

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

## India's Heritage



**Long live heritage**

**Naturally yours**

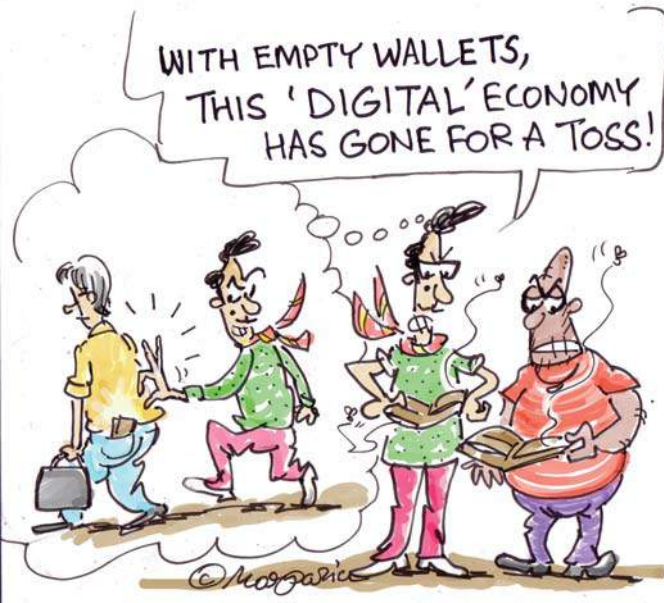
***Flowing since time***

**FACE TO FACE**  
Priya Poduval

**KNOW INDIA BETTER**  
Nothing official about it!  
Inheriting the unsung

Great Indians: Lt. General S.K. Sinha, PVSM / Prof. M.G.K. Menon / M.Balamuralikrishna

## MORPARIA'S PAGE



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Priya Poduval

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### “Why harass the common man?”

Black money is often invested in land, gold and other things and deposited in tax havens such as Switzerland. This sudden announcement has certainly led to chaos and confusion all over the country. It would have been ideal to announce the date of demonetisation in advance, as was done in 2014 regarding notes printed before 2005. This would have saved the common man from the chaos inflicted upon him. The demonetisation move might, at first glance, appear to be a good way to control black money and crack down on fake notes, but it is hindering people's day-to-day lives. The rich and powerful people, whose money is stashed away in tax havens, are having a hassle-free time while the common man/woman like you and me are suffering.

It is also a very good decision by the Central Government that ₹ 2.5 lakhs can be withdrawn from one's bank account if a marriage is performed in the family by showing adequate proof like a wedding card, etc. But the restrictions that one

should produce receipts are entirely baseless. In the first place, why restrictions on withdrawing one's own money from one's own bank account? It is our own hard-earned money which we have earned since the time we were 18 years of age and not Narendra Modi's money. Why harass the common man? On the other hand, demonetisation of ₹1000 and ₹500, though had been introduced to wipe out black money, the fact is that more than good, it has proved to be a bad decision for the common man/woman and hence to the nation.

– Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai

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## WHO AM I?

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



*Earth...*



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# Past is the new Now!

*We must hark back to our legacy, even as we guzzle down a cola or gobble up the triangular wedge of junk, declares **Nivedita Louis**. Are you listening?*

**H**ERITAGE – the new fad that is in. Most people who I meet these days are ‘cool’ as they talk about millet *dosas*, finger millet porridge, foxtail millet *kheer* and the various paraphernalia that go with these dishes. The names and the supposed medicinal qualities of these newly embraced greens and millets are all Greek and Latin to me. As I raise a toast to the rediscovered heritage foods, in all earnestness I agree – the taste buds in my tongue rebel and jump off my tongue in utter disbelief.

The sight of banana flower *vadas* look so enticing, all crispy and rich texture, but can I say the same for the millet *dosas* that resemble grandmother’s handmade cow dung patties? We Indians have specific tastes. South Indians can go to the moon and back if they get piping hot *sambar* and up North, the childhood diktat learnt is *roti, kapda aur makaan*, always in that order.

Give us burgers, give us pizzas, we gulp them down in the malls as if the apocalypse is approaching. The moment we set foot into our homes, the first thing that we ask – “Mom, where is my *sambar*?” We believe a bowl of rice can only complete our day, not a round, sticky, expensive ‘dosa’ called pizza. Our *moksha* lies in licking our fingers high and dry off the last drop of mom’s fish curry, not the ‘finger licking good’ mutant chicken that had hatched in Pennsylvania five years ago!

We guzzle down Pepsi and Coke with equal fervour as our *kattanchaaya*. A *sulaimani* after a hearty *biryani* on any given day would be our choice, after a diet coke, of course. We have become gluttons – the fad of the new millennium is still pushing colas and Macs down our throats in public spaces. To appease the Mother God we do dutifully gulp down whatever is handed over to us in a platter. There is a new generation of backpack wielding heritage enthusiasts who go hunting for a little bit of history and heritage. Few walks and lot of talks later, they still would be trying to figure out who made the first flight – the prototype of Wright Brothers or

our own Pushpak Viman? Anything that is remotely labeled as ‘Indian heritage’ sells at a premium.

There is another team of jet-setting women who are trying to ‘revive’ the saris of India. Look around for these fashionistas who make a killing, mediating between sellers (who still suffer in abject poverty), and the eager buyers. Heritage sells. It is the new ‘packaging’ of a product. Tout anything as Indian and a legacy – the sheep blindly follow.

The only sane inheritance that I have is probably my plus size figure. There, I said it!

Overseeing the money-minting part, it is indeed refreshing to see youngsters in quest of heritage. The love for anything that is antique is a thirst by itself. It pushes one beyond one’s normal limits in search of the past. I still can’t get to my roots – has anyone tried to get the names of our forefathers two generations back? I bet, we cannot go beyond three or say four generations. Following what they ate, how they worked, science behind their practices – it is all interesting. We have been aping the West for a long time and by now, we have started realising the world didn’t exist in London alone, few centuries ago.

The tales and fables told by our grandmothers and grandfathers, the native harvest songs, the local deities and the story behind each of them, the lone pillars in remote areas that were raised centuries ago, temples and their history, architecture of bygone era – everything fascinates us. It is time we kindle the same interest and keep it alive, document whatever we have and pass it on. Legacy

is of course what our children get from us in the passing. Let them not think the whole world ate pizzas and read Homer! ■

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**The sight of banana flower *vadas* look so enticing, all crispy and rich texture, but can I say the same for the millet *dosas* that resemble grandmother’s handmade cow dung patties? We Indians have specific tastes.**

# Long live heritage

*What is heritage? Is it a habit, a monument, a song, a story, a vintage dress, photographs, a ritual or just a tale handed down over generations? **Vithal C. Nadkarni** tells us it is all this and more. It is humanity's collective birth right, he says.*

**S**O you thought genes were the only things you inherit? What about those vintage jeans (pun intended) you 'inherited' as hand-me-downs when your sibling flew off to Lady Liberty's Land? The word 'Heritage' comes from the old French word *heriter* which refers to "that which may be inherited".

As applied to an individual, heritage would cover your father's antique pocket watch, your mother tongue and grandmother's heirloom jewellery. Collectively, heritage would include such awe-inspiring beauties as the Taj Mahal or the monolithic marvel called Sri Kailasanatha temple at Ellora.

## All things big and small

But heritage does not necessarily have to be big and brash; bold and beautiful. Nothing is too small, insignificant, remote or too drab when it comes to culture and heritage. Literally, everything is grist to the heritage mill. By that token, heritage is to be found in the Mumbai CST building, which bristles with gargoyles, domes and spires.

Heritage resonates in the *ragas* of Haveli sangeet and in *sakis* and Sufi *qawwallis*; not to forget the *dhuns* of the Nathas and *kirtans* of Gurubani. Proverbs, recipes and all our quaint ways of doing things or not doing things (like the way a Gujarati woman drapes her sari versus a Coorgi or a Parsi), everything is worthy of being branded as 'heritable baggage' of humans.

Faced with such a grand vastness of things and non-things inheritable, "heritage" inevitably turns into a protean term of gargantuan proportions. This brings to mind St. Paul's astonishing metaphor of "becoming all things to all people" (in order to save the souls of some by all possible means). We

should, however, remember that what's 'heritage' for one generation may not necessarily be so hoary or meaningful for another.

Also, it would be impossible to save all (heritable) things for all time. For Time is a mighty leveler. How mighty can be seen from Percy Shelley's well-known poem *Ozymandias*: In 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II calling himself "King of Kings", ruled over a vast empire. By Shelley's time, nothing remains of Ramses's giant statue except a shattered bust, a noseless eroded visage and "trunkless legs" surrounded by "nothing" but "level sands" that "stretch far away". Shelley is thus alluding to our fragility and the fate of artefacts and cultivated things that count for our heritage.

But hold on. Not everything is lost. We still have the heritage of the Pharaohs in the form of the poem. So how did they recover the Pharaoh's identity from his statue? Through language of course; because of the inscriptions on the pedestal – "I am Ozymandias, King of Kings; if anyone wishes to know what I am and where I lie, let him surpass me in some of my exploits".

## The keys to conserving heritage

Language and memory are the keys to inscription, re-visitation and resurrection. This ensures

continuity in the face of inexorable change. Of course technology helps. As does economy. Or more specifically, moolah, slang for what the good doctors of charity and endowment would refer to as Vitamin M. The regular infusion of this is recommended for the continued cultural health of our body politic!

Let's consider some specific examples. How many of you





know a *bhajan* called *Raghupati Raghav Rajaram*? Well, you also ought to be flattered to know that the same song was also a favourite of Mahatma Gandhi. Now let's see how many of you know the exact words of the first line of this iconic song? *Raghupati Raghav Rajaram / Patit Pavan Sitaram*. I admit I did not have to Google this because I learnt the lines in childhood. But what if I hadn't learnt the song? It doesn't matter because I am still able to access it thanks to YouTube. The video-sharing website has several versions of the *Raghupati Raghav* song. Their existence on the internet can therefore be cited as an example of successful preservation of our collective musical heritage.

Now a caveat. There is more to preservation of heritage than number of hits or blind TRPs. The *Raghupati Raghav* song, for example, has a fascinating history that is not recorded on YouTube. Moreover, the commercially recorded version available on the site does not preserve the entire song.

You have to go to Wikipedia to discover that this commercial version sung by Pandit D.V. Paluskar was set to music by his father, the visionary musicologist Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. The fact that this song was sung by Gandhi and his followers during their 24-day Dandi Salt March is what makes it a historically significant piece of our collective cultural heritage.

But the Wikipedia only reveals a partial genealogy of *Raghupati Raghav*. The lyrics favoured by Bapu were adapted from an "original Hindu text Shri Nama Ramayanam written by Lakshmanacharya".

By digging elsewhere one finds that Lakshmanacharya was a Sri Vaishnava devotee. He collated the 108 names of Sri Rama, ostensibly in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, by placing the names chronologically as in the cantos composed by the first poet (AdiKavi) of Sanskrit, Valmiki.

But who changed, "*Sundaravighrahameghashyam/ Ganga tulsishaligram*" to "*Isvar Allah tero naam/ sabko sanmati de bhagwan*"? The name of that anonymous poet eludes your humble writer despite considerable sleuthing and prowling done in the highways and back alleys of a most magical place known as Scriptland!

All I can say at the moment is we need to celebrate the unsung genius of this ecumenical master. For it heroically strives to bind India into one nation and its citizens of diverse

faiths into one people (just as this magazine does), regardless of whether they follow Allah or Ishwar!

Now let us return to the digital *avatar* of Paluskar's *Raghupati Raghav Rajaram*. He too departs from the "Ishwar/ Allah" text only to take it back 700 years. He does so by beginning his one-line chant (which is taken up by a chorus to a crescendo) with a Sanskrit verse. Now this by itself is a *tour de force* of cultural revival: for the verses, which are set to the Hindustani *raga* Jaijaianti, were composed by Sri Sharangadeva, a Kashmiri prodigy from the Devagiri Yadava royal court of early 13<sup>th</sup> century. In his chant, Sharangadeva celebrates pure sound or *Nada*, which he says, is nothing but the universal life force (*Chaitanyamsarvabhutanam*), which produces bliss or Ananda to first capture and then liberate the listener! Alas, Paluskar's three-minute song preserves just the first four lines from Sharangadeva's encyclopaedic 'Ocean of Music' (*Sangita Ratnakara*).

To get to the full lyrics of the prose-poem you still have to go to the hard copy in the brick-and-mortar world; to the two-volume edition of Sharangadeva's magnum opus, which is available as a Maharashtra government publication. Incidentally, Sharangadeva occupies such a stellar place in India's music heritage that a living maestro of the calibre of Pandit Jasraj thought it fit to name his son after the Kashmiri master.

The moral of the story here is when it comes to heritage preservation, we don't have the luxury of a single one-shot, one-size-fits-all 'solution'. You need the Internet and its prodigious archival power. You also need brick-and-mortar libraries and their serried racks upon racks of mouldering books. But most vital of all, you need embodied human consciousness and its curiosity, its thirst for knowledge and nostalgia. You need faith in the power of the mind over matter, which essentially defeats the inertia of oblivion to preserve culture and heritage as humanity's collective birth-right. ■



Vithal C. Nadkarni is a senior consulting editor and columnist with the Times of India Group of Publications. He is also a fellow of the London-based 21st Century Trust and a recipient of the US-based Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship.

### The Darjeeling Toy Train

One of the great attractions of Darjeeling is the Toy Train of Darjeeling Himalayan Railways (DHR), which has been accorded the UNESCO World Heritage Site status, along with the Nilgiri Mountain Railway and the Kalka-Shimla Railway. DHR operates on narrow gauge tracks and provides an important transport link to various parts of Darjeeling hills and lower plains. While the diesel engines used these days are faster and more powerful, the original steam engines still operate in some sections of DHR and also for joyrides. Built between 1879 and 1881, the railway is about 78 kms long. Its elevation level varies from about 100 metres (328 ft) at New Jalpaiguri to about 2,200 metres (7,218 ft) at Darjeeling. The headquarters of the railway is in the town of Kurseong.

# India is heritage!

*Indian heritage is a much-banded term. After travelling in other continents, Europe notably, **Akul Tripathi** is convinced that more than India's heritage, we should be celebrating the concept of India itself as heritage! He supports this with many examples.*

FATE is perhaps just a subtle message from the all-seeing unconscious that escorts the unsuspecting seeker to the fractal of a truth that he otherwise may never have had the audacity to uncover. It usually unfolds itself into grand patterns from a seed incepted so surreptitiously that from whence a thought becomes the experienter's reality can never be accurately discerned. However, it sometimes does this so callously, maybe in desperation to be acknowledged at least, if not appreciated; that it can be reduced to something as pedestrian as coincidence.

It could be coincidence then that the call to write on 'India's heritage' hit me smack in the mailbox when I was many miles away from India – eager to explore the hallowed heritage of Europe. Even though I optimistically banished the crippling thought of this deadline to a timeline that has made Mission Impossible seem like a walk in the park, just the exposure to that seemingly innocuous, unabashedly flaunted, terribly underappreciated and rarely truly understood term 'India's heritage', sparked the beginning of a latent chain reaction, where each brush with heritage in those travels birthed a domino.

And this is where they all fall...

## On a cold day in Prague...

It began in Prague with tourists flocking and marvelling the Gothic architecture that eerily resembled the facade of Wilson College, my alma mater and a host of other buildings I have grown up knowing as picture postcards of Mumbai. The Christmas markets of Vienna could well have been at the steps of Mount Mary in Bandra (a suburb of Mumbai), and even in Brno, they called it *Chai* (tea, spelt Caj). Brahma Kumari's welcoming sign graced a building in the city centre of Bratislava, and the graffiti in Budapest was dominated by the symbol of 'Om'.

It continued in Istanbul where some European backpackers at the Hagia Sophia all but dragged my wallet to the palace or erstwhile Turkish royalty as they were completely taken in by the idea of a *haram* (harem) and the lavishness of those quarters. Dominoes birthed more

insistently with the instinctive understanding of Turkish words like *sabun* (soap), *dunya* (world), *kitap* (book) and *hawa* (air) to name a few. These words derived from the Persian, married with those derived from Sanskrit-based languages are part of everyday exchanges in all of North India, and the *haram* a concept so standard that even a seven-year-old in India wouldn't give it a second thought or glance. The 'grand bazaar' could have been in any city in India, and the shopkeepers breaking into perfectly pronounced renditions of Bollywood songs from the time of Raj Kapoor to Shah Rukh Khan – usually ending in a chorus by when everyone within earshot has joined in with a jig to match – seemed more home than home actually is.

Honestly, all that was missing was *aaloo wala samosa* (Indian-style spicy potato savoury) and I am pretty certain, it would have been only a few hundred metres away had I keyed it into Google, or perhaps just raised my nose to the wind.

The latent observation of a multi-billion Euro, Dollar and Pound industry spawning out of not dissimilar pockets of national heritages guarded within a few square miles of city centres, and brandished with fervour would finally fission my accumulated dyadic dominoes. They all began falling in the most satisfying of patterns as I walked the endless walk to Indian immigration at Mumbai airport, and joined the Sea of the Demonetised squabbling for pieces of pink paper and pre-paid cabs.

## The eureka moment!

As I watched the madding crowd, in a fly on the wall moment, I noticed all skin colours and passport colours collectively invoking all the Gods that be, as they yodelled and jostled in rhythm to the victory dance of democracy. There was more diversity at 6 am that morning at the airport terminal than there ever has been in the General Assembly of the United Nations. And then suddenly, the accumulated pathos of two weeks of constant spontaneous computation, competition and comprehension of the languishing icons of India's heritage in contrast to its privileged cousins in higher latitude that wore olive wreaths propped up on silver spoon



brandishing golden sceptres while their halos grinned hubristically, fell away in an instant of almost *nirvanic* rapture.

I realised that the email to write about 'India's heritage' was actually a subtle typographical message designed by fate to escort me through fractals disguised as cities to a point that the accumulated pathos inspires within me the audacity to transform my unconscious understanding of the term 'India's heritage' to the conscious reality that, 'India is heritage'.

Scientists who connect wires to the skull and study colourful lines dancing on screens preach that neurons in the brain fire and connect with each other when we understand things. In that moment, every neuron still limping after over three decades of oxidation must have been standing on tiptoes while holding their interlocked hands up in triumph.

### Clarity was never so clear!

For keeping in her womb the oldest hints of civilisation to sanctifying every aspect of life encountered on the planet within its once geographic and now political boundaries, India is heritage.

For decimating and bringing alive creation with each swing of the double edged sword of logic while greedily and impartially accumulating, incorporating and furthering every abstract notion that human thought and imagination could conjure, India is heritage.

For measuring distances into the infinite that surrounds us while destroying every separation to the infinite within us, India is heritage.

For galloping in the age of silicon science with mythology as its pillion, India is heritage.

For knowing that in a probability theorem life is simply a chemical equation and yet choosing to paint it in verse, India is heritage.

For reconciling Darwin with *dasavatar* (the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu), and believing in both while accepting that

none may be true, India is heritage.

Spontaneous spiralling combustions of such collaborating contradictions spewed instantaneously – beginning and ending in the same moment. With a non-seeing gaze at the milieu in front of me and without a hint of concern at having no staff to make that sea part, I looked at Atif, who had collected blisters while I was chasing dominoes and exclaimed, "Atif, do you know what India's heritage means?"

Cursing the spirits he thought possessed me while flying high and free, Atif hobbled away to find some caffeine, leaving in his wake a string of vague implications of dire consequences if I were to launch into an inspired lesson in history till we find a cab.

And this was fate's final play. The fixing of the cork in a bottle being left to age. For in India, heritage is not just history. It is not just our story. It is not just a record of man's journey. It is in unison, every part and the sum total of every mirage and reality on every plane of human existence.

"What was it about India's heritage?" asked Atif, as caffeine pulled his eyelids to the awake position in a taxi blaring all horns away in morning rush hour. "Not India's heritage...India is heritage," I corrected him.

"Not debating grammar on jet lag", he declared, and switched the headphones into noise cancellation mode in a hurry. "Give me some time."

"Give IT some time," I whispered to myself. "Sometime in the future when a generation better than us finally decodes

the many ciphers that guard the enigmas of English grammar, they too will read 'India's heritage' as 'India is heritage' and see it as but a simple truth."

Just give it time. ■

The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.



### The highest Shiva Temple

*Tungnath is the highest Shiva temple in the world and is one of the five and the highest Panch Kedar temples located in the mountain range of Tunganath in Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand. Located at an altitude of 3,680 m, and just below the peak of Chandrashila, Tungnath temple is the highest Hindu shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple is believed to be 1,000 years old. It has a rich legend linked to the Pandavas, heroes of the Mahabharata epic.*

*According to Hindu mythology Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati both reside in the Himalayas. The Tunganath myth is indelibly linked to the origin of the Panch Kedar temples built by the Pandavas. The legend states that sage Vyasa Rishi advised the Pandavas that since they were culpable of slaying their own relatives (Kauravas, their cousins) during the Kurukshetra war, their act could be pardoned only by Lord Shiva. Consequently, the Pandavas went in search of Shiva who was avoiding them since he was convinced of the guilt of the Pandavas. In order to keep away from them, Shiva took the form of a bull and went into hiding in an underground safe haven at Guptakashi, where Pandavas chased him. But later Shiva's body in the form of a bull's body parts rematerialised at five different locations that represent the "Panch Kedar" where Pandavas built temples to Lord Shiva at each location, seeking his pardon and blessings.*

# Naturally yours

*India has mindboggling biodiversity which needs to be preserved. Some good effort has gone in already, which is showing results, says conservationist **Kedar Gore**, citing the example of Project Tiger. But a lot more remains to be done to protect our forests which are our very life force, he warns.*

INDIA is spread over an area of 3.29 million sq km, which is approximately 2.5% of the earth's total land area, and encompasses a wide variety of ecosystems harbouring 7% of the world's flora and 6.5% of the world's fauna! India ranks amongst the world's 17 most megadiverse countries. The Western Ghats, the Eastern Himalayas, the Indo-Burma region and the Sundaland – four of the world's 35 biodiversity hotspots are in India. The great Himalayan range in the north, the vast hot desert in the northwest, the 7,500 km long coastline, impregnable mangroves in the east, deciduous forests and grasslands in Central India, coral reefs of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the evergreen forests of the Western Ghats and the Eastern Himalayas! Such geographical diversity is seldom seen in any other country. Some parts of the country still have inaccessible forests and perhaps new species are waiting to be discovered there.

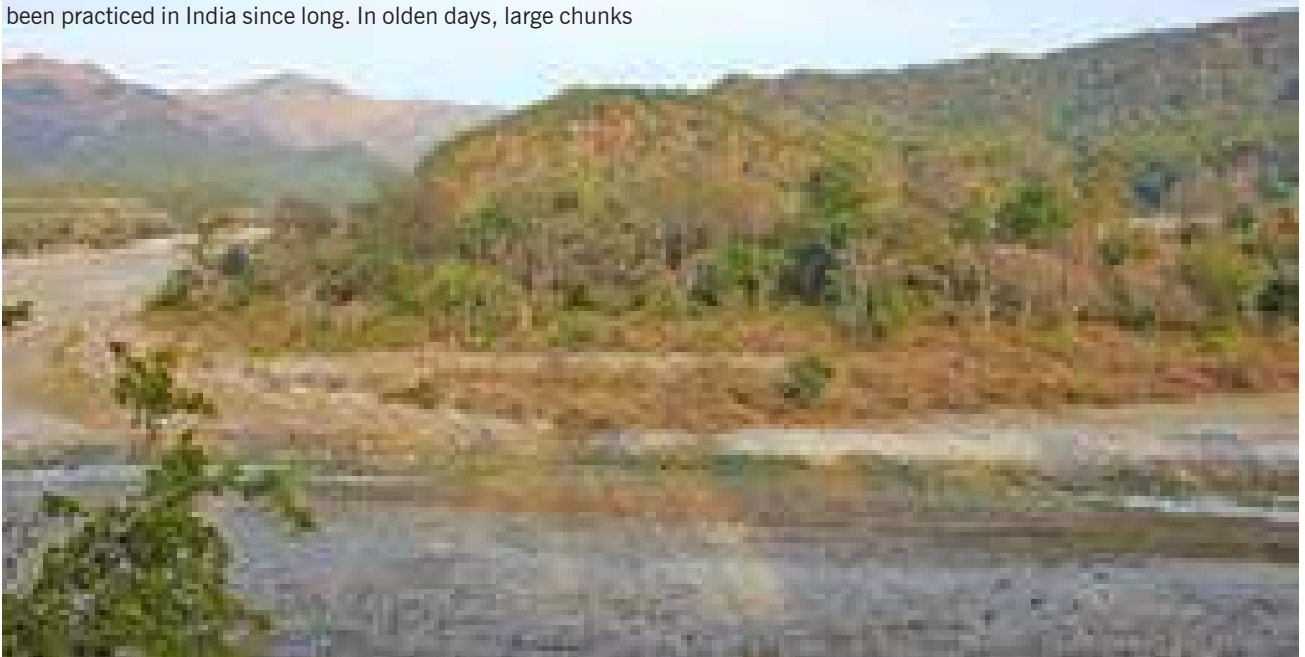
## Conservation was our old habit!

India is a country with one of the oldest civilisations and a rich culture that respects and worships the natural resources. Wildlife conservation, though a relatively modern term, has been practiced in India since long. In olden days, large chunks



**India's Project Tiger has been a successful campaign, with India accounting for 60 percent of the global wild tiger population (All photos courtesy: Kedar Gore)**

of forests were protected by communities as 'Sacred Groves'. These areas were considered sacred by people and destructive activities like tree cutting and animal killing completely disallowed. No person dared to break this system lest he be punished by the Almighty. This fear or respect has been largely



**India's forests hold rich biodiversity**



**The Kaziranga National Park, Assam**

responsible for conserving these forests and the myriad species they harboured. Eventually, these areas were protected by the law. Sacred groves still exist in many of our well-known Protected Areas like Periyar Tiger Reserve that has the temple of Lord Shabarimala, and Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary with a Lord Shiva temple in the heart of the forest...there are several such examples throughout the country. During pre-independence India, important forest areas were declared as Reserve Forests by the British. In 1936, India got its first National Park by the name of Hailey's National Park. Subsequently, it was renamed Ramganga National Park due to River Ramganga flowing through its heart. This area was eventually renamed as Corbett National Park after the legendary hunter-turned-conservationist Jim Corbett.

India has a vast network of 668 Protected Areas extending over 1,61,222 sq km (4.90% of total geographic area), comprising 102 National Parks, 515 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 47 Conservation Reserves and four Community Reserves spread across the length and the breadth of the country. Protected Areas are undoubtedly the most picturesque areas on the Earth. The landscapes of the Valley of Flowers and Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand; the magnificent mangroves of the Sundarbans in West Bengal; the evergreen forests of Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary; the dense forests of Dandeli and Nagarhole in the Western Ghats; the dry and arid region of the Desert National Park; and the mixed forests of Melghat and Kanha in the Satpuda-Maikal Landscape of Central India – all are

exquisitely beautiful, breathtaking and refreshing. Each of these places is different – visually and ecologically. The fauna, the flora, the landscape and the weather is unique in each of these places. From a couple of square kilometers to thousands of square kilometers, ecosystems of critical importance are protected for their ecological values and services. Not every ecosystem will have a tiger or a lion or an elephant or a rhino, but it is nevertheless important for its unique biodiversity or for its value as a catchment forest or the important role it plays in carbon sequestration. It is a globally accepted fact that forests and oceans play a vital role in mitigating the disastrous effects of man-induced climate change.

### **The launch of Project Tiger**

Since the launch of Project Tiger in 1973, India has declared 50 tiger reserves spread over 71,000 sq km area, which is just over 2% of the country's geographical area. As per the national-level tiger census conducted in 2014, India's tiger population was estimated to be 2226, which is around 60% of the global wild tiger population of 3890! India has undoubtedly proved to be a leader in tiger conservation efforts from among the 13 tiger range countries of the world.

Tiger is a conservation dependent species and exists in six Tiger Conservation Landscapes (TCL) of India viz., Shivalik Hills and Gangetic Plains, Central India, Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats, North-Eastern Hills and Brahmaputra Plains, and Sundarbans. Although the designated tiger reserves are well





**The Bandhavgarh Fort in the middle of the Bandhavgarh National Park**

protected and managed for the conservation of wildlife, most of the connecting habitats within these landscapes may not be within the legal domain of Protected Areas, and are therefore often lost to the growing developmental demands and ever-increasing anthropogenic pressures. Thus, India's tiger population today is highly fragmented with source populations primarily restricted to the tiger reserves. Breeding populations of tigers are mostly located in the core area of the tiger reserves, while the buffer areas usually serve as population sinks. Habitat corridors that connect these tiger reserves help facilitate the dispersal of sub-adult tigers, thus helping in the genetic exchange. However, most tiger reserves are surrounded by human-dominated landscapes, and thus, dispersing tigers often come into conflict with human beings. Tigers falling prey to poaching is not uncommon in these areas.

Besides conserving the wildlife, tiger reserves and their connecting corridor forests also provide a range of associated economic, social, cultural and spiritual benefits known as 'ecosystem services'. The IIFM's (Indian Institute of Forest Management) report 'Economic Valuation of Tiger Reserves in India' estimates that Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh alone provides flow benefits worth ₹16.5 billion (₹80,000 / hectare) annually. Important ecosystem services originating from Kanha include gene pool protection, provisioning of water to downstream regions and provisioning of fodder in buffer areas. In addition, these natural landscapes play an important role in ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation, and contribute to mitigation by storing and sequestering carbon. Not to mention the immense recreational and educational value of these areas to humankind.

## **The conservation challenge**

Despite these known facts, wildlife conservation in India is a great challenge. Most Protected Areas in India are facing severe pressures of development that threaten the very existence of these vital habitats. Mining, submergence due to large dams and river linking projects, unplanned and unsustainable tourism projects in some of the fragile habitats, linear developmental projects of road and rail expansion, are just some of the examples. India is a developing country, but in our pursuit for economic development, we cannot afford to compromise on such vital natural areas that occupy less than 5% of India's geographical area. These areas not only protect wildlife species but also protect our fresh water sources, sequester the carbon that we release in the atmosphere, protect the billions of trees that are source for thousands of medicines that we use, protect the wild genes of the food we eat and acts as an unlimited supply of oxygen that we all need to breathe. It will be a foolhardy decision to destroy these areas for short-term economic gains and long-term ecological disasters.

Ecosystems have tremendous resilience and can recover very fast with proper protection and well thought of policy decisions. However, everything cannot be left only for the 'Government' to handle. Every person of this country must take some action towards conserving the natural heritage that India is blessed with. However small this contribution might be, it will definitely help in shaping a brighter and greener future for this country. Every drop counts. It is time for all stakeholders (government, corporate sector, conservationists, local communities and all of us) to work together in deciding a road ahead that will decide the future of India's natural treasures. It is up to us to decide whether we want to just exist as people, or co-exist as *Homo sapiens* with millions of other species on this earth. ■

Kedar Gore has been actively engaged in wildlife conservation and environmental protection work since the past 20 years. Having worked with WWF-India and TERI, he joined The Corbett Foundation in 2009, as its Director and has been instrumental in launching several projects with strong conservation significance and impact. He has received the NUFFIC Fellowship of The Netherlands Government in 2009 and 2012, and is a former Fellow of the International Visitor Leadership



Programme 2010 of the US Department of State. He has been serving as a Member of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication since 2005, and as a Member of IUCN SSC Bustard Specialist Group, and a Member of World Commission on Protected Areas since 2013. Kedar is passionate about conservation photography and has been actively raising conservation issues through his articles, blogs and photographs in reputed publications.

# Restoring culture

*When we see a restored heritage structure, we feel pride and ownership in our city. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage or INTACH has restored a number of such structures around the country. **Gargi Mashruwala**, writes about the seminal work done by INTACH's Mumbai Chapter, and what the exercise entails.*

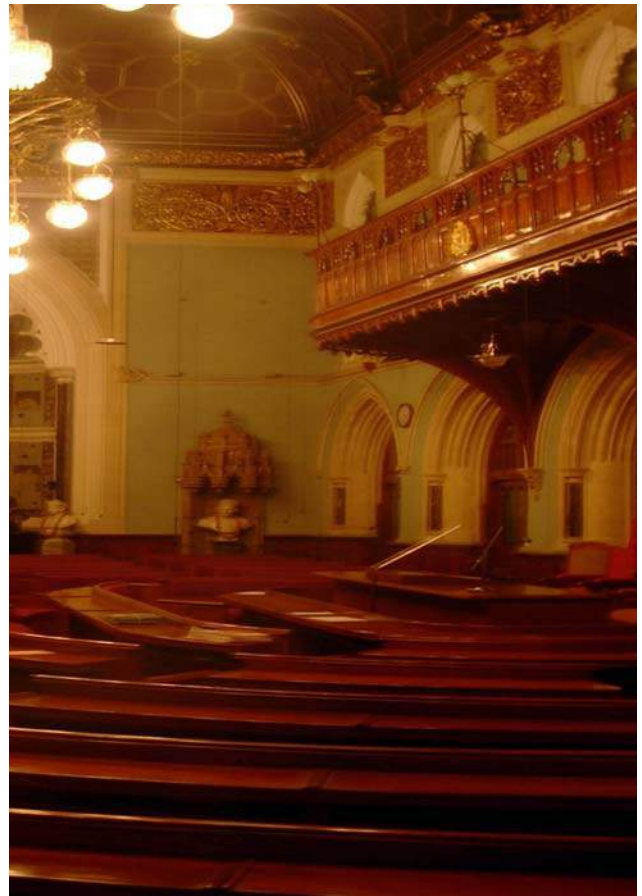
**T**HE character of any city is reflected by its architectural and cultural heritage. In Mumbai we have varied styles of architecture as Mumbai was initially developed as an organic trade town. As Mumbai comprised seven islands, its developments as a city was restricted until late 19<sup>th</sup> century. People of different communities settled down in distinct areas, creating distinct identities, precincts – Khotachiwadi, Matharpakady – are examples of this. The commercial areas grew in and around Flora Fountain in Fort, close to the harbour. The residential areas grew at Byculla, Parel and Girgaum, after the great fire of 1803, in the area of the docks. With passage of time, the Neo Classical gave way to Victorian or Neo Gothic, followed by Palladian or Neo Renaissance, Indo-Sarcentic and finally, Art Deco buildings, and today we have tall towers changing the sky line of the city.

Heritage involves the preservation of culture, builtform and lifestyles, a lesson in history. It is important to conserve these structures and precincts as they symbolise the historic growth of our city. Several concerned citizens and organisations like INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) are working to conserve the historical and cultural identity of the city.

INTACH, the country's premier heritage organisation, was set up in 1984 to work towards the preservation of our culture and heritage. Set up in 1997, INTACH Mumbai Chapter has worked and continues to work with the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) and MTDC (Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation), to restore, conserve and revitalise heritage structures in the city.

## The first list

In mid 1980s, INTACH Mumbai prepared the very first listing of important heritage buildings in the city. This was updated in 1988. In 1992, the Government of Maharashtra notified a draft list based on this listing, and in 1995, it was legislated, making Mumbai the first city in country to have a heritage listing. The biggest threat to our heritage is neglect, ignorance and lack of maintenance. Listing unprotected



**The interior of the MCGM Hall after restoration**

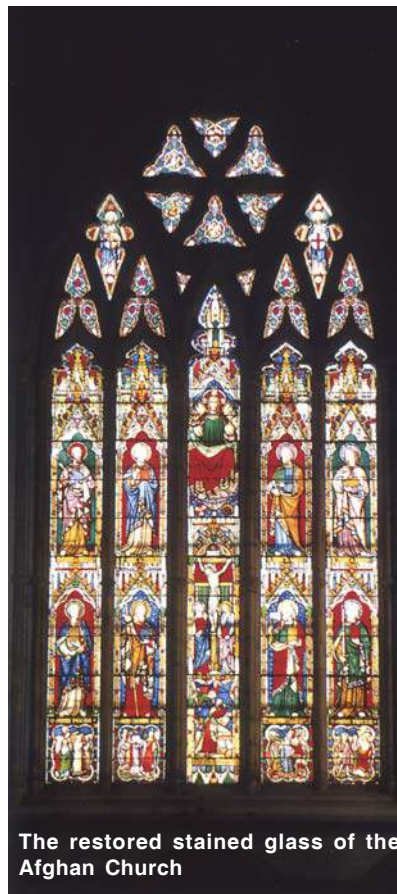
buildings of architectural, historical, archaeological and aesthetic importance is the first step towards knowing what we have and towards planning, formulating and implementing policy and plans to conserve them. The inventory and site listings are also critical for preparing heritage legislation and control guidelines for the protection of the built form of the city. INTACH Mumbai was a founding member of the MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority) Heritage Society that has prepared detailed listing and guidelines for all heritage precincts in the city. It has prepared detailed listings and guidelines for Cumballa Hill precinct and

the entire Matheran hill station. It formulated the first guidelines for the protection of eco sensitive hill stations.

### Mumbai's world heritage sites

Mumbai has two World Heritage sites. The Elephanta Caves were declared a World Heritage Site in 1987. As per covenants and convention of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), World Heritage Sites require a comprehensive management plan. In 1996, UNESCO had threatened to delist the Elephanta site due to poor management. In 1997, INTACH held the very first conference on World Heritage sites in the country in which UNESCO, English Heritage and the World Heritage Centre in Paris participated. That resulted in ASI entrusting the task of preparing the Comprehensive Development Plan to INTACH in 1998. The site was a mess and INTACH created the first site museum in the country there, despite the odds of working on an island with no electricity. Unfortunately, 17 years later, the ASI has simply locked up the museum and has not maintained it. The site is riven by petty local politics and has proved difficult to improve and manage.

The detailed infrastructure upgradation plan for Elephanta Caves and island prepared by INTACH Mumbai, recommends augmentation of facilities for visitors and various improvements, keeping in mind the World Heritage status and covenants. The recommendations outlined by INTACH include proper documentation and conservation of the caves, improvements to the jetty, installation of toilets at the base of the steps, and an alternative route providing a separate access and exit route to and from the caves, to de-congest the steps. A cultural village which will accommodate the informal sector along the steps has been suggested. The stalls will be appropriately designed to blend with the natural and heritage environment. This will enhance the visitor experience of the place and provide better employment conditions for the local people. Signage, garbage receptacles and resting spots will be installed at appropriate



The restored stained glass of the Afghan Church

locations along both the new pathway (i.e., the entrance access) and the old steps (the exit route). The plan would considerably improve the visitor experience.

INTACH Mumbai prepared the dossier for nomination of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2003 at the behest of the Railways. The same was conferred by UNESCO in 2004. CST has been selected as an icon for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, an initiative of the Prime Minister's for 10 iconic sites in India. Central Railways have invited INTACH to repair and restore the South and West façade of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. A concept master plan for revitalisation of the area abutting and surrounding the periphery of CST has been submitted to the A ward, MCGM. The plan proposes a walking plaza at the southern entrance to CST where currently the buses are parked, and lamps, boulders, designed with heritage characteristics. CST has also requested INTACH to upgrade its existing site museum.

### The Bhau Daji Lad Museum restoration

The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, is a premier institution and one of the five must-visit places in the city of Mumbai. The second oldest museum in the country, it was in a state of neglect and disrepair. In 2003, a tripartite agreement was signed between MCGM, the owner of the museum, Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation, who donated the seed money for the restoration, and INTACH, which provided the expertise for the restoration and running of the Museum. It is for the first time in the country that a management trust has been set up with a PPP model to run a museum. The restoration team was led by Tasneem Mehta, Vice Chairman, INTACH, and Convenor, Mumbai Chapter, who prepared the concept, display design and curation for the Museum as Project Director, Vikas Dilawari, the Conservation Architect, worked on restoring the building. Conservators from INTACH's Indian Council of Conservation Institute, restored over 4,000 objects of the museum. Tasneem Mehta designed and

**The Royal Opera House has recently been restored to its former glory. We need many more such owners of heritage buildings to take pride in their properties. There is a need to create a civic movement for awareness and pride to save our heritage.**





**The Bhau Daji Lad Museum exterior (left) before and (right) after restoration**

upgraded the showcases and the display, besides the lighting and the spatial layouts. The work included retrieval of lost skills such as gold gilding and stenciling, selecting the colour scheme and designing of lighting fixtures including the chandelier, spatial re-organisation, and creating a story for the display of objects. The restoration won UNESCO's highest Award of Excellence for Asia Pacific Region in 2005.

The Royal Opera House has recently been restored to its former glory. We need many more such owners of heritage buildings to take pride in their properties. There is a need to create a civic movement for awareness and pride to save our heritage. We need many city festivals that showcase different aspects of our culture and reinforce civic pride. Heritage should be taught and propagated at the school and college level, instilling a will to preserve and conserve our past. Towards this, INTACH Mumbai organises several educational programmes and competitions, including an annual quiz and a FilmIt programme with schools, where children create films on the heritage of the city. These films are shared with school children across India and England. This programme is held in collaboration with the Helen Hamlyn Trust in UK.

Several heritage sites and monuments in the city have been encroached upon. The government needs to take steps to curb further damage to these sites. Incentives like concession in property tax and lease renewal, setting up a special fund to partner repairs along with providing loans at

lower rates of interest for restoration and preservation of heritage buildings, are some recommended initiatives that could be considered. A cultural policy is required that can outline financial incentives to corporates who contribute towards this fund. These funds could help to meet this urgent need of looking after the protected built heritage.

Currently, INTACH Mumbai Chapter is working on the conservation and cleaning of Flora Fountain, one of the iconic landmarks of the city, and cleaning of the marble bas reliefs of the Wellington Fountain at the Regal cinema circle. INTACH Mumbai, for the first time in the city, revived the restoration of stained glass in the city at Afghan Church in 2001, restored the fire damaged Corporation Hall of the MCGM located at the head office in 2000, opened up the Gateway of India plaza in 2008, among several restoration projects of important iconic monuments in the city. ■

Gargi Mashruwala is the Financial Controller and Project Director at INTACH since 1999. She managed the finances for the ₹ 5 crore Restoration and Revitalisation Project of the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum, Mumbai, which was awarded UNESCO's highest award – Asia Pacific Award of Excellence in 2005. She is also the Vice Chairman, since 2007, at St. Jude India Childcare Centres, a Section 8 Company, that creates Centres of Hope to provide shelter and holistic care to children and their family, who travel to the city for the treatment of cancer.



### **Godhadi or quilt**

*Godhadi is a traditional Indian quilt made by the rural women of India. It is basically a Maharashtrian word given to the hand-stitched quilt. In Gujarat and Rajasthan it is known as Gudri and in the eastern part it is called Kantha. It is a lofty blanket made by using two or more old saris stitched in layers as fillers. The topmost layer is usually made of square, multicoloured pieces of cloth in attractive designs or motifs, stitched together in patterns that vary depending upon the weaver's imagination. Mothers and grandmothers lovingly weave these bright quilts for their new born babies. It is their extension of love and warmth for the newborn.*

– Vijayanand Hattangady, former Wng Cdr, IAF

# Slow food

*We have become slaves to fast foods, jettisoning our rich food heritage in the process. Our food heritage is rich in a variety of grains, vegetables, fats and traditional methods of cooking which preserve the nutrition. We must slowly go back to organic and slow foods, emphasises **Kavita Mukhi**. Otherwise, our ill health will eventually force us to, she warns.*

**W**HEN I was in my 20s and first encountered nutrition, the oil-free mania had just begun. People wanted oil-free rotis and no fried food. My most vivid memory is of my grandma one evening leaving the dining table in a huff wanting to make her own *roti*. She poured *ghee* into flour, rolled it in her palms, flattened the ball with the rolling pin, placed it on the fire, turned it over, removed it from the fire, added a touch of *ghee* on her palm and crushed the hot *roti* with her hand. She brought it to the table and never will I forget the relish with which she ate that *roti*. If we had taken our cue from her, we would never have strayed from traditional healthy eating patterns, only to discover decades later that grandma knew best. Instead of naturopathy and new fads telling us what to avoid, we should be advised switching from refined oil to cold pressed oils, just as prescribed in Ayurveda. And whilst on the subject, these oils should be a variety of traditional oils, sesame, safflower, groundnut, mustard and coconut.

Ayurveda very much defines India's food heritage. Our Vedas are documentation of what our sages formulated via experiential insights. In a sense, that documentation is a guideline for us. However, ayurveda is seen as an alternative system of healing, rather than a guideline for healthy living, which it is importantly. Not that its healing component is to be disregarded. It is in fact THE system of medicine, over 5,000 years old. Allopathy is fairly young, but its organised ways and instant cures, albeit their side effects, have made it the first line of defense for a majority of people. If ayurveda principles are adhered to, being the forerunner in philosophy of the good life, wellness will follow undoubtedly. This is our heritage.

## The common thread

The common thread between different Indian food traditions is wholesomeness.

With industrialisation, refined foods (that last longer because of the missing life force) replaced most natural whole foods. Preservatives were used for longer shelf life. Chemicals came into being to disrupt the otherwise vedic and organic agriculture that existed. Material benefits made refining of salt and jaggery too.

There is a resurgence towards whole and organic, but far from mainstream. However, since it is our heritage, it is an eventuality that we will all move towards. If not through wisdom then, sadly, because of ill health. There will be no choice. There is no choice.

Personally it troubles me a great deal to see a poor man spend his hard earned money on food that is hardly going to nourish him, is full of chemicals, may not contribute to his well-being, and is unhygienic. One wonders how the world functions if basic needs of citizens are not met. How can anyone be expected to do any bit of labour work or thinking work or creative work or be socially conscious, without their cells having the right nutrition for it?

Also being a country that has been captured and pushed around a lot, we lost our Gurukul system, we were made to follow a system alien to us. Yes, advantages and disadvantages. One of the senses that took a beating was our civic sense, we are a nation where cleanliness was Godliness, people kept spotless homes, took two baths a day at least. And now we have a country where no one thinks twice about throwing stuff out of cars, buses, trains, boats, onto pavements, anywhere at all, but in the dustbin! The growing population does not make any of our culture building any easier.

In any case, until we learn to use less plastic and be less consumeristic, garbage will keep getting collected and will burden our landfills, will fill our streets and spread disease. We as a nation have to go back to our roots, our traditions, our heritage, if we are to become whole, healthy and happy again. The West is emulating us, our yoga, our ayurveda, yet we treat everything white as glorious, be it skin, sugar, salt or flour!

## The slow food movement

Slow Food, an organisation begun in Italy to counteract the fast food movement, is doing much to preserve traditional foods and styles of cooking. It goes without saying that traditions often need rural living to be maintained, including hand churning, hand pounding and stone grinding. City life in its very nature excludes the close association with food on a field. Food is viewed as a packaged commodity.

Somewhere down the line, the disconnect of food for health

transpired. People don't seem to realise that it is the food that you consume that becomes you. How and when did this even happen? Food is meant to be eaten for immediate energy, long term energy i.e., for the day and night, for building, for repair and healing, and lastly for longevity. One would imagine that all Indian and world food traditions would aim at this. Unfortunately, presentation and taste have taken precedence over nutrition. Not that these are not important. But nutrition has taken a back seat.

Gourmet food has become an end in itself in a city with little else to do besides wine and dine. We are lucky, however, in India even restaurant food can boast of whole grain. Hygiene, however, is suspect. But brown rice, millets, seeds, are a thing of the past. The moving away from the joint family network, I believe has been responsible for the loss of some of our food heritage. Old, wise grandmothers with their experience have not been able to pass it on to the ones who do not have the inclination to receive. A real shame because wisdom once gone is not recoverable.


### Document food traditions

For the young; revere your ma and your ma-in-law, inspite of their cranks, or you will regret it once they are no more. My son always refers to google to check my advice. Yes, google has all the answers, but I am older than google I remind him. He is quiet for a while. Whatever nutritious recipe you can find, hold onto it, document it, pass it on, importantly be in your kitchen, produce your own food from scratch or barter with those producing those bases, let the young taste this goodness. They will better it by finding organic ingredients for these traditions.

Being "only a housewife" is passé. Be a proud mother and wife. You are building a home that will safeguard our heritage. Learn whatever you can from any wise person who is willing to share. Food is a very basic heritage that holds and keeps families together. There is some documentation of good old recipes, but you have to filter through lots of rubbish. Document yours and teach your young. Make food into a learning experience that all can participate in and enjoy. And be healthier for it!

We may be a developing nation but in terms of our food heritage, even though grandma's touch may be lost, we are probably richer than any other. The diversity of our country gives rise to an unbelievable variety of herbs, spices, cereals, pulses, fruits, vegetables, flowers, leaves, roots, shoots, and other edibles for food and medicine. It would take more than a lifetime to know these.

And yet, instead of choosing from this variety of what we have at our disposal, we consume the limited foods that are put in front of us. Time has become valuable and so fast foods and fast living are taking over with no attention to human



**The healthy rice!**


An example of food heritage that has been revamped (tradition + modern nutrition) for the better is the cooking of brown rice in a pressure cooker.

Place rice with double the quantity of water and some sea salt or rock salt in a pressure cooker. After two whistles, remove from flame, allow to sit for two or more hours for best taste, superior nutrition and cost effective cooking technique.

health and happiness. Depression is rampant, refined foods are low on Vitamin Bs the nutritive contributing cause. So what will people do, take vitamin supplements in synthetic form instead of changing their lifestyle, looking at ayurvedic supplementation, getting more sunlight and easing up their life, bringing love into play.

Thanks to ayurveda, our food heritage has been preserved, but it needs a lot of work to be combined with changing tastes, with modern nutrition, so long as that nutrition is also stemming from an organic and wholesome understanding of the subject. The Japanese healing system of Macrobiotic drew also from Ayurveda, some of its balance concepts, and combined them to formulate this powerful system. George Ohsawa, the founder of this philosophy, lived in India to study ayurveda. We need to wake up to the fact that we are indeed blessed to have the opportunity to reclaim our food heritage via ayurveda and via the generations that are still around to pass on this wisdom.

This is the main reason I am in the organic field, to keep the wisdom of the farmers alive, so their next in line is interested in keeping it in process. Or else as a civilisation, our agriculture wisdom will be lost and we will be slaves to corporates that are hell bent on making us lose every open pollinated seed we have, so we can every season buy only genetically modified seeds, ruining our soil, our health and our freedom.■



Kavita Mukhi 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.



# Flowing since time

*India's great rivers are an intrinsic part of her folklore, religion and antiquity. Here, **Vithal C. Nadkarni**, writes about the Narmada river, which is millions of years old, its antiquity older than the Ganga. He also writes about a book on the Narmada, which he has collaborated in.*

**B**ENEVOLENT Narmada is a gift of love and reverence by Hari Mahidhar, one of India's most distinguished photographers, to the oldest and the holiest of the sacred rivers of India. This writer got the opportunity of providing the textual tribute to this opulent 300-page coffee-table book under mystifying circumstances. But let us first start with the genesis of the book with Mahidhar.

His 'Aha' moment came when Mahidhar bought a book at Mumbai airport during one of his trips as a successful industrial and commercial photographer. This was the Ganga's source-to-sea saga, shot and narrated by Italian photographer Aldo Pavan. Thames and Hudson named after two iconic rivers, had printed the tome sub-titled *Across the Sacred Waters*.

## The wakeup call

Mahidhar paid ₹ 4,000 in September 2007 for the volume, which served as a wakeup call to him. If an Italian had gumption enough to document the massive cultural aura of the Ganga in an alien land, what held back an Indian like Mahidhar, who had the additional merit of having spent his boyhood and teens on the banks of the Narmada at Jabalpur?

More enticing, the great river had remained unlimned except for some travelogues (illustrated with drawings), and a couple of adventure books laced with stock photographs. Also, millions of pilgrims flocked to the river for the spectacular ritual known as Parikrama or Pradakshina (circumambulation) of the Narmada (This happens to be the only river in India with such an extensive pilgrimage). Yet, no one had yet done a source-to-sea photographic saga worthy of the river's mindboggling diversity.)

Mahidhar felt it would just be a matter of time before another foreigner breezed by to mock at our collective apathy by showing off *their* photo-biography of *our* (desi) Narmada. On the debit side, everything seemed to militate against such an odyssey: the sheer scale of the logistics involved, for



One of the ghats of Narmada River

example, and the complexity of terrain and cultural and ecological diversity, all seemed insuperable.

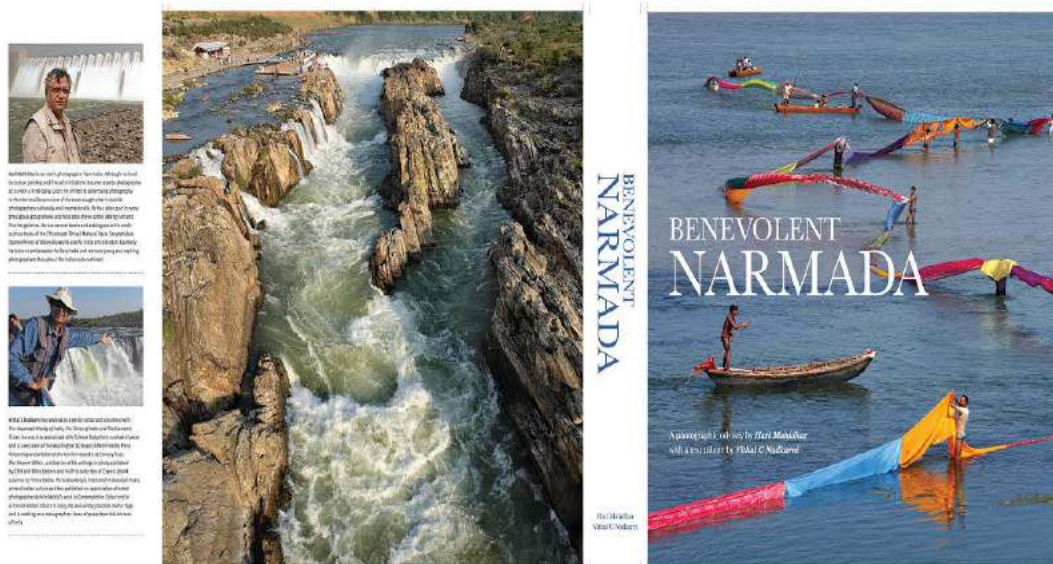
On the plus side lay the opportunity of being virtually the first person to show off the monumental cultural and natural heritage of this most mystical of our great rivers. Of course, this called for Herculean amounts of resourcefulness to make most of the limited forays 'stolen' from a busy professional schedule.

The alternative was lose oneself in the rat race with no promise of self fulfilment. In retrospect, it seems like a no-brainer to have taken the plunge, without second thoughts or sponsors. As you handle the pages, you realise what a big decision this was.

## The long saga

The book that Mahidhar eventually ended up photographing took six years. He published it himself (with short essays and captions contributed by yours truly) and became its stockist/distributor as well. *Benevolent Narmada* is, therefore, a labour of love nourished with large dollops of personal sacrifice and self-discipline.

As a lad growing up on the banks of the Narmada at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, the photographer, whose family



***Benevolent Narmada* traces the course of the river from source to sea: (Top) the book cover (back and front)**

had a flourishing marble and tile business, had already experienced the bounteousness of this great river, whose name literally means, “harbinger of joy” in Sanskrit. Another popular name of the river is Rewa or the noisy one, and also Shankari because of her birth-myth that links the river’s divine descent to the Supreme God Shiva, also known as Shankar. Mahidhar had also been entranced by her mind-boggling cultural aura, the seemingly endless cycles of fairs and festivals, the socio-religious pageants conducted on the banks of the river. The Narmada originates in Amarkantak in the state of Madhya Pradesh at the verdant trisecting point of the Satpuda, Maikal and Vindhyan mountain ranges, and flows westwards through three states for 1,312 kilometres, before draining into the Gulf of Cambay and into the Arabian Sea, 30 kms west of Bharuch in Gujarat.

Mahidhar could easily have finished his book by concentrating on the river’s milieu at Jabalpur. But he wanted the grand prize; a pristine source-to-sea adventure to be sampled with all those untested (and untasted) risks that towered over the distant promise of potential reward.

### When serendipity struck

In hindsight, our collaboration was most serendipitous. I came looking for a world-class photographer to document my own collection of votive folk bronzes. I wanted to share them with the world through images and the mother lode of stories, myths of them that I’d garnered as a peripatetic writer over the years spent in all sorts of situations (all this is better reserved for my forthcoming book called *Icons of Peace*).

**As a lad growing up on the banks of the Narmada at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, the photographer, whose family had a flourishing marble and tile business, had already experienced the bounteousness of this great river, whose name literally means, “harbinger of joy” in Sanskrit.**

In enviable contrast, Mahidhar had already made four presentation copies of his beautifully crafted 400-page book with rudimentary captions. He also had been able to present the first (out of four) copies to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi when the latter came to Mumbai for an election rally in November 2014.

To cut the story, Mahidhar and I ended up with a barter.

I would write his *Benevolent Narmada* and he would photograph my *Icons of Peace*, otherwise known as Panchayatanas.

*Benevolent Narmada* won the support of the Vasant J. Sheth Memorial Foundation and the Museum Society for its public launch in October 2016 at Mumbai’s premier museum, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS). In her introductory speech Asha Sheth, the chairperson of the foundation said she was amazed to discover that the Narmada was elder to the Ganga, not just in terms of age, but also in terms of religious priority. It’s not for nothing that devotees believe that so potent and pure is the Narmada, that even the Ganga has come to the elder river once a year in the form of a black cow to shed her sins.

As the grand-daughter of the founder of Benares Hindu University, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Asha Sheth said she was conscious of India’s inclusive heritage that prompts us

to invoke our divine rivers during bathing and ablution. Then we call for the sanctifying presence of the waters from the Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri by chanting this verse:

गंगा च यमुने चैव गोदावरी सरस्वती |  
नर्मदे सिंधु कावेरी जलेस्मिन् संनिधिम् कुरु ॥





**The book release function of *Benevolent Narmada*: (From left) Vithal C. Nadkarni, Asha Sheth, Sabyasachi Mukerjee, Director-General, CSMVS, Pheroza Godrej of Museum Society of Bombay and Hari Mahidhar**

For we believe that wherever there is water, there is Ganga, and the Yamuna and also the Narmada and the Sindhu or the Indus. The latter serves not only as the root for the very name of our country India, but also stands in as a unifying synonym for the all-embracing ocean.

Happily, a similar sentiment inspired the founders of this magazine. The same feeling occurs in western/occidental tradition as well. At the end of his memoir *A River Runs Through It*, for instance, the American writer Norman Maclean says, "Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time." What an image this is: a gurgling stream cut from the primordial flood running over rocks hewn from the very basement of time.

This description perfectly fits the profile of the River Narmada. She was flowing when the continents of the world were fused together in one mass. Archaeologists say the Narmada-Son-Tapti lineament probably evolved some 4,000 million years in the Archean age on the super-continent called Pangea. There was no India at that time. But there was Narmada.

The Narmada was flowing when Pangea broke off into Gondwanaland. She was flowing when a meteor struck the Jurassic world; when the Indian tectonic plate collided with the Tibetan plateau, which threw up the Himalayas and led to the formation of rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna.

Through these upheavals, the Narmada alone flowed on serenely. No wonder our *rishis* praise the Narmada as the great survivor that out-lasting seven world-endings! Of all the seas and rivers of the world, she alone shall survive the future end of the world, they proclaim. Let us therefore also hail this most dependable and perennial of our lifesavers! ■



Vithal C. Nadkarni is a senior consulting editor and columnist with the Times of India Group of Publications. He is also a fellow of the London-based 21st Century Trust and a recipient of the US-based Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship.

### **Sanskrit is spoken here!**

*Mattur is a village near the city of Shimoga in Karnataka state, India, known for the usage of Sanskrit for day-to-day communication. Sanskrit is the vernacular of a majority of the 5,000 residents of this quaint village situated about 8 km from Shimoga. Mattur's twin village, Hosahalli, shares almost all the qualities of Mattur. Hosahalli is situated across the bank of the Tunga River. Mattur has a temple of Rama, a Shivalaya, a Someshwara temple and a Lakshmikeshava temple. Mattur and Hosahalli are known for their efforts to support Gamaka art, which is a unique form of singing and storytelling in Karnataka. These two villages are indeed unique in their use of India's ancient, classical language. As per the 2001 Indian Census, only 14,135 people have apparently registered Sanskrit as their language. Is this rich language on its final decline? Shouldn't we try and revive it?*



# The story behind the story

*India has a rich tradition of stories and fables, often surreal, often fantastically imaginative. V.R. Devika points to our epics Mahabharata and Ramayana to illustrate this point. She also explains how and why stories came to be.*

**B**RAHMA, the creator, created human beings and all things on the Earth. The four Vedas too. However, the Vedas, which were divine revelations, were available to only the ones who were allowed to recite it...How then can the avarice and ignorance of the common people be addressed? The wise ones went to Brahma to ask about it. They requested him to create something that would bring the essences of the four Vedas to the unlettered common people tilling the land and working with their hands. Brahma meditated on the question for a while and created the fifth Veda!

## The magic of the fifth Veda

The fifth or the Panchama Veda made human beings the creators of stories. They were given the power to tell tales to each other in about 64 different modes including narrating, painting, sculpting, drama, dancing, singing, etc. Thus story telling came into vogue. At least this is what the Natyashastra tells us.

Therefore, they began to create stories... In addition, the telling and retellings created more and more fantastic imagery.

Do you how and when an eclipse occurs? In the beginning of the world, they churned the milky ocean to get at the pot of nectar at its bottom, which would give the Gods immortality. When they finally got at it, all hell broke loose with the demons running away with it. Vishnu became Mohini, the enchantress who mesmerised the demons into giving her the pot with the nectar. She began to serve only when everyone could sit in a row and began with the Gods. The nectar pot became empty by the time she came to the demons' row. But the Gods Chandra and Surya screamed that two who were not Gods but disguised as such had just been served. Rahu and Ketu had just tasted nectar. Vishnu went into his Vishwaroopa and used his weapon, the disc to cut their heads off. Because they had tasted nectar, their heads are still living. The nectar had not yet made below their necks, so their bodies died. The heads of Rahu and Ketu keep going around trying to take revenge on Chandra and Surya for outing them. They do catch up with them once in a while. They have to swallow them since they do have limbs to fight, but because their necks are open, Chandra and Surya can easily come out at the other end.



**This epic is a fantastic story with numerous characters and sub-plots**

## Such fantastic imagination!

More fantastic is the epic Mahabharata. The powers of storytelling are stretched to extremes here. Janamejaya encourages Vaishampayana to get Vyasa to tell him the story of the Mahabharata so that Vaishampayana can tell it to Janamejaya himself and to the many Brahmins who had gathered at the snake sacrifice. The activity at the sacrifice alternates with the story. Each explains the other. Each becomes the other. Each leaves a residue and adds something. For thousands of years after the first telling, the story is being told in hundreds of hues and colours and interpretations in every corner of the country from Afghanistan to Indonesia. Vyasa had begun to tell the story so that something immeasurable, sanctifying, purifying, atoning and blessing might spread out from it, something at whose expense, the best of story tellers would live.

What is interesting is that the story of Ramayana, as in Mahabharata, also is told in the story itself. The children of Rama tell his own story to him.

## Stories like no other

Why did Vyasa and Valmiki choose to tell the story of such complication? Even a tenth of the stories within the Mahabharata and the Ramayana would be enough to allude to the infinite complication of existence. Whatever happens



### **The Ramayana is another story of colossal breadth and imagery**

in the *Jambu dvipa*, there is always a residue, an excess, something that overflows, something that goes beyond. They are crests on the wave of migration (Samsara). The stories are just one of the knots in the innumerable weaves of everything that stitches with everything. Going back in time to what came before it, or forward a little, after it ended, we encounter a net that brushes us on every side and immediately we are struck by the conviction that we will never see the edges of net, because there are no edges.

Everyone sat down, in the grass or around a fire and listened to these stories. Often the stories were familiar for the rituals they were performing came from these stories. The Mahabharata was called the fifth Veda. It was said that anyone who knew the four Vedas with their branches and likewise the Upanishads, but who did not know Mahabharata possessed no knowledge whatsoever.

The story of the last battles in Troy were told by Homer, a blind poet. The battle of Kurukshetra was handed down to us as told to a blind king Dhritrashtra. It makes no sense to tell a story to someone who had witnessed it. It is the mind that has to conjure the imagery of the story. Therein lies the magic of the story.

In the beginning, stories were no more than appendices to knowledge, but gradually the time given over to them grew in the gaps in that knowledge like grass between bricks, expanded and multiplied in stories that generated more stories, until they covered the whole construction of knowledge. After many many tellings, literature began.

Kalidasa added the episode of the curse of Durvasa on Shakuntala and the ring that would bring the memory of the king back. Actually, no such excuse is allowed to Dushyanta for forgetting Shakuntala in the original story in the Mahabharata. This magical addition has added lustre to the story and this is what people like to remember.

Telling a story is a way of having things happen at the

highest possible speed; that of the mind.

### **All arts are a form of storytelling**

All arts are a form of storytelling. An idea blossomed into a form of communication, whether through the body or words or colours or abstraction. Stories are the most durable texture of life for us and help us assimilate the perception of the powers in and around us. All narratives are to bring about rapture. Rapture is a word connected with possession. It is a path to knowledge.

Along with all the hardship of living comes that urge to believe in the divine and the creativity of the arts. That surplus of the creative impulse is simply life. There is no life without surplus. Whatever one does with that surplus, decides the shape of a culture, of a life, of a mind. There were certain cultures that decided they had to offer it in some way. It is not clear to whom, why, and how, but that was the idea. There are other cultures, like ours, where all this is almost like magic realism. It exemplifies a consciousness, which is characterised by an undifferentiated, unmediated blend of the routine, and the divine, the mundane and the mystic, a state of mind, which sees no essential dichotomy between myth and reality.

Advaita tells us that the world itself is a myth. Therefore, no matter what we are doing, we are in the midst of a fable. Fables are by definition what enchant us. The only question is whether we perceive it or not.

Myth is never a single story. It is always a tree with many branches. Unless one takes into account all possible variants, one cannot truly understand it. There is a sort of wondrous fever that can go on, and that is very near a feeling of happiness. The Sanskrit word *tapas*, "ardour", is deeply connected with this. The very purpose of drama as mentioned in the *Natyashastra* in an answer by Bharata, given to Atreya and other sages who enquired about the origin and purpose of *Natyaveda* which was on par with the *Shrutis*, was to give a pastime to cure the qualities of lust, covetousness, jealousy, wrath and misery of the people.

Do we need to sustain stories?

To survive sanely we must and let every generation make its own meaning of the stories. ■



V.R. Devika is a cultural activist passionate about traditional performing arts and education. Her doctoral thesis was on M.K. Gandhi's communication strategies for transformation. She regularly spins on the charkha, gives workshops on it and tells stories of Gandhi to students and teachers, and lectures on Indian culture and ethos. She has traveled widely around the world. She is the Founder and Managing Trustee of The Aseema Trust: [www.aseematrust.org](http://www.aseematrust.org)





KNOW INDIA **BETTER**

# Nothing official about it!

## *Inheriting the unsung*

Text & photos: Akul Tripathi

The United Nations heritage tag given to monuments and cultural sites worldwide are too selective to merit being considered as a definitive list. India, for instance, has hundreds of sites which are precious and irreplaceable when one considers their antiquity and local relevance. These sites must be placed on the same gilded pedestal as the 'heritage tagged' ones, as preserving the local in all its glory, finally benefits the global community.



It was November 1894. In Kolkata (then Calcutta), physicist J.C. Bose publicly demonstrated the use of radio waves.

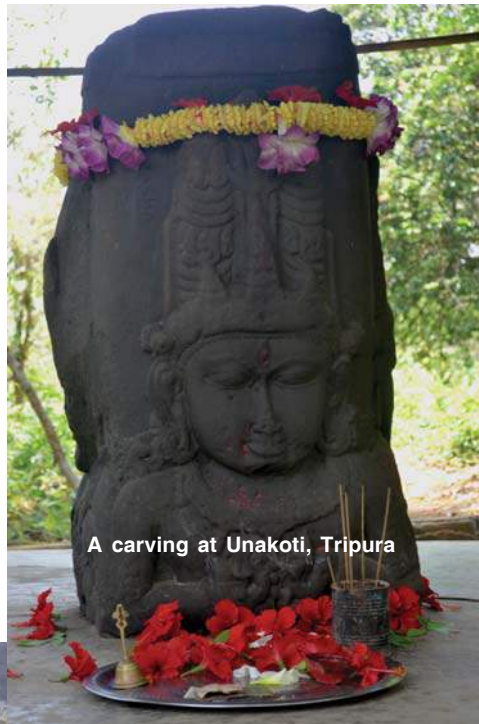
He was amongst the first to understand that radio waves could be used as communication. However, he was not interested in patenting his work. Three years later, Marconi patented the radio in Britain and British patent no.12,039 invisibly ushered in the communication era. Communication soon became the most important founding block of a world that awoke to discover itself, and from Empire to League of Nations, each step blurred the lines of distance. Global became the new buzz word – because suddenly it was possible. A global society was not just science fiction, and a philosophical idling of ideals. It was virtually a reality.

Like the gold rush that accompanies the discovery of a new mine, the helter-skelter race to stake a large claim in this new amoeba-patterned global structure led to creation of entities that supported this phenomenon. Global

outreach and integration became a necessary focal point at every local level. The United Nations (UN) was birthed and on it was thrust the role of the saviour that was the hope of the ‘free’ world. A rallying point for humanity to move towards seeing the bigger picture, the greater good. To spread these ideals and to provide a sense of belonging to every nation in the

larger family, spates of policies and global outreach programmes were churned out. ‘Global’ and ‘World’ as prefixes became almost mandatory for any organisation to be taken seriously.

Amongst all of them, perhaps the most successful – and the most dangerous – is the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s (UNESCO) World Heritage Site (WHS) phenomenon that creates almost outrageous hysteria amongst tourists and locals alike, raising a piece of geography to a modern and hence acceptable equivalent of revered sanctity. For the uninitiated, the WHS is a landmark



A carving at Unakoti, Tripura



Ganesha that seems to bathe in the waterfall when it rains; at Unakoti





**Sculptures in the hills of Unakoti – petrified gods!**

that has been 'officially' recognised by the *Holy* UN and specifically by *Saint* UNESCO as a site having cultural, historical, scientific or some other form of significance that UNESCO regards as being important to the collective interests of humanity.

At first sight it all seems perfectly simple and almost ideal. Why should anyone have a problem with any of these? The move to a globalised system based on international standards seems a step forward in this race that human kind has suddenly deemed necessary to run, since an Indian physicist nonchalantly demonstrated that something in the air could carry messages wirelessly and then forgot all about it, immersing himself into more important things. In such a world, it seems appropriate that landmarks be subject to international constraints.

For a moment, exercise your right to suspension of popular belief, and ask yourself whether it is possible that this international system, based on the expertise of an equally international elite may perhaps be over-emphasising global aspects to the detriment of local and national interests? While this thought finds footing in your conscience, take the leap and also ask whether – forget 'greater good' – is it even good to impose importance and make it mandatory by official decree to treat specially one piece of land owing to certain perceived significations with more reverence than any other on the planet? Is the 'making-significant' of one over another really a global gaze, or merely posturing? Is it possible that this WHS tag is at best a prejudiced one with noble intentions, or at worst a

discriminative one fuelled by deliberate malice?

So with this healthy dose of skepticism inspired by an irreverent call for introspection by the first month of a hopefully more emancipating year, let's celebrate heritage that does not blip on any global radar, but is that vital breath which fuels every faceless local without which there cannot even be the idea of a global.

This is my list of India's heritage – not a definitive list nor listed in any order of importance or even alphabetically, and limited solely due to my lack of knowledge and dearth of experience. Neither spectacular in scope or scale, nor any peerless breakthrough, whether scientific or cultural. Unheralded beyond its pin code. Unregarded beyond its area code. Neither complete nor with any desire at achieving an absolute compendium – just places from my travels that choose to come alive at this moment, in this context. And pruned purely on the lines of me having clicked photos of them. Some not even that...

### **Mountains of petrified gods**

Kailashahar, situated 180 kms from Agartala is a small town in the Unakoti district of Tripura, located along the barbed wire fenced border between India and Bangladesh. The district derives its name from a hill. In Bengali, Unakoti means one less than a crore and as per lore, in the hills of this part of Tripura are present stone reliefs which are the petrified forms of the gods of the Hindu pantheon.



**Paintings inside the Saspol caves**

Legend informs that once Lord Shiva was traveling back to his hometown Kashi with all the other Gods. They decided to rest for the night at the place now called Unakoti. Shiva wanted to get home at the earliest and decreed that at first light everyone should be ready to continue the journey. However, at dawn, none of the Gods had even woken up. Miffed at the Gods' impertinence, Shiva cursed them all to forever rest as they were – but in stone. With his entourage petrified, literally, the Mahadev left for Kashi.

Another legend explains that at that place Shiva and his consort Parvati came across a sculptor who was an ardent devotee of Parvati. Some believe his name was Kallu and Kallu put forward his request to accompany Parvati to serve her. One rendition of the tale suggests that Shiva's ego was hurt that the sculptor was more devoted to his wife than himself, and when Parvati petitioned for him, he set a condition that if Kallu would carve out a crore portraits of Shiva within one night, he would be allowed to come. Unfortunately, Kallu missed the task by one and the deities left without him. Admirers of Kallu maintain that he was almost successful and fearing that Kallu might actually meet the terms of the agreement and would come along as Parvati's attendant, Shiva coerced the Sun God to rise a little early, ensuring that Kallu would fail in his task.

Historians reckon that the place was perhaps built by the Pala rulers in the 8-9<sup>th</sup> century and may also have been a Buddhist pilgrimage centre. While concrete evidence as the science of History demands are yet to surface to provide an answer to those logically centred, the place remains an important pilgrimage centre for those in the know. Besides, the central area accessible by stairs all around, locals say that there are figures and reliefs spread across hills and in the ravines for those adventurous enough to dare and walk around.

### **Ajanta of the Himalayas**

Overlooking a large oasis on the right bank of the Indus, across the river from the famous monastic complex of Alchi in the Leh district of the high altitude desert that is Ladakh, is a set of little known ancient caves above the village of Saspol. Thought to be formed by tides of a lake that once existed here, they are now home to some spectacular medieval Tibetan Buddhist art. These caves are officially called the Gon-Nila-Phuk Cave Temples, but are popularly known as the Saspol caves and regarded by some as the Ajanta of the Himalayas. Atop the hill is also a fort believed to be from the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

It is believed that for a while, the Buddhists in the area were persecuted and then Buddhism was reintroduced from Kashmir, where the tradition still held strong. The 10<sup>th</sup> century scholar and translator Rinchen Zangpo is credited with building a large number of temples and monasteries across Western Tibet. The caves at Saspol are also attributed to him.

The paintings are an invaluable source of understanding the history and evolution of Buddhism and Buddhist thought in the region. The original paintings are believed to be from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, but many have been retouched and some believe redone in the succeeding centuries. Some iconography suggests images made in the 15-16<sup>th</sup> century. The caves must have once been inhabited by a number of monks and must have been abandoned when the caves started to collapse. The caves in these areas are not made of rock, but of an unstable moraine that melts in the rain.

Folklore maintains that these caves, which are today in various stages of deterioration, housed disciples of Zangpo who used them as a canvas to practice and perfect the imagery that would go on to decorate the walls during Zangpo's temple building spree.

### **Those whose names we know not...**

Westward of the southern tip of the Great Andaman archipelago is the North Sentinel Island. On Google maps it would seem as just another piece of gorgeous sandy beaches with a dense forest in the exotic island-landscape of the region. On





JAMNALAL BAJAJ FOUNDATION

Jamnalal being felicitated after his release from Jaipur jail.

# Non-violence

**"Non-violence is a redoubtable  
weapon for the unarmed."**

- Jamnalal Bajaj

Non-violence, for Mahatma Gandhi, was not just a code of conduct but a whole philosophy of life. Jamnalal Bajaj, as a committed follower, imbibed it in his life. All the movements of Gandhiji were non-violent and Jamnalal participated in them – be it the Non Co-operation Movement (1921), his own Nagpur Flag Satyagraha (1923), Bardoli Satyagraha (1928), Boycott of Simon Commission (1929), Salt Satyagraha (1930), Civil Disobedience Movement (1931) or the Bijolia Satyagraha (1931). He practised non-violence in every walk of life, and in all its dimensions.

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JAMNALAL BAJAJ  
AWARDS



Nominations Invited For The  
40th Jamnalal Bajaj Awards 2017 in

- Constructive Work
- Science & Technology
- Women & Children
- International for Promoting Gandhian Values



## Constructive Work



Recognizes contributions in the field of constructive work focussing on Mahatma Gandhi's eighteen Constructive Programmes, to create a self reliant community in India.

## Science & Technology



Felicitates the contributions in the application of science and technology which are relevant, applicable, accessible and affordable to the weaker section of the society and has created an impact on rural and tribal development.

## Women & Child Welfare



Commends the contributions of women towards development and welfare of women and children focusing on education, skills training, healthcare, literacy, livelihood activities, advocacy, holistic development and more.

## International



Honours individual foreign nationals for propagating Gandhian principles and vision of non-violence, peace, harmony, brotherhood and moral conscience, outside India.

For more information on  
Awards and Nomination process visit :  
[www.jamnalalbajajawards.org](http://www.jamnalalbajajawards.org)

Kindly note the last date for  
receipt of nominations is  
**16 January, 2017** for  
the 3 National Awards and  
**28 February, 2017** for  
the International Award.







The exterior of a *haveli* at Ramgarh, Shekhawati

ground at Port Blair you would realise that you cannot get a boat to go to the island or even in the general direction. Not just that, you would be punishable by law if you did venture there.

The North Sentinel Island, though legally administered by the Indian Union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, is the home and domain of one of the last uncontacted tribes of the world – the Sentinelese. We know nothing for certain about the Sentinelese. The earliest information about them comes from an 1880 British expedition, and since then there have been limited interaction with them. The tribe is a fierce one and approachers by boat and helicopter have known to be greeted with a curtain of arrows. A National Geographic film director on expedition has had the rare privilege of being stuck in the thigh with a Sentinelese arrow.

In 1996, the Indian government ended the 'Contact Expeditions'. We don't know who exactly they are, what their history is, how they got there – not even what they call themselves. On a few sq. kms of land in the middle of the ocean remain approximately 250

Today Ramgarh is a treasure trove of painted temples, havelis and cenotaphs constructed between the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the wealthy businessmen. These are exceptional for their frescos and murals depicting mythological themes from the epics as well as images of huge animals.

individuals from pre-history, and amongst the last of the humans not contacted and not wanting to be contacted by modern society.

#### An open-air art gallery

Popular as the largest open-air art gallery of the world, Ramgarh in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan has an intriguing history. Ramgarh is said to be founded by the Poddar merchant family who left the nearby town of Churu – a small township in Bikaner – due to a dispute related to taxation. They came and settled in the almost unknown village of Ramgarh and vowed to make it grander and richer than the Churu they had left.

In the course of the next 100 years, they kept their promise and Ramgarh developed into one of the most beautiful towns in the entire Shekhawati region, and one of the richest towns in India. Along with wealth, the Poddars are complimented as being patrons of learning and the facilities for learning made available here has had the town being labeled as '*Doosra Kashi*' or second Kashi.

Today it is a treasure trove of painted





**The dome of Poddar Chhatri, with its beautiful mural**

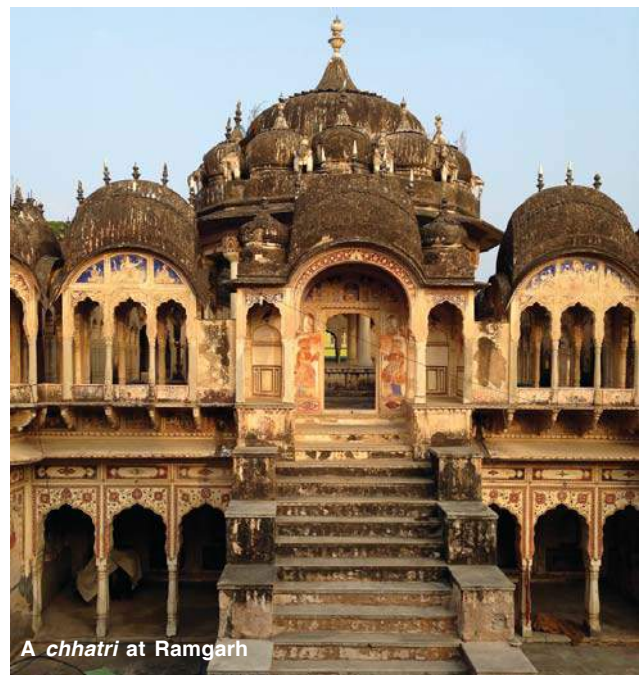
temples, havelis and cenotaphs constructed between the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the wealthy businessmen. These are exceptional for their frescos and murals depicting mythological themes from the epics as well as images of huge animals. Though with the coming of the British, western influences began to make their appearance and foreigners in hats, suits and gowns, cars, steam, locomotives and train, airplanes, and telephones found their place on the walls along with scenes from Lord Krishna's life.

The main attraction in Ramgarh besides the *havelis* is the cenotaph (*chhatri*) of Ram Gopal Poddar. Built in 1872, it houses more than 500 marvellous murals. The one in the dome can be singled out for being exceptional.

### **Deers that dance on a forest that floats...**

A two-hour bus drive, or approximately 50 kms south of Imphal in Manipur is the largest freshwater lake in the north-east region. It is basically a swamp with floating vegetation called '*phumdi*'. *Phumdi* is an accrual of organic biomass that is light enough to float but is at places strong enough to support considerable weight, sometimes even that of humans. Loktak Lake is a unique bio-diversity hotspot occupying an area of about 40 sq. km. Its name literally means '*Lok*' – stream and '*Tak*' – the end; referring to the many streams that feed the lake.

The Loktak Lake is the core around which is formed the Keibul Lamjao National Park – home to the dancing deer of Manipur. Locally known as the Sangai, it is more commonly referred to as the brow-antlered deer and is one of three unique sub-species of the deer. The other two are found in Thailand, Myanmar and surrounding countries, but the Sangai is endemic



**A *chhatri* at Ramgarh**





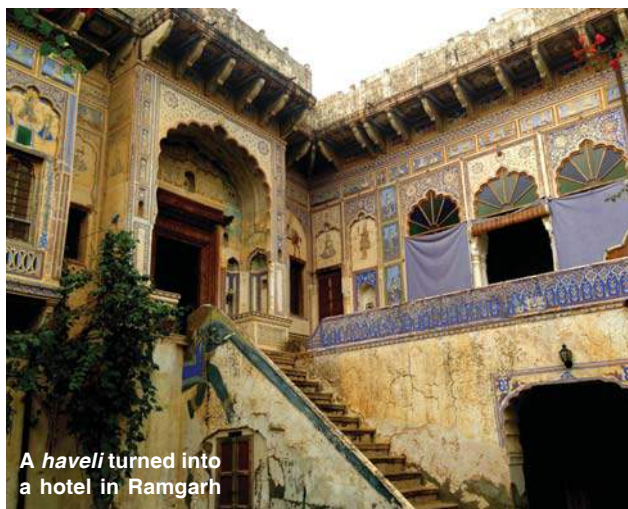
Inside one of the beautiful *havelis* of Ramgarh

to Manipur and naturally occupies a prominent place in local culture and folklore. Once thought to be extinct, it was rediscovered in 1975 and their numbers have increased due to conservation efforts and the establishment of the Keibul Lamjao National Park. The deer have adapted to the floating biomass and have mastered the trick of distributing their weight such as to almost glide over the *phumdi*, making it look like they are dancing. Unfortunately, the Sangai are shy animals and not the easiest to spot, especially just after the wet season when the grass is tall and difficult to see through. However, one can experience the thrill of travelling by a local canoe carved out of a single tree trunk and travel the many channels between the *phumdis*.

### A hidden city of caves

It is wondrous to know that over 2400 years ago, Buddhist monks began carving caves for prayer and meditation on the island we today call Mumbai, and over the course of centuries chiseled out a cave complex of 109 caves from the hard basalt rock. It is from this hard black rock that the caves got their name of Krishnagiri – or black mountain, which over time was shortened to Kanheri. Kanheri is perhaps Mumbai's best kept secret.

Buddhism is thought to have first arrived in Aparantha (western India) at Sopora (near present day Nala Sopara) which was a port town and routes to Elephanta and other parts of Mumbai would traverse through here. It had become an important Buddhist settlement on the Konkan coast by the 3<sup>rd</sup>



A *haveli* turned into a hotel in Ramgarh



Exterior of Poddar Chhatra





**The floating *phumdi* of Loktak Lake in Manipur**

century CE. Once the caves and settlements assumed the form of permanent monasteries, intricate reliefs of Buddha and Bodhisattvas were also carved in the rock.

Kanheri is credited with the distinction of having the largest number of cave excavations on a single hill. The cave complex consists mainly of *viharas* – caves meant for studying, meditating and living. Larger *Chaityas* – the halls of congregational worship were also carved and these have superbly sculpted pillars, reliefs and sculptures. The large number of *viharas* demonstrates the well organised establishment of Buddhist monks.

An elaborate and ingenious rain water harvesting and underground water storage facilities were also carved out of stone. Further up the hills are canals and cisterns – remnants

of an ancient system that channeled rainwater into huge tanks. It is believed that Kanheri was also a centre of imparting Buddhist education, and the great Buddhist teacher Atisha is believed to have studied here.

### **Fabulous capital of a forgotten kingdom**

At the height of the Hoysala rule in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this city was called 'Dwarsamudra', meaning 'door to the ocean', and enjoyed an exalted status in South India. Today it is called Halebidu, which literally means 'old city' or even 'ruined city', as it was ransacked by Malik Kafur twice during his invasions of South India.

Dwarsamudra was the capital then of the Hoysala Empire,



**Riding a canoe at Kelbul Lamjao National Park**





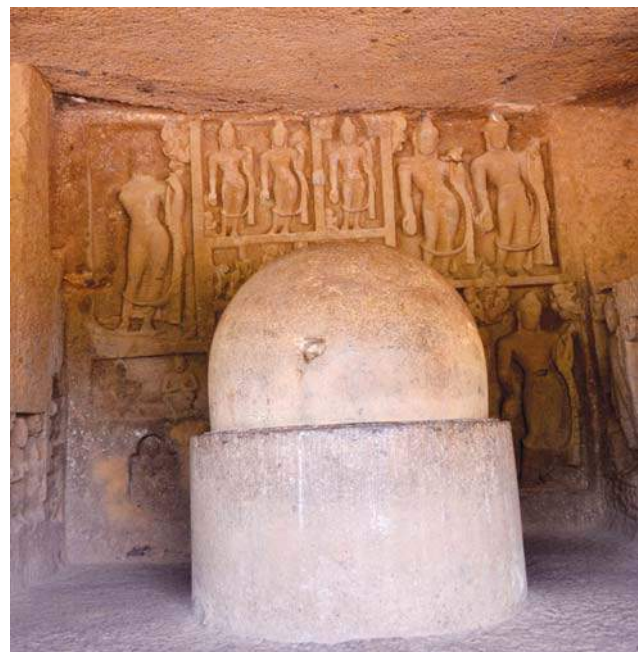
**The rock-cut Viharas at Kanheri, Mumbai**

and though the area is landlocked, it is the large man-made tank that was referred to as an ocean. Situated at a distance of 150 kms from the city of Mysore, it was built facing a large 11<sup>th</sup> century water tank that received water from the channels of an ancient dam built over the Yagachi river.

The Hoysaleswara temple is amongst the last remnants of that glorious period. It is one of the largest temples in South India that is dedicated to Lord Shiva, with inscriptions and carvings from the Hindu Upanishads and mythology. It enshrines Hoysaleswara and Shantaleswara, named after the temple builder Vishnuvardhana Hoysala and his wife, Queen Shantala. It is also known to have the largest Nandi idols in the country. The walls of the temples are completely covered with carvings. Every square inch of the wall is adorned with some figure or scene from mythology and holy texts. The Hoysala crest stands proud on the entrance doorways.

Art historian James Fergusson writes of Halebidu thus:

*“The Hoysaleswara temple may be probably considered as one of the most marvellous exhibitions of human labour to be found...The mode in which the eastern face is broken up by the larger masses, so as to give height and play of light and shade, is a better way of accomplishing what the Gothic artists attempted by their projections. This however is surpassed by the western front, where the variety of outline and arrangement and subordination of the various facets in which it is disposed, must be considered as a masterpiece of design in its class. If the friezes were to be spread along a plain surface, it would lose more than half its effect, while*



**A stupa at Kanheri**

*the vertical angles, without interfering with the continuity of the frieze give height and strength to the whole composition. The disposition of the horizontal lines of the lower friezes is equally effective. Here again, the artistic combination of horizontal and vertical lines and the play of outline and of light and shade far surpass anything in gothic art”.*

It is said that the two shrines, elaborate carvings, and two Nandi bull pavilions that form this enchanting temple complex were completed after a gruelling 190 years, and needed seven generations of workers!





**The Hoysaleswara temple at Halebidu, Karnataka**

### **A celebration of light**

Perhaps the grandest ruin of Kashmir is the temple to the Sun deity Martand. Martand is the eighth and last of the early Vedic solar deities called Adityas. Situated in Anantnag, it is one of the few surviving sun temples in the country. Deliberately built on a plateau above the level of the flood plains of the valley, it is an imposing structure towering against the bright blue sky lending its soaring frame to merge harmoniously with the lofty Himalayas in the background.

As per a legend, the temple was built by the Pandavas after they defeated the Kauravas and Bhima is said to have lifted the mighty stone slabs into place. Among historians, there is a controversy about who laid the foundation of the temple. It is largely acknowledged to be a Ranaditya feat between 370 to 500 CE though some attribute it to Ranaditya's predecessor Aryaraj. The current structure was built by ancient

Kashmir's most celebrated king - Lalitaditya Mukhtapad of the Karkota dynasty in the eighth century. The ruins are the remains of the demolition by the Muslim ruler Sikander Butshikan in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

It marks the apogee of the typical Kashmiri style of architecture which has blended the Gandharan, Gupta, Chinese, Roman, Syrian-Byzantine and Greek forms of architecture. The temple is made of large slabs of stones arranged in horizontal courses with fine joints. Iron dowels and cramping was used in binding the stones with the entire structure built on a single basement or platform. The temple faces west such that the rays of the setting sun would illumine the idol of the sun God that once graced the sanctum sanctorum. A poet has called Martand, "A dream in stones designed by Titans and finished by jewellers".

### **An ode to death**

To the north east of the city of Bidar, roughly three kms



**Temple wall studded with carvings at Hoysaleswara**





**The Martand Temple courtyard in Kashmir**

away lie perhaps the most surprising monuments of Karnataka – a set of mausolea, the royal necropolis of Ashtur, which has tombs of the erstwhile Bahamani sultans, and their spiritual advisers – the Nimatullahs.

Chaukhandi, a four-storied building, marks the last resting place for the descendants of Shah Nimatullah and the beginning of the necropolis. From here, the eternal blessings of the saints

flow outwards to bless the deceased kings who dwell in their tombs 500 metres away.

In a 200-metre stretch, are a handful of imposing tombs placed in the middle of rolling fields as if dropped in from the air like pieces in Lego land. Some broken – dramatically at that – and others complete with tantalising remains of the grandeur they must once have exhibited, the tombs of Ashtur



**The Martand Temple complex**





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The dome of Ahmad Shah Tomb, Ashtur

are a mirror to the fortunes of Bidar. Grand, oversized and then steadily diminishing in size from that of Ahmad Shah I.

Outwardly, the most striking of the tombs is the tomb of Humayun the cruel, which seems as menacing as the Sultan is described to be. Struck open by lightning and a broken cross section grinning malevolently even in his afterlife. Folklore says the lightning is heaven sent as a punishment for his evil ways. It is, however, the inside of Ahmad Shah I's tomb that one encounters the glory the tombs were built to be.

As soon as the eye adjusts to the darkness of the tombs spacious innards, one realises one is standing inside a veritable jewel box. In what seems like Technicolor when compared to the monochrome exteriors, the tomb comes ablaze with shades of gold, vermillion, cobalt, azure bring to life floral motifs, geometric designs and Quranic verses. Still venerated as a pious, saintly king, the tomb is frequented by believers on his

Urs and also colloquially known as the Ashtur *dargah*.

### Full stop

That's it. This list must end here. Not just because this list could truly be never ending and there is a word count to adhere to, but because we have reached the magical number of nine sites. Nine, I deem to be magical not because of any numerological or subtle significations, but because

mathematically, it is a number of absolute purity. The digits of its multiples will always add up to equal nine again. And of course, because ten is the cliché that would begin the 'top ten' nonsense... ■



The writer is a media professional and freelance writer.

## Our Last Six Issues

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*“Children do not catch bacteria from dogs. It’s a myth. On the contrary, their presence increases immunity.”*



**Priya Poduval's** is a story of ordinary people who turn their passion into a profession. Rejecting the safe option of a regular job, she has now found happiness in her 60,000 sq ft. Peppy Paws Resort. Located on Phursungi Saswad road in Pune, it boasts of a 10,000 sq ft. indoor boarding centre, 5,000 sq ft. rooms for office/ kitchen and pet salon, and 1,000 sq ft. for a pool, the biggest in Pune for dogs. The rest is fenced play area and an outdoor garden play area for pets.

Peppy Paws is intended to be a one-stop shop for all pet needs. Priya Poduval spoke to **A. Radhakrishnan** about turning her passion into her profession.

#### **What does Peppy Paws Resort represent?**

It is the culmination of my extreme love for animals, as I have a will power to go against the tide (mostly even without oxygen). One fine day, I chucked a high paying corporate job to follow that dream. I was just 20 years and 245 days old! Finally on 21 February 2009, I started Peppy Paws by pet sitting from a 1- BHK (Bedroom-Hall-Kitchen) rented apartment.

I faced much opposition as nobody could understand my passion. But since that day, there has been no looking back for me. Many hardships later, Peppy Paws became a brand and people started appreciating the concept. On 15<sup>th</sup> August, we officially started our first branch of Peppy Paws pet resort. In seven years, we have grown to be the biggest pet resort in India, catering mainly to pet dogs and cats. With a 2,500 plus client base that trust us, it is growing at the rate of 22%. I strongly feel the key to success in life is not just getting a degree or having a highly paying job. How content you are is paramount. If every day is filled with excitement, doing what you love and you can go to sleep peacefully, you are at the right place. If not, something is not right. There is no short cut to success. If I have not taken a single day off or had a vacation, it speaks volumes about my ardour.

#### **Is it one of a kind in the country?**

Officially we don't have any data to back this claim, but yes, we were the one who introduced the concept of a 'pet resort' in India and as of now, we have the only pet old age home.

#### **How did you develop this passionate love for the furry friends?**

I have grown up with four to five pets; so the love and affection



**Priya and Roshan Poduval with their pets**



**Roshan Poduval taking care of pets at the Peppy Paws Resort**

started from my childhood. But the reason for Peppy Paws is because of my first self-owned dog Tyson, a most loving and affectionate dog. He gave me the strength and courage to move ahead to start a facility.

#### **What motivates you to do so much for them?**

It's their ability to love unconditionally without expecting anything in return. The more time I spend time with them, the deeper I realise they are amazing living beings in the world.

#### **How does the resort cater to dog lovers?**

We have several activities catering to the owners or dog lovers, like weekly socialisation sessions where they can interact with other pet lovers and their pets; get into group play games and swim with the pets, in the 1000 sqft pool which can cater to both the two and four-legged.

Also, we have school groups coming with their kids for their pet activity weeks. Last month for instance, 135 kids from Vibgyor, Magarpatta, Pune had come for their field trip, wherein we introduced our friendly pack of dogs that gambolled with great fun. (See box for the full range of pet services)



**Priya's son Vannsh, who is very comfortable with the animals**



**The swimming pool at the resort**

#### **Is this industry a booming one?**

The pet industry is certainly a booming industry in India and growing by over 15 to 18 % per annum, as per reports. We are happy being 'at the right place at the right time'.

#### **What are the challenges you face running this resort?**

After the initial challenges, now we breathe, sleep, eat 'peppy paws'. But what saddens me is that our business is not listed anywhere in India and hence even banks don't finance. But then each moment is a learning day. Like everyone, we are also not perfect; we also do make mistakes, but try not to repeat them.

#### **How did you then get the finance?**

As mentioned earlier, we have been running around trying to tap all possible ways to generate funds. As banks didn't help us, we became 'corporate beggars' (who can speak English and have a bright vision). After tapping more than 50 to 60 known and unknown sources, with every rejection making us stronger, we finally found an angel investor who funded us.



**The field where the pets run and play**



### **What is your husband's role in this venture? How has your child taken to the resort?**

My husband Roshan is my guide, my breath and my backbone. We share a common love. He even left his job to help realise my dream. He assured me that he would always be there holding the ladder when I climbed each step. His approach to life amazes me. He treats me as a business partner during working hours, and we are a couple only after that. Our little prince, Vannsh, who came into our lives in 2014, has an approach towards animals which is at another level. At this small tender age of two years, he has already learned the meaning of 'sharing', be it an ice-cream or a chocolate. We call him an 'urbanised Mowgli', as he trusts animals more than human beings. In fact, the first word he said was not 'mamma or papa', but 'Sheeba', who is our female Labrador.

### **How much of a risk taker are you?**

Ha! That is a million dollar question. As an entrepreneur, there is nothing to lose, but an entire world to conquer! The definition of risk changes from time to time. In 2008-09, the biggest risk was to dream big and leave a white collar job; but in 2013, it was to decide about having a family, keeping the busy schedule in mind.

By 2015 end, it was taking a loan of 50 lakhs at a 30% interest rate, with a resolve to ensure double gains in just 2.5 years. And also to introduce another little one to the family. It does prove I am a risk taker!

### **What do you feel about the several incidents of stray dogs biting people in Kerala?**

The fault lies with urbanisation, lack of open spaces and uneducated people. I personally have adopted and rescued 15 stray dogs. There is no difference between a pedigree and a stray, once you give them what they need – food, open spaces to run around, and a shelter, with a loving atmosphere.

### **A school of thought says when so many humans are dying, why keep dogs as pets?**

Well, because we can't keep humans as pets, I must say!

### **What is the difference between dogs and cats?**

Well, dogs are loyal, while cats are selfish. Cats will only come to you when they need something. But dogs are just the opposite (cat lovers please excuse me, but that's the bitter truth). But both creatures justify their existence in their own way, depending upon how they have been brought up.

### **Do dogs help you in stress alleviation?**

Yes of course it is a proven fact. When kids grow up with dogs, their immunity increases 33 percent. Our little Vannsh is a

### **The range of services offered at Peppy Paws**

- Cage free boarding, unlike the traditional kennelling or chaining the pet
- A dedicated place for senior pets; sort of an old age home for pets
- The only 'cattery' for the cats
- Critical care centre with 24 hours service
- Peppy Meals... We serve fresh homemade pet meals which are also home delivered
- Organising of various events for pets and 'pet parents'
- Provision of swimming pool for dogs. Human beings can get into it on request!
- Special introduction sessions for kids, where we introduce our most friendliest pack of dogs and present a small demo on how to take care of them, what to expect, things one should not do, etc. Schools approach us for outdoor activities.
- 30 days of boarding valid for a year
- 12 complimentary baths in a year
- Free passes to all our pet events and dog socials
- Free swimming sessions for dogs

living example. And if it's a cat, then it will be 15 percent. Children do not catch bacteria from dogs. It's a myth. On the contrary, their presence increases immunity.

### **Are their unlucky dog names?**

No, but those dogs, which have names with a negative meaning, end up being like that. I had a client who named their dog Devil and it literally behaved like one. (Just a personal observation)!

### **Have you received any awards?**

In 2013, we were adjudged the best pet resort in India category by IIPTF (India International Pet Trade Fair), South Asia's premier annual trade fair.

### **What are your future plans?**

With our foundation ready, we now have to merely build the floors. The road map is to by 2020, have branches in all the metros in India and by 2022, we want to make Peppy

Paws an international brand and go international! ■



**A. Radhakrishnan**, Pune based freelance journalist, with close to four decades of experience in mainstream print journalism, is aiming for the digital platform. Making friends interests him and for company, he loves music and books. He also writes short stories and indulges in poetry.

# Sanskritaya namaha!

*Sanskrit is a dying language, is the lament of those who worry about preserving this rich classical language of India. But all is not lost, says **Shoma A. Chatterji**, as she reviews the number of publications in this language, as well as a recent film made in Sanskrit on a social issue. Is there a burgeoning interest?*

**S**ANSKRIT is among the 14 original languages of the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Yet, today, it appears to be a fading language that today's youngsters are not keen on learning, propagating or researching. This is tragic because it is a rich language that excels in poetry, classical theatre and scholarly studies. But few of us are aware that we still have over 90 weeklies, fortnightly and quarterlies published in Sanskrit in India, which means that it has not moved towards extinction as many may believe. To add to this rich literature is the fact that *Sudhama*, is a daily newspaper in Sanskrit published out of Mysore since 1970. Since the last five years, two other publications, namely, *Vartman Patram* and *Vishwasya Vrittantam* are being published from Gujarat. All India Radio (AIR) has been running a short daily news broadcast in Sanskrit since 1974, also available on AIR's website. The national channel Doordarshan plays a Sanskrit news broadcast on television and its website every morning.

The state of Uttarakhand in India has declared Sanskrit as its second official language. In October 2012, social activist Hemant Goswami filed a writ petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court to declare Sanskrit a 'minority' language. Sanskrit is a member of the Indo-Iranian subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages. Its closest ancient relatives are the Iranian languages Avestan and Old Persian.

## The looming presence of Sanskrit

Sanskrit as a language has contributed greatly both in terms of quality and quantity to Indian culture, going back to ancient history, some of which sustains to this day in the form of plays presented on the proscenium stage, rich poetry recited by Pandits and most important, to literature. In this sense, Sanskrit is a multi-layered language which, though is not the mother-tongue of Indians, is popular among historians, language experts and scholars and also, distinguished personalities across literature, music and theatre. More than 3,000 Sanskrit works have been composed since India's independence in 1947. Much of this work has been judged of high quality, in comparison to both classical Sanskrit literature, and modern literature in other Indian languages. In 2009, Satya Vrat Shastri became the first Sanskrit author to win



A poster of *Isti*; (inset) director Dr. G. Prabha

the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary award.

Sanskrit is used extensively in the Carnatic and Hindustani branches of classical music. *Kirtanas*, *bhajans*, *stotras*, and *shlokas* of Sanskrit are popular throughout India. The *Samaveda* uses musical notations in several of its recessions. The Sahitya Akademi has given an award for the best creative work in Sanskrit every year since 1967. Vedic and Sanskrit literature comprises the spoken or sung literature of the Vedas from the early to mid-2<sup>nd</sup> to mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, and continues with the oral tradition of the Sanskrit epics of Iron Age India; the golden age of classical Sanskrit literature dates to Late Antiquity (roughly the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries). Some of the most outstanding classical literateurs have written in Sanskrit. The most prominent among them is Kalidasa, whose plays like *Abhigyan Sakuntalam* and *Malavika-Agnimitram* have been the main texts in college syllabi till a decade ago. Other famous playwrights whose works are performed even today in other Indian languages are Shudraka, Bhasa and Asvaghosa.

International projects have also borrowed generously from Sanskrit. Phillip Glass, one of the most outstanding composers of contemporary cinema, used texts from the Bhagwad Gita sung in original Sanskrit for his opera *Satyagraha*. A prayer from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad was used during the closing credits of *The Matrix Revolution* and Madonna has included Sanskrit chants in her song *Cyber-raga* in the album



*Music*, besides using *Shanti/Ashtangi* in *Ray of Light* which won a Grammy in 1998. However, whether the use of Sanskrit in these international musical texts were done authentically after understanding their meanings and placing them in the right context, or whether they were used as a marketing gimmick, remains a grey area.

### Sanskrit and Indian cinema

Indian cinema has paid scant attention to Sanskrit, the ancient classical language of the country probably because marketing and release of films in Sanskrit was a commercial risk as Sanskrit was no longer popular either in educational institutions or among Indian youth. Most colleges and universities scrapped the Sanskrit Department within the faculty of languages for want of enough aspiring students. Narrow employment opportunities for students graduating in Sanskrit was another factor. One more reason is that since Sanskrit is wrongly understood to be exclusively “Hindu”, people belonging to other religious minorities are not interested in the language in the belief that it would not do them much good to learn it academically. But the computer age gave a new fillip to the language, and it is now being accepted in academia across the world as a language that opens the doors to a new world.

As of today, Indian cinema can boast of just four Indian films in Sanskrit spread over so many years of its existence. The first two Sanskrit films were *Adi Shankaracharya* (1983) and *Bhagavad Gita* (1993), both directed by G.V. Iyer. The third film screened as the inaugural film in the Indian Panorama the IFFI (International Film Festival of India) last year was *Priyamasanam* directed by Vinod Mankara. The first film was a biographical and historical account of Shankaracharya, while the second film was a recounting on celluloid of the famous Bhagwad Gita. The third film *Priyamasanam*, is about the 17<sup>th</sup> century poet-scholar Unnayi Warriar. But there has not been a single Sanskrit film that explores the social realities of Indian lives till *Isti* came on the scene and coloured the landscape of Sanskrit cinema forever.

### The story of *Isti*

Dr. G. Prabha, who directed *Isti* which he rightly claims is the first ever Sanskrit film to have an independent social agenda through its story and its statement, says, “Today, there is a world view that aligns languages with religions, and

Sanskrit has not escaped an association with Hinduism. My strong opinion is that language should not be divided by religious colour or fervour. My professor Abdul Khadar was a Muslim. In Kerala, there are many Muslim scholars of Sanskrit. A few orthodox people feel that Sanskrit is a ‘Hindu language’. It is the language of mankind. Not only Sanskrit but Urdu, Arabic, etc., – they have a message for mankind. In human beings they have made a caste system. Why also bring it into language? It is condemnable.”

Prabha was Professor of Sanskrit at Loyola College, Chennai. He made two documentary films before *Isti*. This

**Indian cinema has paid scant attention to Sanskrit, the ancient classical language of the country probably because marketing and release of films in Sanskrit was a commercial risk as Sanskrit was no longer popular either in educational institutions or among Indian youth. Most colleges and universities scrapped the Sanskrit Department within the faculty of languages for want of enough aspiring students.**

film besides being beautifully made and acted in, has broken the decades-long taboo of Sanskrit films. It slowly but surely makes an indicting political statement on the power-politics of patriarchy that dominated the lives of the Namboodiri Brahmins of Kerala. *Isti* is about a conservative Namboodiri family in the early 1900s. The family in “*Isti*” is led by Ramavikraman Namboodiri, a highly regarded priest about to marry for the third time. His marriage in his 70s to the 17-year-old Sridevi is justifiable in his eyes because he needs the money from her dowry to accomplish demanding and expensive *yagnas* (fire rituals), when it was the norm for the head of the family to practise polygamy, and often marry women at least 40-50 years younger than him. “I have tried to flesh out the evil practices of society in the past. All this happened in spite of the fact that the community had more than its share of progressive intellectuals. But these ‘pockets’ of patriarchy where the child bride was sexually abused by the head priest who was old enough to be her grandfather sustained,” says Prabha. His older wives were silent witness to this ‘legalised’ crime in the name of religion and ‘convention’ and this included his daughter as young as the third wife. The film thus focusses on withholding literacy and education from both boys and girls in the family, the patriarch holding the key to all financial contributions that come in and forcing his brothers and his sons to depend entirely on his whims and fancies and finally, how his third wife Sridevi uses her awareness through education to fight not only for her rights, but also the rights of the other members of the family.

The film ends with the heir of the family burning his sacred thread in anger, and the old Namboodiri’s third wife walking out of the house in rebellion, after flinging away her

(Continued on page 48)

# A balancing act

*Street performers in India are a harassed and condemned community. Their unique skills are no longer valued by a society which seems to spend lesser and lesser time outdoors. How can this community hold on to its skills, while adapting to changing mores and times? It's indeed a fine balancing act, says **Shoma A. Chatterji**.*

THE word “madari” in Hindi means “street performer”, that is, artists and performers who perform on the streets and depend entirely on the collections from the street audience that collects to watch their performance. Among these are – magicians, jugglers, masqueraders, acrobats, etc. The only man who can find out about these *madaris* is Ishamuddin Khan, touching 49, who lives in deep poverty in Kathputli Colony, a crowded cluster of tiny homes in west Delhi. Yet, he is forever carrying on almost a one-man crusade, not only to save these fading arts, but more important, to save the artists and performers in this rat-race to basic livelihood when television, cinema, theatre, ipads, smart-phones and tabs have conquered the minds, lives and public spaces of entertainment for the mass media.

“Since Independence in 1947, even the independent government has marginalised us completely. Today, we do

not have any officially recognised platform, any package from non-government organisations, as performing artists who have been entertaining the masses for hundreds of years,” says the ever-smiling Ishamuddin, who never wears a sad expression or a solemn face that might reveal his state of mind. He is an entertainer, first and last and his mission is to see that his clan, the *madaris* and their heirs continue to perform in a way that will rescue them from the dredges of poverty and bring respect and dignity to their lives.

“You will find our presence in literature, in history, in text books for children and on some postage stamps, but the society does not care and the government does not even feel like including us in their plans or packages,” says Ishamuddin. The media has sought to highlight his performance and his clan, but it has done nothing to alleviate his sufferings and those of his co-performing *madaris* and their families. “Besides



Indian Street Performers Association; coming together can only help their cause





**Street performers often perform dangerous feats**



**Ishamuddin with his son in 2009**

the government and the masses, our plight accelerates because we are not educated and we do not know the laws that can protect us and sustain us in the very art we are born into. We know nothing about our rights and therefore, we do not know how to claim them," says Ishamuddin.

### **The Great Indian Rope Trick!**

Ishamuddin claims to have revived the Great Indian Rope Trick, which he performed in the presence of a mass audience in 1995, and has therefore, disproved myths that the legendary trick was only a figment of fevered Western imagination. What is this trick we all have heard about but never seen? In the classic version of the Indian rope trick the performer first causes a rope to rise into the air. His boy assistant then scurries up the rope and promptly disappears. Next, the performer climbs the rope after the boy and also vanishes. Moments later, dismembered parts of the boy's body fall to the ground. The performer now descends the rope and places these parts into a basket. Finally, the boy jumps from the basket, fully restored to life. This legendary rope trick has generated over a hundred years of debate among scientists,

psychical researchers, journalists, magicians and the public.

What motivated him to revive, teach himself and then perform the rope trick? "I had heard lots of stories around this trick since I was a child. Then, an American writer told me that an award was being offered to anyone who could perform the trick. I made up my mind to crack the mystery. So, I got sucked into the world of research, trying to dig as much information and knowledge as I could from different sources, from *Jehangir Nama* to Siegel's *Net of Magic*, and all this while, my mother and my wife would keep the family kitchen burning with their job of rag-picking. But, though I performed the trick, I never got the money," he says without rancour.

Ishamuddin completed the first successful outdoor performance in view of a collected public of a trick everyone has been talking about for hundreds of years, but no one has mastered before. His performance made headlines around the world media and amazed the mesmerised audience, but sadly, did nothing to improve his financial condition or his lifestyle.

If his quality of life cannot improve, how will the lives of other street performers improve? Ishamuddin is among the top twenty street magicians of the world; but back home he is a *madari* fighting for sustenance of his livelihood; and struggling hard to bring all traditional street artists some semblance of living a life of dignity.



**Ishamuddin attempting the Great Indian Rope Trick**

### **A union of street performers**

The street performers now have an association founded under the leadership of Ishamuddin who founded the Indian Street Performers' Association Trust (ISPAT) in 2013, which has a website of its own, and a page on a social networking site. "I have travelled across continents and have been featured on



**ISPAT members performing on a street**

international television channels like BBC and CNN, and have got recognition for my individual performances. But that does not fulfil my desire to see my clan sustain. Many of our children have drifted away from their ancestral occupation because it does not feed them anymore. I want to revive the interest in street performances and performers. And so I decided to found ISPAT and many of my ilk backed this decision,” informs Ishamuddin.

The Indian Street Performers Association Trust has been set up to revive the traditional street performances or *madari* traditions in India. This is an initiative by the street performer community for their own community. They have recently got 80G and 12A approval from the government to raise funds. There are seven street performing communities in India – Street Magicians, Acrobats, Snake Charmers, Street Singers, Jugglers, Impersonators or Beherupiyas and Animal Trainers.

When Ishamuddin performed for and got acquainted with Irish gypsies during his travels, he learnt how they work for the betterment of their folk gypsies, and he decided to do the same for his peers in India. He decided to work towards the uplift and betterment of Indian street performers. “So after meeting intellectuals and arts lovers, organisations, visiting colleges and universities, I decided to form this organisation towards giving them an identity, work towards their empowerment, polish their performances, arrange and organise funds and sponsors so that we can participate in art festivals, education programmes, leadership programmes, community training programmes, competitions and conventions. We are trying to get our cultural ancestry back through our performances in our cities and villages,” says Ishamuddin.

He now does performances at birthday parties on invitation and helps his co-street performers to do likewise. His wife tends to the homestead by earning a pittance with all kinds

#### **ISPAT is trying to raise funds to:**

- Raise awareness of the art and community;
- Work with the authorities to allow street performances in designated areas.
- Train the community to enable them to present to new and modern audiences;
- Find work for the communities;

Those who wish to donate should contact Ishamuddin Khan at 9811730682 or write to him at [ispatstreet@gmail.com](mailto:ispatstreet@gmail.com). Donations can be made directly to the following account:

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New Delhi-110008

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of odd jobs. “So long as the British ruled India, street performers earned respect because of their command over the skill and art of traditional performance. Our children looked forward to learning the family’s ancestral art. But with Independence, we are constantly made victims of police harassment and torture. We are considered to be beggars, which we most certainly are not. Many street performers are forced to take up casual jobs as day labourers at construction sites and other indigenous workshops. The only way left for us to earn through our art are birthday parties,” he sums up. ■

Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for ‘commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues’ among many awards. She is currently Senior Research Fellow, ICSSR, Delhi, researching the politics of presentation of working women in post-colonial Bengali cinema 1950 to 2003.





# The art of *Broto Alpana*

Often, the art of drawing with rice flour or paste and colours, like rangoli and broto alpana are not mere artistic expressions. They give a chance to women to get together, observe old rituals, and bond while doing so, says **Manjira Majumdar**. These art forms are a rich part of our heritage and must be preserved.

**W**HEN man started the art of painting images, it became a source of communication between him and others. It first began with the concept of appeasing the unknown power that people in ancient times believed in; a force that controlled their lives. Women folk, both from animistic tribes and rural communities, have been performing specific rites to their gods in order to obtain divine blessings that would safeguard them and their loved ones from misfortune, and provide health and prosperity to their families.

Down the ages, this appeasement or prayer took the form of *broto* or vows in rural Bengal, where the predominant occupation was farming. Vows would be undertaken to satisfy the gods with a view to achieving fulfillment of one's wishes. Furthermore, women belonging to this agrarian lifestyle observed their vows following the ritual of drawing specific decorative motifs with their fingers, known as *alpana* (pronounced *alpona*), derived from the Sanskrit word *alimpana*, which means 'to plaster' or 'to coat with'.

*Alpana* can be compared to *rangoli*, which is an essential part of our culture that has given rise to beautiful designs that can be replicated elsewhere. It is a beautiful tradition of ephemeral beauty – an art that is created only to get pale with time, or scattered away if dry powder is used. In the manner that beautiful clay images of gods and goddesses are immersed in water as a symbol of dust to dust, embodying the very essence of life.



Shooting the documentary *Finger Painting Messages to the Gods*



A woman drawing a beautiful motif or *alpana*

## A unique art form

The tradition of *broto alpana* in Bengal is unique in several ways. It was believed that the force generated from the 'magic' of such ritual would yield the desired results. So basically, *broto alpana* marries the two elements of invocation – prayer and painting – in a message to the gods to grant wishes. *Broto* or *vrat* is similar in that it entails fasting as part of the vows taken. They have long been associated with agriculture – for fertility of the soil, to induce rain and to protect crops. The other reasons were human fertility and wealth. They were also observed to cure diseases, evade disasters, grant good husbands and a variety of miscellaneous needs. Sometimes, the objective of these *broto* was also negative, a desire to harm others – especially the co-wives. The women came together and needed no priest to do this. Dipping their fingers into the soaked and ground rice paste they drew beautiful patterns on the floors of their houses, on walls, courtyards etc. Along with this exercise, they composed and recited rhymes or *chhara*, praying for the above. Sometimes, they chanted these as they painted or encircled the drawings together in rhythmic motions. "The specificity of these rituals was targeted," says Phoenix based Sarbari Chowdhury who has recently made a documentary *Finger Painting Messages to the Gods*. It focuses on this vanishing ritual, still prevalent in some parts

of rural Bengal. “If they needed rain, the rituals included verses and *alpana* referred to the prayer for rain. Similarly, if the ritual was for a good harvest, the *alpana* and *charra* verses depicted a sheaf of golden rice plants, overflowing granaries. In that they are not generic,” she adds, her half-hour film throwing light on the ritualistic processes leading to the actual painting.

Hindu Bengali women are known to keep *broto* on a number of occasions. The widows were known to be imposed with a number of *broto* rituals, perhaps, to keep them busy. There were three kinds mainly. The *shastra broto*; primarily Pauranic rituals, performed by Bramhin priests and followed formal rituals as prescribed in the Puran texts, one clear example being Durga Puja (considered the community’s biggest celebration). The *nari broto* performed by women, and are a mix of pre- Pauranic *broto* and the formal Pauranic *broto*, an example is Lakshmi Puja.

The young girl’s or *kumari broto* is the least fussy of them all and dates back to pre-Vedic times. The rituals here are performed by the women themselves, no Brahman priest is required. The steps for these *broto* include the preparation like first gathering all the items required; preparing the ritual area; taking a ritual bath, drawing or *alpana*; chanting the magic *chhara* verses and sometimes, orally composing them as well. Lastly, reciting and listening to a narration (*brotokatha*) or example of occasions when the performance of that particular *broto* had yielded positive results bringing good cheer to those gathered.

These rituals, over time, have thrown up talented singers, dancers, composers and artists. Those with a natural flair for any of these contributed to the group effort, perhaps giving the participatory women a sense of self-esteem otherwise confined to the drudgery of housework.

### Regressive or creative expression?

So even if we can say, yes, the rituals were regressive because everything pointed to men, home, and hearth, it also gave the women an opportunity to get together and have fun, when also showcasing their artistic talent. What beautiful patterns emerged! Materials used are historically a slurry of *atop chal* (refined rice) for the design itself. The base is prepared with clay/mud mixed with cow dung or sometimes, to add color, red clay is added. Today an *alpana* is painted with zinc oxide, poster colors and the easiest of all these, in

the form of pre-done stickers! “I have concentrated in areas like Nadia, Burdwan, Birbhum and closer to Kolkata – the 24 Parganas,” says Sarbari. “What I found is that the style of drawing differs between the Santhal tribal community and the Bengali community, Hindus and Muslim. The film follows some of the women as they innovate and take creative licenses as they give vent to their innate sense of lines and forms.

Taking a cue from that, Urmi Rahman, former journalist with BBC Radio explains, “The art of *alpana* though not connected with any *broto* among the Muslims, is an important art form in Bangladesh. On Language Day, February 21, students from the state art college draw one of the longest *alpana* on the streets that have captured world attention.

Stylised local vines, figurines and flowers feature predominately in *broto alpana*. The other type of *alpana* which is drawn during weddings, *bhai dooj* and other festivities, can refer to beautiful designs, simple and elaborate, made popular over the years.

Whether *broto alpana* is a regressive ritual comparable to say *karwa chauth* is debatable, but in the words of Madhupa Bakshi, who has grown up with a tradition of *alpana* during various religious rituals: “In today’s global world where oneness of culture and lifestyle are being emphasised, there is a definite need to preserve our unique cultural traditions in whatever form.” As Dean, Media Science Department, Heritage Academy, Kolkata, she understands the importance of traditional forms of communication that exists among various

communities.

“We welcome guests with *alpana* and *rangoli* which are manifestations of our unique culture and artistic expressions irrespective of the gender angle.” That *alpana* has also seeped into larger folk-art styles in Bengal are there for all to see.

But for women of the past steeped in agrarian culture, *broto alpana* helped them to communicate their heart’s desires to the gods while expressing their artistic abilities in their own way. This was but one way for them to feel appreciated, and admired by the bigger community around them. ■



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

**The tradition of *broto alpana* in Bengal is unique in several ways. It was believed that the force generated from the ‘magic’ of such ritual would yield the desired results. So basically, *broto alpana* marries the two elements of invocation – prayer and painting – in a message to the gods to grant wishes.**



# A building like no other

*In recent times, when glass and chrome buildings have become an architectural fad, a team of city architects circumvent this urban trend and opt for locally available material to create a unique spiritual and skill development centre at Nashik, near Mumbai.*

**Mythili Kowshik-Shetty** gives us an insight into Jetavan, a project that seeks to revive local building traditions through community participation.

**J**ETAVAN, the grove of trees where Buddha meditated, is the name given to the Centre in Sakarwadi, near Nashik. It has been built on land donated by the Somaiya Trust and Godavari Refineries, with funds donated by them. Just as the original was a source of enlightenment, this project has thrown up many insights in the process of its execution.

To give a brief introduction, Aparna Dhareshwar and I, are senior architects at Sameep Padora & Associates, a Mumbai-based architectural studio. We have worked on a variety of projects in our 15-odd years, but this one taught us more about community building than all those together.

The institute was programmed to provide a spiritual anchor for the practice of Buddhist thought through meditation and yoga, while also imparting training and skill development for members of the Dalit Baudh community. The community wanted the Centre to be represented by the simplest form of urbanism they aspired to – a concrete (*pucca*) building with ceramic tile floors.

## The indigenous element

Having worked on local materials and labour in our earlier Shiv temple project, we were inclined to have them see the value of indigenous building techniques and materials. Dr. Supriya Rai, Director, K.J. Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies, encouraged our intention to use rammed masonry walls and mud roll timber roofs, while ensuring we kept the project within the stringent budget. The beauty of the project was that not a single existing tree in the premises was cut to make way for the Centre. The six blocks – including the prayer hall, vocational training, administrative and residential units – were designed around the 55 existing trees, enclosing two courtyards, so we could retain “the grove” completely. The roofs are radically different from conventional sloping roofs that slope down from the centre to the walls. Without conventional windows, the natural ventilation happens from the mesh covered space between the roof eaves and wall, also providing lush green views of *neem* and *gulmohar* trees in the complex when the eye soars upwards. Post completion in January 2016, the project has been published in several



**Bringing nature into the building**

(All photos courtesy: Edmund Sumner)

national and international magazines and has won third place in the 2 A Asia Architecture Award 2016 (Public Category) held in Vienna.

Since we had never used these building techniques before, we collaborated with Hunnarshala Foundation, a Bhuj-based organisation which is propagating local building technology across India. Fly ash—an industrial waste product was available easily in the same factory complex as this building. We jointly studied the other locally available resources and came up with a combination of fly ash and plentiful quarry dust to make rammed masonry walls. The roof truss material came from scrap wood from Alang – the ship breaking yard in Gujarat. Mangalore tiles, discarded from older buildings, were used here. Designers, clients, end users, NGO technical personnel and craftsmen coordinated across geographic, linguistic and ideological differences to construct this unique complex.



**The building with a new roof design, where nature becomes visible**

### Open minds, better buildings

Though they had initially envisaged a brick and RCC structural box, the locals were willing to try this radically different approach of rammed earth and inverted roofs instead. They even agreed to cow dung on the flooring when given the explanation that this was a better option than ceramic tiles, because of its cooling and antiseptic properties. Our stereotype of the inflexibility present in rural mindsets was broken. People everywhere, we realised, are open to good ideas, as long as they can see the value for themselves. They are now wholeheartedly using the centre and are very proud of the attention it is receiving.

The other great learning came from the community of craftspeople who came to teach and execute the rammed

masonry walls with Hunnarshala. These people come from Kutch, where natural resources are scarce. In learning and honing new building techniques with Hunnarshala, post the 2001 earthquake, they have shown resilience in developing a more viable future for themselves and their community. Currently, trained construction gangs live for months in unfamiliar surroundings, building and teaching local craftsmen to be self-reliant.

Thirdly, the craftswomen were an eye opener. These women standing shoulder to shoulder with their men, stay on construction sites far from home for many months. Aparna remembers seeing a young mother, effortlessly alternating work with feeding her infant, without slacking off on the job entrusted to her. She says it gave her a new appreciation of how privileged we are, to have the benefit of education and family support to be able to work, but in less trying circumstances.

So, in seeing this project being built, we have observed varying communities in differing circumstances responding in positive ways to change. We learnt that it is in a community's acceptance of new ideas that progress emerges, gains velocity in the hard work put in by them, and eventually soars above circumstances to prosper and even help others who need a

helping hand. And we thought, as the foundation stone was laid, that we would only learn one more new technique of building! ■



Mythili Kowshik-Shetty is an Architect and an occasional writer, who has been working with sP+a as Senior Associate for the last 8 years. She is passionate about how designed spaces can transform the quality of living.

## Sanskritaya namaha!

(Continued from page 41)

*thaali*. The film has angered a group of Namboodiris who feel that the film has degraded their community. But Prabha doesn't agree that the film is anti-Namboodiri.

Sivadasan Namboodiri, the president of Brahmanakshema Sabha in Muvattupuzha, has filed a case against CBFC (Central Board of Film Certification) for granting *Isti* a U-certificate, and the director for tarnishing the reputation of the Namboodiri community. What does Prabha say about this? "I cannot comment on the case as it is sub-judice." He wishes however that it had not come to this. "I know there are those who probably think that this is publicity for the film, but as a retired professor, I never wanted cheap publicity for my work. I want the film to speak for itself, and though it missed the National Award, this omission has been vindicated by the fact that it is being invited to many festivals and has received

appreciation everywhere."

*Isti* means "Search for the Self." Prabha could not have opted for a better title. Let us hope that the film will democratise the language that has been held to be exclusive to higher castes and affluent Brahmins, not accessible to people from the lower strata of society. Cinema with its power to entertain, educate and inform, can bring the social change Prabha is dreaming of. The crusade begins with *Isti*. ■

Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for 'commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues' among many awards. She is currently Senior Research Fellow, ICSSR, Delhi, researching the politics of presentation of working women in post-colonial Bengali cinema 1950 to 2003.





# Dear Prime Minister...

*While lauding Prime Minister Modi for his demonetisation drive, **Dr. P.M. Kamath** asks for further reforms, which will well and truly address corruption, especially in the political system. Will this come to pass?*

## Dear Prime Minister,

You have excelled in your efforts to reach out to ordinary citizens to know their opinions on crucial issues affecting national interest. I am happy you asked for my opinion on the issue of demonetisation and I have given my endorsement to the move in your survey. I could redeposit a few of Rs. 500 notes in my bank account from where they were withdrawn during Deepavali. In day today life, I have faced no problems; I get small change from rickshaw drivers and grocery shops..

In the last column where you asked me to write my opinion I had said: 'End all indirect elections.' You may ask me what the correlation between demonetisation and indirect elections is. One of the purposes expected to be served by demonetisation is to check the use of black money and to gradually liberate Indian politics from the dependence on it (if ever that is possible)! Money is said to be the mother's milk of politics; though money alone cannot help a politician to win the election, money enables a candidate to approach every voter in his constituency. Since the Election Commission (EC) regulates use of money and has a limit imposed on total amount of money a candidate can pump into an electoral contest, candidates look for unaccounted money. Hence, unaccounted money is used in politics in a big way; to buy nominations to contest – often called as 'ticket to contest,' buy all necessities for a successful contest. Votes are literally purchased by spending money on giving



**PM Modi, the architect of the demonetisation campaign**

additional facilities to group of voters such as a bore-well pump, or fixing paver blocks in housing societies as inducements by politicians during the elections.

This art and science of giving inducements to voter has been perfected by Dravidian political parties in South India – particularly in Tamil Nadu. In direct elections, it is comparatively easier for voters to cheat the politicians because it is difficult to determine whether a voter has in fact voted for the politician who gave him money. I have heard DMK speakers in 1971 national elections asking voters to take money from the Congress Party, but vote for them!

But black money is more important to win elections when it is an indirect election as, for instance, provided for the Council of States (Rajya Sabha) and Legislative Council in the States under the Indian Constitution. While a few candidates with limited money but with party backing can get elected to

the Lok Sabha, it is next to impossible to win Rajya Sabha election unless one is a multibillionaire! In case of indirect elections, money is needed to be paid at every step – particularly, getting a ticket and getting enough votes say, anywhere between 35 to 45 votes that are needed. In July 2013, for instance, present Union Rural Development Minister, Choudhary Birendra Singh had said that an unnamed MP (Member of Parliament) had paid ₹ 80 crores for a ticket to contest the Rajya Sabha poll! But that candidate is said to have boasted that he saved ₹ 20 crores as his anticipated budget was of ₹ 100 crores!

Money power has discredited the fair name of Indian electoral democracy. Vijay Mallya when he walked out of the country to avoid law for numerous bank frauds he had committed was an elected member of the Rajya Sabha. He was elected from Karnataka twice as an independent member with the backing of all major parties like the Congress, BJP and JD (S) in 2002 and 2010, humouring all parties. To be fair to Mallya, he is the not the only one to get elected to the Upper House in India by using money power. During the brief rule by PM Chandra Shekhar in 1990, he got industrialist Kamal Morarka elected to Rajya Sabha. There have been complaints of party leaders taking money but not giving ticket! Swaraj Lamba had accused in 2000, her party leader, Laloo Prasad Yadav of taking money from her, but not giving the ticket for Rajya Sabha!

**(Continued on page 51)**

# Who will define Hindutva?

*It's an oft-repeated sentiment in this country that Hinduism is a way of life and hence beyond definition. It may have been fine in the years gone by, but today the terms Hindutva and Hinduism need to be clearly defined. Otherwise, they are liable to be misused by right-wing elements, says **Prof. Avinash Kolhe**.*

INDIA has always been a difficult country to govern, with its mind-boggling diversity. Can you imagine administering a country with 22 official languages and almost all world religions? And as if this was not enough, the modern model of democracy based on 'one-head-one vote', has made India more difficult to manage. This, however, is not to even remotely suggest that we should jettison our democratic model. But we do need to look at it afresh, in the context of our experience of running it for over 60-odd years.

## The Hindutva case

This issue has come into the spotlight thanks to a judgment given by the Supreme Court on 25 October 2016. On this day, the apex court gave a verdict decided by a seven-member bench headed by the Chief Justice of India Justice T.S. Thakur. The apex court was called upon to decide two cases – Abhiram Singh v/s C.D. Commachen, and Narayan Singh v/s Sunderlal Patwa. Many scholars argue that the Supreme Court has let go of a golden opportunity to reconsider the correctness of a judgment rendered by Justice J.S. Varma in December 1995. This is commonly known as the 'Hindutva case'.

According to the verdict given by Justice Varma "appealing to the terms 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduism' during an election campaign did not necessarily constitute a corrupt practice in violation of the Representation of People's Act, 1951 (RPA), since the terms like

Hindutva do not ordinarily refer to religion, but only to 'a way of life'". Now once again the apex got the opportunity to revisit this controversial judgment given by Justice Varma. But the bench headed by Justice Thakur allowed it to pass. This may prove quite dangerous in the future.

**India developed its own version of secularism based on 'equal respect for all religions'. This is why we have national holidays for all religions in India. If we have Diwali holidays, we also have holidays for Eid, Good Friday, Mahavir Jayanti, Buddha Purnima and Pateti.**

This is because India is a secular country where religion has no place in politics. We borrowed this idea from the Western world. Back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, King Henry VIII of England wanted to marry again so that his new wife could provide him with a male heir. The idea was negated by the Rome-based Pope, the global head of Church. Henry VIII decided to defy the Church and marry a second time. In the process, he severed links with the Church and established a separate and independent 'Church of England'. In due course, the idea

that religion should have no role in the political affairs of a country, slowly gained momentum, and later emerged as 'secularism'.

On the other hand, India saw emergence of religion-based political parties in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Political parties like the Muslim League and the Hindu Maha Sabha were trying to attract followers. In this, the Muslim League succeeded, and this was how Pakistan was born on 14 August 1947, which a decade later officially became the 'Islamic Republic of Pakistan'. India decided to embrace secularism with some differences. For centuries, India has been a land of faithfulness. Add to this, the utter poverty and illiteracy in the country, and one knows why we did not and could not adopt the Western model of secularism. In the West, Christianity is the only religion and separating it from politics was relatively easy, whereas in India, a multi-religious society always existed. This is why India could not blindly adopt the western model.

## India's secularism

India developed its own version of secularism based on 'equal respect for all religions'. This is why we have national holidays for all religions in India. If we have Diwali holidays, we also have holidays for Eid, Good Friday, Mahavir Jayanti, Buddha Purnima and Pateti. The purpose was to make people of each religious denomination feel at home. And this is also why we provided in the



Article 123 (3) of the Representation of Peoples Act, 1951, that using religion, race and caste during an election campaign is illegal.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the politics of Hindutva was in full swing. In 1987, Dr. Ramesh Prabhu, the then Mayor of Mumbai contested a by-poll for Vidhan Sabha from Parle constituency and won. During the campaign, he and the late Balasaheb Thackeray, the Shivsena head, openly propagated the Hindutva ideology. Prabhakar Kunte who was defeated by Prabhu, moved the Bombay High Court. The Bombay High Court nullified Prabhu's election as he had used Hindutva to appeal to voters. As was expected, Prabhu moved the Supreme Court which decided the case in 1995. The three-member bench was headed by Justice J.S. Varma, who delivered a highly controversial judgment in which it stated that Hinduism is not a religion, but a way of life. It is necessary to understand the logic behind Justice Varma's decision. The verdict observed that 'the term Hindutva is related more to the way of life of people in the

subcontinent. It is difficult to appreciate how the term Hindutva or Hinduism per se, in the abstract, can be assumed to mean and be equated with narrow fundamentalist Hindu religious bigotry.

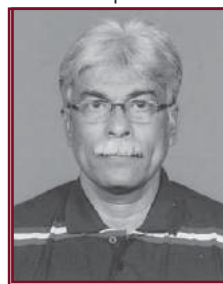
No wonder Justice Varma's verdict was hailed by the Hindu nationalist groups. *Organiser*, a publication of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), wrote an editorial in which it noted, "The Supreme Court has put its seal of judicial imprimatur on the Sangh ideology of Hindutva by stating that it is a way of life or state of mind and that it is not to be equated with religious fundamentalism". To the BJP, the judgment acquired a near-cult status; the party routinely sought to justify remarks made along starkly communal lines, by trumpeting the idea that Hindutva is after all only a way of life.

This was not the end of the story, as India is a highly complex society. Soon after Justice Varma's verdict, another bench of the Supreme Court gave a dissenting judgment. Not only this, it referred the case for the

consideration of a larger bench. Eventually in 2014, it was referred to a seven-member bench, which has now delivered its verdict.

This sustains a contradiction in our polity. On the one hand, we insist that secularism is part of the basic structure of our Constitution, and on the other hand, we refuse to define Hinduism. This is simply incongruous. Let us recall the observations made by Chief Justice P.B. Gajendragadkar in the famous case of 'Kuldar Singh v/s Mukhtiar Singh', decided in 1964. His Lordship had observed that, 'To allow any sway in election campaigns for appeals made on the basis of religion, caste or race would vitiate the secular atmosphere of democratic life'. The apex court should reopen the case in the interest of

secular nature of our polity. ■



**Prof. Avinash Kolhe is Asst. Professor in Political Science at D.G. Ruparel College, Mumbai.**

## Dear Prime Minister

(Continued from page 49)

Following demonetisation on 8 November, there was a question mark before candidates contesting for Legislative Council elections which were due in Maharashtra on 19 November. Many members of zilla parishad, municipalities, and municipal councils etc., were also worried as to their chances of getting rewarded by aspiring candidates for Legislative Council elections. But worries were overcome by their ingenuity; according to a media report, candidates are alleged to have gifted gold coins, rings, chains to electors from local bodies. For them too, these are necessary for contesting elections in ensuing local body elections due between December and March 2017.

Dear PM, you also spoke on public funding of elections; there are possibilities of making it partial public funding. But before public funding is taken up for serious discussion as a reform measure, there is an urgent need to introduce the reform of elections to legislative councils in the states and Council of States at federal level. The first need is to do away with indirect elections and introduce direct elections. In a direct popular election with the entire state as the constituency, Rajya Sabha will provide a powerful message to the federal government to take care of the state's interests. Further, a provision of only two elected MPs will also be a welcome feature to strengthen the role of smaller states in the Indian federation. That is equally true with legislative councils. Most important is the fact that a direct popular election cannot

be directly influenced by money power of gifts for lakhs of voters. Because of illiteracy and poverty, even if voters take money to vote a particular candidate, it is easy for a voter to vote in accordance with his conscience.

Wishing you success in many more reforms in Indian politics and governance,  
Yours sincerely,  
P.M. Kamath

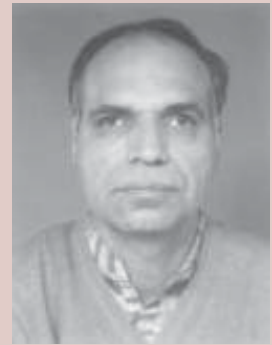
**Dr. Kamath taught Politics in the Department of Civics and Politics, University of Bombay as a Professor of Politics. Currently he is the Chairman and Director, VPM's**



**Centre for International Studies (Regd); he is also Adjunct Professor, Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal University, Manipal.**

# Not even *do bigha zameen!*

*Shouldn't every landless family in rural India, especially the dalits, aspire for a piece of cultivable land? Why are they so badly neglected by successive governments?*



**Bharat Dogra**

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

**R**ECENT movements of dalits in Gujarat and Punjab have re-emphasised the need for providing at least some cultivation land to the completely landless *dalit* and other households, who constitute the weakest section of rural society in India. There is an increasing tendency on the part of the authorities to ignore their very legitimate and justice based aspiration to own at least *do bigha zameen* or a small piece of cultivation land.

Although the neglect of land reforms had started much before the present NDA (National Democratic Alliance) government assumed power, there was at least some semblance of retaining some aspects of land justice. The UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government was relatively more responsive to people's movements, and so when the biggest initiative on land reforms in recent years in the form of *jan satyagraha* was launched in 2012, instead of unleashing any repression, the then government appeared to be quite accommodative, and Jairam Ramesh was sent by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to reach an honourable settlement with the thousands of foot marchers before they could enter Delhi.

Unfortunately, the UPA government did not fulfill these promises, and thus lost a great opportunity to reach out to the most deprived sections. Nevertheless, some processes were set in motion, and there was some hope till the last days of the UPA government of something important being done at least to ensure homestead land to all rural households.

Another indication that all was not lost yet on issues of land justice under the UPA government came with the Forest Rights Act, which was enacted to correct the historic injustice suffered by tribal farmers and some forest dwelling communities. Here again, the actual achievements fell far short of expectations in most places, but poor implementation did not entirely take away the credit that at least the government took up this important issue of land justice with

some seriousness and sincerity, and at least in some places there were some good results.

Another difference then was that the Planning Commission kept drawing attention to the need for proper implementation of land reforms. The NDA government got rid of the Planning Commission all too soon, and now we have no one in the government to even moderately support the continuation of the largely unfinished agenda of land reforms.

At present we have a particularly adverse situation where the Union government is least bothered about land reforms, and at the same time most state governments have gone back on the even moderate commitment to land reforms seen earlier. On the land question the NDA government has been generally seen to be more eager to facilitate the acquisition of more land for industrial and urban expansion and in this prioritisation, the interests of the most deprived sections have been easily forgotten. When even the land rights of farmers are increasingly insecure, it is not difficult to see that the landless waiting to get some land under the promised land reforms are likely to be completely marginalised and neglected. Perhaps the last time that the dalit landless peasant household got some sympathy from a state government was during the chief ministership of Mayavati in Uttar Pradesh. Her government suffered from too many problems, but visits to villages showed that at least in the earlier phase of her government, *dalit* landless households were getting justice on several issues including land.

In neighbouring Madhya Pradesh the chances of implementation of land reforms were relatively much better under the two Congress governments led by Digvijaya Singh, compared to the BJP government which followed. In later years, the left front governments in West Bengal and Kerala had lost much of their earlier zeal for land reforms, but nevertheless their ouster has been a loss to the cause of land reforms. ■



# The purification drive

*Is Prime Minister Modi's demonetisation plan a work of sheer genius, or an ill-thought out scheme, which has caused a lot of stress to crores of ordinary Indians, and the economy?*



**Anuradha Kalhan**  
is an independent researcher. She was earlier a Fellow at NMML, Teen Murti.

THE background to this 'demonetisation as surgical strike' is worth recounting. During the UPA 2 period ending in 2014, there was a massive, popular upsurge against corruption in high offices, the scourge of crony capitalism. Middle classes were united in anger against scams that involved public offices; they ranged from allocation of spectrum in telecommunications to coal mining. In the background were mounting unpaid loans of big business houses (Non-performing assets) of the public sector banking system. This public fury was also based on ground level despair about poor public services for the common man, unemployment, inflation and yawning inequalities.

A popular campaign against corruption gained momentum culminating in the defeat of the ruling government. The BJP had led the attack inside the Parliament and was its major beneficiary. Its election campaign thereafter was replete with promises of clean capitalism with strong, good governance and recovery of ill-gotten wealth for distribution among the people; its victory was a land slide.

Two and a half years into their rule, no significant benefit of the so-called strong, clean, good governance was visible to the people. Economic growth had recovered from sluggishness, crossed 7.5%, driven by domestic consumption and global low fuel prices, but that growth number did not translate into low food inflation, jobs, improved public services or welfare delivery. Looking for multifarious ways to keep up the momentum of public support for impending local and state elections, yet another rabbit was pulled out of the bag. On 8 November 2016, in an unprecedented move, the Prime Minister (PM) and not the RBI (Reserve Bank of India) Governor announced that ₹ 500 and ₹ 1000 notes would cease to be legal tender. This was framed as a purification drive to flush out black (unaccounted for money, estimated to be 20% of GDP), push cash back into the banking system where it can be accounted for, and instill honest tax payment habits. It was claimed that this exercise would also end

counterfeit currency circulating in the country that was used to finance anti-national activity. This was supposed to be a master stroke, simultaneously managing public perception, delivering good governance with patriotism.

Within weeks, the exercise unraveled to become an unprecedented economic contraction caused by a shortage of the medium of exchange. A bulk (86%) of the currency in circulation had been withdrawn in a cash based economy, but there was no provision of replacing it with small and large denomination notes to quickly plug the shortfall. In rural areas where banks to exchange notes are too few, strangely, cooperative banks and regional rural banks were kept out of the exercise. Even in urban areas, short-staffed and poorly supervised banks were slow to disburse new currency. While adequate supply of new currency notes just did not exist, an illicit market grew around exchange of old notes for new, in which it is reported that bank officials also participated. Within a month it was out of control and banks were not only rationing cash withdrawals, but declaring that there was inadequate supply to feed ATMs. The impact on the informal bulk of the economy, entirely dependent on cash is also expected to be severe. This means that production, employment and income flows will be stalled, if not lost, in successive time periods.

For now, new notes for old will demonetise only those notes that do not come back into the banking system. Banking officials expect almost all the old notes, worth 14 trillion rupees, to come back into the system, leaving it to the Income Tax authorities to decide which portion of the inflow is unaccounted money, to be fined and taxed. An exercise, that may go on and on for a long time causing an erosion in business confidence. That is the best case scenario. Twenty thousand tons of paper is being imported for printing currency; however, if some events slow down injection of new currency, loss of trust in banks and more disasters that follow, may be unmanageable. ■



## SPOTLIGHT

## Winter festivities

**U**NLIKE other Hindu festivals that change date every year Makar Sankranti is nearly always celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January. It marks the transition of the Sun from the zodiacal sign of Sagittarius to Capricorn during the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere. In Tamil Nadu, Sankranti heralds the harvest festival of Pongal. On Pongal, sticks of sugarcane are offered to the Sun god seeking happiness in life. In Karnataka, pieces of sugarcane are exchanged. This exchange is symbolic of the sweetness that they hope to have in all their dealings with each other.



- Sankranti heralds the season for kite flying. The International Kite Festival is held every year in Ahmedabad during Makar Sankranti.
- In Maharashtra, sweet *tilguls* (til laddus) are exchanged with the words, '*Til gul ghya, god god bola!*' (Eat til laddus, speak sweetly!). Married women gather to perform the traditional *haldi-kumkum* ceremony.
- In Punjab, people celebrate Lohri on the eve of Sankranti. They beat the chill of winter by lighting huge bonfires. They celebrate the day after Sankranti as Maghi, with singing and performing the Bhangra dance.
- Andhra Pradesh celebrates the festival for four days. The people call it Pedda Panduga meaning big festival.

## AMAZING LIVING WORLD

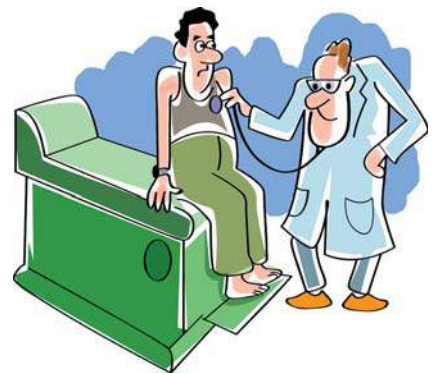
### Pelican Flower

*Aristolochia grandiflora* or the Pelican flower is a creeper which produces gigantic flowers. The average flower is 30 cm long and 20 cm wide – there are some which are even 60 cm long. The flowers have heart-shaped faces and are attractive. However, they have a repugnant smell. Insects like the smell and are attracted to the flowers. When a fly or any insect sits on the flower, it gets trapped by the hair which covers the tubular portion of the flower. The insect is released only after it gets completely coated with pollen.



The unopened bud of the flower resembles a sleeping pelican and hence it is known as the Pelican flower. The flowers are used in traditional Chinese medicine to treat certain types of arthritis and edema.

## HA!



A paratrooper took a day off, claiming that he was sick. The doctor checked him and said, "I can't find anything wrong with you, soldier. Why are you not working?"

The paratrooper sighed and said, "I don't know. I just don't feel jumpy."



## ART BEAT

### Bamboo Dance

Tap tap tap... young Mizo girls hop in and out of clacking bamboo poles in perfect unison without missing a step. One wrong step and the girls could risk injuring their ankles as they show off their skill in the fascinating Cheraw dance of Mizoram.

Both men and women participate in the dance. The men sit on the ground facing each other as they open and close the long horizontal pairs of bamboo poles that are supported by two bases, one at each end. The women clad in colourful ethnic costumes dance with utmost skill and concentration as they step in and out of the poles, weaving seemingly complex patterns with their steps.

The tapping of the bamboo poles provides the rhythm of the dance. Gongs and drums add to the vibrant tempo.

Cheraw was originally a funeral dance, but is now performed during festivals, marriages or to celebrate a bumper harvest.



## CURIOSITY

### Does a ghostwriter write stories on supernatural beings?

No. A ghostwriter is a professional writer who is specially commissioned to write on a variety of subjects. However, readers don't come to know about him as somebody else gets the credit for his work — usually a well-known person. Thus a ghostwriter writes books, stories, articles, official letters and speeches, reports etc. for a fee.

Autobiographies of famous personalities are often written by ghostwriters. This is because celebrities



are either too busy to devote time for writing or may lack necessary skills to do so. A ghostwriter is legally bound to remain in the shadows.

Ghostwriting is an accepted practice in the publishing industry. Sometimes publishers get a new book for a best-selling series written by a ghostwriter if the original writer is unable to do so in a short time.

Songs in some popular albums are also ghostwritten and 'ghost-composed'!

## STORY TRAP



**Beware of falling into the trap set in this story. Read it carefully to find out what's wrong with it!**

### Uncle Pandit's Treasure

Uncle Pandit's excitement was evident to all. He wiped his glasses and put them on again to give his shaking hands something to do.

Mohan's father had left a curious will: he wanted his long-lost friend Pandit to have his precious stamp collection. When Mohan was young, the two would sit poring over catalogues while tea grew cold in their cups. And here was Uncle Pandit again, tracked down with great difficulty.

"Look at these, beta!" Uncle's fingers quivered as he pointed to four dull stamps mounted on a sheet. They had no serrated edges, and all showed the head of Queen Victoria.

"The world's first stamps! Precious Penny Blacks!" Completely overcome, Uncle took off his glasses once more. "They are well over two centuries old. We're holding history in our hands!" he said.



**Answer:** A stamp with Queen Victoria on it couldn't be over two hundred years old — she wasn't even born then. The first postage stamps were the Penny Blacks of Britain, but were issued only in 1840.

# LT. GENERAL S.K. SINHA, PVSM

Profound scholar, statesman and strategist (1926-2016)

**G**ENERAL S.K. Sinha was born in 1926 in an illustrious family in Patna. He had a brilliant academic career and graduated with Honours in English in 1943, at the age of 17. He joined the Army and was adjudged the best cadet at Officers Training School (OTS), Belgaum. He was commissioned into 7/9 JAT Regiment and later transferred to 6/9 JAT Regiment. He saw service in Burma and was appointed Adjutant of Japanese Prisoners Of War (POW) Camp when the war was over. The POWs employed on manual work got a higher scale of rations. He ensured manual work for all POWs so that they all got better rations. When he left for Indonesia to take up appointment of GSO3, 15 Indian Corps, a senior Japanese officer said to him: "One day we hope to pay our gratitude to you when you come to Japan. Till then Mount Fujiham and the Sea of Japan will be anxiously waiting for your arrival."

At the time of Independence, he was the only Indian officer in the military operations branch and had close inter-action with Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel. As GSO2 in the Delhi and East Punjab Command under General Russell, he organised air lift of troops and material to Kashmir in the 1947 War. He participated in the discussions on the alignments of Cease Fire Line when hostilities were over.

He got married to Premini in June 1948, and they were blessed with three daughters and a son. He was transferred to 3/5 Gorkha Rifles (GR). He completed Staff College in India and Joint Services Staff College, UK. He held various command, staff and instructional appointments with distinction. During the 1971 Indo-Pak war, he was the Director, Military Intelligence. In the journey to the top, he commanded II Corps and Western Command before taking over as Vice- Chief. He was awarded PVSM, made Honorary ADC to the President and President of the Gorkha Brigade. He was expected to take over as the Chief but was denied this promotion for reasons not made public and he took retirement. He took it calmly and made no public comments. The sword had been sheathed. When he made a farewell

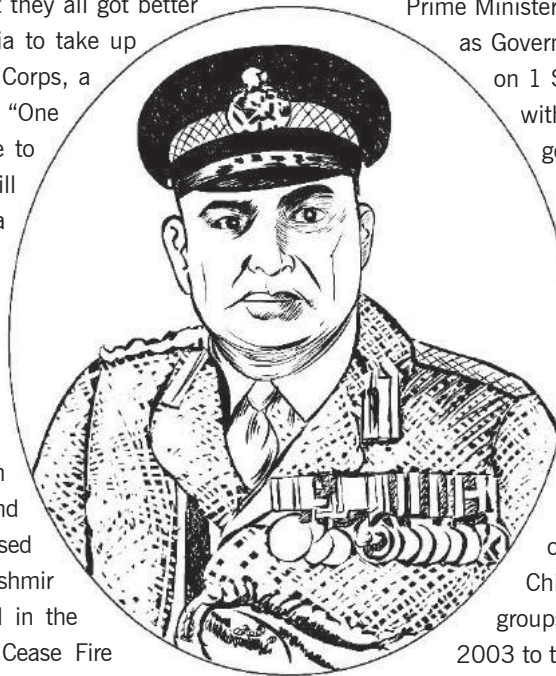
call on R. Venkataraman, the Defence Minister, he was not offered even a cup of tea and the Minister kept on advising him not to enter politics. He retired to his home town, Patna, in 1983.

In 1990, Lt. Gen. Sinha was offered the post of Ambassador to Nepal. The relations with Nepal were then at a low ebb. Eleven months later, the Government at Delhi changed and he resigned. It speaks volumes for his success that the King and the Queen called on him before his departure - a complete departure from protocol. In 1997,

Prime Minister I.K. Gujral invited him to take over as Governor of Assam, and he was sworn in on 1 September 1997. Assam was beset with challenges of insurgency and poor governance. He forged a unified command of all security forces and dealt with violence firmly. He promoted shallow bamboo tube wells, costing ₹ 22,000 each, to transform the agricultural economy. He gave due honour to Assam's military hero, Borpuken, who had achieved a decisive victory against Aurangzeb and succeeded in getting the award of Bharat Ratna for Bardoli, former Chief Minister of Assam. The militant groups were isolated when he left in May 2003 to take over as Governor of Jammu and Kashmir (J & K).

He followed a similar approach in J & K. He took the initiative to install mini-hydel plants and gave the task to the Army. It brought the Army closer to the people. He was happy to see the Tricolour fluttering in every village as he drove to the 1000th mini- hydel plant, 20 kms from Baramula. Gulam Nabi Azad took over as Chief Minister on 27 October 2005, and Mufti Mohammed Sayeed started a vicious campaign against General Sinha on the issue of transit facilities for Amarnath pilgrims, and he was relieved on 25 June 2008. General Sinha settled down in New Delhi and became busy writing, lecturing and playing golf. He authored five books including his memoirs. He passed away on 17 November 2016. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd)





# PROF. M.G.K. MENON

A life devoted to science (1928-2016)

**M**AMBILIKALATHIL Govind Kumar Menon who passed away recently in New Delhi at the age of 88, was one of India's most celebrated physicists, who also made an invaluable contribution to the growth and development of science and technology in the country for a period of over five decades. He also distinguished himself as one of the country's top policy makers. Menon who had his early education in Jodhpur and the Royal Institute of Science, Bombay, later did his PhD at the University of Bristol where he was mentored by Nobel Laureate Cecil F. Powell, the subject of his thesis being Particle Physics. His sphere of research centred around his experiments with cosmic rays and in exploring the properties of fundamental particles. He was also actively involved in setting up balloon flight experiments as well as deep underground experiments with cosmic ray neutrinos in the Kolar Gold Mines in Karnataka.

He joined the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) when it was headed by its Founder, the eminent scientist Homi J. Bhabha in the year 1955, and served the institute in various capacities for five decades. The sudden death of Dr. Bhabha in an air crash in 1966 saw Menon taking over the reins of the institute at the age of 37. He was fortunate to have the guidance of Dr. Bhabha during his formative years, and was also given a free hand in running the institute by J.R.D. Tata. At TIFR he nurtured the careers of hundreds of budding scientists, and also pursued his varied interests in scientific research.

M.G.K. Menon was a blue-eyed boy of the late Prime Minister (PM) Indira Gandhi who entrusted him with numerous responsibilities, and he acquitted himself well in all of them, vindicating the confidence that she placed in him. He also served as Scientific Advisor to PM Rajiv Gandhi from 1986-89, and was a nominated member of the House of Elders, the Rajya Sabha, from 1990-1996. Menon was appointed as a Minister of State for Science & Technology by Prime Minister V.P. Singh, albeit for a short period, as the

government did not last long. Apart from being a Director of TIFR from 1966-1975, Menon during his long career also served as Chairman of ISRO in 1972, and as a Member of the Planning Commission (1982-89). Among the other posts that he held was the President of the Indian Statistical Institute, President of the National Academy of Sciences, India, Vice-President, Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), and was also the Chairman, Board of Governors, IIT (Indian Institute of Technology), Bombay and Indian Institute of Information Technology, Allahabad. Several awards and honours also

came the way of the physicist and these included among others, the prestigious Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize, the Abdul Salam Medal, the Padma Shri, the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan from the Government of India. He was also selected as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1970 and was also a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. His contribution to the campaign for protection of the fragile ecosystem in the Silent Valley in Kerala also won him a host of admirers.

Although his forte was physics and research, Menon wore several hats during his long and eventful life, and was at different points of time a scholar, an electronics expert and was also adept at handling issues related to space and defence. His stint in Parliament and in the Ministry of Science and Technology too showcased his keen interest in the nation's development and in ushering in an era of scientific growth in the country. Above all, he was recognised as a humanist and a trainer par excellence. Menon would always recount his meeting with the Nobel Laureate Sir C.V. Raman when still in his teens and had been greatly influenced by him. He had resolved that science would be his calling in life, and his passion for science took wings and turned him into one of the country's greatest scientific minds. ■

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



# M. BALAMURALIKRISHNA

Prodigiously talented musician (1930-2016)

**B**ORN on 6 July 1930 at Sankaraguptam in Andhra Pradesh, Mangalampalli Balamuralikrishna was a veteran Indian Carnatic vocalist, multi-instrumentalist, playback singer, composer and actor.

A 5<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of the saint-composer Thyagaraja in the *guru-shishya* tradition, Balamurali, as he was popularly called, was a recipient of all three Padma awards — Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri. He also bagged national film awards for best playback singer for *Hamsageeth* and music direction for *Madhvacharya*. He also acted in some movies, including *Bhakta Prahlada*. *Oru Naal Podhuma* from the Sivaji-Ganesan starrer *Thiruvilaiyadal*, is still a popular number.

A non-conformist, with a distinctive style, he was imbibed with the spirit of experimentation and boundless creativity. A master of Carnatic and Hindustani vocal music, he composed several *thillanas*, *kirtis* and *varnams*. He revived old ragas like *Narthak* and *Sunadavinodini*, and created new ragas like *Lavangi*, *Mahathi*, *Manorama*, *Murali*, *Omkari*, *Prathimadhyamavathi*, *Rohini*, *Saravashree*, *Sumukham*, *Sushma*, *Ganapathi*, *Siddhi* and *Pushkara Godvari*.

He composed 25 new ragas with fewer than the five notes prescribed and countered purists with, "I respect that tradition has given us the grammar of music. But there should be freedom to interpret it. I don't like not applying my own mind".

Balamurali inherited his talent from his father, Pattabhiramayya, a well-known musician, who could play the flute, violin and the veena, and mother, Suryakanthamma, an excellent veena player, who died early. His father realised his son was only musically inclined and hence took him to Parupalli Ramakrishnayya Pantulu, a direct descendant of the *shishya* tradition of Thyagaraja, who gave him a thorough foundation in the Carnatic music fundamentals.

When just six-years-old, he started giving concerts and grew in stature as he combined sophisticated vocal skills

and rhythmic patterns of classical music with the popular demand for entertainment value. The child prodigy had by the age of 15, mastered all the 72 *melakartha ragas* and composed related *kritis*. Hence the prefix 'Bala' to his actual name became a fixture, and was a constant reminder that he should never stop learning! Composing, to him for a concert or for films, just happened. "Often you hum and it gives you a sudden idea. There is technology of course, but sometimes it also comes out in a flow, and yet when you try to do the same thing again, you get something else".

Having composed over 400 compositions in 31 Telugu, Sanskrit, Kannada and Tamil films, his defence to those who looked down on film music was that "I've never felt any genre is lesser or greater. The challenge with a film song is often greater. Unlike a concert or an album recording, one doesn't have the luxury of time to evoke the mood of a raga. It has to make an immediate connect."

Balamuralikrishna was a great votary of music therapy. He opined, "We have a history of looking at art as more than leisure. This applies to music too. Studies have shown how from the 19<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy, a child in the womb can hear music. S/he connects with it even after birth. Music therapy has helped cure stuttering, and improved speech fluency in kids who are just 8-10 weeks old. It is also beneficial for people with neurological disorders and hypertension."

In addition to performing more than 18,000 concerts around the world, Balamuralikrishna has released more than 250 cassettes (tapes) in India. He was always punctual for a concert, and once onstage, music used to flow like water.

There never was a dull moment at his concerts! Aged 86, he passed away on 22 November 2016, survived by his wife, four sons and two daughters. ■

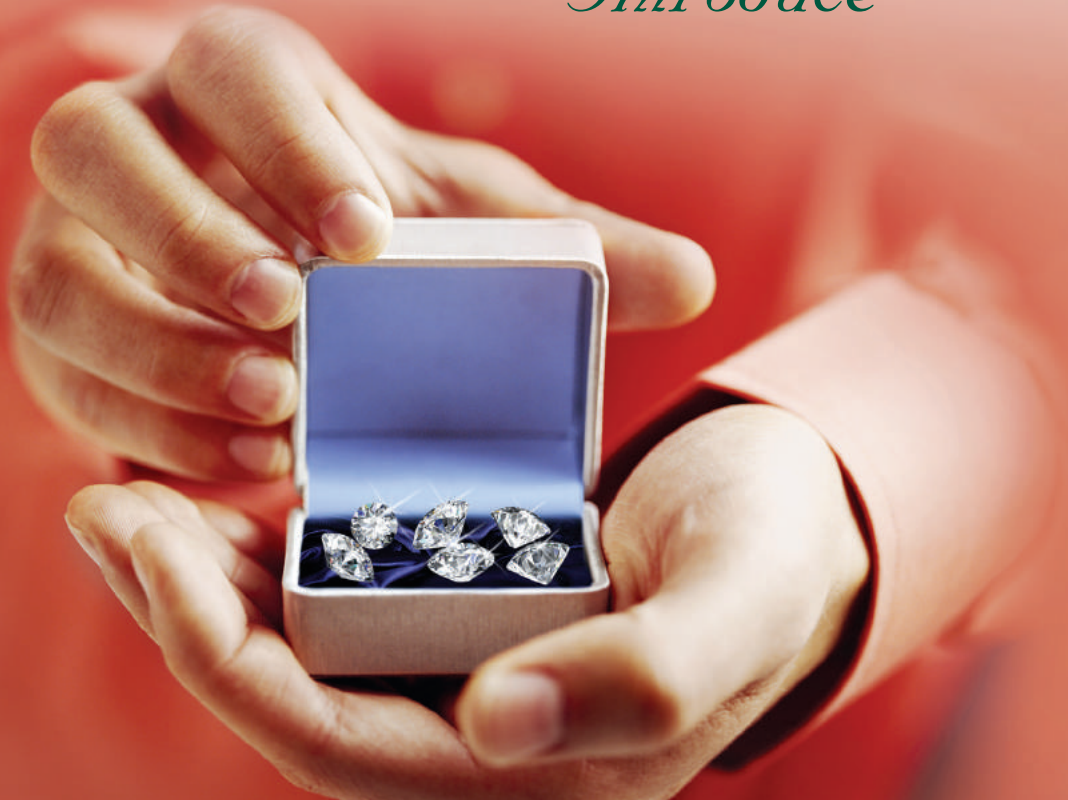
— A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, short story writer and poet.

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





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*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?*  
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Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

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

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