

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

## The Indian food palate



**On a food trail**

**The safe food**

**Of the streets**

**KNOW INDIA BETTER**

**Pondicherry:**

**French with a twist**

**FACE TO FACE**

**Devrath Kamath**

Great Indians: Homai Vyarawalla / K.F. Rustamji / M.S. Viswanathan

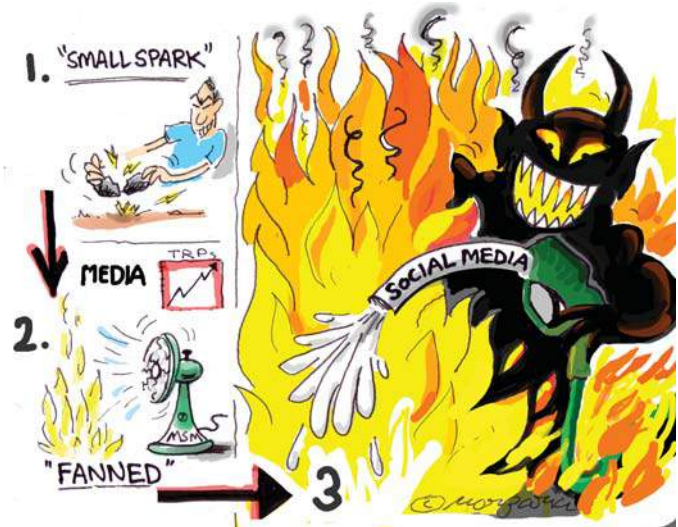


## MORPARIA'S PAGE

ANOTHER ODD-EVEN PROPOSAL, THAT MAY CHANGE DELHI CAR-OWNER'S RESISTANCE TO THE NEW RULE:



ICU VENTILATOR SUPPORT FOR THE AIR-POLLUTION AFFECTED ON ALTERNATE DAYS ONLY!



WHAT STREET-DWELLING GARIB KHAN'S WIFE SAID TO HIM ON HEARING OF THE SALMAN KHAN ACQUITTAL IN HIT&RUN CASE:



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JANUARY 2016

VOL.19/6

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### Food



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Devrath (R) with his father  
Jagdish Kamath

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Homai Vyarawalla



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

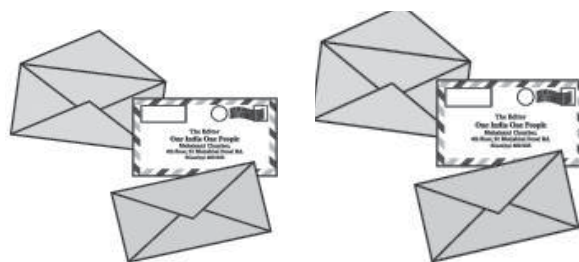
### "Timely article"

The December issue has a timely article on intolerance, but it is only half the story. The Chief Justice of India and Dalai Lama believe that the Indian society is tolerant. Not everyone can go to the court due to high costs. The factual position is that elements of the society have always been intolerant. We witnessed the drive against sign boards in any language other than Marathi. The law makers could not take oath in Hindi. There was a threat against observing *chhat puja* or employment of Biharis. A citizen criticising Nehru is asked to apologise and the Parliament is not allowed to function on that account. The point is that the people who complain of intolerance are equally guilty of that charge. It is suggested that opportunity be given for putting across the other people's views.

– S.C. Sharma, Mumbai

### "A matter of pride"

It was a pleasure to read an article by the 'Super-cop' Mr. J.F. Ribeiro, and as usual he has done frank plain-talking highlighting the ugly side of both politicians and the policemen. It is a matter of pride that we have such commendable officers. I remember him from the days when my father was District Collector of Sholapur and he was the



Superintendent of Police. He had stood as a rock to protect the Collector when a massive unruly mob of mill workers had gone on strike and were turning violent. His accomplishments as Police Commissioner of Mumbai and DGP of Punjab are legendary, but less is known of his recommendations to restructure and modify the police force. Even now it is not too late to take his advice and bring in the much needed reforms that can ensure better policing, law and order, and quality of life for citizens.

– Dr. Ali Khwaja, Bangalore

### "Happy to read the article on resolutions"

I read your December issue and I was very happy to read the article about resolutions (*What have you resolved for 2016?*). We really don't need to make lofty resolutions every year, just adopting small changes will reap enormous rewards in the long run. But are we willing to do that?

– K.K. Nair, Vashi, Mumbai



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# Confessions of a die-hard foodie!

*Despite her best intentions, Nivedita Louis is unable to break her running affair with good food. Could you, if faced with the delectable kaju katli, the resplendent gulab jamun or the elegant bar of Lindt? Food for thought indeed!*

**D**O you know what is the next best thing that can happen to you after Ramu Kaka's yummy yummy *jalebis*? The next plate of *jalebis* waiting on the table. My weighing scale creaks and cries every time I try to measure the 'few' extra pounds I've gained. Big is nice, that is my *mantra*. I never knew I was a foodie till I tasted the ice cream from Michaels Parlor. I was so fond of their fruit salads that there were waiters who refused to serve me at the mere glimpse of my large self entering their shop. Who would like to walk back and forth seven times to serve a single customer? I was termed "Kash"tamar- meaning 'horrible customer'! To me, the most beautiful sight is that of the *Mithaai* shop, in the vibrant hues of green, yellow, white and pink on display.

The moment I set my eyes on a *kaaju katli*, I can't stand still. It is like a lover beckoning you. She calls out to you from under the glass display, her alumina foil rustling, alluring you. The pink *paneer jamuns* shine and shine pulling your attention. A bite of it and Heaven is guaranteed. Thoughts of Karachi Bakery fruit biscuit makes me salivate like my pet pup. A glimpse of homemade *gulab jamuns*, I would be ready to climb Everest and be back.

I was hallucinating eating *parathas* with chicken curry as I counted to ten on my delivery table. No wonder my daughter craves *parathas* and chicken curry. An article on food not mentioning the *biryani* would be a sin. Mughalai, Malabari, Hyderabad, Pathani – you name it, I've tried it. Not just eating, cooking them too. If I were Mary Antoinette, I'd have boldly said, "If they can't have bread, let them have mutton *biryani*". If Snow White wouldn't have been enamoured by apples, we would be having one fairy tale less. If Eve was not a foodie, she wouldn't have touched the Forbidden Fruit and we would all be now gladly dancing in The Garden of Eden, instead of this mundane existence.

How can I forget chocolates? Ferrero Rocher! Hershey's Kisses! Lindt milk chocolates! Life without chocolates is like fish without fins. Or a man without a wife! You have to savour it, relish it. You can never have enough of it, be it the nagging or the whimpering. If chocolates could listen, I would love to be married to one large chocolate bar!

I sit pensive as the doctor keeps talking, chiming in her sing-song voice on how controlling carbs is essential for my health and body. Carbs, diet and exercise. The *mantras* of the day kept figuring in her speech for 'n' number of times as I kept admiring her diamond earring that flashed every time she shook her head. The diamonds that looked like sugar sprinkled on a *mysurpa*. I smiled inwardly as she blew out a huge breath indicating she was done with me for the day.

It is not that I don't worry about my extra large figure. I do rant and rave when I have to climb 20 steps to see my doctor. I do hate it when I see pencil stick figures walk past me in tight Levi's looking smug and lithe as I stroll along the malls clothed in a Levi's 'ripper', threatening to rip anytime. I feel and fret that I should be 'normal' size. I try to control my food cravings and hunger pangs

with fibre biscuits that taste yuck. But all my will power is lost the moment I see KFC's bespectacled man and his chicken calling me out to see my 'finger licking good'. Who is bothered about the weighing scale that always is a liar or the low-carb, feel-good diet? I'd rather live short feeding on

my cheese oozing pizzas, than live longer suffering the oats porridge! ■



The writer is currently Chief Booking Clerk with Southern Railways. She is married with two kids. She has a B.Com and an MBA and is an avid blogger, social activist and voracious reader. You can read more of her writings at: [www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com](http://www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com)

# On a food trail

*Food has a way of travelling, with conquering armies, merchants and traders or with just adventurers. However it may travel, it arrives in a new place, mingles with the local flavours and ingredients and gives rise to newer, more innovative cuisines. That has been the way of the world till now, and so will it be in the future. Akul Tripathi takes us on a food trail from the days of the caveman to today, tracing how the potato filling in our samosa is possible today because the Europeans discovered the new world!*

**H**AVE you ever lived abroad? Or, if you have grown up in one place, lived your adult life in a separate city that is geographically different? Stayed away for studies? Or even travelled for over a week to a new place? You know then the first thing that we miss, more than home even, is food. Especially mum's home-cooked food. But that is a different story altogether.

Cuisine is often considered a part of culture and though the two are hand-in-glove, I am not sure if it is just a sub-part of culture. Cuisine is an entire category in itself. Something that complements culture just as economics and money. Whether or not there is economics, money would still be needed. Such I believe it is with cuisine.

## Tracing the food culture

I am sure that even in India, before there was even the thought of something that would begin at being called culture, there was a caveman cooking his favourite pot of rabbit stew with the grass from the hills yonder for added flavour. Only that grass from that one particular patch would do. Nothing else would taste the same. His neighbours from the adjoining cave complex would rather grill the rabbit than boil it into a stew, while the forest dwellers of the neighbouring tree-houses would steam it and flavour it with fruits, flowers and that one specific root.

The British got quite a taste of this (excuse the pun and the ones to come) when they went about colonising India. As per a popular legend - one without any quotable references, just as legends should be - a famous cook named William Harold was sent to India at a time unspecified, to help the invading armies by preparing delicious meals, because as we all know, armies have always marched on their stomachs. Being exceptional at his craft, he soon landed in the employ of a high ranking British official.

The British official had recently fallen in love with a local fare called *bhel puri* and wanted the cook to prepare the



***Bhel puri*, a dish which William Harold couldn't master**

dish for him. Good ole William went about the neighbourhood knocking on doors to get a recipe for a dish that was never written down previously. At every house, he got a different recipe. Either a new ingredient, or herb or oil were added or substituted to the potatoes and puffed rice - the only two constant, stable ingredients, it seemed.

After a long, hard day, William returned to the barracks, without any set recipe and quite probably in awe of the plethora of variations he found. Something quite unheard of from where he came. When the officer asked for the *bhel* in the evening, William explained he couldn't find any fixed recipe and said, "We'll have to stick to French fries again tonight, sir." Some take the legend as far to include that the officer, in a fit of rage, shot William dead which led to a mutiny by the forces as William actually was a very good cook and a night long court martial had the officer sent back to England.

Such is the power of food. But before I digress again, the point here is the motley pot-pourri of recipes and ingredients that is the flavour of this country; the endless diversity that is as or more discernible in what people eat than anything else



but is perhaps the most underrated. Like every other aspect of life on the subcontinent, every successive influx of people brought with it their own peculiarities, but in what is unique to this patch of land amongst all the rocks of the solar system, instead of wiping away what was and establishing a new stronghold, everybody continued to co-exist.

While it is difficult to ascertain things from so long ago, there are various vehement beliefs. The people of the Indus Valley civilisation are believed to have cultivated peas, sesame, dates and rice. However, one could infer that native Indian vegetables should have been brinjal, ladies finger, long beans, double beans, spinach, drumstick, banana, coconut, bitter gourd, snake gourd, bottle gourd, pumpkin, onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric, cardamom and black pepper. And then at some highly contested point in very old history came the people we now call the Aryans.

With them, they brought their food. People, as you can see, have been marching on their bellies since as far back as we know. The picture of what was eaten in India becomes clearer with the coming of the Aryans.

Cows, buffaloes, horses and pigs were domesticated in addition to goats and sheep which are believed to have been domesticated earlier. This led to usage of milk and milk products on large scales. Grains like barley and wheat were added to the millets and rice that already grew in India. Possibly, pulses like lentils and chickpeas along with fenugreek, asafoetida, onions, radish, lettuce, carrots and cucumber came along with them or during the exchange with the area of the middle-east called the fertile crescent (land of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the eastern Mediterranean coast) which was home to the Neolithic founder crops which formed the starter pack in early agriculture.

The most important contribution of ancient India to the culinary world is sugar - the English word itself is a relative of the Sanskrit *sakkhar*. The sugarcane grass is native to the Ganga delta. The grass is crushed and boiled to make the solid mass of jaggery which on refinement produces the white crystalline form of sugar called *khand*, which many linguists believe to be the origin of the English word 'candy'. It was here at this time that sugar gradually replaced honey as a sweetening agent.

What happened undoubtedly at the same time as the

Aryans settled in the subcontinent is that there were leaps in technology that encouraged and facilitated great leaps in food production. It is perhaps the first record one has of a balanced diet, that consisted of fruits, vegetables, meat, grain and dairy products. Food classification based on its temper into *rajasic*, *tamasic* and *sattvic* evolved during this time. This concept further developed to the deep, detailed science of Ayurveda.

Food came to be understood as something that has a powerful effect on the human body and mind. It came to be regarded as an important ingredient for the balance of mind,

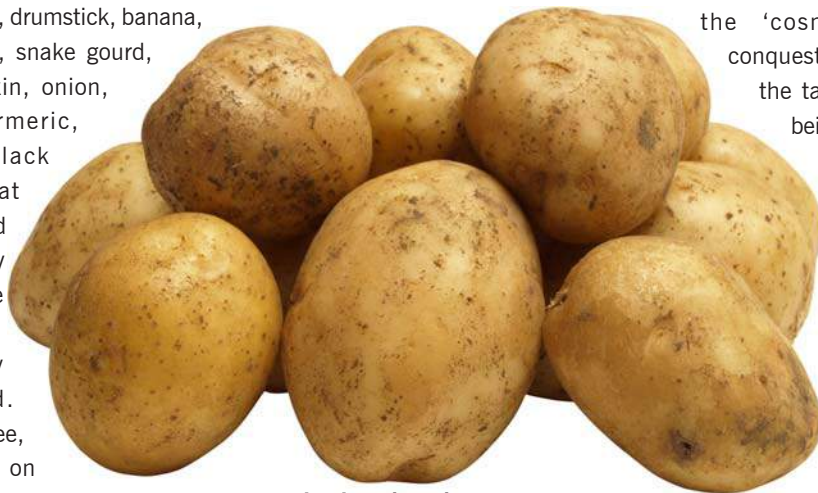
body and spirit and an integral part of the 'cosmic cycle'. Various conquests since kept adding to the tally and variety of foods being consumed by the sub-continental inhabitants.

The next major addition, in style and substance, came with the invasions of the central Asian tribes that finally led to Mughal India and the settling of the average Indian restaurant menu, the way we see it now.

A sophisticated, largely austere eating system that was oriented to the spiritual progress or the

working need based requirements of the inhabitants of the subcontinent - was invaded, layered buffered and finally integrated by the nutrition rich, largely simple everyday fare of the armies (there come those belly marchers again). As the conquest spread, the more stately and elaborate dishes of the central Asian kingdoms found their way into the royal courts and influenced the habits of individual and group dining. Indian dishes were livened up with nuts and spices. Raisins found their way into the country, along with meat and grain dishes like *halim* - a porridge of grain and meat; sweetened drinks; elaborate rice dishes cooked with meat - the *pulao*, *kofta* and the *biryani*, all words of Persian origin. In came the *samosa* - a stuffed pastry, all manner of grilled and roasted meats - the *kebabs*, and sweets like *kulfi* and *halwa*. Arrived and dug into the soil like a native, the indispensable tandoor and the associated *naan*, *kulcha* and *lachha parathas*.

This new mishmash of tastes and textures reached heady levels of sophistication, luxury - even opulence - in the Mughal courts. Just when the palettes seemed to have experienced as much flavourful divinity the vast conjoined landmass and trade across it could achieve, it was time for the Columbian Exchange.



**An American import, can one imagine our *samosa* without the potato?**



**Sugar, perhaps the most important contribution of ancient India to the culinary world**

### The Columbian Exchange

While the Mughals were giving the Gods a run for their money in painting the worlds red with both blood and revelry, the Europeans were trying hard to find things they could barter with the East that seemed to have it all, including considerable disdain for the backward, pale skinned *firangs*. And Lo! they 'discovered' the Americas.

This is when the tide started turning for the Europeans with the new world unleashing several things that the rest of the world had never seen (and substantial silver and gold). Through the Portuguese and the Spaniards mainly, the proceeds from the Americas spread across the world with a swiftness of transfer never seen before on the planet.

Staple food sources of the modern world owe their origins to the Americas. Potatoes, tomatoes, chilli pepper, cashew, peanuts, bell pepper, cocoa, guava, papaya, sweet potato, sunflower, tobacco and maize amongst numerous others spread to courts and streets of the world. The foods from the Americas were calorie rich and added to the already significant and diverse food sources of the Indian subcontinent. With food that also had a long shelf life, it is believed that the population on the subcontinent saw a steep incline as nutritious food became readily available. In fact, the global population is believed to have doubled in the two hundred years since the

contact with the new world.

This, despite the fact that the contact brought to the native Americans diseases that they had no natural immunity against. Chief among them was small pox which decimated the tribal populations of the Americas by 80-95% in all cases and 100% in several. More lives were lost to this influx of disease than any war or epidemic in the history of mankind. This unequal, tragic exchange of valuable life-blocks for disease; the environmental impact of Columbus' landing in the new world, what was termed as *The Columbian Exchange* from the title of a book by the same name.

Were it not for this extravagant trade-off, we would be living in a world where there would have been no tomatoes in Italy, no chocolate in Switzerland, no cigarettes in France, no cattle in Texas and no *aa/oo* (potato) in our very own (is it now?) *samosa*!

Races, empires, countries and conquerors disappeared without a trace, hegemonies dissolved into oblivion - but the food they brought taught a valuable lesson. The flavours did not repel or rebel, they coalesced into a heady ensemble indistinguishable, yet distinct, that lays out like a several course meal; a history of seasonings and seasons that no book can dare deny or disprove. If only those waging wars for rubbish would look into their plates and pause before a morsel, they can find both *nirvana* and *jannat* right there in the knowledge that life as we find it, in fact life itself would not have been possible without extraordinary, selfless exchanges from peoples across the world.

It has taken millennia of dogged persistence, unmatched genius, innovation and invention with a healthy dose of *jugaad* to make us the best fed generation in the history of the planet. A true history would take a couple of dozen volumes and cannot even begin in these couple of thousand words. That we today deprive instead of supply this benefit which is our



shared inheritance, to others of our own species, is a disgrace we shall have to answer for to both God above and generations right here, almost right now. ■

The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.

### An interesting tidbit

*The delicious Maddur vade or vada is named after the town of Maddur, about 80 km from Bangalore, en route to Mysore. Because the recipe of the vada and its preparation originated in this town, the snack is named after this place. A Maddur vada typically has a slightly hard crust and a soft core. The onion pieces in it add to the taste of the vada and make it a delightful snack. The curry and the coriander leaves in the recipe not only add to the flavor of the food, but also help in its digestion. This vada is best had with coconut chutney or tomato sauce.*



# Food and tradition

*Food and rituals are an intrinsic part of India. But with many complicated rituals making way for simpler ones, and in some cases dying out, are the foods associated with them also getting lost? Rinku Bhattacharya hopes not and says that there seems to be an interesting revival of at least some traditions and food practices.*

FOOD and tradition are intertwined, and as the world changes, we often change our beliefs and ideology around food. The Indian culinary legacy spans several thousands of years, and with this heritage is a culinary culture that is replete with traditions, some which are time tested and others that do not stand the test of time. It is worth observing that it's evolution, and it's willingness to adapt to new influences and changes, that shape and enrich Indian cuisine. The Indian culinary heritage has evolved over the myriad diversity of different traditions, religious and cultural influences that have shaped the country. Some of the changes are subtle and cultural, others tend to be changes that occur due to the environment, the needs of the times and the changing universe.



**Elaborately made kachoris – does any one have time for this anymore?**

## Declining rituals, forgotten foods

There are often two key factors that cause traditional food and memories to erode, the first of these being time, and the second being the elimination of rituals.

Several traditional dishes such as elaborate desserts and complex main courses have ceased being everyday items; even rice puddings like my grandmother made, stirring and nursing the stove for over five hours have been replaced by their paler cousins which suffice, but lack the true deep and rich taste that is procured by hours of slow cooking, allowing the milk to thicken and reach a soft state of uniform consistency. This is probably true of homemade breakfasts consisting of rich *kachoris* (puffed stuffed bread filled with lentils or other treats that are elaborate) which we have either packed off far into the recesses of living, or dispensed with them completely to make room for things that work and fit into the reality of the times. Today's lifestyle is significantly

busier when compared to a world a few decades ago. This leaves us less room for time and complexity in the kitchen, household help in our kitchen is increasingly being replaced with mechanical tools and gadgets, all of which require an adaptation of traditional cooking as we knew it.

Rituals are activities that are an indelible part of our culture and these are often accompanied by specific foods. As time passes, we tend to discard certain rituals and foods that accompany these rituals also get lost in the wayside. I can think of traditional weddings that often used to be fortnight long affairs that brought with them assorted foods, simple to large. Following the birth of children, women often went to their parents'

house and spent their first months secluded, enjoying various dishes that were nourishing and allowed them to spend time undisturbed with their newborn child. With the advent of the nuclear family, or even families separated by distance, some of these food traditions have been lost and rendered impractical.

For instance, traditional post pregnancy foods were designed to nourish and heal the body as well as increase the milk supply for lactating mothers. Several of these recipes actually vary based on the region of India we are exploring. In Northern India, a *barfi* or fudge made with *gond* or edible gum is very common and was supposed to heal the body and offer the mother energy. Ghee or clarified butter was added in generous doses to foods as it assisted with strength, and aided muscle repair. Fenugreek or *methi*, is again another much touted home remedy and often served to new mothers as a pudding, as was tapioca.

In turn, select legumes and lentils such as split peas or *channa dal* were avoided as they might be gas inducing and could interfere with the quality of milk provided to the

newborn. Modern day medicine sometimes replaces these home remedies in the form of pills. This is certainly the case with fenugreek and turmeric.

Change however, is never a unidirectional tool. We live and learn and often bring back the wisdom of the old days, sometimes in newer forms that work with the current realities of our living. Two trends that I feel have been very popular and traditional in the past few years are a return to Ayurveda remedies and spices, as well as a new regard for vegetarianism, both of which are time tested traditional remedies that are rooted in the kitchens of India.

### Tradition in a new avatar

It is not uncommon in today's day and age to find an obsession with turmeric, the golden spice that is often sought as a remedy to almost all things from curing coughs and colds, aches and pains to even more complicated diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, bringing me back to the days of my grandmother when she prescribed turmeric as a beautification agent by adding it to my glass of milk every morning. Turmeric used in Indian cooking as an anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial agent, brought with it several health benefits. In today's modern world people have even simplified the process by having turmeric tablets. Alongside the turmeric, we have fenugreek tablets which are high in iron and said to be beneficial for nursing mothers and trailing behind are everyday spices such as cumin, coriander and cinnamon. Incorporating Ayurvedic traditions, trying to link the food science with mind and body healing is back and trendy again.

We find people moving towards traditional cures for diseases, often exploring possibilities for cancer healing foods. Diabetics are finding ways to incorporate naturally bitter foods

such as the bitter gourd into their diet as it actually has an impact in terms of reducing high sugar. People turn to light liver healing foods such as radish leaves and gourds to cure ailments such as jaundice. These ailments often require an extended care regime and people have realised that natural food therapy is often gentler on the system than overdosing with copious amounts of medicine. There is in general an increased openness to try something natural, as years of tradition have proven that these actually do not have negative effects, even if they might not have all the purported benefits one might expect.

Weaning off heavy meat based diets and leaning more towards vegetarianism is also making a comeback. People are espousing a stronger preference towards exploring healthier vegetarian fare, sometimes for ethical reasons, and at other times for general health reasons. Plant based fare is lighter and offers us natural minerals and proteins. Vegetables are certainly a gift of nature and tend to be kinder on the environment.

Tradition and food therefore make great companions and bedfellows

and they exist and feed off each other. Like all great friendships, they evolve sometimes separately and sometimes come together in perfect harmony and stand the test of time. ■



The writer is an award winning author of two cookbooks, *Spices and Seasons*, *Simple Sustainable Indian Flavors* and *The Bengali Five Spice Chronicles*. Rinku writes the blog, *Spice Chronicles* and lives in New York with her husband and two children. She can be found on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



**Spices like turmeric, coriander and cumin, which have medicinal properties, are used widely in traditional Indian cooking**

### Did you know?

*Jaggery or gur is produced by extracting juice from sugarcanes and boiling of the sugarcane juice. Today jaggery is being preferred in many diets over sugar, as it has many benefits. Jaggery aids in digestion, prevents constipation, is a natural sweetener, and provides energy over an extended period of time. Jaggery is also rich in minerals, mainly iron with traces of other mineral salts. While most of the iron in jaggery comes through its processing in iron vessels, the other minerals come directly from the sugar cane juice, since the juice does not undergo refinement or bleaching of any kind. Therefore, jaggery is a very good source of minerals for the body. Of the various types of jaggery, the palmyra jaggery has a cooling effect on the body when taken with water, and the date palm jaggery is said to have a warming effect on the body in winter. So adopt gur everyday!*



# The safe food

*Organic foods are considered by many as a fad. But it's an absolute necessity if we want to preserve our soil and encourage the next generation of farmers, says **Kavita Mukhi**, who is behind The Farmers' Market initiative in Mumbai. She also debunks some myths about organic food.*

**A**S a teenager I would never have imagined that I would be involved with organic... I was happy-go-lucky, eating whatever was served up, and busy with life. But then a child was born to me that made me want to get involved with food. As a parent and as a tired mother, the normal fare did not supply me with the energy I needed to take care of my child. I wanted the best for my baby. I was shocked to hear that almost all the food we consumed was refined and incapable of supplying us with needed nutrients. Soon I realised that it was worse than that, not only were these foods robbed of their nutrients, but they were grown with chemical fertilisers and sprayed with pesticides that made them toxic to us. As a young mother I wondered why no one else seemed perturbed. This was in the early 80s. Today, 35 years later, with pollution, junk foods, sedentary lifestyles and diseases getting worse, the need for safe food has become even more urgent. For me, organic is simply another word for safe food.

## The layers of habit

However, people also eat refined organic food like white rice. I have always wondered why anyone in their right sense, would remove the layer that contains the wealth of nutrients from the rice. Farmers who eat white rice surprise me even more since they know the effort it takes to grow rice, imagine then polishing off the nutrients that the rice has absorbed



**The popular Farmer's Market**

from minerals in the soil, the Sun's energy and the ions of the atmosphere. So here we take the word "organic" to mean not just chemical free, but also whole unrefined foods that nourish the body.

We have come to the point in our civilisation where farmers and farming are in a pathetic condition. We are used to buying cheap food, farmers do not calculate labour, rent etc., like other businesses do. We will pay more for clothes, jewellery, shoes, perfume, even restaurant food, but balk at paying the right price for farm produce, which is what organic is being priced at. Because of our apathy in this area, farmers are committing suicide and their children are opting for work in other fields, maybe only growing enough for their own families.

Where does that leave town and city dwellers? Soon at the mercy of industrialised foods. Gone will be the days of open-pollinated seeds. There will be only hybrid seeds so farmers have to buy for each season afresh. Scarier than that is that one company will own all the seeds and we will be at their mercy. These genetically modified seeds may cause ill health, may even cause our genetic make-up to be affected and then there is no turning back. It is disturbing that this has occurred! So before this unfolds, we need to be very clear about our support of farmers, especially organic ones, who understand the importance of no chemicals, the importance of keeping the soil healthy with multicropping, mulching, composting, new ways of dealing with pests, water harvesting,



**Organic fruits and vegetables are sold at The Farmer's Market**



**The organic cafe**

keeping traditional crops going, finding markets, forming groups to market (which is how The Farmers' Market became a reality in Mumbai), saving seeds, learning more about vedic agriculture, biodynamic farming, permaculture etc. All this keeps the soil regenerating for our future, keeps farmers healthy and away from pesticide-loan-related debts and suicides, keeps us healthy and the planet clean and green.

In the next couple of decades itself if we lose our next generation farmers to other livelihood, then we will have lost something more precious than anything else...We would have lost our agricultural wisdom that will not be passed onto the farmers' children. It will be a great loss to the nation, and the world if our tradition, heritage and culture do not have this next generation farmer to do what only they know how to do best – feed us with safe, pure, indigenous food.

So those who feel organic is a fad, should try it out for

#### **A healthy living primer from Kavita Mukhi**

With your own cooking style, you only need to switch to whole and organic ingredients to make your food work for you. This is how:

Use organic *saindhav namak* (rock salt) and whole sea salt

Use organic *ghani* oil (cold pressed) of safflower (kardi), peanut, sesame, coconut, sunflower and mustard and organic *ghee* and milk

Use organic whole unpolished brown and red rice

Use organic wheat bread or better still, Indian *rotis* and organic millets

Use organic jaggery and unrefined sugar

Use organic *dals*, spices, herbs, tea, coffee, honey etc

And of course, organic fruits and vegetables from The Farmers' Market!

Absorb sunshine, be active, be productive, be loving and be happy

Feed your staff the same and be even happier



**Local farmers and growers get a fillip with The Farmer's Market**

themselves. Besides all the truths presented in this article, my challenge to all is to taste the goodness of organic, only then will you be able to know that thus far you have been tasting chemicals. That is the change that is needed. Choose organic. Feel the difference and taste food as it was meant to be! Awareness of this is crucial to popularise organic. Farmers' Markets are the only way. We have Farmers' Markets in every town and village of India, now we need to lay stress on organic produce at these markets just as we have done for The Farmers' Market in Mumbai ([www.farmersmarket.co.in](http://www.farmersmarket.co.in)). The government has to make space available for this. Different companies do their bit, good ones bring about awareness, those that do not may only be in it for the money. Check out why the company was started and you will know whom to trust.

Human health and well being is only a side benefit! The future is organic only because it is the way we used to be before adulteration by western chemicals! India has been organic before the word came into being. We are simply going back to our roots by choosing organic. It is the only way forward because it is what sustained us for centuries before the advent of chemicals. My dream is that, going ahead, we no longer need the word organic because everything will return to its original state and be safe, healthy and whole, for all and everywhere. ■

The writer pioneered the marketing of organic food in India over three decades ago. As an eco-nutritionist, *la leche* leader, lymphologist and craniosacral therapist, she imparts an honest, practical way of staying healthy. Realising the difficulties of agriculture on her own natural farm, she initiated The Farmers' Market in Mumbai in 2010. In its Season VII now, the market has helped a large group of farmers to be self-sufficient, build water tanks, buy vehicles and travel to conferences. It has helped their next generation to remain in the field. Crucial if we want our children to inherit an earth with living soil, pure air, clean water and safe food.





# Of the streets

*Ever wondered how some street foods are pan-Indian, you can find them in almost any part of India? They may taste a bit different in their different avatars, but the essence remains the same. **Anuradha Rajan** does a roundup of ten such popular Indian street dishes and tells us why we seek them wherever we go!*

**T**HE streets of India are incomplete without their street food. A hawker or vendor with a portable stall sells food or drink in public areas like a market, a fair, and at stations. India is famous for its cheap and tasty street food, and every Indian city has its own signature snack.

The metros are famous for their Indian Chinese, whereas the smaller towns and cities stick to their traditional flavours. Amongst the traditional favourites, it is interesting to note that *samosa*- which we consider to be the mascot for Indian street food- has its origin in the Middle East! Here are some ubiquitous Indian street foods:

## Momos

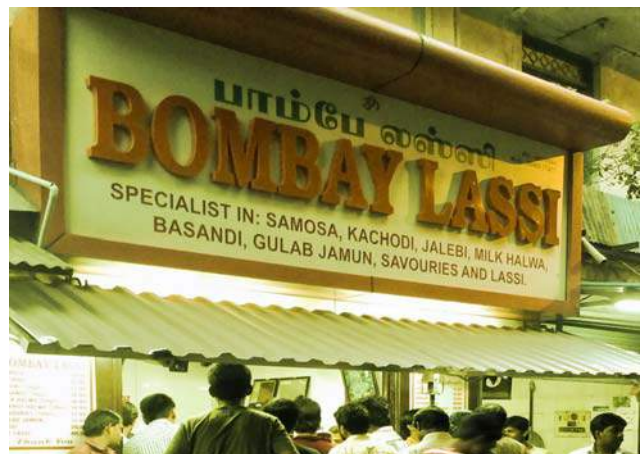
These boiled dumplings originated in Tibet or Nepal, but are served all across India. Traditionally filled with yak meat, you can now buy vegetable versions and those filled with chicken or lamb on street corners, served with a dip.



**Momos are very popular today**

## Aloo tikki

It is a snack made of boiled potatoes, onions and tempered with various spices. In Mumbai, a popular version of *aloo tikki* is served with spicy curry and various chutneys and is called *ragda pattice*. The *vada* in a *vada pav* found in Maharashtra, also involves a potato patty, which can be compared to a *bonda* found in the southern states. The *bonda* is a typical south Indian snack, and like the *vada pav* is coated with a *gram* flour covering. Vegetable *bonda* is a dish of Udupi cuisine and in Kerala, a sweet version of it called *sugiyam* is also found.



**A shop selling north Indian street snacks in the southern city of Chennai**

## Samosa

Did you know the *samosa* can be traced to the word *sanbosag* (Persian) and is said to have originated in the Middle East prior to the 10<sup>th</sup> century! It's known by different names, and due to cultural diffusion, *samosas* are prepared all over the world. In Delhi and most of the northern states, a big version of the *samosa* with a spicy filling of masala potatoes, peas, and even dry fruits is quite popular. In Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand, *shingara* (the East Indian version of *samosas*) are popular snacks and are found almost everywhere. They are a bit smaller and consist of unmashed boiled potato along with other ingredients. The coating is almost like a pie crust. In Hyderabad, a smaller version of the *samosa* referred to as *lukhmi* is consumed. In South India, they are slightly different and vary according to the taste of the locals.

## Idli, dosa, appam

Touted as the oldest of all culinary techniques, the process of fermentation is used to create some of the most spectacular dishes of all. In India, different regions have their unique fermented preparations, which the locals have mastered over the years, and these dishes have become an integral part of their culinary lineage. Whether it's *appam* and *ishtew* (a vegetable or meat dish made with coconut milk) in Kerala,



**The south Indian *dosa* and *idli* are pan-Indian now**

*idlis* and *dosas* with varieties of chutneys and strangely, varieties of *sambhar* (spicy lentil dish with vegetables) too. The *dosa* has gone global with cheese and *schezwan* words being tossed around. Breakfast is so much more than muesli on the streets of India.

### Bhelpuri

Variously called *bhel* (Maharashtra), *bhela*, *churu muri*, *churmuri* (Karnataka), *jhaal muri* (Kolkata), it is a snack made of puffed rice. As indicated by the famous song, *Chowpatty jaayenge bhelpuri khaayenge*, *bhel* is often identified with the beaches of Mumbai, and is thought to have originated here in Mumbai. It has travelled all over the country and the modifications manifest in the garnishing.

### Frankies, rolls, wraps

A *kati roll* is a street food dish originating from Kolkata and is said to have started its life in the Nizam restaurant and then later spread elsewhere. Today, the *kati roll* comes in a large number of varieties and the innovations come in two areas- the fillings and the wrap. The original filling is a skewer-roasted *kebab* wrapped in a *paratha* bread. The common variants on the filling are egg, potato, *paneer*, mixed vegetables and curried chicken or mutton and the more exotic combinations such as *thai* or *schezwan* are also available. In some areas of the country like Kerala, we have a deconstructed roll in the form of *paratha* with chicken, egg, or mutton curry. And in Mumbai, you have the famous *frankies* being sold at various nooks and corners and even malls.

### Jalebi

A dessert which has multiple places of origin like the Middle East, South Asia, East Africa and so on, can be served hot or cold and is very popular all over the country. It goes by different names such as *jhangiri* or *imarti*, each with a variation.

### Manchurian

The *gobi manchurian* is an Indian-Chinese fried



**The luscious, ever popular *jalebi***

cauliflower food item rising steadily in the popularity charts. It is the result of the adaptation of Chinese cooking and seasoning techniques to suit Indian tastes. In the dry and gravy form, common ingredients like cauliflower, cornflower, *maida* (flour), soya sauce, ground pepper, and the typical garnish of spring onion can warm your system like nothing else. The dash of MSG (*ajinomoto*) needs to be ignored once in a while!

### Puri bhaji

Originating from South Asia, it is commonly consumed all over the Indian subcontinent. In the southern part of India it is mostly a breakfast dish and in the other parts, it is a snack or a light meal. It is usually served with a curry or *bhaji* and in some parts, the richer cousin *chhole bhature* can also be found. Puri is also served at ceremonial functions as part of the *prasad* with *halwa* made out of *rawa* (*sooji*).

### Pakoda

*Pakodas* are created by taking a couple of ingredients and dipping it in a batter of *gram* flour and deep frying it. The variations again come in the ingredient that is being deep fried, which could go from an onion, eggplant, potato, spinach, plantain, cheese, *paneer* (cottage cheese), cauliflower, tomato, or chilli peppers and can also occasionally be made with bread, fish, or chicken. In some parts of the country it is known as a *bhaji* or a *bhajiya*, and no monsoon day in India is complete without a bowlful of *pyaaz pakoda* (onion *pakoda*).



Hope this article makes you hungry enough to overlook the dubious seasonings and calories for a day to savour some finger-licking street fare! ■

The writer is a mother of two, with a passion for cooking and food presentation. In an earlier avatar she was a high school teacher of English and Environmental Science.



# The bubbling Indian cauldron

*Indian food is an amalgamation of cuisines from various ethnic, religious and caste traditions, though sometimes there are rigid rules about consumption of food perceived to be favoured by the 'lower caste' people. Happily, commercialisation and the social media are today helping to bring down some barriers, though not all, writes **Vandita Morarka**.*

**F**OOD practices provide a veritable lens into the cultural practices of any community. India is geographically large and culturally varied, as are the food practices followed throughout the nation. While there has been an evocation of Culinary Nationalism by various authors, Arjun Appadurai in his essay on 'Morality, Nationalism and Food Practices' highlights that, "India has no historic cuisine, but in religious texts it was ingredients and dishes that were detailed, rather than the process of cooking."

The evolution of these ingredients used for cooking in India can be seen as a yardstick for studying changes in several socio-economic factors, as evidenced by the 'social significance of the Indian relationship to food' mentioned by Appadurai. Food habits and dietary preferences in India are deeply influenced by religious, class and caste considerations. Food brings with it, to a certain extent, a sense of identity and belongingness. We need to examine if the supposed present day commercialisation of food and rise of the middle class has reduced the impact of these considerations. Here, we look at the changing food habits of certain communities in India, in particular at the ingredients used and rituals followed by them for preparing their food.

## The commercialisation of food

The art of preparing food is historically a cultural process. There has been a spurt in the commercialisation of ingredients used worldwide and India has been no exception. This commercialisation has eroded away a certain cultural essence to food preparation. Spices, which were once freshly ground and prepared at home, now have packaged counterparts available at every store. Earlier, each Parsi family would have its own unique recipe for *Dhansak masala*, passed down through generations - this recipe was a matter of pride and was highly guarded by each family. Today, the 'Mangal Dhansak Masala' has replaced the popularity of the home made variety. The extensively used *molgapudi* of South India, which was earlier, prepared at home, is now store brought. An everyday ingredient like *ghee*, once prepared only at home,



***Molgapudi* of South India, also called 'gun powder' is rarely made at home today**

is now only store bought in most of urban India. The preparation of these ingredients had several cultural connotations associated with them. It was a rite of passage for the mother to pass down the secret coveted family recipe to her daughter, as it was part of greater religious tradition to use 'pure' *ghee* prepared at home. With women increasingly working outside their homes, and the growth of nuclear families – the cultural aspect of food has reinvented itself in new ways.

Caste too has played a dominant role in shaping what a person can or cannot eat in India through the times. The *dalit* community under subjugation developed its own food rules and the use of ingredients like offal, pork and beef flourished as the upper strata in the caste hierarchy shunned



### How many households make *ghee* from scratch?

these food items. While the upper castes have forever used food habits as a means of exerting superiority; such as by not consuming food prepared by *dalits*, by not touching a *dalit* when giving them food items or otherwise. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has manifested this power struggle in new ways; even now domestic help is hired on the basis of the caste or community they belong to and the food they eat, and people are even allotted flats on the basis of the food they consume. So the next time you want to rent a house in a city like Mumbai, be prepared to answer what you eat for lunch!

Cookbooks that showcase recipes of a certain caste or community are more frequently being published. Diverging from earlier traditions of orally passing down the recipes, these cookbooks help preserve the cultural traditions of a community. But with the writing of these cookbooks being done in English to cater to a wider audience – it opens up the earlier highly secretive barriers regarding food preparation within each community, to the world at large. The popularity of cookbooks like *Why Onions Cry: Peek into an Iyengar Kitchen* by Nandini Sivakumar and Vijee Krishnan, and *The Courtly Cuisine: Kayastha Kitchens Through India* by Preeta Mathur tell us that though even today food habits are influenced by the caste one belongs to, it is more of a struggle to maintain these rigid barriers between castes. The caste bias is quite visible though in

documentation of food habits, where the leaning is towards that of documenting food habits of the richer upper castes and communities.

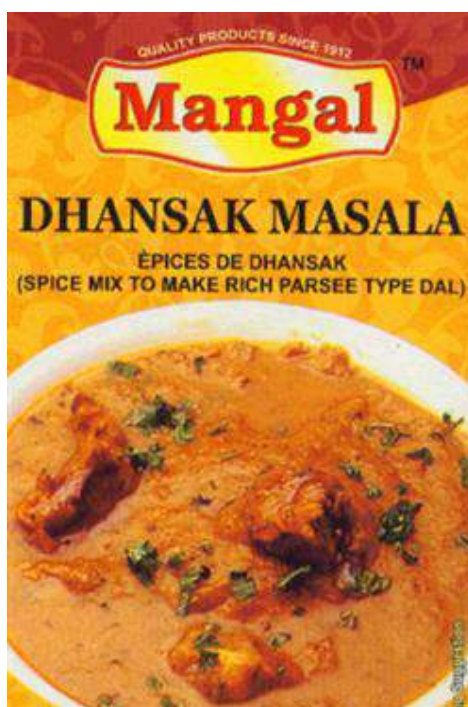
Economic shifts and perceptions have also caused a change in how ingredients are prepared and used. While Rajasthan was known for having separate cows that were fed sugarcane and their milk then used to make desserts, especially to make *kheer* – today milk is produced in the same manner, for all purposes. The consumption of *jowar* and *bajra* has reduced among upper classes due to these millets being perceived as food for the poor. *Sorpotel*, a dish of Portuguese origin, is now limited in consumption to Goa and Mangalore only. It used to have offal boiled in animal blood; most *sorpotel* now doesn't contain blood. Offal is lesser consumed in India now, mainly as it has to be used immediately after being removed from the animal – and is used more by poorer sections. *Doodh na puff*, a popular Parsi sweet that needs to be kept on the terrace through the night to collect dew and be beaten into a creamy air froth and then sold combined with *Khariya ni jelly*, is no longer made as extensively; the time taken for its preparation no longer makes it feasible (Personally, the time taken is well worth the brilliant taste!).

Globalisation has blurred boundaries of what one would perceive to be 'Culinary Nationalism'. Corn having been introduced to Indian cuisine only about 200 years ago is now consumed more than barley, which is an indigenous crop. Marathi cuisine traditionally did not use tomato, a foreign crop, as an ingredient. Even today, during rituals, the usage of tomatoes is restricted. But at the same time it has brought different worldwide cuisines to India, which has been adapted within the nation in varied ways. It has brought along with it a culture of fast food and consumerism, especially to urban India and a love for all things from the West, including its

food. Though ask any Mumbaikar and they'll tell you how *vada pav* beats a burger any day! This dichotomy between the old and the new is what makes food practices in India so intriguing.

Food habits with regard to religious influence are extremely polarised on the main issue of consumption of pork and beef, between Muslims and Hindus.

(Continued on page 19)



Store bought Dhansak masala is today a mainstay



# An Indian itinerant's foodie tales

*Food is an intrinsic part of travel in India. As you travel, you tend to seek out food along the way, in small shacks, remote villages and roadside eateries, where the best food can be found, says filmmaker Bidyut Kotoky. His experiences confirm what we all know – that food is one of the main ingredients which makes travel in India such an enriching, unforgettable and life-changing experience.*

LET me start with a confession – I'm not exactly a 'foodie' in the typical sense of the term. I mean, food does not really play a central role in my existence – am not really passionate about it. But I'm passionate about my travel and consider myself more of a traveler than a tourist. And you can't have a complete experience as a traveler by ignoring the local culinary culture...Hence, by default, food started playing a more important role in my life than I had originally designated it in my psyche.

When I look back at my adventures as a traveler, I find that many of those had food associated with it. I still remember that night in the island of Bali, vividly, although it took place in 2003. The night when I decided to accept an invitation for dinner at the fishing village near our resort. Actually, it was on the previous night, while taking a midnight stroll that I got talking to one of the security guards of the resort, and he invited me to taste the roasted fish in his village the next evening, against the payment of some nominal Indonesian rupiah. And in my sojourn, I was joined by my brother, brother in law and niece. Till date, I remember the disappointment on the face of the villagers when we called it quits after eating a couple of freshly caught smoked fish each. They were disappointed because they felt we ate far too less for the amount we paid, and to top it, being teetotalers, couldn't accept their offer of local liquor...But as I close my eyes, I can still smell the aroma of the freshly smoked fish with the roaring sea as the backdrop... (by the way, I got a call from my niece Praptee while I was in the middle of penning down this piece...when I mentioned this incident, she remembers vividly how we ventured into the fishing village taking the short-cut of climbing over the resort wall...and how we were served the fish, roasted in banana leaves...and to think that she was all of eight years old at that time!)

## Of bharta baingan and dal bati choorma!

Or for that matter, let me visit the road trip through Gujarat that I undertook with my wife Pallavi and another couple of friends Cyrus and Nalini, in 2010. After starting from



Fishing at Majuli island

Ahmedabad in the morning, it was late afternoon by the time we approached the Gir national park. To say that we were starving will be an understatement here! So we stopped by a roadside makeshift shack, which didn't even have proper side walls – forget table/chairs - more due to lack of choice rather than because of it. But what an experience this 'lack of choice' provided us with... Sitting in the *charpai*, we relished the *bharta* cooked from the freshly plucked green brinjal, along with the hot *bajra roti* on tiny charcoal '*chulha*' (stove) and washed it all down with a rich glass of *chaas*, and it tasted divine not just because we were starving.

Another time with the same sets of friends - this time on the roads of Madhya Pradesh, around 2002. Another divine culinary encounter, this time on a magical full moon night. We were amidst the ruins of the historical township of Mandu. Tired of the restaurant food, en-route to our hotel we stopped in a village at the first neat hut we saw and requested the host if they would be willing to prepare *dal bati choorma* for us. Happily they agreed and started to cook by the side of the road. We went off to our room for a wash and on return an hour later, we were greeted by the sight of plates full of *baati* and *bafla* cooked on *kande* (dried cow-dung cakes) served

with rich *dal* and sweet *choorma*...never tested better *dal bati choorma* till then, or since! Again, our host had one complain – that we ate too little...Well, the blame was not entirely mine – the couple accompanying us is well known in our circle of friends for their voracious appetite...Not voracious enough to satisfy our hosts that evening, though!

The food does taste different depending on the ambience and circumstances – no point arguing this fact. I'm sure all of us who have relished that hot bowl of Maggie noodles (before the recent ban!) at the roadside stall on a hill station will agree that it tasted so much better there than at home! However, the best example of this universal truth I experienced on our trek to the Valley of Flowers and Hemkund Sahib in Uttarakhand towards the end of August 2001. After hours of the tiring climb of 4,632 meters (15,197 feet) in freezing temperature, when we reached the Gurudwara at Hemkund Sahib on a chilly afternoon, the water of the lake next to it was starting to freeze. As we took our seats inside the Gurudwara, the volunteers served us piping hot tea in a steel glass (almost a foot tall!) and piping hot *khichdi*...To start describing how these two regular items tasted at that moment – well, I plead guilty of not even trying!

### The culinary Northeast

In my journey as a filmmaker, I had assignments of doing stories on food on more than one occasion – mainly from my native place - the Northeast India. Once I had this assignment - a story on Assam's *chunga pitha*, which I particularly enjoyed. This delicacy usually is prepared during the cultivation festival of *Bihu*. There are quite a few varieties of *pitha* – generally made sweet, although a savoury version is an option too. This particular version of *pitha* requires the most elaborate and picturesque method to prepare. A paste made of rice flour is put into a cylinder made from young bamboo – bamboo cut in the joint – and sealed at one end with a lid made of



The delicious *pitha* is made in bamboo tubes



*Dal bati choorma* is a very popular dish

hay. These *cylinders* are then kept standing in a line in a make-shift stove, made with banana or bamboo poles on both sides and another bamboo kept as a support. These bamboo cylinders are set alight with hay around it and are burned till they change colour from green to brown. Once they cool down, the bamboos are sliced open to reveal perfectly shaped *chungas* (cylinder) of rice flour! These *pithas* can be garnished with desiccated coconut, sugar or just salt as your taste buds prefer – but if you witness the exotic preparation of this delicacy, you are bound to fall in love with the dish even before tasting it!!

### Majuli tales

On another occasion, around the year 2000, while making a documentary on one of the largest inhabited river islands of the world, Majuli in the River Brahmaputra (Assam), we encountered this interesting fish pickle *namding* - made from dried fish by the local Mishing tribe. What makes this pickle (which has a quite a strong smell by the way!) stand out is its strong anti-malarial properties – much needed in this river delta, infested with mosquitoes! Similarly, the tribe has their traditional drink called *apong*, made out of fermented rice. Consumed in the right quantity, *apong* is supposed to have some medicinal qualities – mainly to fight the 'beriberi disease', which is fairly common in that area.

Majuli occupies a special place in my heart and that is not just because of the beauty of the river island or the warmth of the people I met there. In 2009, when I returned to Majuli for the shoot of my Assamese/Hindi bi-lingual feature film *Ekhon nedekha nadir xipare/ As the River Flows*, nothing much had changed there...as if the island was frozen in time. During the shoot, we had hired a caterer from Mumbai to take care of the food of the unit, with special emphasis on



meeting the tastes of the actors from Mumbai. However, I was happy to order food from the resort that we were staying at – some simple village food consisting of brown rice, vegetables grown in the resort owner's backyard (he and most villagers refuse to buy vegetables from the market as they could be sprayed with chemicals, and so prefer to grow their own food). Of course, every plate would also come accompanied with a preparation of the indispensable fresh fish caught in the river. Once my film's lead actor Sanjay Suri saw my plate, he refused to touch anything prepared by the 'Mumbai caterer', for the rest of the schedule!

Today, when I read about the Centre's initiative of declaring some northeastern state as 'organic', it doesn't surprise me much. After all, most of Northeast regions have always grown organic – most dishes are prepared with little or no oil, either boiled, roasted or smoked with fresh spice and herbs that

grow in abundance in the area – much, much before terms like 'organic' had become fashionable! ■

The writer is a film-maker and a reluctant writer, whose sole objective for writing is to get his readers curious to watch his films. His documentary *Bhramoman Theatre – where Othello sails with Titanic* won a special mention in the 53rd National Film Awards. For his debut feature film in Assamese, *Ekhon nedekha nadir xipare* (As the River Flows) he won the 'Best script award' for the period 2010-2012 at the Assam State Film Awards. The film also won awards at the 2013 Washington DC South-Asian Film Festival and the 2014 North Carolina South Asian Film Festival. Since the last 3 years he has been busy with his feature length documentary *Guns and Guitars – a musical travelogue*, which is in its final stage of post production. Made with self-raised funds, the film will be ready for release soon.



## The bubbling Indian cauldron

(Continued from page 16)

While the tension seems to have been superficially reduced, it still persists just beneath the surface as seen in recent uprisings against beef consumption. But we do have instances where a professor at Delhi's St Stephen's college invited people for a lunch of pork to highlight how food can be seen as the bridge for issues of religious tolerance, though for religious reasons he himself did not consume pork.

One would assume that with the increased commercialisation of food accompanied by the general modernisation of society, the considerations of religion, class and especially that of caste would be reduced. But one cannot say that is truly so. These factors continue to influence what one eats and what one associates culturally with each food item. The divide between castes is in fact exemplified here. Dalit activists like Kancha Ilaiah berate the 'vegetarian fascism' of the upper castes, providing the example of the beef festival held at Osmania University, in Hyderabad which was rampant with protests from other castes and communities. Why protests? Because students celebrating the food they eat offended them!

Along with this, ingredients used have changed as a result of changing lifestyles of people. Calorie consciousness has modified traditional ways of cooking. Kashmiri food once laden with rich spices and oils now has its more toned down version available at restaurants. A Parsi dish, *eeda pak*, once used to contain 50 egg yolks; this has now been reduced due to increasing health concerns. Lack of time in a modern lifestyle has changed how food is prepared, from the utensils used to

the time put into each dish. A shift towards a more individualistic society and influence of western cultures has changed food preferences and dietary habits of younger generations. Easily available processed and packaged, ready-to-eat food is the go-to for many young people who live away from home due to the increasing geographical spread of where one works and studies. The fading away and modification of certain ingredients is an evidence to the evolution of the food process in India.

At the same time, one sees an interest in the revival of the traditional food culture of different communities in India. Increase in social media and networking between different communities has led to a wider cultural exchange, including that of food recipes and cultural practices between communities. One can find many blogs, YouTube accounts, Facebook pages etc., that celebrate food across cultures, opening up food practices of varied communities for all. As Chitrita Banerjee writes in her book *Eating India: Exploring a Nation's Cuisine*, "Authentic food is adapting, assimilating and regenerating to newer cultural and culinary forms". Be it through the opening of restaurants and cafes offering truly authentic traditional food or the ingenuity of places like 'The Bohri Kitchen' in Mumbai – the rejuvenation of traditional cuisine in India has begun. ■



The writer is a Law and Public Policy student with special interest in Gender and Human rights issues.

# Welcome to my home

*How do you feel about meeting strangers over a sumptuous Bohri meal in the sprawling home of the chef? **Disha Shetty** visits The Bohri Kitchen and writes about this new trend of housewives cooking multi-course, traditional meals for you in their homes, at a cost. You get good food served with doses of culture, and the home chef shares her traditional recipes, while being commercially compensated. It's a win-win for all!*

Enter the sprawling living room, home to the Kapadias, in a residential corner of Mumbai's Colaba where old British era buildings and tall modern sky-scrappers co-exist. Early morning sunlight floods the space where a dining table rests comfortably on one side, and a large part of the floor is covered with a mattress meant for seating.

This is where the Kapadias entertain a group of 14 people every Saturday and Sunday, treating them to authentic Bohri food, topped with an abundance of warm hospitality. They call it 'The Bohri Kitchen'.

So how did the idea of opening up their home to strangers come about, I ask 27-year-old Munaf Kapadia, a former Google employee and now the CEO, Chief Eating Officer, at The Bohri Kitchen. "I wanted to keep my mother, who is a housewife and very entrepreneurial, busy," he says. He saw her food being appreciated by others and realised that authentic Bohri cuisine is not something that is easily available. That was in December 2014. A year on, the news about the experimental lunch has spread through word of mouth and The Bohri Kitchen has carved a niche for itself. The events are sold out within hours of it being posted on their Facebook page.



**The family's living room where they entertain a group of 14 people every Saturday and Sunday**



**Munaf Kapadia (left), along with his mother Nafisa, the team behind The Bohri Kitchen, at their home in Mumbai's Colaba**

## They have a no-serial killer policy!

The process to try the food is simple. One has to go to their Facebook page and drop a message about the event they want to attend, and if the family finds the request genuine, their address will be shared. "My fear is that someday a random person will enter our house, a reason we screen people beforehand. I also introduced a no-serial killer policy," Munaf shares, tongue-in-cheek.

Once a person's request to attend is validated, he or she is treated to a multi-course Bohri lunch that is served on a big steel *thaal* or plate. Munaf takes the guests, who are given a name tag, through the basic Bohri traditions followed, and tells them about the food.

"The reaction to the food and the hospitality at our home by our guests blew us away. They hugged my mom who has four kids, me being the youngest, who so far had taken her food for granted," Munaf said about the first event they hosted.

For his mother Nafisa, it is a way to keep busy and do what she knows best. "I always loved to cook. We were a big



### A mix of Yemeni and Indian influences

Within Islam there are two major sects - Shias and Sunnis. Bohris are a small community of one million people within Shias. Originally from Yemen, they moved to Gujarat in India. "From Gujarat some of us moved to Maharashtra, but our mother tongue is Gujarati. So the cuisine is Yemeni but with Gujarati, Maharashtrian and even Punjabi influences. This is what makes Bohri food palatable to most people," Munaf explains. He adds that while the cuisine has regional influences, the manner of cooking and the way it is served has not changed much.

joint family; my in-laws were there as were my husband's brothers and their wives. We were always cooking. Now with my daughters married and with just the three of us in the house, cooking small portions was becoming a task," she shares.

#### A typical menu of The Bohri Kitchen Starters

Mutton *kheema samosa*  
A surprise chicken dish

#### Sweet Dish

Ghas *falooda* with fresh fruits

#### Main Course

Raan in red masala  
Lassan *Baidu*  
Chicken *biryani* with *paya*  
soup

#### Dessert

Saancha Ice Cream  
Paan

#### Beverages

Nariyal *paani* with blended  
*malai*  
Rose *sherbet* with chia  
seeds  
Jaljeera soda

To sample their food, call on  
098194 47438 or check out  
their Facebook page:  
[www.facebook.com/  
thebohrikitchen](https://www.facebook.com/thebohrikitchen)

### Coming soon – home delivery

While there were no financial ambitions when The Bohri Kitchen started, Munaf now has his eyes set on a delivery model and wants his mother to not cook regularly, but to simply oversee the cooking. "I invested sometime in building a brand and creating the logo. I decided to make it a premium, exclusive thing," Munaf explains.

Almost all who come for the lunch are non-Bohris and are warned to wear loose expandable clothing in advance. But the family says that it is the varied mix of people who walk into their home that motivates them to hold more events.

"My father likes it. He believes that it is a great networking ground for me,



One of the groups, following a one-and-a-half hour long marathon eating session at The Bohri Kitchen

at an early stage in my career," Munaf says. His father incidentally was told that the first group of people who came to their home were just friends dropping by for lunch. The fact that they were being charged for the food was hidden from him. "My father would never dream about charging people for food in the house. He comes from a traditional mindset, but at the same time he is every adaptable," he adds.

However there is little change or experimenting with the menu unless it is a group booking. "I have been following the recipes taught to me by my mother and mother-in-law. Munaf is the biggest pressure though; he wants me to stick to the Bohri style of cooking," Nafisa shares.

### About being a 'home chef'

Munaf believes that the biggest mistake home chefs make is to remain just a home chef and not create a brand around themselves - a reason why he wants a distinct identity for The Bohri Kitchen. "You need to dissociate the food from the person and leverage the positives from being a home. You have to tell the customer that we are serious, we have a feedback mechanism and we learn from our mistakes," he explains.

Six months from now Munaf wants to see the home delivery facility rolled out and his mother turned into a culinary supervisor. "The Bohri Kitchen should be the single brand that comes to your mind when you think of Bohri food," he signs off. ■



The writer is a young journalist who has recently discovered the joys of travelling.

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# PONDICHERRY

## *French with a twist*

The state of Pondicherry is a delicious mix of French and Tamil cultures. One doesn't triumph over the other; rather, there is a lovely co-existence where even as you sip on filter coffee at a shack, you can peep into the French cafe next door! As you walk down the lanes of the quaint French quarters, with its well-kept roads and high-ceilinged villas, it's easy to imagine that one has been transported to France. Yet, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the ancient temples, churches with stained glass paintings, the echoing sounds of the temple and church bells, and pristine beaches remind us that what we are experiencing is a delightful blending of several worlds, which contribute to the city's multi-cultural ethos.

**Text & Photos: Usha Hariprasad**





**A typical building in the French style, which is very common in Pondicherry**

**F**OR a while, walking the cobbled streets of Pondicherry near the seafront, you can get confused. Rue Victor Simonel, Rue de Caserne, Rue Romain Rolland; everywhere you turn, you see a Rue de something, and you get the feeling that you are somewhere in southern France. The clean streets, the big villa styled homes, the elaborate gateways and balconies, only emphasise this feeling. The French influence is strong here and the reason is plain enough to see. After all, the French had made this town their home, for more than a 100 years. In fact, Pondicherry is the French interpretation of the word 'Putucceri', which means new settlement in Tamil.

What makes this laid back town fascinating is its myriad

colours. The French quarters along the beach, the colourful homes of the Muslims, the ethnic Tamil homes, the beautiful churches, the ornate *gopurams* of Dravidian style temples - it is an amalgam of various cultures and traditions. Here, a small shop, supplying strong filter coffee to its customers happily coexists with a French café next to it. Temple bells resonate easily with a church's gongs and bells. A tourist can easily identify with the city's multicultural ethos.

### **The history of Pondicherry**

The Union Territory of Pondicherry comprises the Pondicherry town and its villages, Karaikal in the south of Pondicherry, Mahe on the west coast and Yanam in Andhra Pradesh; all former French colonies. There are over 7,000 industries in Pondicherry, with only 35 percent of the population depending on agriculture.

Pondicherry has a long history that can be traced back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Arikamedu, seven kilometres from the city was an ancient sea port for Roman ships. It was a major Greco-Roman trading centre. The ships brought in wine, olive oil, fish sauce, and trade included pottery, textiles etc. A visit to the Pondicherry museum gives you a glimpse into these historical facts.



**One of the elegant 'Rue'**



**The French quarters**

Pondicherry came under a lot of rulers between 4<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earliest rulers of Pondicherry were the Pallavas of Kanchipuram. They ruled Pondicherry until the start of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Then it came under the powerful Cholas until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Rajendra III was the last Chola king to rule Pondicherry. After that the state came under the rule of the Pandya kingdom. Later, Ulugh Khan defeated the Pandyas and established his rule in Madurai. The Sultanate of Madurai came to an end with the Vijayanagara rule. The Vijayanagara rule lasted till 1614 after which the Sultanate of Bijapur established their rule until 1638.

### Pondicherry's colonial history

The colonial history of the city begins at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Portuguese set foot in 1520 with the trade in textiles. They set up a factory in 1523. The Dutch started buying textiles around 1618 and the Danes followed, setting up a factory in 1624. The French arrived in 1674 and established their new settlement. They were the last of the European powers to come to India for trade. The Dutch captured Pondicherry in 1693 but returned it to France through the Treaty of Ryswick. The Dutch power then on reduced while the British influence grew.

The period 1740 to 1757 witnessed a lot of power struggle between the British and the French for supremacy. During the French administration the town was fortified, the streets and the city were well-planned. There were wide outer ring roads for the movement of traffic, the inner streets laid out in grids were meant for walking. The town became an important port-the warehouses that stored stocks like groundnuts, cashew, cheese, silk etc., still stand today.

In 1742, with Dupleix appointed as Governor of Pondicherry, France, whose interest until then was commercial, slowly became involved in Indian politics. During his administration, Dupleix strengthened the defences in the town.



**The Tamil colony – many worlds co-exist in this town**

In 1761, the British captured Pondicherry and removed the fortifications. In 1763, with the Treaty of Paris, Pondicherry was returned to France. Finally, after 138 years of French occupation, the territory was handed over to Indian administration in 1954.

Today we can see both the French and Tamil quarters in the town. A storm water canal separates the two quarters.

### Pondicherry and the Aurobindo connection

Sri Aurobindo and Pondicherry have a deep spiritual connection. After all, this is the place he chose when he decided to devote himself to spiritual work. Born in Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo was a professor in Baroda College for 13 years. He was very active in politics and was one of the leaders of the National Movement. He began his practice of yoga in 1905 and five years later, he gave up politics and came to Pondicherry. In his 40 years of residing in Pondicherry, he developed a new system called Integral Yoga that focusses on spiritual realisation.

In 1926 he founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram along with Madame Mirra Richard, who is considered to be his spiritual partner. Madame Mirra Richard popularly known as the 'Mother' was born in Paris on Feb 21, 1879. She was a French painter, sculptor, writer, who was deeply interested in spirituality. She used to see visions of Sri Aurobindo. She met Sri Aurobindo in 1914 and realised that he was the spiritual *guru* appearing in her visions. She then joined him in 1920 in Pondicherry. The Mother was in charge of the Ashram and she established the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in 1952, and Auroville in 1968.

### Things to do in Pondicherry

With so many attractions vying for your attention, Pondicherry can be confusing. So here is a compilation of must-do-things while in the city:





A view of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

### Sri Aurobindo Ashram

“Develop your inner being, find your soul”, “Organise your life, your work, your consciousness”. Sayings such as these guide you inside the serene Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. Founded by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the ashram can open your doors to an entirely new world, where every aspect of work is seen as a tool for spiritual discipline. There are over 80 departments ranging from health, education, gardening etc., and the residents of the ashram work as volunteers here.

For the visitors there is an art gallery, library and photo section giving more details about Aurobindo and the Mother. At the centre of the Ashram lies the *samadhi* of Aurobindo and Mother, very beautifully maintained, and is a calming place to sit in silence for a few minutes. The flowers and the incense lit there make the atmosphere very conducive for meditation.

### Manakula Vinayagar Temple

There are more than 350 temples in Pondicherry and some

were built by Chola kings between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Situated a few minutes from Aurobindo Ashram, there is a lovely temple of Lord Ganesha called the Manakula Vinayagar temple. The temple is an ancient one and is said to have existed before the French arrived in the city. It is also called as Vellakkaran Pillai (White man's Ganesha). It is believed that a French man tried to do away with the deity but it miraculously kept reappearing. This turned him into a devotee of Ganesha.

There are two versions of how the temple got the name 'Manakula'. 'Manam' indicates mind and 'kulam' means pond in Tamil. The belief is that praying to the deity here can calm



The Manakula Vinayagar Temple, also referred to as Vellakkaran Pillai or 'White man's Ganesha'

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**The Promenade where there is a curb on vehicular movement after 6 pm every day**

the mind like a pond. The second version seems more realistic, though. The word 'Manal' indicates sand. Old Pondicherry was full of ponds and sand dunes. A Ganesha deity was installed on the bank of the pond and people used to worship the idol after their bath in the pond. A temple was soon constructed and as it was near the banks of the sandy pond, it got the name Manakula Vinayagar temple.

### **The Promenade**

This 1.5 km long stretch on the beach is a treat for the eyes. The cool breeze, the misty waves crashing the black rocks lining up the stretch, the beautiful sunset, the multitude of shops offering you anything from gelatines to pastas, is an experience by itself. The lack of vehicle movement after 6 in

the evening makes it all the more pleasurable. A walk here takes you to the Gandhi statue and the French War Memorial as well. The sands of this beach have witnessed some of the Anglo-French battles. Every year on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, on Bastille Day, the French Memorial gets lit up.

### **Churches**

The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century churches are a must-visit. The gothic splendour of Eglise de Sacre Coeur de Jesus, its rare stained glass paintings depicting the life of Christ is a truly splendid sight. The Eglise de Notre Dame Dela Conception Immaculate Church built in 1692, is also another important church to visit. It is one of the oldest churches of Pondicherry, designed in Portuguese style. The Eglise de Notre Dame Des Anges in Rue



**The Gandhi statue**



**The French War Memorial**





**Auroville, the international township, where residents live in peace and harmony**

Dumas is also a worthy place to visit. It is modelled after the Basilica at Lourdes in southern France. The mass here is conducted in three languages - French, Tamil and English.

### Auroville

Auroville was founded on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1968 by the Mother. Designed by Roger Anger, it is an international township, belonging to humanity as a whole. It was developed on the lines outlined by the Charter given by the Mother. People from different nations reside here in peace and harmony, focusing on their higher, spiritual self. Currently there are around 2400 people from different nations residing here, though the township was intended for around 50,000 people. The city is planned in such a way that it has a peace area, various city zones like

industrial zone, cultural zone, residential zone etc., and finally, surrounded by a green belt of 405 hectares. There are several organisations working here like the Auroville Trust that manages the affairs of residents, the Artisans Trust that looks after the productive units like handicrafts, the Centre for Scientific Research that studies alternative sources of energy etc. At the centre of the city in the peace zone lies Matrimandir, a place meant for inner focus, concentration and silence.

Matrimandir means 'Temple of the Mother'. The Mother here refers to the universal force, that conscious intelligence governing life. The Matrimandir is a large golden sphere with 1400 golden discs. The architect was Roger Anger and he began building it on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1971. At the apex of the sphere is an opening to let sunlight enter in. The light falls on



**Eglise de Sacre Coeur de Jesus Church**



**The Eglise de Notre Dame Des Anges Church is modeled after the Basilica at Lourdes in southern France**



#### **The refreshing Paradise Beach**

a crystal glass globe at the centre of the sphere that guides light all through the meditation hall or the inner chamber, which is fully white.

Surrounding the sphere are 12 gardens, each with different names like Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Light etc. The Mother selected a central flower for each garden. Barring the garden of Wealth and Garden of Perfection, the rest of the gardens have hibiscus as their flower, albeit in different colours.

(Tip: Passes to enter the dome can be collected at the

visitors' centre i.e. at the entrance of Auroville. But be warned; there is a waiting time of two days. Matrimandir is around 1 km walk from the visitor's centre. One can also stay at Auroville and be a part of the volunteering community.)

#### **Pondicherry Museum**

Excavations from Arkiamedu period, 1<sup>st</sup> century burial urn, stone tools of Neolithic age, pieces from Tsung period in China, precious stones, palm leaf manuscripts, bronze sculptures from Chola, Pallava and Vijayanagara period, terracotta figurines, French Transport – all these and more at the Pondicherry museum will open your eyes to the strategic importance of this place in history. The museum is vast with different sections - Archaeological, Transport, Numismatic, Arms, Geological, French, Bronze section etc., each a treasure trove of information. In the Bronze Gallery there are temple lamps from different dynasties, in the Transport section you will see coach, palanquin and *pousse-pousse* (cycle rickshaw) of the French period.

Other museums you can visit are the Jawaharlal Toy Museum and the Bharati Memorial museum.

#### **Chunambar Water and Sports Centre – Paradise Beach**

Paradise Beach lives up to its name. Pristine sandy beaches, blue skies, lush greenery is what you expect and what you get,



**The Pondicherry museum which has many tools, sculptures and manuscripts from the past**





**The Serenity Beach, where one can catch some fishing activity**

when you visit this beach. The beach is accessible through beautiful backwaters at Chunambar Water and Sports Centre located along the Cuddalore Main Road. This centre is about 8 km from Pondicherry. From this place you will have to purchase tickets and cruise along the backwaters to meet the blue sea. Normal boats, speed boats and other ferry services will take you to Paradise beach in 15-20 minutes. The beach is not very crowded and is a well maintained one. There are changing rooms and a couple of shacks offering basic food stuff and water. As the sea is not very rough here, it is safe for both kids and adults. The ferry service is from 9-5 pm and boats are available every 30 minutes to ferry you to and fro. The last boat leaves by 6:30 pm.

**(Tip:** If you would like to see some fishing activity, then you could head out to Serenity Beach close to Auroville. This beach is not well maintained though.)

For water related adventure activities like kayaking, surfing and pool diving, there are a number of diving centres and surf schools ready to show you a different world beneath the sea.

### **Aayi Mandapam and Bharati Park**

This park is near the beach and is a good place to rest or walk. The garden is beautiful and is surrounded by important government buildings like the Governor's Palace, Legislative

Assembly etc. This park also has historical importance. It was originally the site of the first French Garrison, Fort Louis that got destroyed by the British in 1761. There is also the Aayi Mandapam or the park monument at the centre of the park. It is a Greco-Roman styled monument built during the reign of Napoleon III, Emperor of France. Aayi was the name of a 16<sup>th</sup> century courtesan who once had her home here. She demolished her home to appease a king who mistook her candle lit home in the night as a holy place and went to pay his respects. When he discovered the truth, he was angry and



**The Aayi Mandapam, which was built by Napoleon III to honour the legend of Aayi, a 16<sup>th</sup> century courtesan**





**The Botanical Garden, which also houses a 20 million-year-old fossil tree**

to please the king she built a reservoir in place of her home. Some 300 years later, it was this very same reservoir that quenched the thirst of Napoleon's men. Napoleon III, charmed by this story, ordered a monument to be built for Aayi.

### Botanical Garden

The Botanical Garden spread over 22 acres of land boasts of rare plants brought in from places like Calcutta, Ceylon etc. It was planned by C. S. Perrotet who wanted to study the

plants that could be grown in this region. The garden was created in 1826. Though not well maintained, it is still a cool green space with lots of trees. It is a good place to visit with kids as it provides valuable information about fossil wood, spices, and a myriad plants and trees. It also has a small play area designated for kids and a joy train that runs along the entire length of the park.

**(Tip:** Check out the fossil section that has a 20 million-year-old fossil tree.)

### On a platter

From delicious thin crepes to mouth-watering South Indian traditional fare and Italian pasta, Pondicherry is a gourmet's delight. Though the French and Tamil streetscapes boast a lot of these hangouts, there are some go-to places in the city. Surguru is where you head to if you wish to taste traditional south Indian tiffin. The variety of *idli*, *dosas*, *appams* and *iddi appams* will give you a great start to the day. Villa Shanti, Le Café, Les Chefs, Indian Coffee House, Le Chateau are some other options that you could try out. For some ethnic Italian stuff visit La Pasta World. They serve some decent pasta, all freshly cooked with fresh ingredients and homemade sauce. And if you are in the mind for some excellent wood fired pizza then check out Café Xtasi for some tasty pizzas with varied options. Other cool places to check out are Café des Arts for Crepes, Café Ole for sandwiches, Auroville Bakery and Bakers Street for French Breads, Le Duplex for Indian and European cuisines and Zuka for delicious chocolates.

While there, don't forget to try out filter coffees and masala milk. Filter coffee is available at various joints while masala milk outlets are near the sea shore. Made from nuts, sugar and various spices, this hot drink is especially welcome after a day of sightseeing. Numerous eating places near the Promenade is something that should be tried out as well. From seafood dishes, pastas and ice-creams, there are some heavenly dishes one just shouldn't miss. ●

## Heritage walks

For those who would like to delve deeper into the history of Pondicherry, a heritage walk in the city is a must. INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) conducts regular heritage walks in the Tamil and French quarters of the city. The organisation has partnered with the state government to restore heritage structures in the city. It also offers guidelines to private owners who would like to repair and renovate their homes. INTACH has recently renovated the Indian Coffee House, Le Café etc., in the city.

Pondicherry has not yet got the heritage tag that can protect its 17<sup>th</sup> century old buildings and heritage structures in the city. That is why there has been destruction of most of the structures in Tamil quarters and part of the French quarters. A walk with INTACH in these areas will help you understand the history of these buildings, the effort taken to renovate these structures. In the past decade, there has been a lot of pressure to bring down the old structures in the city to give way to new buildings.

The walk in the French streetscapes will also make you realise a few details about renovation. With each restoration in the French quarters, the main French elements are retained while modern elements are added to it; say, the outer walls, big pillars, high ceilings and inner courtyard would be maintained while adding extra features over it, as the owner demands.



A heritage building in Pondicherry



Le Café, a popular hangout



## Accommodation in Pondicherry

Local home stays, budget hotels, luxury inns – take your pick. Whether you are a traveller on a budget or a tourist seeking a true heritage experience, Pondicherry has a lot to offer either way. Tamizh Park, Villa Beyond, Promenade, Coramadal, Surguru, Kings's Residency etc., are some preferred budget accommodations in Pondicherry. If you are looking for a tinge of romance with a French twist, then heritage hotels is the answer. To name a few, Du Parc hotel, Villa Pondicherry, Hotel De L'Orient, Villa Helena, Villa Shanti, Maison Perumal etc.

Want a 100 year old property restored in French style? Then go for Villa Shanti, a beautiful heritage hotel where you get to see both French and traditional Tamil elements in the restored property. Then there is the Maison Perumal in Koli Street which is a 130-year old heritage structure. It too has a touch of both old French and Tamil elements. Villa Helena in Suffron Street that ushers in old colonial atmosphere, Villa Pondicherry, a colonial building in Dr Ambedkar Salai, Hotel De'Lorient that was once a colonial mansion of De Lorient, now a luxury hotel, Friend's House in Rue Du Mas street are some other worthwhile options.

A 17<sup>th</sup> century structure, Du Parc hotel in Jawaharlal Nehru Street is also a famous heritage hotel. Numerous French Governors have stayed in this house. Du Parc is a local heritage house boasting of both French and Indian traditions.

## Guilt-free shopping

Every nook and corner you hit on a quaint little shop housing some treasure. It could be colourful hand-printed fabrics, handmade cards, incense, perfumes, scented candles etc., the

**Every nook and corner you hit on a quaint little shop housing some treasure. It could be colourful hand-printed fabrics, handmade cards, incense, perfumes, scented candles etc., the urge to buy and linger in the shop gets pronounced. And nobody can blame you. After all, Pondicherry is famous for things like traditional handlooms, handmade products like paper, carpets, hand printed textiles, dolls and leather goods.**

urge to buy and linger in the shop gets pronounced. And nobody can blame you. After all, Pondicherry is famous for things like traditional handlooms, handmade products like paper, carpets, hand printed textiles, dolls and leather goods. Till the 1980's, the town boasted of handicrafts like hand printing, cane and bamboo works, perfumes etc., which soon gave way to terracotta, stone and wood carving, clay toys, incense etc. Tourists visiting Auroville also taught skills to local people like dried flower decorations, scented candles, art pottery, ceramics etc.

It could be a guilt-free shopping too as Pondicherry is duty free, which means low taxes on goods like handicrafts, leather goods, textiles, and you can buy goods at subsidised rates. The popular streets for shopping are the Mission Street, Nehru Street and the Sunday Market happening at the Mahatma Gandhi Road. Some of the go-to shops in the city are Boutique Auroshree for handicrafts, Kalki for funky arts and items, and Casablanca for some international brands of décor items, Hidesign for leather goods, Auroshika for items made from Aurobindo Ashram, Fabindia, and Anokhi. To check out local markets you can also head out to Goubert Market, Serenity Beach Bazaar set up mainly on weekends. ■

The writer is a freelancer who is fond of travelling, discovering new places and writing about travel related destinations around Bangalore at Citizen Matters. Currently, she works in a trekking organisation.



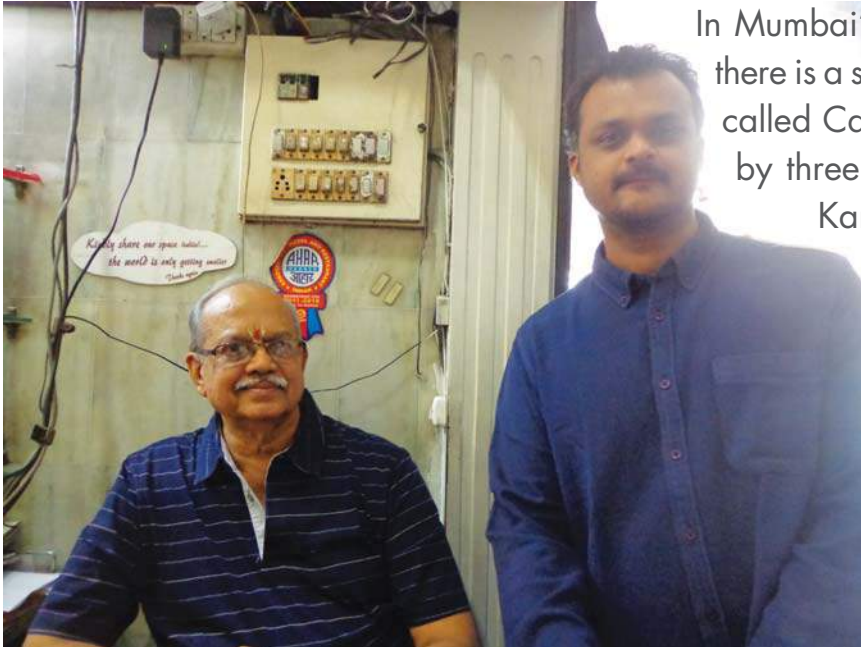
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*“One lady whose bill was zero first thought it was a mistake, and was then elated!”*



Devrath (right) with his father Jagdish Kamath

In Mumbai's central suburb of Matunga there is a small, and very busy restaurant called Café Madras that has been run by three generations of the close-knit Kamath family. For 75 years, the 60-seater quaint restaurant that serves authentic South Indian food has seen serpentine queues, with families patiently waiting for their turn. This no-frills place focuses on quality food and customers happily share tables with complete strangers, focusing on their

*dosa* and *upma*, washing it down with the strongly brewed filter coffee. The restaurant is as much a part of the Matunga folklore as the temples, silk shops and the market that stocks everything South Indian. On the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary day, patrons of this iconic restaurant got a surprise in their bill – they were charged the 1940 rate and most of them got a bill of less than ₹1!

**Disha Shetty** spoke to a very reluctant and publicity shy **Devrath Kamath**, grandson of founder Gopal Kamath, about that day and how the restaurant has evolved over the years. Devrath's father Jagdish, uncle Suresh and brothers Jayprakash and Gopal directly oversee the day-to-day running of the place.

#### When did Café Madras start?

My grandfather Gopal Kamath started the place along with a Tamilian gentleman in 1940.

#### What are the popular items on your menu?

The recipes served at the restaurant are our own concoction. Even the *sambhar* that we serve is slightly different from most places. Our food is different and when we introduce a new dish to the menu, we try to bring freshness to it. *Idli* butter *podu*, mini *idlis*, *upma* and *molgapudi* (gun powder)

are quite popular. Our *molgapudi* is very different from what you get in the South. We are very proud of our *mysore dosa*. The batter we use is unique. Our *rasam vada* is the same and we don't see any need for improvement. It is one of the things that should not change, ever. Our *set dosa* is pretty popular too.

#### Do you experiment with your menu?

We experiment with the menu. We don't get stuck with the same recipe, but we will not change something unless we are convinced about it. Most of the suggestions come from family



Cafe Madras (left), and the ₹ 1 bill a customer got

### Then and now

In 1940, a *masala dosa*, an *idli* plate or a plate of *upma* each cost 20 paise at Café Madras, while filter coffee cost 15 paise. Today, while *masala dosa* costs ₹ 50, steamed *idli* and *upma* each cost ₹ 35 and filter coffee is for ₹ 25!

members. We keep trying to improve as we believe in change, that is, change for the better.

### There is always a long queue outside your place. What do you think brings people back to the restaurant?

People queue up because it is a small place! We focus on quality which is the reason we have not yet expanded.

### What are the changes that you have seen over the years as you try to ensure the business runs successfully?

More women are willing to work in the kitchen now, which is a positive change. There is a lot women can do, but it is only now that they have started to enter the workforce, at least in this part of the country.

It is difficult to get manpower. When new malls and banks open, they need clerical and cleaning staff where the work is not that rigorous. It takes them time to realise that here, the money they earn is purely savings, as food and accommodation are both taken care of. Thankfully, after a point there is an equaliser in the market.

### How difficult is it to ensure that prices remain affordable with essential items becoming expensive?

I think most of it is farce as for 2-3 months in a year, prices of different items peak in a cyclical manner. For instance, for two months every year onions touch ₹ 60/kg, but they remain at ₹ 10/kg the rest of the time. If prices of one or two key ingredients go up, the situation is manageable, but it becomes

difficult otherwise. That said, the prices are bound to rise over a period of time. We too have increased our prices several times in the past three to four years.

### How is the experience of running a food business in Mumbai?

Mumbai is the best market for food business in the world. The sheer number of people here is unbelievable. The challenge however is to retain the staff and ensure there is a balance.

### Talk about the special offer you had to mark the restaurant's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in November.

While I was at the counter, a customer suggested that we must do something to remind people of 1940. That idea stuck, and for five hours we provided food at the prices back then. But it went viral on social media and people thought that it was for the entire day. We never expected the kind of response we got. It was only when customers came to pay the bill did they realise that it was zero or one rupee. One lady whose bill was zero first thought it was a mistake, and was then elated!

### But how could someone's bill be zero?

The computer rounds off the prices automatically. So if someone's bill is less than 50 paise, it will automatically make it zero. The lady had ordered idli which cost 20 paise and filter coffee that was priced at 15 paise. When she got the bill, she thought it was a mistake, but when she was told about the special offer, she was so happy! That joy was enough for us. ■



## One India One People Club activities in Mumbai

### Connecting Urban India with Tribal India

A team of eight adivasis from Gondwana, Chhattisgarh were in Mumbai in early September to highlight the serious problems of governance, violence, education, lack of basic amenities, etc., faced by tribals in Central India. The objective was to connect 'Urban India with Tribal India' - both face to face and through a social network. The team visited some of the member colleges of One India One People Foundation and narrated their stories with songs, street play, dance and puppet show. The students and teachers got an opportunity to engage with the adivasis and understand their problems and day to day struggles. To know more about them one can log on to [www.cgnetswara.org](http://www.cgnetswara.org).



Ms. Anuradha Dhareshwar, Editor, OIOP, addressed the students at a lively session at Vivek Vidyalaya High School & Jr. College, Goregaon (W), Mumbai. Watching on is Mr. Pavan Pandey from CGNet Swara



Mr. Pavan Pandey and his adivasi team from Chhattisgarh performing at St. Rock's Junior College of Commerce, Borivali, Mumbai



The session at VPM's R.I. Shah College, Mulund (E), Mumbai. The OIOP Foundation was represented by Mr. Nagesh Bangera (centre, in the group photo)



## Connecting Urban India with Tribal India



The CGNet Swara team performing at Maniben Nanavati Women's College, Vile Parle

## Value Education Workshops by PCGT (Co-ordinators-Ms. Suruchi Pawar and Ms. Rupal Shah)



Kudos Kids Primary and Secondary School, Santacruz



Shri M. M. Pupils Own School, Khar



Jnana Sarita High School, Mulund



Matunga Lions Pioneer English School, Matunga



St. Xavier's Junior College, Vile Parle



S.E.S. English Secondary School, Dahisar



Sheth G.H. High School & Junior College, Borivali



St. Joseph's High School, Kandivli



St. Xavier's High School, Vile Parle



# The city of hope

*The Chennai floods wreaked devastation at many levels, from the properties and belongings that people lost, to the traumatic loss of lives. Amidst this was a bunch of volunteers who worked the social media, coordinated relief efforts, spent hours touring the affected areas and reached relief to the needy. One such volunteer was **Liz Thottan**, who recounts those terrifying days when a city collapsed, but a city also found its soul.*

**T**HE tourist season was just about to commence in Mahabalipuram, a fishing village and a UNESCO heritage site, 60 km off Chennai. In preparation for this I decided to do some brochures and posters of my business there and headed to Chennai to meet my printer and graphic designer. It was a hot sunny day, and I spent three hours working with him, and listening to his horrendous experience of how all the utilities in his house got ruined due to the heavy rains a couple of weeks back. He had subsequently moved his family back to his village eight hours away from Chennai, and was heading to bring them back that weekend, after a thorough clean up of his house.

## When the skies opened up

As I walked out of his office, to my complete surprise, I stepped out into a pouring, rainy day - all within a matter of three hours! My friend called me to hurry up and make it to her house, as the roads were getting blocked due to heavy traffic and there was prediction of heavy rains in the next 48 hours. I got to her house and decided to stay back in Chennai for another day before I headed back to Mahabs (Mahabalipuram) and my business.

Call it fate or destiny, what my city of Chennai witnessed in the next 48 hours, is nothing in comparison to anything I have seen. The rainfall was scary and went on and on for 14 hours.



**A typical scene on Chennai streets after the flood water receded**

This was enough to create enough damage and loss of lives to this city. But the residents of Chennai were not prepared for the release of water from the Chembarambakkam Lake close by. Terrorists use guns to kill, and the authorities of Chennai used water for mass destruction. Without a warning, in the middle of the night, people started to scramble for higher elevation to keep themselves safe from the rising gush of water. Not just water, it was water mixed with sewage from the infamous Cooum River that runs through this city. Now, why would a government do this without any prior warning in a city of eight million inhabitants? We will never have the answers, though there are thousands of speculations.

The city had come to a complete

stand still without electricity, drinking water, food, or network. I was fortunate to have a working internet and could catch some glimpses of what was happening to my city. When there was a short respite from the rains, my friend and I drove around to see what life was like outside. It was then I met Sunder Ramu, a dear friend, and offered to help him. He wanted SUVs and big vehicles to go into heavily flooded roads for rescue. It was this conversation and the fear in his eyes that made me understand the seriousness of the situation. We decided to drive around for another survey of the city and headed straight to Loyola College. I know and have seen the college open its doors for various emergencies in the city. As I went in to meet the authorities, I was taken aback



**A city collapsed, but its citizens rallied around**

to see that the commerce department of the college was already home to 800 homeless and rescued people. It was then I took it upon myself to help this unit in the best way I could. I met the priest heading the unit and told him that I would make him my one-point contact to source supplies for him.

I have always spoken about the power of Facebook. I have had several businesses in the past and my only marketing tool has been the Facebook. So I got working for my city, for my people, for humanity. I could always sit back with a book and enjoy the rains and say, this is not my problem. But I knew inside me, that this was my problem. It was my duty towards the people of a city that I had made home 30 years ago. It was just a Facebook post requesting for relief material to be delivered to my friend's house that started it all. Within three hours I had friends and family getting in touch for lists of things they could supply, and we had a pile of necessities like blankets, mats, sanitary pads, diapers etc.

### A city awakens

In the meantime, Sunder called me to check if I could organise torch lights

and cotton ropes to continue his rescue work in the night. Some of my friends who had just moved to India from the US, witnessing something like this for the first time, went all over the city in search of these lights and by night time, we dropped it at Sunder's studio. Into the second day of the floods, I knew that we were witnessing something very, very strange - an outpouring of humanity for humans and animals. Never have I seen or heard of something like this. The youth of Chennai, the hardcore lovers of this city were restless, how could we help? Where do we start? They were willing to do anything for this city.

My initial focus was Loyola College, to supply food and medicines and all that was required there. The number of people coming into the college had gone up to 2000 by December 2. With the absolutely brilliant networking platform that Facebook provided, I could always say yes, whenever the priest called frantically saying, "Can you send us 2000 lunches and dinners?" It was all about connecting the dots on Facebook, sharing the posts and coordinating the efforts.

I had previously participated in a Disaster Response Team (DRT) training by Deutsche Post DHL and had some knowledge of various aspects of disaster management. I had been chosen to be part of this training by my then company, Blue Dart Aviation. What I learnt is that you can be out there physically rescuing people, you could be the psychiatrist, or the doctor, or the person in charge of sourcing and supplies. With little mobility, and nursing a bad sore throat

and a fever, I chose to focus on sourcing and supplies.

### Beyond Chennai

In between all that work for Chennai, I saw posts of 'Anbodu Kochi' (With love from Kochi) floating around. First the name they chose was so endearing. I had been following their posts and was in awe of their wonderful work. After a week in Chennai I got a call from an NGO in Mahabs that a whole segment of Irula community was severely affected by the floods and have been completely abandoned by the authorities. The volunteers had been so overwhelmed by the gravity of the disaster that hit Chennai that they had no time to think beyond it. That is when I moved to Mahabalipuram on December 6 to set base there and help the relief for the Irulas. A friend in Mahabalipuram offered me a space for storage and to my complete surprise, I got a call from Anbodu Kochi, saying they were going to send me approximately 10 tons of



**Volunteers diligently at work**



relief. This was a big consignment to deal with, but with support from the volunteers in Mahabs which included a few stranded tourists, I managed to deal with it with ease. And then I understood, when many hands come together, no job is too big. We, six of us, offloaded a container of 6 tons in 34 minutes at the break of dawn, 5 am. By 5 pm, 90% of the relief that was offloaded had already been dispatched to Mudichur, (probably the worst hit area in Chennai), the Tamilnadu outreach headed by a social worker from the US, John Curtis Degler, and an independent Spanish lady, who works with a couple of villages on a regular basis.

In the meantime, I got various messages to check on an area which had been cordoned off by gushing water on all sides and 6,000 Irulas were reportedly stranded on four islands. Three of us loaded a truck full of relief, food, clothing, mats and blankets, and headed to check on the Irulas. There I met Deepa, a young woman who runs an NGO from Mahabs. Deepa had already taken over these islands into her fold and was scrambling to find relief and support. These 6000 people miraculously had survived 14 days without a morsel of food. We offloaded our relief at Deepa's house.

One thing led to the next and suddenly I find myself today supplying relief and rehabilitation to the Red Cross, Singapore, supported by volunteers from Chennai headed by Mr. Noor. A friend from Kolkota continues to support me on the rehabilitation part 17 days after that terrible and scary night. Her lead, an NGO in Delhi, is helping with another 10 tons of monthly provision kit that would be distributed in the next few weeks. My ex-boss always told me, "If you take up a job, see it through." And I am going to see it through which will take me a long, long time.

I still have not been able to get in touch with my graphic designer. I



**The supplies sourced through Facebook posts, stacked at a storage place**

wonder what's his story now. Friends talk about trauma, sleepless nights, fear of water and fear of clouds. PTSD (Post Trauma Stress Disorder) is on the rise. Overnight, many of my friends have gone from being middle class to extremely poor. One friend told me he is ₹ six lakh in deficit in 14 hours because there is nothing left in his house including his car. The harrowing death of the ex-armyman and his wife, who got on top of the dining table first and then on top of the chairs on the dining table and eventually to drown, is going to haunt me and millions of Chennaites forever. Muslims serving food to the Hindu priests at the Parthasarathy temple in Triplicane is always going to bring a cheer.

We Indians are way too emotional. And when we are faced with situations like this, we have to keep the emotions aside and think practically. But, there were many times in this one month, I couldn't hold back a tear or two. After all we are still humans and my Chennai is the standing proof Humanity still exists. Sometimes I think we all need levellers like this. To bring us back to earth and remind us to be Humans first. Though harsh, it has brought back my

old Chennai of the 80's. People are kinder, calmer and more friendly.

Everyone today is pointing a finger at the government. But who chose this government? Blame yourself for not standing for your rights, for not fighting for what is right and wrong. We have to stop the blame game and take responsibility for our own actions. Are these people coming out on the streets and protesting today? No. Everyone has gone back to their own jobs. Relief supply has started to slow down. Life is back to normal.

I for one, can very proudly say, I may not be here to correct the world, but given a situation, I did my best in the best way I knew. And there are thousands of unsung heroes today in Chennai, who did exactly what I did. And because of them, I am proud to say, I love Chennai. ■

**In the writer's words:** "In our youth, many of us talk about quitting at 40 and living life on one's own terms. Have you met any such person yet? Here I am. My life as a nomadic wanderer".



# Portrait of a master

*He made calendar paintings an art form and was as well-known for his abstracts as for the publicity designs he created for films. J.P. Singhal was an artist with a difference. Pradeep Chandra profiles this prolific artist.*

**H**AILED as the Raja Ravi Varma of the century, Jayanti Prasad Singhal (1934-2014) popularly known as J.P. Singhal was the highest paid artist of his time, and when he was painting for calendars, the waiting period for his work was a minimum of two years. Since the time he landed in Mumbai till 2002, his paintings were in homes, shops, hospitals, offices and everywhere else that one could imagine. "That is the power of Calendar painting," he told me once. When I asked him why he never exhibited his work, he replied saying, "I don't need to. While most other painters have to exhibit to sell their work, my work is sold even before I paint it."

However, at the end of his career,

he held his first exhibition on Ajanta and Ellora at the Jehangir Art Gallery and only last month i.e., in December 2015, his family hosted a retrospective of his work at the same venue only a couple of months after holding it at the J.J. Institute of Applied Arts. About his work on Ajanta Ellora, Alyque Padamsee once commented, "Not the gloom of depression and negativity but the shadowy world of mysteriousness... an out of earth experience that envelops one like a magic shroud. This is the world that J.P. Singhal has captured...a gift of eternity. The eye speaks directly to the heart. Words constrict the experience. Let these visuals impact your emotional retina. It's as if we are seeing Ajanta Ellora for the first time... As Picasso said,

"It took me sixty years to see life through the eyes of a child. To discover the wonder with which J.P. Singhal saw these paintings and sculptures is to relive history. Truly the dark is light enough."

**Humble background, large canvas**

Born in a middle-class



**J.P. Singhal, the prolific artist**

family in Meerut on October 24, the son of a *halwai* which he was proud of, he once mentioned, "*Kya ameer log meethai nahin khate?*" Singhal once said inferiority and insecurity were his lifelong friends, so when he saw that his drawings attracted his classmates and teachers in school, he decided to take this up as his profession. He was the first renowned painter from this small city and this made him very happy. He got married at the young age of 18 years and his wife Maya was just 16, so he had to think of how to run the family even though he lived in a joint family. Charging ₹ 6/- as fee from each of his students, he opened an art school which eventually became quite famous. Although, as much as he enjoyed and loved teaching art, there came a point where he realised that teaching alone won't support his family's livelihood. So, he began sending his paintings to *Dharmyug*, a Hindi weekly, and in 1954, his first work *Satyavan Savitri* was published which eventually opened the door to success. From here on, he regularly received assignments to illustrate poems of well-known poets



**A rural scene painted by Singhal**



including the likes of Dr. Harivanshrai Bachchan among others, which he was very thrilled to work on. In 1958, he was pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation letter from a client in Dhulia who had seen his work and wanted to meet him personally. A money order of ₹80 was also received as advance travel expense. JP travelled for the first time to Dhulia and to his surprise, the client who was an industrialist, Seth Maganlal Motilal, bought his paintings worth ₹5000. At age 20 years, he had made the biggest sale of his life and on his way back he went to Nagpur where he sold another five paintings and returned to Meerut one happy man. One of these painting was Shiv Puja of which 60,000 copies were printed and then there was no looking back for Singhal, the artist. Singhal received a lucrative job offer from Bombay Fine Arts Offset and Lithoworks at a salary of ₹1500 plus ₹300 rental allowances, and so he shifted his base to the city with his wife Maya and son, Dinesh.

Although, Singhal was not sure if calendar art is what he wanted to do, but that's what he was employed for, and calendar art was the cheapest way of advertising for a lot of companies at the time. A calendar would cost a mere

₹ 2 or 3, but would be in front of people's eyes 365 days a year. After 12 months, if you like the picture get it framed and put it on a wall and Singhal's paintings were so realistic that often it was retained on the walls instead of being discarded after the calendar year.

Another plus point with Singhal was that he used to paint all sorts of subjects across the spectrum like mythology, beauty, nature, tribals, and never limited his works to any typical subject. Top companies like Britannia and Advani Oerlikon would buy his paintings of children and adivasis respectively. In his life time he painted almost 2800 original paintings and worked only with water colour. He would create even an oil painting effect with this colour by adding glue to it and make it look very thick and work with knife as well to render the desired finish to his paintings. Specially *adivasis* or Indian tribal paintings made him famous across the globe and won him



**The renowned Ajanta Ellora painting by Singhal**

to films when Raj Kapoor approached him while making *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* and asked him to conceive an *adivasi* look for Zeenat Aman for the movie. Thereafter, Singhal worked for almost 200 films and made his name in the industry as a top publicity designer.

Once, while working on a calendar painting he called the famous Reza. While in conversation, Reza commented on him being a calendar artist, implying it was inferior work and this made him take up the challenge and JP started painting abstracts to prove that he was much beyond painting for calendars. M.F. Husain, who was Singhal's good friend and for whom Singhal had done the publicity work of the film *Gaj Gamini*, encouraged him to do this. Surprisingly, all his work in this genre too was sold out at the first show held at Jehangir, and this made him immensely proud. Singhal used to say, "I got more than I deserve and beyond my expectations, for which I am thankful to God." ■

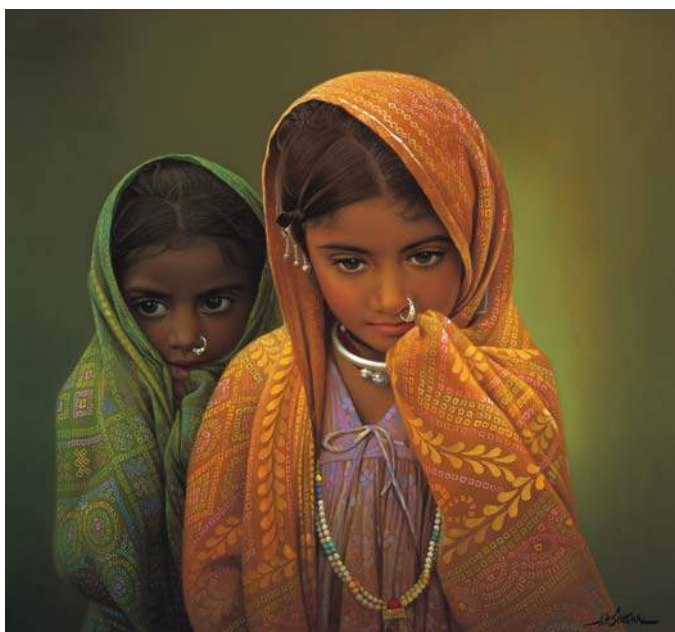


The writer is a photojournalist and an author, and is presently working on a book on J.P. Singhal.

many awards. He felt he was recording a part of history with his work on this subject and did so with first-hand experience by venturing into unexplored rural territories.

### The crossover

There was also a time in his life when he was drawn



**Another 'realistic' painting by Singhal**

# A festival to remember

The 21<sup>st</sup> Kolkata International Film Festival had an interesting mix of films even though the jury had to face certain constraints, says **Shoma A. Chatterji**. She runs through the films which impressed, and those which didn't.

A mixed medley of films in the Indian Select formed one of the three segments which featured at the Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF). One of these was the section on International Cinema. The second was the NETPAC section which featured South Asian films and the third was the Indian Select with 12 regional language films including Hindi, and three Bengali feature films. The average quality of the films in the Indian Select was lower than what one has witnessed at previous KIFFs, which made the judging easier because there was hardly any competition for the citation from the Indian Film Critics Association whose three members formed the jury. But it was also sad because it reflected the less-than-average quality of the films though in terms of subject matter, most of them were original and unique.

The other problem with films chosen to participate in the Indian Select was that they had already bagged the National Award last year which is a top award and therefore, ought not to have

been considered for this competition. The jury kept them out while making their decisions on the winning film. No strict regulations and norms were decided upon during the selection. Even FIPRESCI award winners of the last year were included in the section. The FIPRESCI award is a very prestigious award bestowed by a jury composed of members from FIPRESCI which is an international organisation of film critics, with its head quarters in Munich, Germany.

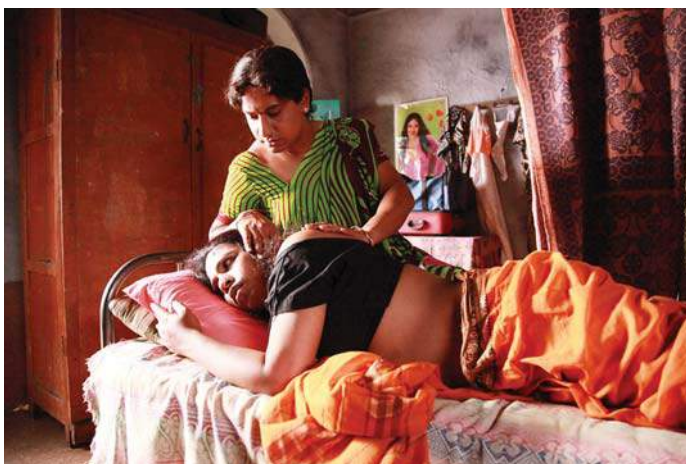
The jury ended up judging eleven films in all because four were excluded for reasons explained above. The language break-up of the 15 selected films was – three films in Bengali, one in Assamese, one in Hariyanvi, two in



***Birds with Large Wings*, a feature-length Malayalam documentary was screened at the festival**

features of biographies, mainly of lesser known individuals who have/had contributed significantly to their chosen channels of interest/endeavour, and set out examples for others to follow. The opening film *Lokabandhu* (Friend of the People) directed by Dhiraj Kashyap from Assam unfolded the life and struggles of Dr. Bhubaneswar Barua who was a physician who rushed to attend to critical patients and helped them in cash or kind if he found them in poor circumstances. But he was also a freedom fighter and a passionate philanthropist. But this film was steeped in long sermons, amateurish screenplay, and theatrically structured scenario, worsened by poor performances. The doctor's supportive wife is so marginalised that she hardly has a line to say.

*Tulasi Apa* (Sister Tulasi) in Odiya directed by Amiya Patnaik is also a fictionalised account of the real life educationist Padmashree Tulasi Munda who rose above her poor and low caste tribal Munda roots and fought her way



***I am not a He but She*, is about young boy who feels imprisoned in his male body**

Kannada, two in Malayalam, two in Marathi, one in Odiya, one Punjabi, one Tamil and one Hindi.

## The roll-call of select films

Several films were fictionalised



through terrible obstacles and problems to help people of her marginalised, impoverished and oppressed class of *Dalits*; she broke through the rural-urban divide effectively to go on and be bestowed with the Padmashri. Enriched by some powerful and convincing performances by the lead characters, the film fails to impress because it takes a very long time to come to the point and the cinematography, though imaginatively conceived, does not come across in lucid imagery.

*Saankal* (Shackle) in Hindi directed by Dedpiya Joshi brings across the terrible truth of a concocted custom among some Muslim communities in Rajasthan. During the Partition, for those families who did not go across to Pakistan, the gender divide got tilted in favour of females. As a consequence, several girls remained single till a relatively older age. To get rid of the stigma that attaches to families where girls are unmarried, these communities devised a new custom of marrying off the girls to very young boys within the community so that there was no community cross over. This meant that a girl of 26 was married off against her will to a boy of eleven. That is just half the story.

After the marriage, this young bride was subjected to repeated rape by the men in her husband's family including the boy's father, uncles and so on with the support of the other women in the same family. *Saankal* narrates the story of one girl who grows to love her boy husband as he grows up, but who cannot rescue her from her torture. She commits suicide. The story sounds very powerful but the film is that much weak in terms of performance, presentation, music, acting and technique. The only good thing about the film is its subject matter and the picturesque backdrop of Rajasthan.

*I am not a He, but She* directed by B.S. Lingadevaru is a touching

story about a boy who feels distinctly uncomfortable and imprisoned in a male body with a woman within him. His increasingly effeminate behaviour, body language and manner makes him a strange person to people close to him, but his empathetic sister tries to help him. But he moves away to the city and

aligns himself with his inner desire to 'become' a woman. The film won two National Awards this year – for best actor (Vijay) and Best Make-up Artist (Raju, Nagara).

*Ghar Aaja Jeetu* (Punjabi) directed by Jaswant Mintu who also edited the film is produced by Dr. Jaswinder Singh Gandhi who wrote the story. Gandhi is a certified addiction specialist working with addiction medicine at the Amrit Drug Readdiction and Research Foundation for many years. "I decided to produce the film for drug addicts, especially for their families, whose lives are destroyed by the act of a single member will stop at nothing to get money for his drugs," says Gandhi. The film stands out because it shifts focus to his two daughters who keep waiting for him to return to normal life. "They are compelled to walk on the razor's edge and continue to burn in the flames of drug addiction though they have not done anything to face this destructive life," Gandhi sums up.

*Pagdi, The Honour* (Haryanvi) directed by Rajeev Bhatia is about an old man filled with ego and dignity. He is humiliated by everyone in the village because his younger son runs away with a rich man's daughter from another caste, which the old man will not agree to even with his life.



A still from *Elizabeth Ekadashi*

Yet, he rises above the social taboo and understands that custom-made laws have outlived their utility and it was time he changed and accepted the lovers with his blessings. The film bagged the National Award for the Best Haryanvi film and the Best Supporting Actress award for Baljinder Kaur in 2015. It is a well-crafted film with realistic insights woven into the commercial format without disturbing the message. But it is packaged commercially for the mainstream market and bends backwards to fit the message into the production values.

*Birds with Large Wings* (Malayalam) is a feature-length documentary directed by Dr. Biju which depicts the after-effects of the spraying of pesticides presented from the point of view of a photographer who visits the affected people and the places several times in search of the truth. The film explores in great detail how people in general and children in particular were so seriously harmed by the pesticide filled with endosulfan which had violated all safety norms leading to distorted growth among kids since the last 12 years. However, the film was kept beyond the jury because it was a documentary film and not a feature film.

*Panhala* in Marathi was not up to the mark and got lost within a maze



**Last Page, which won the Best Film award in the Indian Select section**

of metaphors that did not work while *Elizabeth Ekadashi* is a lovely tribute to the spirit of children to win against odds, but as it had won the National Award already, it had to be excluded. Another film *Mail Runner-1854* (Tamil) held great promise because it followed the journey of a mail runner, the historical precursor to the modern postman who literally ran with his mail bag from

place to place to deliver letters, money orders and so on during the British rule. But it turned out to be a major disappointment because it pretended to sell the usual marketable love, song, romance, adventure, action, villainy and so on, making it a crassly commercial film probably to promote the actor who played the title role and is also the producer of the film. *Ain* (Malayalam) directed by Sidhartha Siva began with the best intentions but fell flat because of the confusing script that rambled this way and that to finally close in where it began, without resolving the issues involved.

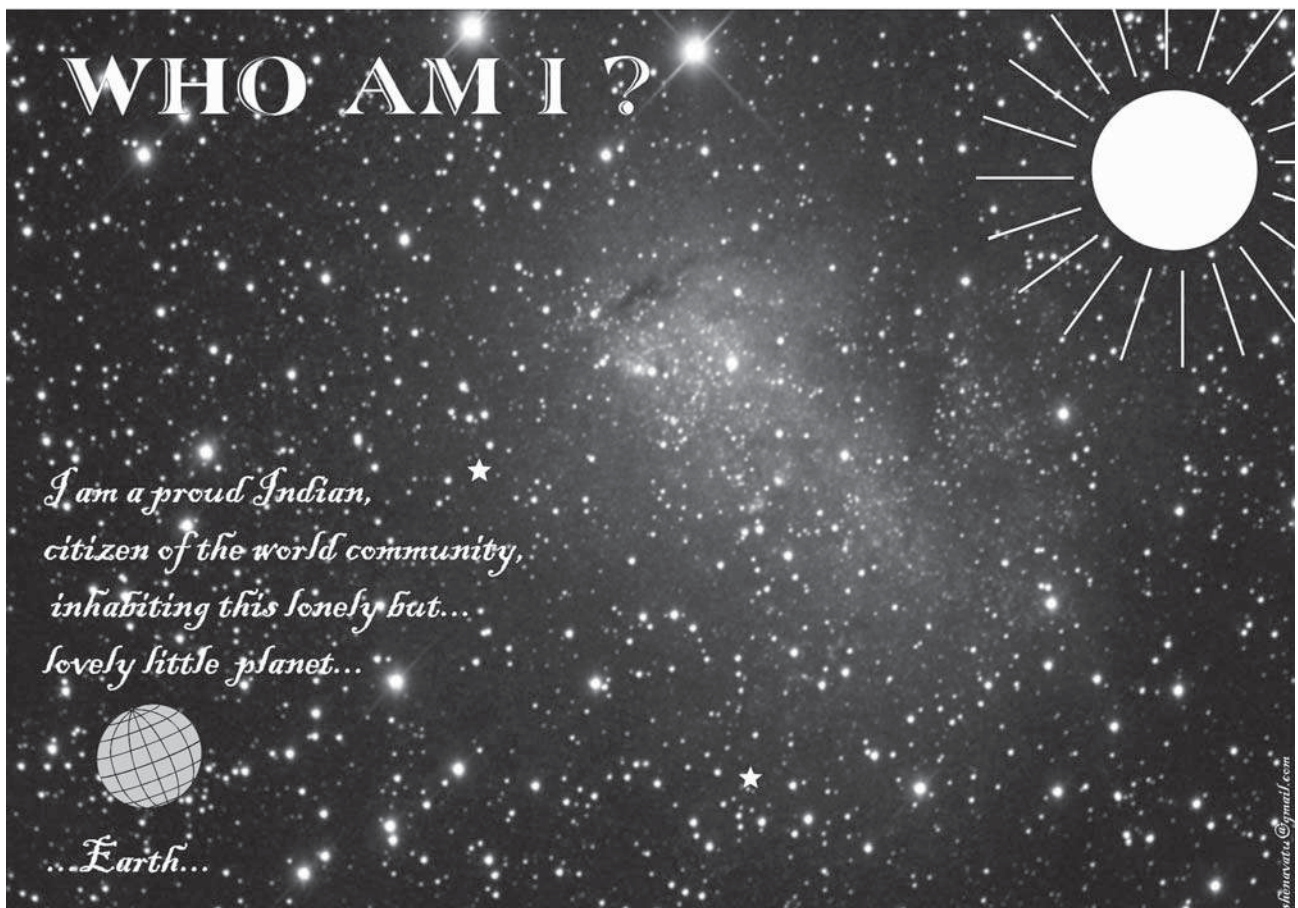
*Last Page* (Kannada) directed by Nikhilmanjoo Lingaiyah won the Best Film Prize in the Indian Select section. It is about an old couple who live alone with the wife doing all the household chores while the husband keeps nagging her endlessly. When he falls sick and has a surgery, he slowly

becomes a different man and prepares for his wife's comfort and livelihood if he were to die suddenly. But it is the wife who dies and he tries to cope by sharing the simple joys of living with the children in the neighbourhood. The message on empathy for senior citizens comes across only through suggestion and implication, and is never loud or crude. ■

The writer 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.



She is currently Senior Research Fellow, ICSSR, Delhi, researching the politics of presentation of working women in post-colonial Bengali cinema 1950 to 2003.





# Women at centrestage

*The Centrestage Theatre lineup in Mumbai featured plays mostly by women writers and directors, a coincidence, says **Deepa Gahlot**, the Curator of the festival. The festival featured interesting and varied themes and subjects, with some splendid acting, stage production and direction.*

**T**HE focus of the NCPA's (National Centre for Performing Arts) annual Centrestage Theatre is the freshness of the line-up. So, a question asked by a particularly diligent journalist, made one notice that yes, a large chunk of the 15 plays in 2015 were written and/or directed by women, and no, it was not deliberate. (The curator (myself) and supporter of the festival, Dr. Saryu Doshi are women).

Even though theatre in Mumbai is not constrained by the commercial concerns that afflict cinema and television, there have been very few female playwrights and directors, which is why such an explosion of talent in one festival came as a surprise. It is not a coincidence then that most of these plays also had female protagonists.

## The emerging female protagonist

Meera Khurana directed *Miss Cuckoo*, (written by Adhir Bhatt and Bobby Nagra) had a most unusual protagonist. Pratibha Rastogi (Seema Pahwa), who prefers to go by her stage name Miss Cuckoo, is brought by her son and daughter-in-law (Aseem Hattangady-Dilshad Edibam Khurana), to an old age home for performing artists called Golden Oldies. She is a sharp-tongued and outspoken woman, who doesn't want pity. When the manager of the home, Chacko (Kashin Shetty), tells her family they can come visit her often, she says, "Why? Don't they have anything better to do?" She admits that she could get along with her daughter-in-law if she wanted to, but their strife spices things up.



A performance of the English play *The Living Room* at the Centrestage Theatre festival (Photo: Narendra Dangiya)

Still, a home for senior citizens is not where she'd rather be, the stage and film star in her craves attention. Much to Chacko's horror, she changes with the windows open, and walks around the corridors in the buff. Being cooped up with other old people does nothing for her morale – she listlessly listens to the radio, reads poetry and gossips with another inhabitant of the home (Khurana), who excitedly carries news of scandalous goings-on.

It is obvious that Miss Cuckoo must have been a hell-raiser in her youth, and that prevented her from reaching the heights of stardom that she deserved; the major male stars did not want to work with her. She says, without any embarrassment, that she doesn't know who the father of her son is – "must be one of the men in the drama company." But in a moment of introspection also admits

that women of her time were exploited, because they did not have a choice.

Normally, people don't expect a senior citizen who could be anything between "70 and 103" to have sex appeal, but Pahwa plays Miss Cuckoo with an unholy glee that proves that age has nothing to do with a woman's self worth, or self image.

## Kalki Koechlin as director and other stories

The protagonist of *The Living Room*, written and directed by the very talented Kalki Koechlin is also an elderly lady of indeterminate age. Ana Nil (Sheeba Chadha) is described as an old lady, but she is astute and fleet of foot, dressed in a lacy white night gown, dozing on her living room couch, oblivious to the thunder and lightning raging outside. She wakes up to find



Death (Neil Bhoopalam) sitting in her ex-husband's chair. This must be a rare play about death that is not gloomy - to begin with death has pale blue skin and is dressed in women's clothes, to comic effect. He explains that is the first time he has a body, and what remains unsaid is that he probably didn't know what to wear.

Ana thinks this strange man in her house must mean she is part of some reality show, and she spends the next few minutes posing for an invisible camera. She also phones her ex-boyfriend Joe (Tariq Vasudeva), who figures out something is not quite right. Then Ana's energetic godson Born Kuber (Jim Sarbh) lands up, he phones Dr. Zeus (also Vasudeva in a Groucho Marx get-up) who finds the patient's lack of pulse and heartbeat odd.

Through the surrealism of the play - the sequence when Ana sees her life flash by (it is believed this is what happens when a person is close to death) which is beautifully choreographed - Ana remains quite unfazed. In the midst of the chaos in her living room, she remembers the ginger cookies in her oven, which even tempt death. She is a woman who has experienced suffering, but her lust for life is undimmed - she has the nerve to tell death that she isn't ready.

7/7/07, directed by Faezeh Jalali, and devised by her actors, is about an Iranian teenager, who was just nineteen

when she was arrested for the murder of a man who tried to rape her. After six years of torture and torment she was hanged in October 2014, despite worldwide protests and appeals for clemency.

Jalali's stunning production, is played out on a bare stage using light and shadows to great effect (lighting design Arghya Lahiri) the only props are the actors' voices and bodies, as the story of Reyhaneh's horror unfolds.

Reyhaneh is alternatively played by all the young women in the cast because she could be any teenager in any part of the world, and victim-shaming would probably be the same. Maybe in a more liberal country she would not be hanged, but the interrogation and humiliation in court would be the same. The cops made her confess to whatever they wanted by beating and torturing her and throwing her into solitary confinement for months on end. Her rather strong defence was ignored by the judge who believed that a man from a religious family could not possibly have attempted to rape Reyhaneh.

Faezeh Jalali intersperses Reyhaneh's trauma in prison, with her interactions with other women in prison, who try to help each other and survive the brutality as best as they can. There are moments of joy snatched from the unrelenting bleakness.

Islamic law allows the family of

the victim to pardon the murderer. Reyhaneh is offered a pardon by Dr. Sarbandi's son, if she will withdraw the accusation of attempted rape against his father. She is offered a reprieve if she does not name him in court. She refuses to change her statement, accepts death with astonishing equanimity for one so young, and writes to her mother asking for her organs to be donated.

In contrast with this tragedy is *The Gentlemen's Club*, a rambunctious production, directed by Puja Sarup and Sheena Khalid, which looks at the underground drag scene, but one in which women perform in male garb. Sarup herself plays a 'Drag King' who performs to Shammi Kapoor hits and Sheena Khalid is a Justin Bieber impersonator. It's a crazy, outrageous world in which women celebrate masculinity.

A dance-drama production of Dharmvir Bharti's epic poem *Kanupriya*, was directed by Minal Joshi, who believed the beautiful work that gives Radha a voice as a woman, not just as Krishna's consort. Heeba Shah attempted to dramatise a Persian poem, and directed a colourful *Parindon ki Mehfil*. *Spaces*, co-written by Noor Baig is about a young woman trying to hold on to her home with its glorious history, against those who want to destroy its beauty for commercial gain. Gurleen Judge directed Ramu Ramanathan's *Ambu and Rajalakshmi*, about two cousins, who have much in common though they lead very different lives.

Only theatre allows such an exploration of ideas and themes...



more power to the women who are proudly moving into the spotlight. ■

The writer is a Mumbai-based film and theatre critic.



# The politics of award *wapasi*

*In light of many Indian intellectuals returning their state awards citing growing intolerance in India, P.M. Kamath writes that such acts have no meaning. In fact, those who are returning the awards are doing so just to show their allegiance to the Congress which gave them those awards in the first place, he alleges.*

THE Government of India and various cultural and educational organisations like the Sahitya Academy since 1950s must have conferred several hundreds of awards from Padmashri to Padma Vibhushan, to various individuals. Men and women in service of the nation, like armed forces, Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and those in Indian Foreign Service (IFS) are given awards year after year for their meritorious service. Pension is given to freedom fighters along with a *Taamrapatra*. The Government also gives awards for best films in various Indian languages. Similar awards are also conferred by the state governments, like Best Teacher awards at different levels like Primary, High School and University. States too have film awards. Karnataka state, created after the states reorganisation, for instance, gives away Rajyotsava awards every year. The list of awards given here by either the Federal government or the state governments is not exhaustive. But these awards are given despite a constitutional provision - Article 18, against such titles. Our politicians accept awards from foreign governments and organisations, which is also prohibited under the Constitution.

## Purpose behind the awards

Why are these awards given then? Governments as an organised body whether alien or native, dictatorial or democratic obviously to survive in power, need public support. India being a vibrant and highly pluralistic

democracy needs such support more than any other country. Equally true is human craving for recognition for individual work. Even saints need and seek such recognition! Life begins for a child with recognition. I have seen how much a child (and the parents) are elated even in preschool when the child is given an award. The crux of the issue is: You do not have any mechanical method to select, but go by subjective criteria. During the 65 years since the Indian Republic came into being, the BJP has been in power only for seven years! For the remaining 58 years, the nation has been ruled by the left of centre parties like the Congress and those who came out from it and became different kinds of left leaning parties - in short, left of the centre forces! The governments formed by these political parties, again mainly the Congress had selected awardees because they served the government of the day well, and awardees were the people close to it. Thus, compared to the team supporting left leaning forces, the BJP promoted team of awardees can be easily defeated by sheer voice vote of the left of the centre awardees!

The awards are given absolutely on the basis of the evaluation of gain to party in power - even if there is some consideration given to the achievement of the awardees, main determining consideration is *apna admi*. Corruption plays a huge role too. I know for sure that awards given to Primary and Secondary school teachers are rigged, with part of the prize money going

back to the politician involved. Another consideration is the need to include religious minority representatives. The same principle works in determining nominees for Karnataka Rajyotsava awards.

Let me take one example. In the 1980s, the then Vice Chancellor of Bombay University brought with her on the Republic Day, a college Principal who was introduced as the higher education winner of the Best Teacher Award. But a few lines spoken by the teacher on that day after the flag hoisting, left me and others present wondering: In what sense was he the best teacher?

## Award *wapasi*

If the award giving on the part of the government has a strong political motive, there is also in return a reciprocal allegiance on the part of those recipients who are now returning them to the present government. Then what are the motives on the part of those eminent men who now return their coveted awards to a government which did not give them those awards to begin with? One fact should be ruled out right in the beginning: That they neither coveted it nor they ever wanted it! If that is so, they would not have accepted them to begin with! They do not subscribe to the constitutional high principle of asking citizens not to seek or accept titles.

Then it means we need to go a little deeper into the likely causes. First point to ponder is that they share the grief experienced by the Congress

(Continued on page 51)

# A survivor's story

*With the increasing assaults and violence against women in India, it is heartening to note that justice was finally done in a gang rape case in Odisha, even if it was delayed justice.*

**Rakhi Ghosh** writes about the incident and how the victim is today a strong pillar of society.

**S**HE is a hardworking government school teacher and an attentive mother and wife today, but she has been through her fair share of hell. The incident that changed Seema's (name changed) life forever happened over 17 years ago on July 2, 1996. She had just taken up a job as a social worker, fighting for the rights of destitute women. On that particular day, she was returning with her older brother and his friend to her village in Delanga sub division in Khurda district, after attending a seminar in Bhubaneswar, Odisha's state capital. As they reached Delanga square late that day, they missed the mini bus that would have dropped them off to their village, so they decided to walk. "I had to attend an interview for a government job the next morning. It was only 6 pm and I was very familiar with the area, so I had no reason to be worried for my safety. We were just a few kilometres away from our village when two persons came up to us and attacked my brother and his friend," she recalls.

Fearing that something was wrong, the young woman fled from the spot. But soon she noticed two other persons following her. They caught up with her and took her to a secluded place where her brother's attackers joined them. From their conversation she gathered that they had severely injured her brother, and she realised that they were planning to do something terrible to her as well. "I tried to resist them but they were young and powerful. All four of them raped me. I was screaming, shouting, but no one came to my rescue. Whenever I recall that incident



**The increase in violence against women is a cause for concern**

even now, I feel that sense of outrage and start shouting to myself, 'Why me? Why me?'" laments the rape survivor, who is in her forties now.

## The long, difficult trek to justice

Of course, the pain and the trauma did not end that fateful evening. That, in fact, was just the beginning of her long ordeal for justice. She had to literally fight not just the system but the society with its cultural stigmas and taboos. In those days, it was not easy for a woman who came from a small village to file an FIR (First Information Report). Her family supported her, but everyone else, including the police, lawyers and the medical community, proved most unhelpful. Her father was clear – he told her that they have to fight back. "When we have done nothing wrong, why should we be blamed?" he stated. She filed the case and all the four accused were arrested and sent to jail.

When the case came up in the trial court, bribes had been paid and there was immense pressure on her to step back. "The accused happened to be the sons or relatives of some very powerful people. Local politicians turned up to force me to withdraw my charges," she recounts.

However, she forged on courageously – until her marriage in 1999. Thereafter, things became tougher. "Being an Odia *bahu*, it was tough for me to fight as a rape survivor. My husband was supportive and had agreed to marry me despite knowing everything. But we live in an unsympathetic society. Sometimes I feel I should not have married. I was burning with the memory of that attack on me every day and every night of my life. Even as late as 2011 they came in search of a mutual settlement. But what was there to settle? How could I forget that dark day in my life?" asks this mother of two children.



Nonetheless, her case remained in cold storage till a young human rights lawyer in Odisha High Court, Prabir Das, filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) for the speedy trial of this long standing gang rape case a few years back. Says Das, "After the Delhi gang-rape incident, the Supreme Court had sent letters to High Courts across the country to expedite the trial of pending gangrape cases in fast-track courts. When I heard about this from a local journalist, I decided to file a PIL on her behalf to ensure that she was not denied justice. Rape violates a woman's human rights and her security in society."

### Justice at last

In February 2013, the Odisha High Court sent a letter to the Khurdha Chief Judicial Magistrate Court asking it to take up the case speedily. After 17 years of waiting, the survivor finally got a chance to demand justice. Remarks Sabitri Mishra, the then Public Prosecutor of the Khurdha Chief Judicial Magistrate Court, "The entire court – even the defence lawyer – looked stunned when she narrated her side of the story. I even

noticed tears in the eyes of some lawyers as she spoke. The judge ruled in her favour and the rapists were sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment. Finally, after 17 years, she got some justice. I must say the woman is very brave and her husband, very supportive. This is really a victory for everybody fighting violence against women."

Looking back on the days just after the incident, Seema pointed out how women like her are often accused of inviting the crime upon them. "People would ask me why was I outside at that time in the first place. It is as if they were accusing me of the crime. During the early days, I just shut myself away in a dark room. Relatives, friends, acquaintances, they all stopped coming to our home. I was generally liked by people who knew me, but once this happened, everyone turned their backs on me. As a social worker I was fighting for the rights of women, but during that time I had lost the confidence to raise my own voice."

Generally, violence perpetrated against women in rural India tends to get very little coverage in the press, although

they too go through the same stress, fear and agony as their counterparts in the city. This survivor had to make a new life for herself in order to cope. She and her husband moved out of their village to a neighbourhood that did not know of the incident. She sometimes gets anxiety pangs over whether the rapists would seek revenge and attack her family, "My daughter is now 12, I want to keep her safe at all costs."

Today, she sees herself not as a survivor, but as a crusader. Whenever she hears or sees a woman or girl being harassed, she rushes to help. She has even filed FIRs against those who harass women. In her capacity as a teacher she educates her students about life and security. She says in conclusion, "Life has taught me a lot. Whenever I see anyone harassing a woman I stand up for her. Whenever I hear or read about a gang-rape case, I just pray that such incidents come to an end some day. As long as I am alive, I don't want others to go through what I have gone through. Only rape survivors know what rape really is." ■

(© Women's Feature Service)

## The politics of award *wapasi*

(Continued from page 49)

Party bigwigs at the loss of power that naturally gave them tremendous power over patronage. That the Congress Party is not able to adjust and accept the reality of loss of power can be well proved. The last 14 months' political behaviour of the party of opposing legislations favoured by it while in power, or obstructing every move in the Rajya Sabha is a sign of that. It is obvious that these award returnees wish to lighten the pain of their patron-saints by returning the gain they had enjoyed all these years after they received the award. Ms. Nayantara Sehgal who was the first to return the award created a psychological impact on others who benefited from the Congress/Left rule.

She enhanced her credibility by stating that she opposed the imposition of National Emergency by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. But it is one thing to be critical of Mrs. Gandhi when power was within the Nehru-Gandhi family, and quite another thing to return the award to discredit opponents of that family.

Of course, to make her action laudable by the ordinary people, who are always a majority, she offered growing intolerance as the reason for her act. Others followed her to toe the line of 'return of award to protest against intolerance!' The only another country comparable to India in plurality of religion, ethnicity, language, regionalism and caste system, is the US. However, in the US there is almost a daily instance of public expression of intolerance, like an attack on a Sikhs or a Muslim.

India however has those diversities

thrice more than that of the US, but with fewer incidents. Those who accuse Indians of being intolerant need to read the statement made by Ted Cruz, the second front-runner in the Republican Party nominations for next year's US Presidential elections. He appreciated the Indian tolerance of Muslims, which has made them moderate in India! ■

**Dr. Kamath, formerly, Professor of Politics, University of Bombay, is currently, Hon. Director of VPM's Centre for International Studies (Regd.), affiliated to Mumbai University. He is an Adjunct Professor in Department of Geopolitics and International Relations. While teaching**



**in the University, he guided a Ph.D dissertation on Terrorism as an instrument of Foreign Policy and an M. Phil thesis on Sri Lankan Ethnic Crisis.**

# In the shadow of drought

*When rains are erratic, especially in areas which practice rainfed farming, and with negligible state support, what do the affected farmers do? Is dire poverty and extreme hunger the end of the road for them?*



**Bharat Dogra**

is a Delhi-based freelance journalist who writes on social concerns.

**G**AHABRA village is located in Naugavan Panchayat (Naraini block) of Banda district (Uttar Pradesh). This village is inhabited mainly by small farmers. The previous *rabi* crop was ravaged by untimely heavy rains at the time of crop ripening, causing around 70% crop loss. This was followed by an almost complete loss of *kharif* crop. The time for sowing the current *rabi* (winter) crop has almost run out, and there is no sign of rain yet. So this village faces an unprecedented situation this year (2015) of almost no *rabi* crop being sown. Shockingly, the protective cover provided by the government has deteriorated. At a time when the need for the employment guarantee scheme is most acute, no work has been provided in recent weeks.

Meanwhile, several workers said that they have not been paid for the work they had done at MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) work sites earlier. The supply of nutrition from ICDS or Integrated Child Development Services (*anganwadi*) is very less. Due to the absence of work, people have migrated in large numbers. Due to the failure of two continuous crops, people do not have any stocks of home grown food now and depend entirely on market purchased food/BPL (Below Poverty Line) food. BPL food is available to only about 20% families and even for them, the food lasts for just about a week or so. About 95% of the people are unable to get enough cereal and salt in adequate quantities to satisfy their pangs of hunger. Pulses are now out of the question. For these families, buying vegetables is also not an option, except once in a while when they prepare a watery curry of potatoes. There is also a great shortage of fodder for animals.

Bipatiya, a woman of this village said, "Hardly any extra nutrition is available for pregnant women and women who

are breast feeding small babies." Other women said that when mothers are themselves so underfed, it cannot be expected that they'll be able to breast feed adequately, and so they try to supplement their own milk with water boiled with rice grains.

Sulkhan Ka Purva is also located in Naugavan Panchayat of Naraini block (Banda district). This village is inhabited mainly by Muslim small farmers. Here too, the previous *rabi* crop failed, then the *kharif* crop failed and now due to drought there is no water to sow the *rabi* crop. People from many families have migrated and others are planning to leave soon. No work has been provided under MGNREGA in recent weeks. Vegetables and pulses are now missing from the diet of the villagers. One young villager said that when he went to a meeting called by an NGO recently, he got to taste *dal* or pulses after a long gap. But a little relief is available to families getting meagre supplies of milk from goats. Cows and buffaloes are giving very low yield of milk (if at all) due to the acute shortage of fodder. Goat milk is very less and so it is diluted with some water to moisten rice and

make the rice more palatable, particularly for children. Instead of going to school, most children go to nearby forests to pick up berries to satisfy their pangs of hunger.

A voluntary organisation Vidyadham Samiti has started a grain bank (*anaaj* bank) and a dry fodder bank (*bhusa* bank) in these villages with the help of Action Aid. The fodder has already been distributed as there was great need and it was also not easy to store it for a long time. The grain bank still has some grains in it. Villagers say these are very good initiatives, but they need to be stepped up. Above all, there is urgent need for rural employment work and drought relief work, which should be started immediately. ■

**Bipatiya, a woman of this village said, "Hardly any extra nutrition is available for pregnant women and women who are breast feeding small babies."**



# A tax to bind us all

*What is GST? What are its pros and cons? A succinct primer.*



**Anuradha Kalhan**

is a Fellow at Teen Murti, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).

THE nation is waiting for another parliamentary discussion on the Goods and Services Tax (GST). The last one was in December 2014 when the Constitutional Amendment Bill to make it possible was introduced. This is perhaps the most important fiscal legislation since the value added tax (VAT) introduced in 2005. This proposed tax will replace all indirect taxes including VAT.

Indirect taxes are the main source of tax revenue for the government. When we purchase commodities and services as final consumers or as producers, included in the bills are familiar taxes like central excise tax, countervailing duty, state VAT, sales tax, service tax, octroi, entry tax, luxury tax, all of which will now be replaced by one GST. That is why a constitutional amendment bill was needed to insert an article in the Constitution making legislation on goods and services taxes a concurrent power of the centre and states. Some of these taxes are levied by states.

Public finance theory recommends limited use of indirect taxes (taxes on goods and services) because the tax is paid equally by all who consume the goods or services, by the rich and poor in the same proportion for every unit consumed. Thus, as a percentage of their consumption expenditure, a poor person will end up paying more taxes. This is detrimental to the principal of equity which requires the rich to pay proportionally more than the poor. Hence, the significance of raising public revenues from direct taxes instead, on income, corporate profit, wealth and inheritance taxes.

Over the past few decades, there has been a tendency to limit and reduce the use of direct taxes. Arguments most commonly held out to support this is that high direct taxes discourage tax compliance and wealth accumulation. The former suggests that the state does not have the political or administrative capacity to collect direct taxes, and the latter is supposed to be detrimental to growth. We are told that whatever is detrimental to growth is damaging to job creation and poverty reduction, besides the income and wealth tax

base in developing countries is supposed to be too narrow for virtuous tax practices. There is overwhelming evidence now that wealth has been accumulating at the top end of Indian society, inequalities have widened and not enough decent jobs have been generated to redress poverty, but indirect taxes continue to remain the top revenue earners. Some would suggest this is the 'trickle up' theory at work.

The stated motivation behind this change in indirect tax regime is to create a single Indian market, unify the system as far as possible across states, sectors and increase the tax base to include all goods and services, as far as possible. This will inhibit states from reducing taxes to attract investments, a tendency that has been harming revenue collections since liberalisation.

It is yet to be determined what rate structure will exist for different commodities and services. A proposed GST Council of representatives from states and centre will determine the details. Will the tax burden on the masses rise when they buy necessities like edible oils, processed foods, baked items, FMCGs (Fast Moving Consumer Goods), internet and mobile phone services? By all accounts, the proposed 18 % tax or thereabouts will make these essentials more expensive. This will be added to the already rising food prices. At 18% GST India will approach the ranks of high tax European countries like UK. The Indian citizen may rightly suspect that she may get nothing at all in return? After all, we are not expanding or strengthening the public health, education, housing or the social security system right now.

On the other hand, nobody doubts that having a unified tax system will improve logistics and the national supply chains for large organised retailers, e-commerce, manufacturers and suppliers. They will save time and money as trucks plying between states move faster with no stoppages or additional taxes at state boundaries. The enhanced public revenues will be used to develop more roads and ports to expand national and international supply chains, further penetrating local markets everywhere. ■



# YOUNG

## Cannes of the Literary World

The Jaipur Literature festival is being held from January 21 to 25.

### SPOTLIGHT

SINCE 2006, the Diggi Palace in the Pink City has played host to the biggest literary event in Asia, the annual Jaipur Literature Festival. Renowned writers and intellectuals from India and around the world gather for lively discussions, debates, question and answer sessions and creative workshops. The festival brings together international literary stars and budding authors on a common platform. Moreover, it promotes an interaction between authors who write in English and those who write in regional languages.

The five-day festival is prestigious, drawing famous people like Ben Okri, Chetan Bhagat, Vikram Seth, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Oprah Winfrey, etc. Readers can not only attend their reading sessions, but also get their personal copies of books signed by the authors. All the events are free. Writers Namita Gokhale and William Dalrymple are the



festival directors. Given the democratic nature and the positive energy of the festival, they call it the Kumbha Mela of Indian and international writing!

### ART BEAT

## Kashmiri folk theatre

IN the beautiful valleys of Kashmir, villagers are entertained by a traditional form of folk theatre called 'Bhand Pather'. Bhand means performer in the local language, while pather refers to a dramatic performance. They are performed in the open around Sufi shrines and Hindu temples by bands that travel from village to village during harvest time.

Bhand Pather traces its origins to medieval times when



Kashmir saw many foreign invasions. The plays expressed the people's feelings of alienation and oppression at the hands of their foreign rulers.

In modern times, the plays are usually satirical or humorous in nature, highlighting social issues. The plots centre on cruel kings, priests and other members of the ruling class who exploit the common man.

A performance begins with the nasal strains of a *shehnai*-like instrument called *swarnai*. The musicians play the *dhol*, *nagara* and the *thalij* (cymbals) to the accompaniment of Kashmiri folk songs. Then enter the *maskaras* or jesters — the main performers who bring the stories to life with their lively routines blending song, dance and acting. In the play, the actors lampoon the tyrannical characters using mimicry and buffoonery and then take on the role of rebels who oppose the oppressor.

A lot of the action is impromptu — the actor may climb onto a tree or the roof of a house at the spur of the moment. Bhand Pather thus spreads inspiring messages of empowerment through simple entertainment.



## STORY

## The Honey pot

Rambharosey's old mother gave him a pot of honey before leaving for Varanasi and asked him to keep it carefully. "Guard it well," she said, "this is good honey, it will keep me healthy after I get back."

Rambharosey kept it in the corner of the barn. Next morning, when he went in to get some hay, he saw that the pot had cracked and some ants had found their way into the honey. "Oh dear," he said, "now what should I do?" He stood in the barn and thought hard. Then he got a big, shallow pan from the kitchen, filled it with water, and put a flat stone in the middle. Then he stood the pot on it. "There," he said, pleased, "I have created a moat around the pot. Now the ants cannot get at it."

So much thinking put such a strain on

Rambharosey that he forgot to cover the pot.

The next morning, he came into the barn and saw some dead flies around the mouth of the pot. "Oh dear," he said, "now what should I do?" And he stood in the barn and thought hard. Then he brought his finest fishing net from the house and covered the mouth of the pot with it. "There," he said, "now let's see how the flies get at it."

All this thought put such a strain on Rambharosey that he forgot to shut the window of the barn. That night, maddened by the smell of honey, a bear came to the barn and tried to break down the door.

The next morning, when Rambharosey saw the scratched and



battered door, he sent for the village carpenter and locksmith who built him a new door and fixed a shiny new lock on it.

That night, a band of thieves passing by saw the shiny new lock and thought, "Rambharosey must be rich. He keeps his money in the barn." So they broke open the lock and entered the barn. Finding nothing, they went away, disappointed. The next day, Rambharosey saw the broken lock and said to himself, "This won't do." So after getting the lock fixed, he posted a lathi-wielding guard in front of his barn door. The people went and told the King, "Rambharosey has hired a guard to look after his barn." "Hmmm," said the King, "Rambharosey must be rich." And he increased the tax Rambharosey had to pay.

"Rambharosey is rich," everybody said, "do you know how much tax he pays to the King?" The richest merchant in town heard this and he was so impressed that he quickly went and got Rambharosey married to his daughter.

But the barn door is locked, and the guard is still guarding the door, and Rambharosey refuses to open the door until his mother gets back.



## SPARKLER

### Scotching a Rumour

One day a stranger stopped the American multi-millionaire John D. Rockefeller in the street and began relating his problems to him.

"I walked 20 miles to see you, Mr. Rockefeller," he said, "and everyone I met on the way told me you were the most generous man in New York."

Rockefeller knew the man was going to ask him for money.

"Are you going back the same way?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Will you do me a favour?"

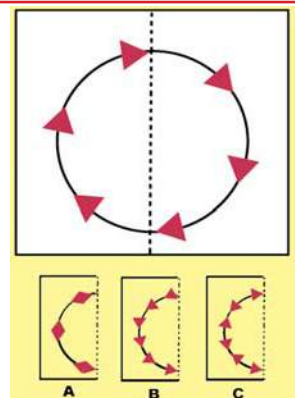
"Certainly, Mr. Rockefeller," said the man. "What is it?"

"Will you please deny the rumour for me?"

## PUZZLE

### Visual thinking

If you draw this figure on a tracing paper and fold the paper vertically, which figure from the following options would you get?



Answer : C

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# HOMAI VYARAWALLA

Pioneering chronicler and photographer (1913-2012)

It was common for the Films Division Newsreel to screen the arrival of Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru from his travels. As he was shown disembarking from the plane, a battery of photographers waited on the tarmac to receive him; amongst them a solitary female figure stood out – sari clad or some times in a dress – camera cocked to grab that one signature shot of her favourite subject – Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

India's first woman press photographer Homai Vyrawalla, captured the last days of the British Empire in India right down to the departure of the last Viceroy. She was a key visual chronicler of the post-Independence era. India's first woman photojournalist ironically received less attention than the Indian work of her international contemporaries – Henri Cartier-Bresson and Margaret Bourke. She was the only professional woman photojournalist in India during her time, and her survival in a male-dominated field has to be lauded.

Born into a middle-class Parsi home in Navsari, Gujarat, Homai grew up in Bombay and was the only girl in her class to complete her matriculation! She learnt photography from Maneckshaw (she called him Maneckji) Vyrawalla, later her husband. Her training at the Sir J. J School of the Arts, Mumbai influenced her visual sense as did the modernist photographs she studied in second hand issues of LIFE magazine. Her early portraits of everyday urban life and modern young women in Mumbai show these influences; but since Vyrawalla was unknown and a woman, these were initially published in the *Illustrated Weekly* and *Bombay Chronicle* under Maneckshaw's name!

In Delhi, she joined the British Information Services. There she photographed a significant meeting when Congress members voted for the Partition of India. Vyrawalla also documented events leading upto Independence, the building of dams and steel plants and the state visits of the most famous names in 20<sup>th</sup>-century history, including Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ho Chi Minh, Marshall Tito and Russian leaders Brezhnev and Khrushchev. Vyrawalla captured the first entry of a young Dalai Lama into India for *TIME-LIFE*.

High-society magazines like *Onlooker* and *Current* requested her for "pictures of good looking women." Not surprisingly, they published large spreads on the visits of Queen Elizabeth I and the US First Lady Jackie Kennedy. Her most significant contribution as a photo-journalist was the first Flag hoisting at the Red Fort on 15 August 1947; and funerals of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri. She had also covered the visits of Queen Elizabeth and the former US President Dwight Eisenhower.

Homai often recapitulated that during the day she photographed politicians and leaders; in the evening she covered social events that were held in Delhi.

At a time when candid photography was favoured, she got the best shots. Her favourite subject was Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, who she caught in playful and vulnerable moments. Ironically, her most famous photographs of Gandhi were taken during his funeral in 1948. Vyrawalla loved black and white, and she processed her own images and believed that the choice of monochrome preserved them for posterity. And more than 50 years later, it's easy to see why.

The bonhomie she shared with her colleagues, allowed them to request each other for a frame – "*Ek frame mere liye.*" In case of multiple assignments, they kept one frame to share with someone. The newer crop of press photographers who scuffled for a shot, and the marked presence of policemen and barricades at political meetings distancing the photographers from the leaders in the 1970s augured retirement, albeit premature, for Homai Vyrawalla.

After a career spanning 33 years which traced the birth and growth of a new nation, Homai was disillusioned, as the Nehruvian dream began to falter. The day a policeman asked her to move away from the barricade at a public meeting of the then PM Indira Gandhi, the First Lady of Indian Photography immediately shut her camera and put it away, with an air of finality. ■

– Piroj Wadia is a veteran film journalist.





## K.F. RUSTAMJI

A visionary policeman (1916-2003)

**R**USTAMJI was born on 22 May 1916 in Kamptee near Nagpur, and had his early education at St. Francis de Sales school. He later passed M.Sc. (Zoology) in 1936, standing first in the Nagpur University, and worked as Demonstrator in the same college for two years. He topped the examination for selection to the Indian Police (also sometimes referred to as the Imperial Police) in 1938 from the State of Central Provinces (presently known as Madhya Pradesh). As Assistant Superintendent of Police in 1942, he courageously dealt with the riots during the Quit India movement and was awarded the Police Medal for exemplary service. In 1947, he was posted as Superintendent of Police to Akola which is on the border of the erstwhile Hyderabad State. He took part in the Hyderabad Police Action for integrating the State into the Union of India. After a tenure as DIG (Deputy Inspector General) at Aurangabad, he was assigned the task of Chief Security Officer to Prime Minister Nehru in 1952.

In 1958 he was appointed Inspector General (IG) of Police, Madhya Pradesh. Armed dacoits had been thriving in the Chambal region for a long time. He used to keep a list of the gangs on his table and would cross out a name as he was eliminated or arrested. Acharya Vinoba Bhave who had the support of President Dr. Rajendra Prasad tried to convert the dacoits to a peaceful life. This caused a setback to the good work being done by the police and Rustamji criticised the approach of Acharya Bhave and had to face an enquiry. The people supported him and his honour remained unsullied. The police continued to eliminate the formidable gangs. He was awarded the Indian Police Medal for Distinguished Services in 1958.

Prior to 1965, the state police was responsible for the security of the Indo-Pakistan border. The inadequacy of this arrangement was realised when Pakistan attacked three posts in Kutch on 9 April 1965. The Border Security Force was raised under the Ministry of Home Affairs for security of Pakistan border on 1 December 1965, and Rustamji was

appointed Director General of this organisation. BSF was made responsible for Indo-Pakistan land border and check transnational crime including smuggling. The immediate task was to ensure security of installations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and check cross-border movements there. Some of the Armed Police battalions located there were made available to him, since BSF had no troops of its own then. Gradually, BSF raised its own force which expanded to 240,000. The presence of this force promoted a sense of security amongst the border people. The BSF capabilities were well-used in the

Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. It was made responsible for training and supporting the Mukti-Bahini operations. Awami League leaders were invited to Delhi and later to Calcutta. Rustamji selected Mujibnagar from where liberation of Bangladesh was to be proclaimed. Along with the Army, the BSF undertook the stupendous task of looking after the refugees coming in large numbers. The officers and men fought with great courage and bravery, capturing many Pakistani posts on their own. The BSF personnel won one MVC, four KCs and eleven VrCs. Rustamji was honoured with the Padma Bhushan award in 1972.

He retired from the BSF on 31 May 1974 and was appointed Special Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs where he structured the Indo-Tibetan Border Police and Central Industrial Security Force. He recommended formation of Coastal Guard for patrolling the maritime borders and set up the National Police Commission. He became a member of this Commission from 1978 to 1983, and visited Bihar. He exposed the condition of under trials who were being kept in jail for long periods without a trial. His articles in the Indian Express were the basis for the first Public Interest Litigation (PIL) as a result of which 40,000 prisoners were released all over India. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1991, the highest award that a policeman had received so far. He passed away on 2 March 2003. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd)



# M.S. VISWANATHAN

The King of Melody (1928-2015)

**M**ANAYANGATH Subramanian Viswanathan who passed away recently was known to the film industry as M.S. Viswanathan or simply by his initials MSV, and was hailed as 'Mellisai Mannar' (King of Light Music). He held sway over the world of film music and worked as a composer in over a thousand Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Hindi films, though most of his compositions were for Kollywood, as Tamil cinema is often called. A self-taught musician who had a keen ear for music right from birth, MSV gave his first performance on the harmonium at the age of thirteen and due to the strained financial circumstances of his family, later joined music troupes as an errand boy.

His talent and flair for music however caught the attention of veterans like S.M. Subbiah Naidu and C.R. Subburaman, famous composers of the time, and they soon took him under their wing. MSV who had by then become an expert at playing the harmonium soon picked up the nuances of music, both light and classical from the masters, and his acquaintance with his orchestra mate and violinist T.K. Ramamurthy resulted in their coming together as a duo, christening their partnership as Viswanathan-Ramamurthy.

A spate of films directed by veteran director Bhimsingh for which the poet laureate Kannadasan penned the lyrics, received a marked fillip thanks to the melodious tunes set by Viswanathan-Ramamurthy with the numbers sung by playback singers T.M. Soundararajan and P. Susheela turning out to be chartbusters. The pair had an unblemished record of scoring hits with every single film they signed and faced little competition from their contemporaries. The sensational music in the film *Aayirathil Oruvan* starring M.G. Ramachandran and a teenaged Jayalalitha was the last film that they scored music for, and after that they went their separate ways.

Although T.K. Ramamurthy too was not short on talent, it was Viswanathan who emerged more successful after the split and from 1965 to 2014, when he finally bid adieu to films, his compositions continued to rule the roost in Tamil cinema. And as superstar Rajanikanth observed in a tribute

on his demise, MSV's music was instrumental in ensuring the success of actors like MGR and Sivaji Ganesan and even highly successful directors like Sridhar and Balachander.

Viswanathan worked with almost all the major producers and directors of his time and also shaped the careers of a host of playback singers right from T.M. Soundararajan, Seerkazhi Govindarajan, P.B. Srinivas, Yesudas, S.P. Balasubramaniam and the supremely talented female singers like P. Susheela, S.

Janaki, L. R. Eswari and Vani Jairam.

One of his most illustrious contemporaries K.V. Mahadevan had earned a reputation for his prowess in scoring music for mythologies, a rage during the olden days and critics of MSV felt that this was one genre that the latter could not get the measure of. MSV silenced the Doubting Thomases with his brilliant compositions in the B.R. Panthulu directed *Karnan*. Although the arrival of music marvel Ilayaraja on the scene all but eclipsed MSV's career towards the fag end, Raja who considered MSV as his mentor, joined forces with him to score the music for the film *Mella Thiranthathu Kanavu*.

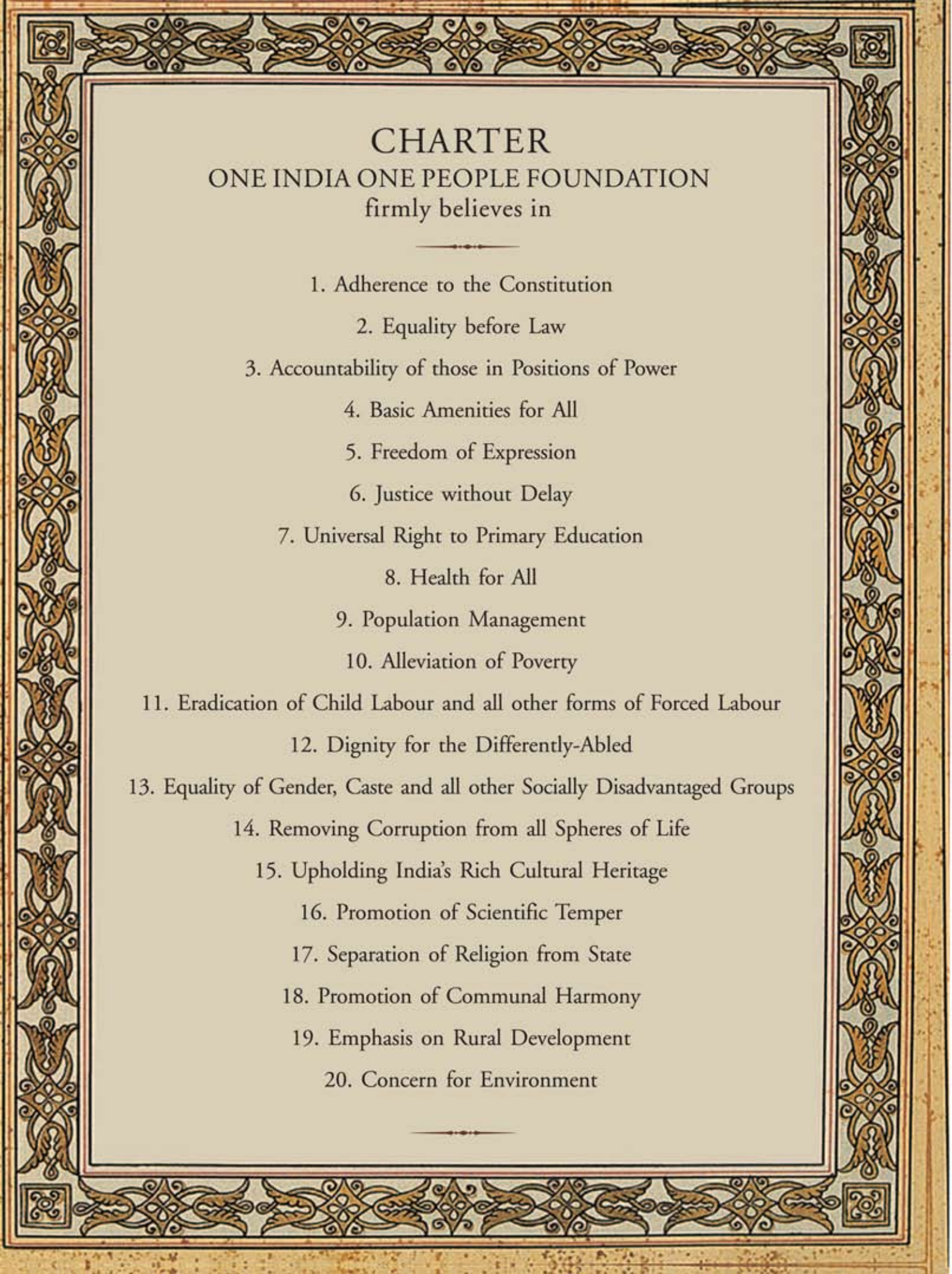
Viswanathan was also a highly rated singer. *Sollathan Ninaikiren Allah Allah*, *Inbathilum Thunbathilum*, *Vidai Kodu Engal Naade* were some numbers that he crooned with consummate ease and great finesse with the rich timbre of his voice adding a lot of pep to the songs. Not many know that the maestro had aimed for a career as an actor before he found his true calling in music and MSV could fulfill this desire by doing cameos in a number of films like *Kadhal Mannan*, *Kadhala Kadhala*, and *Rojavanam*. Although MSV won a number of state awards in his long and eventful career, national honours eluded him but that hardly troubled the musical genius. However, there is not even an iota of doubt that his music will forever reign in the hearts of his fans all over the world for all times to come. ■

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

(Sketches of Great Indians by C.D. Rane)







# 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

(October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1930 – February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE