology.

In the third leg of his visit, Modi stopped at the Serum Institute of India in Pune where he interacted with the scientists and reviewed the progress of the vaccine candidate for coronavirus. Serum Institute of India has trucked with AstraZeneca and Oxford University. PM Modi also reviewed the preparedness of the launch and production and distribution of the vaccine during his visit.

## Reviewing the processes at every stage

If the vaccine development programme goes as planned and acquires the necessary regulatory approvals, then companies could be producing millions of doses of the Covid-19 vaccine by the next year. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also held a virtual conference with heads of three vaccine development and manufacturing companies: Gennova Biopharmaceuticals, Pune, Biological E Ltd and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd., Hyderabad.

Biological E Ltd had procured permission to start human clinical trials of its vaccine candidate in October 2020. Gennova Biopharmaceuticals is scheduled to begin the human trials of its proprietary m-RNA vaccine in December 2020. This m-RNA vaccine is similar to that of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd. has tied up with Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and Gamaleya to test the Sputnik V vaccine on Indian volunteers. In September 2020, Dr Reddy's and RDIF entered into a partnership to conduct clinical trials of the Sputnik V vaccine and the rights for distribution of the first 100 million doses in India.

Dr Reddy's Laboratories and the RDIF announced on 1 December 2020 the start of adaptive phase 2 and 3 clinical trials for vaccine Sputnik V in India after receiving necessary clearance from the Central Drugs Laboratory in Himachal Pradesh. JSS Medical Research will conduct the clinical trials as the clinical research partner of the company. The company will also undertake the safety and immunogenicity study in the process. Dr Reddy's Laboratories has also partnered with the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), Department of Biotechnology for advisory support and to use BIRAC's clinical trial centres for the vaccine.

For the Phase 3 of Sputnik V clinical trials, 40,000 volunteers have participated of which over 22,000 have been administered the first dose and more than 19,000 with the first and second doses of the vaccine.

## Domestic vaccine development

The phase 3 human clinical trial of India's own vaccine, Covaxin, developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) began on 2 December 2020. The trials started at privately-run Vydehi multi-specialty hospital in Bengaluru.

Vydehi Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre official K. Ravi Babu said, "The ICMR has permitted our hospital to conduct the third phase trial for Covaxin developed by the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech." The hospital has roped in Clintrac International Ltd for the trials that will involve 1,000 volunteers. Mr Babu explained the 'vaccine will be given to the volunteers in two doses' and will be 'monitored daily through phone/video call for feedback and updates.'

## Reaching vaccine to the masses

Once the vaccine is developed, it will be a humongous challenge to disseminate it to the 1.3 billion people in India. In a statement released on 1 December 2020, the Union Health Ministry said that 'India does not need to vaccinate all of its 1.3 billion people if it manages to break the transmission of Corona virus'.

At the press conference, Director General of the state-run Indian Council of Medical Research Balram Bhargava said, "If we are able to vaccinate a critical mass of people, and break that virus transmission, then we may not have to vaccinate the entire population." The World Health Organization experts believe that a 65-70 per cent vaccine coverage rate is sufficient to reach population immunity.

India is a country of more than a billion people. The Covid-19 fight will end only when an effective vaccine will reach the right proportion of the population to control the spread of the virus. India has run massive immunisation programmes and makes 60 per cent of the world's vaccines. It is also home to major manufacturers of vaccine. This includes Serum Institute of India - the largest in the world. So, the country is prepared to vaccinate the 1.3 billion people against Covid-19. India is expecting to receive and use 500 million doses of vaccines against the novel coronavirus and in the process immunise up to 250 million people by July 2021.

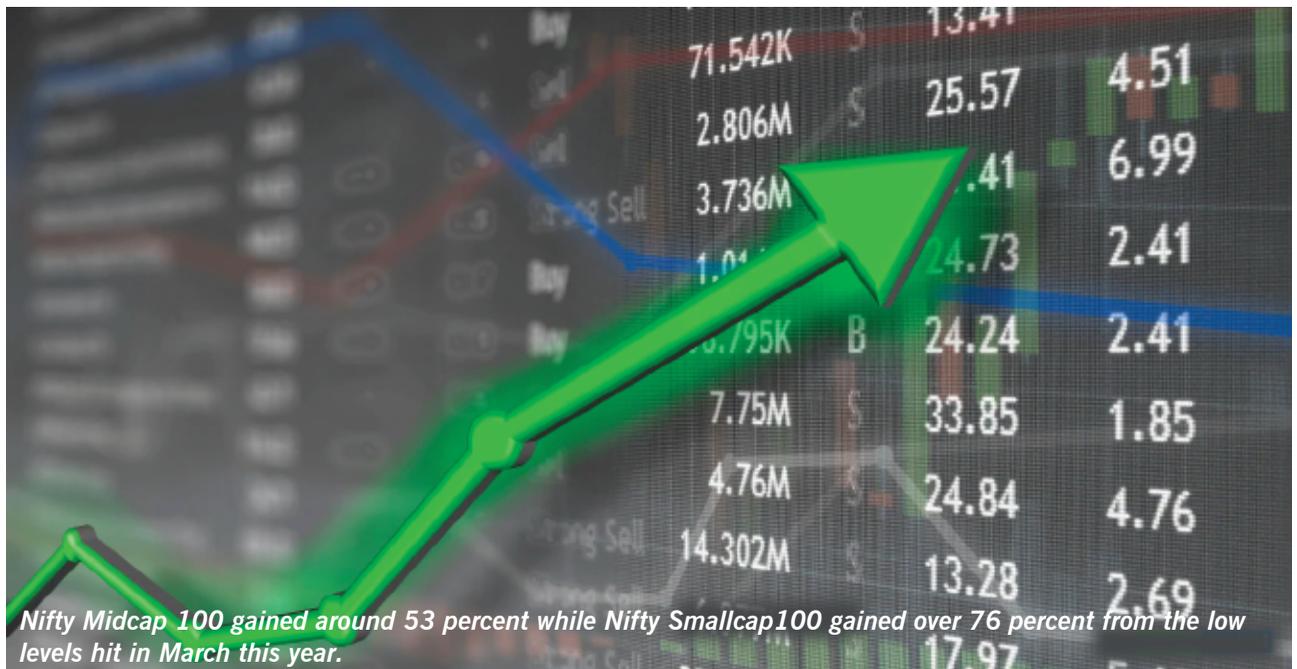
The government has also prioritised the distribution of the vaccine: The first preference will be given to Covid warriors, including doctors, nurses, paramedics and all others who are on the frontline in the battle against the virus. In the next stage, the vaccine will be given to senior citizens, those who are co-morbid and other vulnerable sections of society.

India is not only prepared to satiate the domestic needs but also provide necessary support to neighbours. The Indian government is enhancing cold chain and storage capabilities for delivery of Covid-19 vaccine of neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh.

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# ‘Local’ as medicine to heal and rebuild

*Despite the debilitating economic effects of the pandemic, India managed to bounce back and script a story in optimism. When the pandemic was at its worst, foreign investors were putting money into the country at a pace faster than before and the government took timely steps to cushion the pandemic’s health and economic impacts, affirms Prachi Desai.*



The discussions and discourses on economy in the year 2020 and the forecasts for 2021 centred mostly on the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis that came as a global shock interrupted both demand and supply chains the world over. The impact was felt throughout the globe primarily due to the inter-connected nature of the present-day world economy.

While, on the one hand, the pandemic constricted supply of labour and impacted productivity in operations, the lockdown led to closure of millions of businesses and deeply disrupted the supply chains. On the other, the infection caused the economy to stall because of job losses, loss of income and a consequent reduction in spending in households and financial investments.

The loss of income caused by the disease itself, morbidities among the working population and the prevalent unemployment was a serious cause of worry. India too felt the tremors of this one-of-its kind torrent. However, despite the forecasts and the fears, the country not only stayed afloat in the economic crisis, it managed to keep masses from going under, simply by focussing on ‘going local’.

## Forecast for economy to dip

It was the uncertainty caused by the novel coronavirus that caused fear among nations. Not only was the duration, magnitude and the impact of the virus difficult to analyse, even the prognosis of the disease was changing every day making it very difficult to ascertain the symptoms and the course of treatment for patients. On a larger scale, the uncertainty triggered a vicious cycle that slowed down businesses, reduced consumer confidence and constricted financial flexibility among businesses and individuals. It finally led to unemployment and lack of investments that further impacted the economy adversely. Experts were finding it extremely difficult to account for the linear and non-linear effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In June 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, Global Economic Prospects described both the immediate and near-term outlook for the impact of the pandemic. It even laid out the long-term damage the crisis could cause reducing all prospects of growth. The baseline forecast reported a 5.2 percent contraction in global GDP in

2020. This figure was obtained by using market exchange rate weights that indicated the deepest global recession in decades.

The economy was plunging despite humongous efforts by governments to stall and reverse the downfall. In fact, the long-term damages forecasted by the report were expected to wreak havoc by 'lowered investments, erosion of human capital through lost work and schooling, and fragmentation of global trade and supply linkages.' Similar forecasts were made for the Indian economy too.

## India fought back and how!

The pandemic was expected to plunge most countries into recession in 2020, with per capita income contracting the largest globally since 1870. Developed economies were projected to shrink seven per cent while developing economies were forecast to contract by 2.5 per cent.

The grim picture represented the weakest showing by such economies in at least sixty years. India, however, was writing a different story. When the pandemic was at its worst, foreign investors were putting money into the country at a pace faster than before. According to a report by CARE Ratings, 'between April and September 2020, when India's economy was in a "technical recession," the foreign direct investment into the country rose 15 per cent year-on-year to USD 39.9 billion (Rs 29,400 crore).'

The report further added that 'Optimism on India growth story among foreign investors combined with ample liquidity in the global market has aided flows into India.' Not to mention it was the big reforms introduced and pushed by the Indian government such as supporting the manufacturing sector and the economic stimulus packages released by the government that guaranteed the robustness of the Indian economy in this global turmoil.

## Government reforms ensured recovery

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for Atmanirbhar Bharat early during the lockdown, followed by Finance

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's economic stimulus packages with a multi-sector focus on manufacturing, social welfare, stressed sectors, housing, infrastructure, exports and agriculture – ensured that India survives the global economic crisis. Several measures were announced by Minister Nirmala Sitharaman specifically focussing on MSMEs considering the priority to local brands.

The multi-pronged approach by the Indian government witnessed various ministerial heads and departments working in unison to roll out policies and reforms to combat

the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic and health consequences of the same. The steps taken by the government ensured actions to cushion the pandemic's health and economic impacts, protect marginalised and vulnerable groups, and make way for a recovery that lasts long. India realised the best way to do so was to look inwards and 'go local'.

PM Modi's call for 'local' began with the nation's Home Ministry itself when Home Minister Amit Shah through twitter confirmed the announcement of the Ministry of Home Affairs 'to ban all outside products from the canteens of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) starting from June 1' that would translate to '50 lakh families of about 10 Lakh CAPF personnel will use indigenous products.'

## Citizens rose to Atmanirbhar call

The strength of any nation is its people. And, for India, the world's second largest nation, it's the 130

crore Indians who supported the nation's recovery in every possible way. They obeyed the lockdown norms that helped in containing the situation and gave enough time to the state and local government and civic bodies to prepare the health infrastructure and human resources for the long fight ahead.

More importantly, it was the support provided by citizens in protecting and promoting the local market and products that helped the government in implementing its economic policies to slow down the damage done by the pandemic to the Indian economy. Not just that, the shopkeepers and those with enterprises created their own

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for Atmanirbhar Bharat early during the lockdown, followed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's economic stimulus packages with a multi-sector focus on manufacturing, social welfare, stressed sectors, housing, infrastructure, exports and agriculture – ensured that India survives the global economic crisis. Several measures were announced by Minister Nirmala Sitharaman specifically focussing on MSMEs considering the priority to local brands.**

version of wares to cater to the Atmanirbhar Bharat concept thereby creating a sea of local makes.

## Indian economy registers positive growth

It is not just public perception that points towards a recovering economy and a mindset that India has fought the crisis well protecting its citizens and the economy. Indian economy is indeed coming out of the de-growth phase.

According to Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar the 'GDP growth will enter the positive territory in the fourth quarter of this fiscal. 'He said, "The second quarter GDP figure (contraction of 7.5 per cent) reflects that the economy is coming out of this pandemic-induced de-growth phase and my expectation is that in the third quarter, we will achieve the same level of economic activity as the year-ago period."

He further explained, "And the fourth quarter will show a small but positive growth over the previous year

because the government has... ushered in many structural reforms and some more are in the pipeline."

It was the reforms initiated by the government that focussed on 'going local' that provided a strong foundation for accelerating economic growth. Mr Kumar added, "We have now shrugged off the negative impact of the pandemic and are moving towards a sustained high growth trajectory in the coming years."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi couldn't have summed it better when he addressed the nation and said, "In times of crisis, this local has fulfilled our demand, this local has saved us. Local is not just the need, it is our responsibility also."

**Prachi Desai is a Delhi-based researcher with Maverick – A DraftCraft International initiative to further reach, accountability and the law in Pre-Primary, Primary, Intermediary and Secondary Education**

# WHO AM I?





# Fortified History

*Forts exemplify much more than the ruins chronicling the past. They epitomise country's art, culture and architecture and are weaved into history through the rigours of time. In this second of the three-part series on The Forts of India, Akul Tripathi showcases five of them known for their distinctive ethos and majesty and dwells on the tumultuous times they thrived in.*

*Text & Photographs: Akul Tripathi*



### **Hari Parbat Fort**

It's a vast country. And in its vastness, it encompasses an endless history, limited only by the seeker's urge and determination. The history itself is not unyielding, just particular about who it lets in. Testing to see who takes the effort to approach its reclusive, brooding, often intimidating presence. A presence manifested in a thousand different ways – in stories, and idioms, and fables. Sometimes in gossip, and most assuredly in the physical structures that are the receptacles of ages long gone.

Dwellings – of man and God. The temples, the homes, the palaces and the forts that stand as symbols to prove time exists and everyone has a past – the Gods and those who worship them. Among these time keepers, the homes and palaces speak of individuals, but the forts – they represent all the humanity that once existed in that particular geography.

The stories of these forts are not just those of its makers, but the story of a weave of time itself...

### **Hari Parbat Fort**

On the banks of the Dal Lake, in the heart of

Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu & Kashmir, keeping fixed in its gaze both Shankaracharya and Hazratbal, stands the guardian of Srinagar – the Hari Parbat Fort. Originally built by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, it is the only fort in the valley. In due course, its occupant came to represent the ruling power in Srinagar. Despite being always in the line of sight of the several thousand tourists who come here every year for the scenic beauty of Kashmir, few people have ventured in, or know its tumultuous history which in many ways represents the history of Kashmir.

As per legend the site of the hill was once a huge lake wherein a demon called Jalobhava used to live. The inhabitants approached Goddess Parvati for help who took the form of a bird and dropped a pebble on the demon's head. The pebble kept expanding until it became the present hill and crushed the demon under it. Some say that the bird was a myna called *haer* in Kashmiri from which Hari Parbat takes its name. She is worshipped as 'Sharika' in Shri Tsakra, (an emblem of cosmic energy pervading the universe) the temple on the western hill of the slope and is the *ishta devi* of the valley.

The fort was first built by Akbar when the Mughals

annexed Kashmir to the Mughal empire in 1586. His army ousted Yusuf Shah Chak and exiled him to Bihar. It provides a panoramic view of the city of Srinagar or the Shahr-e-khaas as the Afghans called it. There were frequent rebellions for some years, following Akbar's conquest of Kashmir. Some say that one such uprising was by a group of people called Dilawars and to protect the Mughal soldiers and courtiers, the great *kalai* meaning wall was built.

The great wall stretches 4.75 km. and is 10 m. high and some reckon it to be the longest ancient wall in India. It took 21 years to build the wall that surrounds the hill and cost the Mughals a reported ₹one crore and 10 lakhs between 1597 and 1618. Akbar wanted to build a city within the fort walls called *Nagar Nagar* and his nobles and courtiers had built houses within the fort walls – a plan that was never fulfilled. The rulers had also built several palaces inside the fort. Many of the buildings no longer exist but several Mughal structures, including a *hamaam* (bath), a mosque, and a *sarai* (inn) built by Dara Shikoh, still exist.

The Mughals ruled Kashmir till 1752, after which the Durrani dynasty of Afghanistan snatched Kashmir from the Mughals, reportedly at the behest of Kashmiri noblemen who were distraught with the inefficient Mughal administration. Their rule of 67 years was one of terror. Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Sikhs won Kashmir from the Afghans,

again, reportedly at the request of Kashmiri noblemen who took a risky and secret trip to Lahore, the capital of the Sikh Kingdom. The Sikhs ruled from 1819 to 1846. In 1846, the region was given to Dogra ruler Ghulab Singh for maintaining neutrality in the Anglo Sikh war which the British won. From 1846 to 1947, the Dogras ruled Kashmir under three rulers – Ghulab Singh, Pratap Singh and Hari Singh. Hari Singh signed accession to India and the army entered Kashmir, and used the fort to fight off the Pakistan sponsored irregulars who had occupied the valley. Till date it remains under the care of the Indian army...

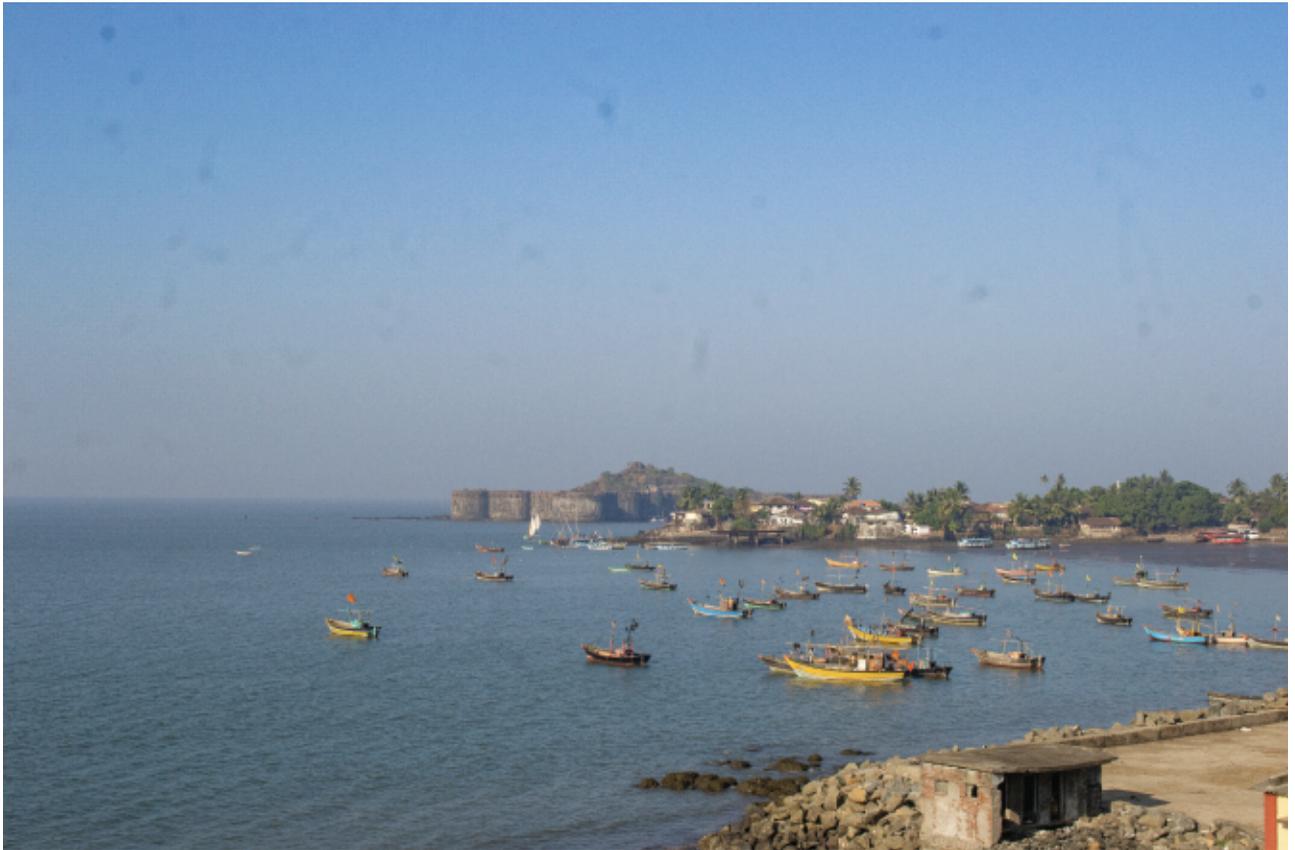
## Janjira

There are hill forts, and forest forts, and sea forts, and river forts. And then, on the western coast of India, 160 kms from Mumbai is Janjira – a fort on an island. Nay! A fortified island!

The story of Janjira Fort begins in the 16th century. The local inhabitants, the Kolis of Rajapuri village wished to ensure their safety from seafarers and pirates that were a constant threat via the Arabian Sea. As such, they decided to reinforce an island half a kilometre away from the shore of their village. Between 1522 to 1527, their Chief, Ram Patil, also referred to as Rama Koli, built a wooden fort around the island, which was known as the 'Medhekot'. The



***Murud-Janjira—the fort remains unconquered till date***



***The local habitants of the Janjira Fort were the kolis(fisherfolk) of Rajapuri village. The fort is now under the care of ASI.***

Nizamshah of Ahmednagar realised the importance and strategic location of Medhekot, and sent his Siddi commander Piram Shah along with three ships to secure it.

It was the festival of Holi and Medhekot was celebrating! Piram landed near the island posing as a merchant, and requested the chief to give him and his sailors asylum for the night, as the sea was getting rough and they needed to secure the expensive merchandise they were carrying. The kolis agreed and Piram unloaded huge baskets of silk and goods at Medhekot. And for the kindness of the kolis, he offered them liquor as gift. The kolis consumed the alcohol and got completely drunk.

In reality, the offloaded huge baskets/containers did not just have silk or goods, quite like the Trojan horse, it had soldiers hiding within. Once the enemy was drunk and incapacitated, Piram ordered his attack and took over the island. They captured Rama Koli, held him captive and killed his garrison and men.

This marked the beginning of an extensive reign of the Siddis. In due course, it also led to the demolition of the wooden fort, and in its place, the Siddis built Fort Janjira.

Over the years, many rulers like Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaj and his fearsome Marathas, then the Peshwas and later the Dutch, the Portuguese and even the British made

various essays to capture this fort; but like a determined warrior Janjira fought back all their attempts, and remained impregnable, unconquered!

The Janjira Fort is a 22 acre area which comprised of a Darbar Mahal, Sheesh Mahal for the queen, a dargah, four masjids, a temple, surveillance room, a storehouse for explosives, two freshwater ponds and tombs of the important.

On 6th May, 1948, formalities of Janjira State to become part of Indian Union were completed and the Siddi rule came to an end. Up to 250 homes resided here till around 1970s. Around 1975 the Central Government took over the fort as everybody had left. After which it came under the Archeological Survey of India (ASI), under whose care and neglect, the fort continues to flourish and languish...

## Chiktan

Not far from the natural bounty that is Kashmir, in the rain shadow of the Himalayas, beyond the ZojiLa Pass, begins the cold desert of Ladakh. On the outskirts of Kargil, once a bustling trade town connecting to the Silk Route, lie the ruins of Chiktan Fort. Known through the times by various names – Maryul, Kha-chumpa, Kia-Chha and Ma-Lo-Pho, the marvel that was once Chiktan, remains the identity of this outrageously beautiful desolate landscape.



***On the outskirts of Kargil, once a bustling trade town***

The legend of Chiktan has its beginnings in nearby Gilgit-Baltistan, now situated in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). A prince of Gilgit - ThaTha Khan, much loved by the Balti people was driven from his homeland by his step brother who envied the more able prince. In a sequence that seems like out of the movies, ThaTha Khan made an escape that James Bond would be proud of and arrived at Chiktan, which charmed him such that he decided to base himself there. To fulfil his ambitions, he called for master architect Shinkhen Chandan and his son from Baltistan who, say the lores, took nine years, nine months and nine days to build a wonder of their times with woodwork so intricate that nothing like it existed in Ladakh or Baltistan. It lingers in the local memory that the fort once housed a tailspin room built on a tall tower that revolved with the air!

Historians too assign the underpinnings of the fort to be laid by the very charismatic ThaTha Khan, though several credit another ruler Tsering Malik to have built the fort the way it appears now, in the 15 -16th century. Its history is one that is remembered for several extreme atrocities that somehow seem believable and even necessary in the harsh land. Execution meant being pushed off the mountain, but held skewered on long pointed logs for the scavenging birds to devour, leaving only bones to reach the earth. Naturally, the echoes of such events invoke phantoms of the past, and it's a strong heart that walks these ruins once the darkness settles in...

As the Dogras committed to expansion, all of Ladakh, including Chiktan fell within their purview and the royal family too absconded to live in normal houses. Locals, still in awe of the fort and its craftsmanship, remember how Chiktan stood tall and proud till very recently when one of the descendants secured a contract to build a dispensary in the area, and pillaged the fort to use the wooden pillars, doors and even stones to construct it; bringing down in his greed the symbol of Chiktan's strength, history, culture - its very identity.

## **Bhangarh Fort**

Of late it has emerged as a popular site for haunted tourism. The Bhangarh Fort, situated at the edge of the Sariska Tiger Reserve in the Aravallis of the Alwar district of Rajasthan, is probably the most popular fort in recent times. Visited by paranormal specialist, featured in umpteen news reports and also the main location of a horror movie; most people have heard of Bhangarh, but few know about it.

The fort was built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Kachwaha ruler of Amber, Raja Bhagwant Singh for his younger son Madho Singh in 1573 AD. Madho Singh's brother was the celebrated Man Singh, who was the General of Mughal emperor Akbar.

The most remarkable of its buildings are the



***Bhangarh Fort in Rajasthan has emerged as a popular site for haunted tourism***



***Bhangarh***

temples of Gopinath, Shiva (Someswar), Mangla Devi, Lavina Devi and Keshava Rai. The distinctive intricacy of carving that Rajasthan is known for, stands out in these temples, intact among the ruins around it. Other buildings include shops along the main road, several *havelis*, a mosque, a market and a palace. The palace was protected by two inner fortifications across the valley. The town is separated from the plain by ramparts with five gates. The main lane ends at the Shaiva temple with a water tank fed with a perennial stream of water that originates in the magical snake-infested sandal woods, that is what the country folk still affirm.

Bhangarh is synonymous with a *tantrik* Balak Nath, also known as Balu Nath. Folklore remembers him in stories featuring him, the founder of Bhangarh – Madho Singh, a beautiful queen named Ratnavali, and Ajab Singh, the grandson of Madho Singh and founder of the nearby fort of Ajabgarh. The various versions of the stories end similarly – through a curse by the *tantrik* that leads to the abandonment of Bhangarh.

History however records that when the Mughal Empire weakened after the death of Aurangzeb, Jai Singh II, the founder of Jaipur, annexed Bhangarh to his state by force in 1720. Neighbouring Ajabgarh

invaded Bhangarh and the city was ransacked. An estimated ten thousand people lived in the city at the time. After the attack, the population was decimated, and post a famine in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the town was abandoned and has remained a ruin ever since, populated only by stories of ghosts that perhaps never were...

## Kangra

Protected by the auspices of the nearby Kangra Shakti Peeth, the fort of Kangra, situated 20 kms from the town of Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh, is often regarded as India's oldest fort with claims of a continuous lineage from the times of the Mahabharat! The Katoch dynasty of Kangra are reputed to have their mythical origins from the Trigarta kingdom mentioned in the Mahabharat and Susharman Chand Katoch, the founder of the fort who was an ally of the Kauravas.

Spread over four kilometres, it is amongst the largest forts in India and its strategic location, strength, and wealth have seen invaders from Mahmud of Ghazni to Tughlaq, the Mughals, the Sikhs and the British. Like it is with wars and strong forts. Some were won, some lost. Wealth was gotten and given. Local legends boast of the Kangra

Fort having 21 deep wells laden with treasure of which eight are said to have been robbed by Mahmud of Ghazni, five by the British and others still remain undiscovered.

Unparalleled in its location at the edge of a cliff with a river flowing by and built with stone that speaks of the strength of the ages, Kangra Fort houses a number of temples including Shitala Mata Temple, Lakshmi Narayan Temple, Ambika Devi Temple and a Jain temple that had a colossal Rishabh Natha idol. The descendants of the Katoch rulers still visit and pray at the Ambika Devi Temple regularly.

Changing hands between the Katoch dynasty and invading rulers, the fort was finally with the Sikhs under Raja Ranjit Singh till 1846, after which the British took over. The earthquake of 1905 caused massive damage to the fort and the lack of upkeep had it fall to ruins. But oh! Such beautiful ruins...

Each weave of time is as intricate as it can be simply explained. Each weave distinct, and each fort, a knot in this weave. And when viewed together, knitting a picture as complex as it is straight forward. Telling stories that are disparate in space and time, yet they collide and create wondrous patterns and illustrations. Each event, associated



*The Kangra Fort in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh is amongst the oldest and largest forts in India*



*The earthquake of 1905 caused massive damage to the Kangra Fort and the lack of upkeep had it fall to ruins.*

with colour or sound that can create in the mind's eye a masterpiece of art or music; and when expressed in words, it tells a story. A story of India, knotted together by ruins – majestic and rubble. A history, glorious and forsaken...



Akul Tripathi is a senior media and entertainment professional. You can follow him on Instagram : <https://www.instagram.com/akul-tripathi/?hl=en>

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## “When we can have Batman, Spiderman, Superman etc., why not a Plogman?”

A jog starts with the first step. A ‘plog’ starts with the very first piece of trash you pick (‘plocka’ in Swedish, from where the ‘pl’ comes in). A forest fire begins with just a small spark. Change starts with an idea, no matter how small it may seem.

G Nagraj epitomises the first step, the spark, and the idea in India’s silicon city, earning him the sobriquet ‘Plog Raja’ (though he prefers to call himself Plograj). It took something very banal – the sight of plastic bottles strewn around at a business-meeting to inspire him to become an eco-warrior and set the ball rolling in the city of Bengaluru. He is seen practising what he preaches, even if that would mean going to great lengths and running those extra miles – literally - and that is what is likely to rub off on people who see him doing what he says everyone must do.

People like Nagraj and Greta Thunberg in Sweden (the home of plogging, in fact, with the word tracing its etymology to ‘plocka’ + ‘jogga’ = ‘plogga’; meaning ‘pick (up trash) while jogging’) will initially be scoffed at just as change-makers often are. But over time, the intrinsic motivation gets supplemented by a whole lot of extrinsic motivation in the form of ardent supporters. Change then happens, as the only constant we know, egged on by one’s good karma.



*Catch them young – G. Nagraj helping his daughter Avni plant a tree*

Support must pour in like a deluge for such initiatives and when one does not see that happening, one wonders why. Do-gooders are often taken for granted and oftentimes there is what we can label as a rebound effect. The rich and arrogant, I have often heard saying, “Well, who cares? We chuck what we want to. That guy there will anyway do what he has been doing all along.”

Yours sincerely overheard such a quip when I used to make it a point to pick up trash and deposit it in dustbins, on my walk to/from CST Railway Station in Mumbai from/to my workplace adjacent to the Gateway of India in the period 2001-2003. That needs to change, and hopefully, ‘times are changing’, to quote the Nobel laureate Bob Dylan. There is a long way to go, and the onus is not just on his shoulders but rather on those of all of us.

**G. Venkatesh** in conversation with Plogman **G. Nagraj**.



### From Nagraj to Plograj... How did the change happen?

It took something very banal – the sight of plastic bottles strewn around at a business meeting I was attending that led to the conceiving of 'The Indian Ploggers Army' in Bengaluru. Over time, it started attracting more 'recruits'. Disposable consumables are a blunder, while reusable are a wonder. The idea is to popularise the concept of 'phone banks', 'clothes banks', 'toy banks', 'knowledge banks' etc., to promote reuse.

**The word plogging has a Swedish etymology. (Plocka meaning pick up). It may have been difficult to popularise it in the initial months but perhaps it enabled you to make more people curious...a common trick used in marketing?**

When we started on a modest scale in early 2013, we called what we were doing a 'clean-up activity' encompassing parks, beaches and lakes, which were littered with reusable, recyclable and safely-disposable wastes. A clean-up motivated by the waste management hierarchy which we subsequently expanded to – Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Remove, Respect, Rejoice – was later christened 'Plogging' inspired by the Swedish initiative plogga.se, sometime in 2015. Now, it is a term which

is known far and wide, in India too. Names, jingles and memes serve their purpose well in postmodern society, and must be resorted to.

When we can have Batman, Spiderman, Superman etc., why not a Plogman? A Plogman can be seen actually bringing about positive change, in real-life, while the others are simply reel-life characters.

**Great change starts with something very banal...like your act of picking up plastic bottles during the conference. Do you feel angry when you see how irresponsible people can be?**

Every story has a beginning somewhere in time, no matter however banal it may have seemed then. But that is the Eureka moment which launches something more solid, durable and change-inducing over time, if one keeps at it. Anger? Yes, there are times when one wonders why and how people can be so irresponsible. But the way out is to keep being seen doing good, keep influencing those who can be influenced first, before those inconsiderate bystanders have no option but to join the 'army', or at least change their consumption habits.

**Often, great thoughts never manifest as great acts. Sometimes they are expressed as words...but the precept is**

### never practised. How did you go straight from thought to deed?

Actions have always spoken louder than words. Well-done is always better than well-said. We first do what needs to be done, and then create jingles, memes and posters to spread awareness (Sample this, presented with superstar Rajnikant in the backdrop – *'Thalaiva spreads joy, Saliva spreads virus...stop spitting in public.* Or this one targeted at kids – *'Twinkle twinkle little star – single use nakoyaar!*). It is the trash and what people see us doing with it that speaks to them! It is a virtuous cycle, and most effective when pursued the other way around – do, speak and then make others think (or rethink rather) and get to doing what you do.

### Any financial support which may have come in from the public, governments or corporates? To diversify and involve more people and harness synergies?

We must say that support has been forthcoming all the while. Municipal authorities, for instance, are actually happy that we are contributing to mitigating their waste management burden and they do cooperate by providing us with vehicles during plogs to collect dry trash for safe disposal/reuse/recycling. Corporates, schools and colleges support us by volunteering along with us, on some of our plogs, and this builds up awareness and also keeps adding to the strength of the Indian Ploggers Army. Instead of seeking monetary support, we seek support in kind, provision of reusable bags to collect the trash for instance. I must add that several eco-groups in Bengaluru and other cities we have plogged in and collaborated with us. It is a joint responsibility we all need to undertake for Gaia, Mother Earth.

### What you have initiated fits well into a Circular Economy which is the new paradigm in the West. Our country lags behind and is conspicuous by that fact. Your opinion?

Wherever we have plogged, we have seen that there is a lack of civic sense. This needs to be imbibed if one wishes to entrench a sustainable circular economy. Having said that, single-use disposables (paper cups and plates, plastic spoons and forks etc.) which are carelessly strewn around, have no place in such an economy. Recyclable food packaging waste accounts for a sizable proportion of the trash. There is often minimal awareness of the long-term damage they do to the environment. Problem shifting keeps happening in the environment – garbage cans to landfills to lakes and oceans. The Reuse and Recycle mentality must be imbibed, and then the higher ones in the hierarchy – Rethink, Refuse and Reduce. (To be highlighted) While we Remove, Respect and Rejoice, we try to inculcate the need for the other Rs in the minds of people. There are three possible responses we can expect from people:

- they ignore and walk away
- they become cautious, conscious and eco-friendly (if not eco-warriors) and try to become sustainable consumers
- they join you and wish to contribute to do good and

spread awareness, out of a sense of 'belongingness' to their respective cities, and ultimately to Mother Earth.

### You now have the authority to stop a person who is littering and demand that he/she pick the litter up, and consign it to the designated container. Would you do that, or would you wait for people to just watch you and learn?

We do make it a point to go up to litterers and tell them that what they are doing is wrong. It is very rare that this approach does not make them realise their wrongdoing. They accept their *faux pas*, and sometimes defend themselves by stating that the behaviour is prompted by a paucity of dustbins in the area. But the fact that they know that we are picking up their trash, embarrasses them and sends across a clear signal – *Trash may be yours or mine or his or hers or theirs, but Mother Nature we are defiling is ours!*

### You have not restricted yourself to Bengaluru but have expanded your footprint to other cities too. What is the response from other cities?

We have at this point of time plogged in 19 Indian cities – Pune and Mumbai in Maharashtra, Hubli, Bengaluru, Mangalore and Coorg in Karnataka, Tirumala, Tirupathi and Vizag in Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad in Telangana, Chennai, Madurai and Trichy in Tamil Nadu, Kurgaon in Rajasthan etc. I am also happy to mention here that some devoted and dedicated 'plogmen' have emerged in these cities too to spread awareness about waste segregation at source, reduction in the utilisation of single-use disposables, and the creation of a committed 'army' of ploggers – young and old alike --their actions speaking louder and louder over time.

### What is your goal?

It is simple and straight. We will keep plogging till there is nothing left to be plogged. In fact, whenever we have a successful plog, it represents a system failure. If we fail in our plogs (in other words, do not come across any trash to pick), it is a sign of an efficient, well-oiled waste management system. We will keep connecting the 'green dots' and bridge the gap between need and greed. We want to fail completely as ploggers, within the next two decades. That is the goal for the future.

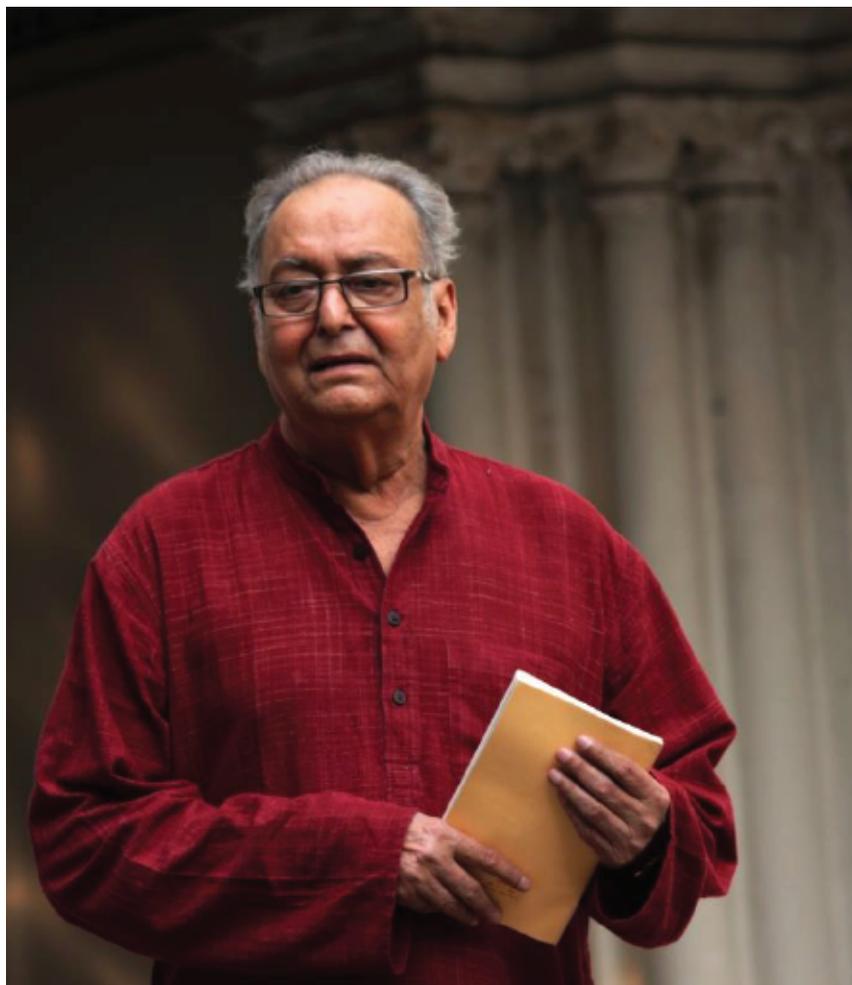
<sup>1</sup>Pioneered by Eric Ahlström in Stockholm. [www.plogga.se](http://www.plogga.se)



**G. Venkatesh is Associate Professor, Department of Engineering and Chemical Sciences, Faculty of Health, Science and Technology, Karlstad University, Sweden. He is also a freelance writer for several magazines around the world. The author has set up Varshita Venkatesh Girls' Education Fund with Plan USA in memory of his wife and the Varshita Venkatesh Plogging Fund for The Indian Ploggers Army**

## End of an iconic era

*The genius of legendary Apu, who teamed up with the cinema giant Satyajit Ray in 14 films, was not restricted to Bengal alone. A multi-talented creator, Soumitra Chatterjee redefined culture and stood as beacon light for meaningful cinema in the country. Shoma Chatterji pays handsome tribute to this titan who was an educationist, elocutionist, raconteur and many things rolled into one.*



**Actor Soumitra Chatterjee**

**S**oumitra Chatterjee, who passed away recently of post-Covid -19 complications is one of the best things that could have happened to Indian cinema. Sad that national cinema had never tapped the potential of this great personality. Sadder still that his contribution to Bengali art and culture is always linked only to cinema and that too, only with the name of Satyajit Ray and his films. There is much more to Soumitra

Chatterjee than acting in 14 out of the 25 films of Ray.

For 60 years, from Satyajit Ray to Tapan Sinha to Mrinal Sen to Gautam Ghosh and Aparna Sen, all major directors have utilised Soumitra Chatterjee's enormous talent. The thespian talent has also enriched television. He bagged the National Award for *Podokhhep*, directed by Suman Ghosh. Other awards include the Padma Bhushan, and the Sangeet

Natak Akademi Award for his contribution to theatre, besides the Dadasaheb Phalke Award that he won in 2012.

He was perhaps, the only Phalke winner whose talent went far beyond acting in his mentor Ray's films and also beyond films *per se*. He had done television; he wrote, directed and acted in plays as varied as *Neelkantha*, through the Bengali adaptation of Antony Schaffer's famous play *Sleuth to King Lear to Atmakatha* by Mahesh Elkunchwar all in Bengali. He was in great demand as an anchor and commentator in music, radio and theatre programmes and was a brilliant recitation artist who knew Rabindranath Tagore's *Shonchoyita* by heart which he could fluently quote from memory. He was a brilliant elocutionist too. He has left behind around a dozen books of poetry besides an abstract translation of Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*. He jointly edited one of the best Bengali literary magazines called *Ekkhon* for many years with Nirmalya Acharya. The publication ceased after Acharya's death. Except for Bhupen Hazarika, without meaning to belittle the other Phalke awardees, Chatterjee is perhaps the only multi-dimensional personality to have graced the award instead of the award having graced him.

Amitav Nag, an IT professional who edits a brilliant film journal, *Silhouette*, says he is an 'enigma' who, like Amal, the character he portrayed in Satyajit Ray's *Charulata*, stormed into films like a comet but stayed on for 60 years. Who is Soumitra Chatterjee? Is he the actor who brought characters to life in 15 films by Satyajit Ray beginning



**Chatterjee in Satyajit Ray's *Apur Sansar***

with *Apur Sansar* (1959) and ending with *Shakha Proshakha* (1990)? Or, is he the man who found it easier to cope with cancer at 77 through *The Third Act, Therefore*, a play he wrote, directed and acted in last year? Actor-director-poet-writer Soumitra Chatterjee, suffering from cancer, presented his autobiography as a live stage performance. He also entered the world of *jatra* in 2003. *Jatra* is a travelling theatre form that moves from place to place.

A BBC documentary on his life and works called *Gaach*, meaning 'tree' has also been made. He has directed and acted in more than ten significant plays with successful shows abroad. His books on poetry began with *Jalapropater Dharey Dandabo Bole* (To Stand by the Waterfall) in 1975. *Droshta*, an abstract translation of Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet*, was published in 1995.

He has acted in around 300

films, ranging from 14 films of Satyajit Ray and crassly commercial potboilers. He held on to his own even when Uttam Kumar was the reigning super-star. He had a different style, approach and method in acting which impacted on his screen image. "Working with Uttam Kumar when he was already at the peak did not intimidate me because we shared a close family bond. I had seen him for the first time at my sister's wedding. He was a close friend of the groom. Working together for the first time in Tapan Sinha's *Jhinder Bandi* (1961) only strengthened the friendship that continued till his death. There were fights but at the end of it all, he was like my elder brother," said Chatterjee.

Ironically, Soumitra was rejected for a role in *Neelachale Mahaprabhu* after a screen test a few years before he was chosen to play Apu in Ray's *Apur Sansar*. About his work alongside Uttam Kumar,

Chatterjee said, "Uttam Kumar gave me a tremendous sense of competition. I had to deal with it on my own terms, without either imitating him, or being influenced by him. We were more like the East Bengal and Mohan Bagan football teams. Calcutta would always be divided into two warring groups when it came to choosing between the two of us. And we acted together in quite a few films. I did have my box office potential as hero. I would not have lasted this long if this had not been so."

Making his screen debut as the historic Apu in Satyajit Ray's *Apur Sansar* in 1959, Soumitra Chatterjee had acted in around 300 films over time till his passing away and some of his new films are yet to be theatrically released. It is perhaps a record of sorts, in terms of the popularity he commands – less as a star – more as an actor.

**(continued on page 33...)**

# Bamboo, the versatile grass

*As a very fast growing, renewable and easy-to-grow resource, it is a talented multi-utility material with countless uses including construction, clothes, food and fuel. Hiren Kumar Bose points out that it also promises to generate potential employment and absorb greenhouse gases as part of climate change mitigation.*



**The interiors of a bamboo restaurant**

It is a versatile crop. It can be used in 1,500 different ways including as food, a substitute for wood, building and construction material, for handicrafts and paper. Intriguingly, it's from the grass family and known as Bamboo.

India is the world's second-largest cultivator of bamboo after China, with 136 species and 23 genera spread over 13.96 million hectares. According to the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare, India's annual bamboo production is estimated at 3.23 million tonnes. However, despite all this, the country's share in the global bamboo trade and commerce is only four per cent.

There is a wide gap between demand and supply due to overexploitation, poor regeneration, low productivity and lack of market

information. In November 2017, the government recognised bamboo as grass to encourage trade. Till then the Indian Forest Act, 1927 defined bamboo as a "tree" bamboo grown outside forests was subject to regulatory rules of felling and transportation. Despite the efforts of the National Bamboo Mission, new plantation work was stalled as funds were released only for the maintenance of bamboo plantations.

Developing bamboo as a load-bearing structural element would pave the way for its high-value application in construction, which can make bamboo cultivation an economically viable way of greening the vast wastelands. Land degradation is a major problem confronting India. According to the State of India's Environment 2017, nearly 30 per cent of India's land is degraded. With its unique ability to stitch and

repair damaged soils, bamboo is ideal for rehabilitating degraded soil.

## Manifold advantages

According to K.C. Koshy, formerly head of Plant Genetic Resources Division of the Kerala-based Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden & Research Institute though the country's bamboo cover is mostly concentrated in the North-Eastern states, all states hold promise for bamboo cultivation, specifically the Western Ghats region, a significant source of moisture for monsoon and which runs along the west coast of peninsular India.

The advantage of bamboo is manifold compared to monoculture tree plantations. After planting, bamboo clumps start yielding after 4-7 years. It can become part of agroforestry practice in small landholdings. New bamboo plantations may curb the pressure from deforestation by serving as wood substitutes. It can be planted to reclaim severely degraded sites and wastelands. It is a good soil binder owing to its peculiar clump formation and fibrous root system and hence also plays an important role in soil and water conservation.

Besides its role in enhancing livelihoods, bamboo has the potential to sequester carbon from the atmosphere. India's per person emission of carbon dioxide was 1,730 kg a year in 2014 and had risen to 1,900 kg in 2016. According to Bharathi Namby, an agricultural scientist it would take just five bamboo plants a year to make India carbon-neutral because each of them absorbs about 400 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> a year. Namby who



*A Bamboo house*

has developed a high-density bamboo variety called Beema (*Bambusabalcooa*) says that India's average yield was about half a tonne per acre. Through tissue culture and fertilisation, this has risen to 40 tonnes per acre.

Indeed, a body of evidence is emerging that shows bamboo captures carbon quickly, while it also rapidly rejuvenates degraded lands, restoring soil fertility. With most of India's designated forest lands degraded, planting bamboo can be the first stage in long-term agroforestry and agricultural redevelopment, xscientists say. The latest report from INBAR (International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation), an intergovernmental organisation of 43 countries emphasises the point.

The speed with which a plant grows has a part in determining how much carbon dioxide it can absorb in a given time. In a paper submitted at the National Workshop on Global Warming and its Applications for Kerala, researchers of Thri-sur-based College of Forestry say,

"Bamboo potentially acts as a valuable sink for carbon storage, and on an average, one hectare of bamboo absorbs about 17 tonnes of carbon per year."

Bamboo can grow at the rate of up to 1.2m a day making it one of the fastest-growing plants. Due to this, it takes only three years to establish mature groves. As a result, bamboos are effective carbon dioxide absorbers, not only above-ground carbon (AGC), but also below-ground carbon (BGC) in roots, and rhizomes. To a lesser extent, it absorbs soil organic carbon (SOC) too. Importantly, growing out of a tangle of underground stems, bamboo can help reforest landscapes denuded by development or natural disasters, binding topsoil to prevent erosion.

Dr Hemant Bedekar, a botanist by education and horticulturist by profession, and executive director of Bamboo Society of India (Maharashtra Chapter) believes a hands-on approach needs to be taken to bring more lands, be it waste-

lands, river banks and basins under bamboo cover. "The country's research institutes need to step in to conduct multi-location trials on the performance of various species in all or specific agro-climatic zones and based on the results promote them," he stresses.

### **A climate change warrior**

Efforts to study the role that plants play in climate change mitigation are increasing. Most researchers focus on the promise of large, leafy trees. The bigger the plant, the more carbon dioxide it absorbs. However, increasing evidence points to bamboo being a surprising grassy climate change warrior. Grown as a low-cost sustainable, household-level commercial plantation, it can be introduced, adopted and scaled-up to secure water catchments and protect erodible soils. However, it is essential to keep in mind that afforestation has to have a proper mix of bamboo and other tree varieties.

China has shown the way by increasing its bamboo cover for industrial purposes, unlike India,

which has failed to do much despite its large-scale availability. Even the centrally sponsored scheme of National Bamboo Mission (NBM), under the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture, which has an allocation of INR 129 billion (USD 1.81 billion) in the 2018-19 Union Budget, has no allocation for R&D, despite experts seeking R&D money for decades.

Bamboo has the potential to generate employment and high income, while at the same time significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. There is an urgent need to devise ways to absorb excess greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. India is the fourth-largest emitter of greenhouse gases after China, the US, and the European Union. India's emissions increased by an alarming 4.7% in 2016 compared to the previous year. However, India's emissions per head are among the lowest in the world. India had told the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

that it would create an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 GtCO<sub>2</sub>e (gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) through afforestation by 2030, as a key part of the targets it set for itself under the 2015 Paris Agreement. But India's 2018 report to the convention secretariat showed that growing forests is the one area where the country is lagging behind its target.

As for reforestation, afforestation and REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation)—a forest specific mechanism—are eligible for carbon trading, bamboo afforestation activities can be brought under CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), making it a people-centric activity rather than the State's responsibility to meet the 12-year deadline to restrain the rise in planetary temperatures. According to Arun Jyoti Nath, Assistant Professor of Ecology and Environmental Science at Assam University, the evolving REDD+

programme with its positive financial incentives is likely to assist India in reducing its deforestation rates.

"Incorporating bamboo in REDD+ can be seen as an offset scheme within carbon markets and carbon farming," he says. "Importantly, carbon trading is an important strategy that will facilitate earning of carbon credits. Experts believe that including bamboo in climate change mitigation, adaptation, land restoration and restoration strategies makes national plans more effective and brings a host of climate-smart options.



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

issues.

## End of an iconic era

(continued from page 30...)

Yet, the National Award remained the proverbial mirage in a desert for many years. He never created an aura of elusiveness around him in terms of making a distinction between art films and commercial films. Just as one can watch him express a scene with Debasree Roy in Rituparno Ghose's *Asookh*, one can also be privy to a Soumitra Chatterjee performance in a crassly commercial film like Swapan Saha's *Baba Keno Chakor*. He acted under the directorial baton of a much younger star like Chiranjeev in *Bhoy*. Likewise, he did not permit his ego to come in the way of an important role in his co-star Aparna Sen's *Paromitaar Ek Din*. His play *Neelkantha*, written and directed by him with himself in the title role, first staged in 1988, was revived on the Calcutta stage and would draw a full house every time. *Ekshan*, one of the best literary magazines in Bengali was jointly edited by Chatterjee along with his friend Nirm-

alya Acharya. It ceased publication after Acharya passed away. Old issues of *Ekshon* are considered an archival treasure.

"A serious interest in cinema started with the first Film Festival held in Calcutta after my parents shifted to Calcutta from Howrah. For the first time, *I watched Bicycle Thieves, Miracle in Milan, Fall of Berlin*, with friends equally interested in cinema. These films changed my entire thinking about cinema. We saw *Renoir's River*, shot completely in India. Then came *Pather Panchali*. Ray made four films before he did *Apur Sansar*. I now feel for me, those films were sort of a preparation for what was to come – my first film *Apur Sansar*," he reminisced.

When asked to recall of few of these, he mentions Tarun Majumdar's *Sansar Seemantey*, Raja Mitra's *Ekti Jeebon*, Tapan Sinha's *Jhinder Bondi*, *Kshudita Pashan*, *Atanka* and *Wheelchair*, Ajoy Kar's *Saat Paake*

*Bandha*, Mrinal Sen's *Akash Kusum*, another film by Saroj De called *Kony* where he played a swimming coach trying to establish a girl in her struggle against poverty and sports politics as a champion swimmer and of course the Ray masterpieces.

To state simply, he redefined the meaning of Bangla culture and kept his focus on sustaining the richness of Bengali language and Bengali culture as he knew it.



**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.**

# In tune with the universe

*Thanks to Jigyasa Giri, the Chennai-based Devaniya Dance School has imbibed and fused seamlessly the northern ethos of Kathak in all its intricate glory into the 'culture of Madras'. What began as a humble journey in 2009 with just five students is today recognized as cross-cultural synergy that thrives on a committed campaign to draw more seekers, says **Rashmi Oberoi**.*

**W**hen you love what you do, this can only be counted and seen as a blessing! It sparks interest and develops skills that help to contribute to something beyond yourself. Welcome to the Devaniya Dance School, Chennai whose vision of enjoying the process of learning rather than being just performance-oriented encapsulates Jigyasa Giri, who is not only revered in Chennai but well-known globally. She is someone who has followed a passion that intermingles with a career...one that 'overfloweth' with joy...and this resonates through Jigyasa's voice when you speak to her.

Jigyasa founded Devaniya, a Dakshin Gharana of Kathak in Chennai in November 2009. A Kathak dancer, teacher and choreographer, Jigyasa also designs and styles all the costumes and jewellery herself. She previously taught at Bangkok and Mumbai and has been teaching in Chennai since 2001.

## A uniquely curated grain of Kathak

Kathak is one of the eight classical Indian dance forms and while it is native to North India, Jigyasa has done wonders in bringing this dance form to the South, weaving it into the culture of Madras as we know it. She has been exceptional in keeping with the strong teaching tradition and cultural vibrancy, as well as its goal to push the boundaries of Kathak dance. It interlaces the fine art of storytelling, constructed through music, text, costumes and vocals.

Love speaks to each one of us in myriad ways. Every person's journey through expectations, wishes, dreams,



***Kathak performance by Devaniya Dance School, Chennai which has evolved a new dance style by blending the North-South artistic ideologies***

desires are unique on the path of seeking love in all its forms. Jigyasa means the curious one...a desire to know things and a keenness to share, and so Jigyasa has lived up to her name. The journey of over a decade now, spins its magic, slowly and caressingly in the form of a differently curated grain of Kathak.

Devaniya began its modest journey in 2009 with just five students and over the years, Jigyasa's magical touch, her fearless energy and omnipresent aura radiating through herself and her teachers has drawn in over 500 students (predominantly girls). While she was initiated into the world of classical dancing as a child, all thanks to her mother, Jigyasa's love for the subject rose many years later. Her Gurus through her growing years passed on their trust, awakening in her the awareness that she was indeed

bestowed with the elixir of life to teach. The undying support of her two senior teachers Swetha Sunderarajan and Shankari Srinivas, who have Kathak flowing through their veins and flawlessly recite the syllables (bols) have been Jigyasa's backbone.

Jigyasa ignited the thirst to pass on her learnings to others – through grace, rhythm, energy and dance. The spirit of Devaniya evokes the feeling of oneness. There is only positivity that radiates here – sacred, divine and harmonious to our universe. This is where Jigyasa's students dance to the earth's tunes and lead them to light with expressions that manifest into love that is omnipresent.

## Best of both worlds

The style of Dakshin Gharana of Kathak is the best of both worlds...-



**Students learning Kathak at the Devaniya Dance School**

gentle yet strong, fierce yet serene. There is a subtlety in this dance form...the tune, synchronised movements and flow softly mesmerises and enchants you. "When you are in tune with the universe, your dance movements express it," says Jigyasa. You move from the seeker, dancer and teacher into a perfect balance of all three worlds.

Jigyasa has been recognised by the 'Guild of Women Achievers' for bringing about a cross-cultural synergy in the field of dance and has trained under the tutelage of Late Guru Natyashri Krishna Kumar Dharwar in the Banaras Gharana. She has also trained under Guru Dr. Maya Rao, Director, Natya Institute of Kathak & Choreography, Bangalore. In her 10th year, through Jigyasa's constant dedication, perseverance and innovation, Devaniya has been officially certified as the founder school of the Dakshin Gharana of Kathak and by doing so has added a new page in the history of Kathak.

Devaniya bespeaks a story of survival, success, synergy and gracious merging of a city and its inhabitants. That wondrous journey of sensitively and artistically adapting geography, climate, language and people and weaving it into a Northern dance form. Devaniya has a different style and ethos and over the years, the art form has been evolving. Hard work and perseverance with a dash of flak have been

instrumental in its growth. A deep sensitivity towards the blending of North-South artistic ideologies and subtleties is a large part of the Devaniya philosophy and its commitment to cross-cultural synergy that signifies India.

## Devaniya Artist Fund

In honour of artists, specifically Indian folk and classical, Devaniya has recently launched the Devaniya Artist Fund and invites responsible social organisations such as the Rotary, and other corporate bodies to contribute generously to the fund. This fund has a two-fold agenda - One is to help Devaniya, as a unique platform of dance in Chennai, to expand its outreach across the large spectrum of seekers of the art; while the other is to extend that same support to rural/folk artists who more often than not require funding to showcase their traditional talent and ultimately earn for their art.

As you get deeper into conversation with Jigyasa, you learn that she has also co-authored two cookbooks with her friend, Pratibha Jain, which document traditional wisdom of India. Their first book *Cooking at Home with Pedatha* won the Best Vegetarian Cookbook in the World, 2006. In December 2008, they published their second cookbook based on Ayurvedic insights titled *Sukham Ayu* which won the second place for Best Health & Nutrition Cookbook in the World, 2009. She is also a trustee & resource facilitator of Satya Surabhi Trust which runs a school in Kodaikanal called My School Satya Surabhi. This school provides quality and value-based education and nutritious noon meals to its students who are primarily the children of the

farm labourers and small vendors of Attuvampatti. Her family, her inspiration. Coming from a family of reputed doctors, both parents and sister, Jigyasa carved a niche for herself in the world of dance. She says, "My mother is nothing short of a genius balancing between a gynaecologist-obstetrician and psychiatrist-hypnotherapist. My father still practices at 88 and is revered by his patients." Jigyasa's daughter has followed her mother's footsteps and performs whenever she can take time off from her corporate life. Jigyasa is married to hotelier and hospitality business strategist V.V. Giri, grandson of India's former President, Bharat Ratna Dr. V.V. Giri. She is the daughter-in-law of late Bhaskar Giri, a dotting father figure to her for as long as he lived, and Dr. Mohini Giri, former Chairperson, National Commission for Women & Honorary Chairperson, Guild for service, North India. Dr. Mohini Giri is India's leading Women's and Widow's Rights activist. Her family has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement to Jigyasa.

Over the past few months, Devaniya has glided into online virtual classes due to the pandemic hit. The new normal has been an interesting journey – different but a great learning. What has been remarkable is that many of their old students who had to discontinue due to leaving the city or country are back for the online classes. That re-connection had been wonderful. Jigyasa has recently started a blog called 'The Cosmic Whispers' – her own private space where she unfolds her thoughts in the form of prose or poetry. Devaniya enriches lives, using Kathak as a canvas full of dreams for creativity, positivity and being one with self and the audience. Devaniya thus, is truly one of a kind – a symphony of rhythm and effervescing happiness without boundaries.



**Rashmi Oberoi, an army officer's daughter is passionate about writing and has authored two story books for children -**

**My Friends At Sonnenshine and Cherie: The Cocker Spaniel.**

## HONORARY CAPTAIN BHANDARI RAM VC

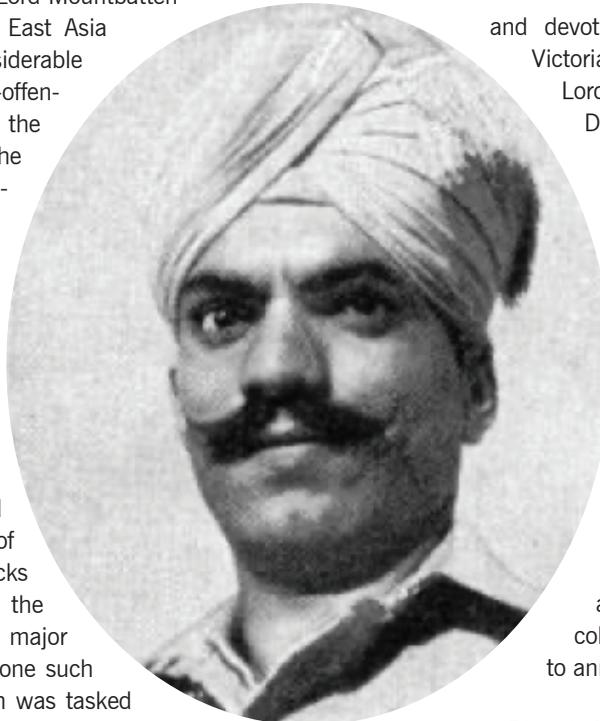
Gem in the Baluch Regiment crown (1919-2002)

**B**handari Ram was born on 24 July 1919 in village Auhar in Bilaspur State now Bilaspur District, Himachal Pradesh. At 22, he enlisted in the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion of 10th Baluch Regiment. The regiment composed two-third Muslims from the North West Frontier Province and one-third Brahmin Dogras from the present day Himachal Pradesh State. After Independence, the Baluch Regiment was allotted to Pakistan and the Dogras were absorbed in the newly raised 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Dogra Regiment.

On the appointment of Lord Mountbatten as Supreme Commander South East Asia Command, the Allies made considerable progress in Burma but a counter-offensive by the Japanese wiped out the gains and effectively confined the Indian Division to the Administrative box.

Operations in the Arakan are difficult and call for strength and perseverance. General Slim decided to use the 25 Indian Division to clear the route into North Western Arakan through the Mayu Hills. The 16 Baluch under command of 51 Indian Brigade was part of this division. Series of short attacks had to be carried out to soften the Japanese defenses before a major offensive could be launched. In one such preliminary operation, 16 Baluch was tasked to attack a bunker, held by the Japanese. 16 Baluch launched the attack on 22 November 1944. Bhandari Ram was in the leading section of the attacking Platoon from 16 Baluch. To reach the objective it was necessary to climb a steep slope via a narrow sheer-sided ridge. Just fifty yards from the crest, the leading section came under enemy fire that wounded three. Bhandari Ram was hit in the leg and shoulder. Intense light machinegun fire from the Japanese positions then held down the platoon, delaying the company attack. A seriously wounded Bhandari Ram crawled forward close to the enemy machinegun post but before he could attack it with grenades the Japanese hurled grenades at him. He got wounded in the face and chest. In extreme pain and spattered with blood, Sepoy Bhandari Ram continued to crawl and reaching closer lobbed a grenade into the enemy post killing the machine-gunner and two others with him.

His bravery inspired the platoon to rush forward and capture the complete position. Upon his comrades return, Bhandari Ram asked if the enemy position was taken. When told it was, he replied: "I can die now, my duty is done". He, however, survived and was carried for dressing wounds. He set an extraordinary example of gallantry, determined to destroy the enemy at all costs without thinking of his own life. One is left awestruck reading the details about Sepoy Bhandari Ram's bravery. Little wonder, his comrades were inspired.



His courage, determination and devotion to duty earned him the Victoria Cross (VC) by The Viceroy Lord Wavell at the Red Fort, New Delhi on 3rd March 1945. After the war, Bhandari Ram VC stood alongside Field-Marshal Lord Gort VC and other VC holders to be honoured by King George VI. After Independence, the Baluch Regiment was allotted to Pakistan and the Dogras were absorbed in the newly raised 8 Dogra Battalion. He displayed his tenacity three years later during the Indo-Pak War 1947-48 where he fought against his former Baluch colleagues and did not allow them to annex Indian territory.

Bhandari Ram served for 22 more years until his retirement in November 1969 as the Captain. He was awarded the Param Vishisht Seva (Most Distinguished Service Medal). Post-retirement, he took up farming in his home district until indifferent health prevented him from working. Until a year before his passing, Bhandari Ram had been regularly attending the annual Reunions of the Victoria Cross Association at London. He died peacefully at his home on 19 May 2002 at 82. The Baluch Regiment created a montage of his VC-winning action and of his Army life which was presented to The Army and Navy Club UK to perpetuate his memory.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)

# KAPILA VATSAYAN

Life devoted to Arts (1928-2020)

**A** doyenne in the world of art and culture, Kapila Vatsayan was born in Delhi on the 25 December 1928. Academically inclined from a young age, she completed her post-graduation in English Literature from the Delhi University and followed it up with Master of Arts in Education from the University of Michigan eventually completing her doctoral thesis at the Benares Hindu University.

Her aptitude for the fine arts led her to established teachers like Rukmini Devi Arundale and Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, both of whom eventually became her mentors in due course. Kapila's abiding interest in Indian dance forms led her to master the nuances of Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Manipuri seeking out exponents of the various genres to put her through her paces. Apart from her Kathak and Bharatanatyam teachers, she also picked up the nuances of the art of Kuttiyattam from the revered guru Mani Madhav Chakyar and Kathak from the equally accomplished Achan Maharaj.

Kapila Vatsayan differed from other contemporary practitioners of dance as she visualised it as an art form that merited a holistic treatment with a fusion of the different disciplines. In her view, there was a need to imbibe theoretical knowledge along with rigorous practice to bring about a multi-cultural approach that was vital for an understanding of Indian culture. She undertook an extensive study of the fine arts and her painstaking efforts culminated in her recording her research in the various tomes that she published in later years. She also developed an abiding interest in arts in general and was also highly knowledgeable in diverse sectors including architecture. Kapila was hailed as a leading scholar of Indian classical dance and as a chronicler of art history as well.

The celebrated dancer was responsible for establishing of a large number of national institutions for higher education while serving as a Secretary to the Government of India in the Education ministry and was the Chairperson of the Asian project of the India International Centre, New Delhi. In 1987

she took over as the Founder Trustee of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, India's premier arts organisation and in 1993 she became its Executive Editor and Chairperson. She was first nominated to Rajya Sabha in 2006 but resigned following the Office for Profit controversy. She was again nominated to the Upper House in 2007 and served as a Member of Parliament till 2012.

An accomplished wordsmith most of her twenty books revolved around Fine Arts and Culture. Some of these were products of extensive research and were hailed as timeless classics and veritable treatises. Perhaps the best among the lot was the tome 'The Square and the Circle of Indian Arts' and 'Bharata – The Nritya Shashtra', 'Dance in Indian Painting' and 'Traditions in Indian Folk Dance'. Her biography narrates in vivid details her devotion to Fine Arts and her varied accomplishments was titled 'Afloat a Lotus' and was authored by Jyoti Agarwal.

During her long and illustrious life Kapila was a recipient of numerous honours, recognitions and awards, In the year 1975 she was awarded a prestigious Fellowship by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Lalit Kala Akademi award and the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship in 1975. In 1992 she was conferred with the Asian Cultural Award and the John D Rockfeller Award. In 2000, she won the Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavana Award and the crowning glory was the Padma Vibhushan, the country's second highest civilian honour which came her way in the year 2011.

Kapila Vatsayan passed away on 16 September 2020 at the age of 91. Glowing tributes were paid to the late celebrity who mentored a whole generation of arts lovers apart from attaining an iconic stature herself. The various institutions that she helmed and those that she was instrumental in establishing are fitting testimonials to her achievements in her chosen fields.

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



# BHANU ATHAIYA

An iconic fashion designer (1929-2020)

**B**orn on 28 April 1929, Bhanu Athaiya was a trailblazer Indian costume designer and set decorator with a body of over 100 films in six decades, with Indian filmmakers such as Guru Dutt, Yash Chopra, B.R. Chopra, Raj Kapoor, Vijay Anand, Raj Khosla, and Ashutosh Gowariker; and international directors such as Conrad Rooks and Richard Attenborough.

The Maharashtrian Brahmin was among the then few designers properly trained and holding a certificate. Across genres, including romance, period and thrillers, she could contour, draw and show her designs, even when films were sans scripts. She adapted beautifully, understanding the requirements, bringing authenticity and style, taking meticulous, detailed and ever inspiring film costumes to the global platform, making it a classical art.

A time management advocate, she keenly observed life. Hard work, dedication, obsession, passion, and positivity were traits she possessed. To her, "*Creativity knows no age. I have the frame of mind of a 16-year-old and I am always ready to fall in love with life*".

Born Bhanumati Annasaheb Rajopadhye in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, one of seven children, she lost her father, a self-taught artist and photographer, when just nine. His books on Leonardo Da Vinci, and other European painters were comic books to her. She earned her degree, a gold medal and fellowship from the J.J School of Arts, Mumbai in 1953.

Though a talented painter, she recognised that fashion designing was a "*way to express myself and let my imagination soar*". In the 1940s, she joined 'Fashion & Beauty' and 'Eves Weekly' as a fashion designer and illustrator. Her sketches became popular and led to requests by actors and producers to design costumes for their films. Her costume design career encapsulated the classic look of the B&W (black and white) era to the age of Technicolor.

Her first break came with Guru Dutt's superhit film *C.I.D.* in 1956 and then *Pyasa*, *Chaudhvin Ka Chand* and *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*. Others included *Sangam*, *Ganga*

*Jumna and Waqt*, *Ek Duuje Ke Liye*, *Nikaah*, *Lagaan*, *Karz*, *1942 - A Love Story* and *Swades*, *Gandhi*, etc. She also produced costumes for the 1972 film *Siddhartha*, an adaptation of the famed Hermann Hesse novel.

Bhanu's work reflected her ability to authenticate any period or people. She visited Calcutta's old mansions for *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam*, travelled to desert Rajasthan for Sunil Dutt's *Reshma aur Shera* and Samark and Bukhara and Tashkent to research for *Ajooba* and *Ali Baba Aur 40 Chor*. For *Lagaan*, she framed the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial India's look.

For *Gandhi*, she had total control of designing the entire wardrobe, right from covering 50 years life span of Gandhiji's character, other principal characters and the huge crowds.

She was the first Indian to win an Oscar in 1983 at the 55<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards, sharing it with acclaimed British designer John Mollo for the Best Costume Design, for Mahatma Gandhi's biopic. She also won two National Awards, one for *Lekin* and the other for *Lagaan*, and a Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009.

Bhanu Athaiya died from complications of brain cancer in Mumbai, aged 91, survived by her daughter,

Radhika Gupta.



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

CHARTER  
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION  
firmly believes in

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

# WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

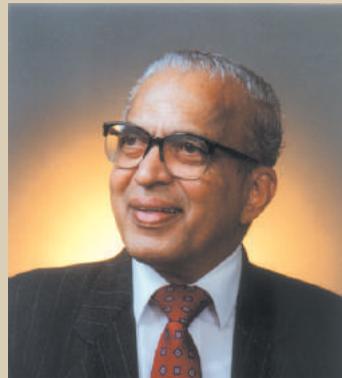
Am I the Commander-in-Chief first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor  
(Mayover 9<sup>th</sup> 1930 – February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007)  
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE