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ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined



FACE TO FACE

Bobby Sarma Baruah

KNOW INDIA BETTER

Pulicat

A lagoon, monuments and the Dutch connection



Is India Safe?

Great Indians: Admiral A.K. Chatterji, PVSM, AVSM / Surjit Singh Barnala / Taarak Mehta

MORPARIA'S PAGE



Contents

APRIL 2017

VOL.20/9

THEME:

Safety



11



23



Bobby Sarma Baruah 36

Morparia's page	2
Don't 'care' for us!	5
<i>Nivedita Louis</i>	
How safe is India?	6
<i>Vandita Morarka</i>	
How safe is my city?	8
<i>Longnam Kharपुरi, Shabarni Basu, Ishma Raina and Anvi Mehta</i>	
The charm of Chennai	11
<i>Liz Thottan</i>	
No place for the elderly?	13
<i>Shoma A. Chatterji</i>	
Safety ahoy!	15
<i>Karn Ragade</i>	
Whither, girl power?	17
<i>Santanu Mishra</i>	
Fatal journeys	19
<i>Babji Choudhary</i>	
Know India Better	
Pulicat: A lagoon, monuments and the Dutch connection	23
<i>Nivedita Louis</i>	
Face to Face	36
Bobby Sarma Baruah: Shoma A. Chatterji	
Features	
The day never ends	39
<i>Anvi Mehta</i>	
Not my cup of tea	41
<i>Usha Hariprasad</i>	
Anger!	42
<i>A. Radhakrishnan</i>	
Fun with our past	44
<i>Divya Prasad</i>	
The shape-shifter	46
<i>Shoma A. Chatterji</i>	
The pioneer	47
<i>Prof. Avinash Kolhe</i>	
Shut it down!	49
<i>Bharat Dogra</i>	
Times they are a' changing	50
<i>Ram Puniyani</i>	
Book Review	51
<i>Dr. P.M. Kamath</i>	
Column	52
Nature watch : Bittu Sahgal	
Infocus : C.V. Aravind	
Young India	54
Great Indians	56



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“Innovative and excellent content”

The February 2017 issue of OIOP was not only very innovative, but also had excellent content. The articles were of high quality and made interesting reading. Suresh Nair brilliantly analysed the variety of humour as played out in Indian movies. His

observation that regional films are able to have rip-roaring comedies with literate humour due to its narrow spectrum of viewership, was bang on target. It is true that in Hindi films the writer is forced to contrive humour in the dialogues so as to encompass the nationwide hindi-speaking audience. Consequently, only banana peel / slapstick comedies evoke laughter in the latter and hence become successful.

Hemant Morparia, the super-cartoonist, bemoaned the lack of enthusiasm among the next-gen to take up cartooning. While his article accurately elaborated the reasons for this declining trend, the artist proved that he was no less a writer. We would like to read more of your writings, sir!

Hats off to the editorial team to have thought of such stimulating content even as the print media is getting stiff competition from the electronic media. This is perhaps the only way to bring people back to ‘old-fashioned’ reading!

– Dr. Rajan T.D. MD, DVD, DNB, PGDMLS

Pharma Consultant, Specialist in Skin & Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Mumbai

“Stinking urinals”

Urinals at most of the railway stations in Mumbai stink like anything. They are not washed for days together. At Churchgate and CST railway stations, it becomes very difficult to even eat or drink anything from the stalls or even walk towards the platform in order to catch a train, as the stink is very strong. One can even get the stink of urine outside the railway stations. The railway authorities should make arrangements to wash these urinals once in every 15 minutes, as a lot of commuters use them. Even the toilet which people use are in a bad shape. The same applies to the urinals and toilets at Matunga and Parel railway stations. If the railways could provide us with 100 per cent cleaner and greener toilets in the trains as well as on platforms, the

whole outlook of the railway stations will be improved. I hope they take my letter into consideration and provide us with cleaner and greener toilets.

– Jubel D’Cruz, Mumbai

“What are we actually developing?”

In this 21st century, we talk about development, innovation, technology, advancement and what not. But are we actually developing? With so many crimes relating to female molestation, rape cases, sexual abuse, can we really say we are progressing towards social development? Because of a certain class of lunatic men, women have to live with fear wherever they go. Eve-teasing is so dominant that every teenage girl in every corner of the country has witnessed female abuse of some kind or the other. In a country which is projected to be a global superpower and economically equipped, how can we live with such backwardness in the society? Why is it that a women’s position in our society is still considered so low that any person can insult their dignity and get away with it?

Eve-teasing has posed a serious threat to the women of our society. There is hardly any girl or woman who has not been the target of eve-teasers. Bus-stops, auto-rickshaw stands, etc., are the favourite haunts of the eve-teasers who seem to have no other business than passing lewd remarks on women who happen to pass by. Eve-teasing is a crime and to put an end to it, women themselves must take the initiative. But women generally ignore the eve-teasers as they fear the evil consequences that might befall them in future.

It is this baseless fear of the women-folk which gives the eve-teasers the courage to pass objectionable comments as they think that women are too meek and timid to confront them. It’s high time women shed their fear and confront the eve-teasers boldly. This is the only way to teach a lesson to such culprits so that they will not dare to tease another woman in the future, and think a thousand times before passing lewd remarks again.

– Jubel D’Cruz, Mumbai

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Don't 'care' for us!

*Will Superman take a break and the considerate man stand up, please? demands **Nivedita Louis**, who is fed up with the male euphemism of 'care'!*

WHAT irritates a woman more? A bad-hair day? The "stay safe" message from the men of her life? I would like to affirm the former, but sadly, for most women, it is the latter. The only thing that comes free in a woman's life is advice from the 'know-alls', in case we forego the 'buy one, get one free' offers.

It starts with "Don't play with Anu's son", and goes on with "Not this dress!", "Don't wear this lipstick", "Not these stilettos", "Reduce the compact, will you?", "Why do you have to laugh so loud?", "No outing with your guy friends", "Cheee... does your friend smoke? Don't you ever do that!", "What? A drink with friends? Are you insane?" and goes on and on till eternity. We preach sermons on 'don'ts and dos' to our girls. Have we ever bothered to tell our sons to treat women right?

How insensitive can our men get? While the mother keeps rolling *rotis* out of her kitchen like the roti-maker is on fire, the father lounges on the sofa and complains how Kohli missed the catch. Our sons grow up seeing their fathers acting the couch-potatoes they are, and think watching TV brings *rotis* to their plates once they're married.

Safety of a woman is directly proportional to the length of her skirt. Shorter the skirt, lesser her safety. Don't ever question why the nun with her five layers of dress isn't safe. Or why the little six-month-old with her rompers isn't safe. Rapes happen because the woman asks for it. Yes, dear Lord, she prays, 'Please, let me be the sacrificial lamb today, send me a bus with four drunk men.'

And oh! Learning Krav Maga to deal with jilted lovers isn't a safe option against the acid attacks. Safety isn't about teaching your daughters karate and kung-fu alone. It is about teaching your sons that 'failures always happen in life, and how we make the best of a failure shows our real worth to people'. These days the love of jilted lovers is worse than the roads laid during election *dhamaka*! In three days of a

proposal and a rejection, all we are left with are potholes the size of moon's craters. Only time will teach our men that 'rejection' is cool and it can end well with a little booze and "Why this *kolaveri di*" soup song.

If there is one word that can make a woman go ballistic, it is "care". All in the name of care, our men keep suffocating the lives of women. We are brain-washed from time immemorial that a woman is 'weak' and is to be cared for.

She needs 'pampering'. She needs constant 'care'. No sirs! All she needs is a fag at the end of a tough day, or an outing with her besties!

We don't need fire-breathing dragons at the back of our necks, checking the watch and saying, "You're late!", "This place isn't safe". As our equals, it is your duty too to keep this place safe for us. After all, you are the bosses! Ah! Talking of the bosses! "Who is the boss?" – "You!", "Who pays you?" – "You!", "Who can molest you?" – "NO ONE!" A woman gets paid for her work as salary. No one, take the point, no one gentlemen, pays her in kind, unless SHE asks for it!

We don't need a Superman to save us every day. Let him please wear his ensemble right (not the undies over the pants, gentleman!) and go save the world. We need the 'considerate man' who perfectly

knows what a woman possesses, and doesn't cross the boundary under the pretext of 'caring' for her. A woman is aware of her power. A man must simply acknowledge her very being and walk hand-in-hand. Safety starts at home.

Let's treat our mothers and wives right. Our daughters and sons will take their lessons from us. As simple as that! ■

Nivedita Louis is a writer, blogger and social activist by choice. Bitten by the travel bug, and smitten by nature, she loves travelling and cooking. She blogs at www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com.



We don't need a Superman to save us every day. Let him please wear his ensemble right (not the undies over the pants, gentleman!) and go save the world. We need the 'considerate man' who perfectly knows what a woman possesses and doesn't cross the boundary under the pretext of 'caring' for her.

How safe is India?

*The perception of a country's safety plays a big role in its desirability as a destination. Unfortunately, for a country which is as breathtakingly beautiful as India, she doesn't attract as many visitors. **Vandita Morarka** introspects why India is seen as being unsafe, and what we have to do to make it more safe for its citizens, as well as visitors.*

HOW do we answer "How safe are we?" More important, can we? Are we equipped with the necessary laws and data to be able to claim safety in our country? Safety in terms of a nation has some necessarily tangible aspects to it, from road safety, safety from crimes like robbing/mugging, safety from conflict like situations within the nation, to safety in terms of sexual violence etc.

Let's look at some statistics. India is ranked 141 on the Global Peace Index, 400 reported road deaths occur daily in India, and at least 34,651 cases of rape have been reported in 2015, according to data available with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). It is startlingly becoming obvious that India is not safe, and that measures to improve safety are not working as fast as they should. Irrespective of whatever the increased reporting is credited to, be it to more awareness or government effort – the fact remains that a large volume of reports are still coming in, showcasing the lack in various aspects of safety in India.

Do we feel safe in our country?

How safe is India then as a country? How safe do our citizens feel? Do our citizens feel safe at all? To be able to answer these we need better data, more reporting, and more polls that look beyond standard safety measures, to also gauge perceptions of our citizens towards their own safety. How do we define safety here? Are we safe when all gendered persons can walk freely at any time of the day or night, without fear of sexual assault? Are we safe when driving is not made dangerous due to high incidents of accidents? Are we safe when our nation is free of internal conflict? Are we safe when we can travel in local trains without fear of theft? These questions are to serve as a thinking point, and to help us look at safety beyond traditional realms, and beyond these questions as well. Is safety the job of the government, or is it something that we as citizens need to demand? We do know for sure that India is not as safe as it could be, and that this impacts the quality of life of its citizens, as well as its economy and tourism industry. To build a better, stronger India, we need to make it safer!

Effects on tourism

"Women should use caution when travelling in India.



Citizens at a candle light vigil in Delhi, for 'Nirbhaya', the young girl who was brutally assaulted in Delhi

Reported cases of sexual assault against women and young girls are increasing; recent sexual attacks against female visitors in tourist areas and cities show that foreign women are also at risk ..."

– An excerpt from a UK travel advisory warning people about possible sexual assault as a major concern for women travelling to India.

A US State Department travel advisory to its citizens visiting India also highlights scamming of foreign tourists and sexual harassment, as being commonplace in India and for tourists to beware of such instances and their possibilities when visiting India – this advisory also led to a decrease in traffic of foreign travellers to India.

A quick online search on tourism and India will throw up at least a few articles on the first results page on unsafe experiences of foreign travellers in India. Delve deeper and you will see the virtual space populated by people speaking of their travel experiences in India, of having been scammed or faced sexual harassment. Travellers from outside India and even those from within India travelling to other places in our vast country, speak fondly of India, they reminisce of the beauty and majesty that is India, they speak of the hospitality of Indians, but they also speak of feeling unsafe at various points in their journey.

Cases of sexual assault against foreign tourists have also

been on the rise. There have been cases of a Japanese woman being kidnapped and sexually assaulted near Bodh Gaya; of a Russian woman being assaulted in New Delhi, in 2015; of an Israeli woman being sexually assaulted by a group of men while she was travelling in Manali, in 2016. All of these cases find note in dossiers advising on Indian travel, and highlight safety concerns in India, impacting global perceptions of our nation. Any search on Indian travel will also give you a list of scams to avoid when one is in India. While scamming happens in most countries, it seems to happen a lot more in India. From being charged extra for goods and services, to scarier issues of being taken to lonelier locations and divested of one's money - scams happening here range across the spectrum.

India is only the 38th most visited nation according the United Nations, the number of foreign tourists to India have also declined over the past decade or so, and this is despite India's massive size, unparalleled beauty and the cheap travel options it offers; safety concerns definitely emerge as one of the reasons for this! Should we be concerned? Yes! Tourism is a major part of India's soft power, and a way for it to showcase its culture to the world and weave itself into the international cultural dialogue. Tourism also adds a massive amount of money to our economy, creating jobs, supporting livelihoods and bringing in foreign exchange. Earlier, the National Council for Applied Economic Research estimates stated that tourism accounts for about 6.77% addition to India's total Gross Domestic Product. Safety of tourists without accounting for any of these added benefits should anyway be a priority for a nation wanting to posture itself as a world power. Conflicts in certain regions of India has made governments of other nations advise their citizens against travelling to particular locations in India. The possibility of exploiting the tourism sector as a means to boost our economy becomes massive in the face of data showing the untapped potential of tourism in India. The opportunity tourism gives India to establish itself as a world power culturally, needs to be captured.

While safety has always been of concern, an interconnected virtual world with people sharing more of their personal experiences online and to a wider audience, increased reporting and media coverage, have shown an increase in the number of cases one hears of and in the number of incidents reported. While measuring in terms of data, cases of scams, sexual assault and other unsafe aspects may have gone up – what the country needs to focus on is getting rid of these unsafe factors in their entirety!

Building Brand India

This government, like previous governments, is also trying to address safety issues in the country, be it through way of

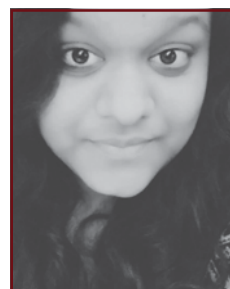


Foreign tourists often face harassment in India
(Photo: Md. Masarrath Ali Khan)

setting up helplines and emergency phone numbers, increasing sensitivity training of its officers, or providing better, legislative support. In a push towards rebranding India and building Brand India on a world scale, the present government has also made efforts to boost tourism in India. What is still missing though is mass scale awareness, sensitisation and a better implemented legislative set up. There is a need to rewire the thinking of Indian citizens towards issues of corruption, gender equality, road safety, civic sense, and so on. What is reflected in statistics is nothing but the apathy of Indian citizenry towards any efforts to improve safety within the country.

We need to demand better laws and better implementation. We need to hold public servants accountable for lapses. We need programmes that educate, create awareness and sensitise citizens on these issues. It is the general attitude that also spills over to how we treat our tourists. Our nation needs an informed and engaged citizenry that is supported by more stringent laws, and an effective implementation system. A common unified helpline number for the country would help assist people in times of need, regular police patrolling that is meant to assist, than be part of moral policing, more official help desks at major tourist points, verification of various services online by the government to help check authenticity of businesses, could be some steps that could be taken to aid safety measures in the country.

The spirit of *Atithi devo bhava* (The guest is God) is definitely present in the spirit of our country, which is why, despite these issues, tourists continue to visit India. But we must strive to make our country safer for ourselves and tourists visiting our country, to help improve the quality of life overall. ■



Vandita Morarka is a Law and Public Policy student with special interest in gender and human rights issues.

How safe is my city?

*Safety in India's metros are stories best heard from the women residents. Four young women – **Longnam W. Kharपुरi, Shabarni Basu, Ishma Raina and Anvi Mehta** – tell us what they think about safety in the cities they reside in. How safe do they feel? And what would be the basic precautions they would take to safeguard themselves?*

The Delhi story

I write this from solely my personal experience. Delhi NCR is indeed a place where one such as I, would have to be extra cautious at every turn, no matter what time of the day. Delhi being a metropolitan city with such an eclectic culture, both liberally educated and also conservatively centred, I would have to say that one has to know when and where to behave and portray oneself accordingly, be it in conversation or dress. However, despite all of these careful manoeuvrings, a woman often is target of all sorts of misogyny, from simple stares, open catcalling, to the more extreme sexual harassment and even molestation. In all the eight years I have lived here, I have been especially cautious about where, when and with whom I go out with: If the situation calls for me travelling alone, I carefully pick the best way, to ensure maximum security.

Using Uber and Ola Cab services is one way to go when one has to travel in safety in the city. Besides this, we have such services as Jugnoo auto services. I personally rely on familiar auto drivers in case I don't use these services, besides the most convenient Delhi Metro and Delhi Police registered autos from the metro station. Safe transport is one way to go, and being alert is another while travelling. If unsure about the route, whipping out a GPS would be ideal. Area is next.

If one is living in areas that are prone to unsavoury behaviours from inhabitants and passersby, then one has to be truly cautious. For instance, when I lived in the North Campus of Delhi University, the area was safe enough with the abundant presence of police and like-minded students, making it a safe area of sorts, albeit not one utterly free of unsafe occurrences. There I used to exercise and jog on the roads close to the Ridge forest and the Vice Chancellor's gardens. Now that I live in Gurgaon, the situation has changed drastically: I cannot think of stepping out of my apartment courtyard to go for a run, or going out beyond 9 p.m. on my own – I discourage my women friends and acquaintances from doing the same. Gurgaon is a city that is still in the throes of modernisation, and is still littered intermittently with villages and large empty plots of land.

If one were to go out late at night for a function, or simply clubbing and pubbing on the weekends, one has to ensure that one's company is reliable and able to keep one safe, that the transport is sorted and the destination is of a credible nature. Under no circumstances should a woman trust a stranger(s): The woman should always stick to her close-knit group.

When it comes to what to wear, it utterly depends on the situation. In addition to this, transport, destination credibility, and the company one keeps is essential. An application called First Immediate Response (FIR) is available for installation in smartphones that allow police to locate, through GPS, distress calls. The women's helpline – 1091 – is also available. Lastly, women should always carry a pepper spray for self-defence. All in all, a woman in Delhi NCR has to be smart and extra responsible for her own safety. ■

Longnam W. Kharपुरi is an M.Phil student at Delhi University.

"My fears...my concerns in the City of Joy"

I wish to call myself a 'modern' woman living on my terms in a metropolitan city, enjoying my life with a job that helps me challenge my own comfort zone regularly. However, even as I claim to be a free bird, unknown fear about my safety and sanctity refuse to leave me. I am a 28-year-old woman working



Shabarni at her desk; she is cautious about post 9 p.m. travel

as an Assistant Professor in a college in Kolkata, the City of Joy. Though my working hours are absolutely 'comfortable' going by the so-called rules of the society, still worry grips my family if I am late even by half an hour. My parents will definitely make a call to know my whereabouts.

Even as I enjoy complete liberty, my parents won't let me set my foot out of the house alone after 9 p.m., and will insist on accompanying me. Having said that, I should also mention that I myself make every effort to return home by 9 p.m. Well, it is not that I fear to be alone in my city, but yes, I am definitely concerned about my safety during nighttime. Having spent almost four years in journalism, I have become skeptical of most of the people I spot at night. My fears are mostly about someone following me or worse, trying to engage me by passing an unwanted remark. I wonder whether it would be proper on my part to retort? Will I escape safely if I do so? And if I don't reply, won't that affect my self-esteem? And does all this have any link with what I wear? What I wear can surely not give license to anyone to pass a lewd comment, or make any inappropriate approach. I take public transport for commuting regularly, but if on a certain day I find a less crowded bus or a shuttle, the first thought that crosses my mind is whether it will be safe for me to board the vehicle? I would always prefer a crowded bus instead, to be carefree during my ride.

As a precaution, yes, indeed, I try to avoid some dresses which may attract the wrong attention. It is not my dress I will be conscious about, but the strange looks it would attract, that would make me feel uncomfortable. Sometimes I feel low on confidence that I make decisions going by someone else's mindset. However, I do not have another choice, as a



working woman who uses public transport. I try never to let my fears come in my way, and walk confidently and with a bold attitude, which I feel is a guard against men having improper intentions. ■

Shabarni Basu is an Assistant Professor in a Kolkata college, and a freelance writer.

The Hyderabad tale

ONE question that I have been encountering all my life is, "Freedom is important, but at what cost?" The general response that I've had to this question is a sigh, followed by a silent understanding of the context it is being told to me in. Sometimes, the lacunae of our society are so deeply ingrained in the way we function; we silently accept it as our way of life. So, as a 20-year-old female student living away from



Ishma in Hyderabad; it's a friendly city, but has pockets of darkness and uncertainty

home, I have to constantly remind myself that freedom of stepping out of my hostel alone, at 9 p.m., has a cost – a cost that could range from judgemental stares on the streets, to eve teasing or something worse. It also causes anxiety in my parents, sitting 2000 km away, hoping that I am safe on the streets of my own country, a country that promises me freedom as a right. So if a right is unconditional and freedom is a right, why should my freedom have a cost?

Hyderabad is considered to be one of the relatively friendly cities of the country, with bustling streets throughout the day. However, the moonlight cloaks these very streets in fear and uncertainty, silencing the robustness that Hyderabad otherwise exudes. Highways, Ring Roads and the periphery of the city, which is the site of most college campuses, are the prime locations where the overall safety, especially that of women, is highly compromised. The threat to safety is mostly nocturnal, and most girls feel unsure about stepping out once the sun has set. It does not matter if a girl is dressed in traditional wear or western wear; they are all equally subjected to uncomfortable instances of catcalling or teasing. Despite this, any girl stepping out alone, at whatever time of the day, tries her best to be dressed in a 'non-provocative' way. As is obvious, nobody would want to encounter situations like these, which is why any girl has to think twice before leaving her safe premises.

If the girls do decide to step out, it is only in groups, with equipments like pepper sprays always in their bags, and their transport details being tracked by family or close friends. The problem lies in the fact that safety is area specific even within a city, so it is extremely difficult to draw black or white generalisations. Women's safety in Hyderabad is somewhat

selectively permeable – if certain parts of the city can be safeguarded for women, why not the entire city? Should the safety of the people in the city – especially that of its women, be a relative factor? ■



Ishma Raina is a student at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences with a special fascination for Indian History. Her introduction to the diversity in India began right from her schooling days. Avid reading and travels across different parts of the world like Russia, UK and Japan have only strengthened her quest to know and showcase India better.

On the road, but unharmed!

SAFETY of women, a very sensitive issue in our country, but also something that is misunderstood. We are being told that it's not safe for a woman to travel in India. I agree, there are bad elements in the society, but there are equally helpful people in the country.

Recently, I travelled from Champawat in Uttarakhand, to Delhi on a bike (Activa) last month. We were two girls and the distance was 500 km. As we entered Uttar Pradesh, we were more than nervous because of the horrendous things we had heard of. But nobody bothered us in any of the small towns that we passed. The best instance was when we reached Delhi and we had to look for a place to stay. The online hotels did not have any vacancy, we had to go the traditional way of hotel hunting. At midnight, in Lajpat Nagar, we were hunting for hotels and a few men asked us of our problem, trying to help us. People did stare at us, which was bad, but we did not feel unsafe at any point. We were carrying a Swiss knife for safety, but never did we need to use it. The third day we had to travel back to Champawat and had to halt at a hotel on the highway. Fortunately, we met a Sikh guy owning a guest house. One thing I have come to believe is that you are safe and you won't be harassed if you are with a person following Guru Nanak ji. The Sikh man was more than concerned for our safe and comfortable stay. We reached our location very safely, though many would think that this was a risky move. We need to have such an environment that women can move freely wherever and whenever.

We did it, we are happy that everything went well. If anyone asks us to do it again, we would love to go across the



Anvi Mehta with her friend on the road; this was an unexpectedly hassle-free journey

country on a bike. Even during my stay in Pune for one and half years, I felt safe. We used to go out late nights and return home late. There was an instance when two men followed us, a friend of mine and I. We were scared and instead of stopping we raced the bike faster. They followed us and did overtake us. When they stopped us, they told us that our bike's stopper was down, we could have fallen if we had encountered a speedbreaker. We were stumped. The men did not really mean harm, but we thought they did. Maybe it is my luck, but up till now, I have not experienced any eve teasing during nights in Pune. Unfortunately, it is in crowded places and festivals that we had guys passing comments, and during events like Ganesh Chaturthi and New Years Eve. But I believe again, we need to create an environment where it's safe for women to be out. Also, women have to be vigilant and know about their surroundings. We can't expect others to work for our safety and freedom. We have to do it ourselves. ■



After completing her engineering, Anvi Mehta interned for a newspaper and has been freelancing since then. Currently working in Uttarakhand as a Fellow, she travels to document different cultures and arts.

The Top 5 safest cities in the world

Tokyo (Japan), Melbourne (Australia), New York City (USA), Zurich (Switzerland), and Toronto (Canada) are considered the top five safest cities in the world. The only Asian city which figures in the top ten is Singapore. These cities are ranked on personal safety, infrastructure safety, health security and digital security. These rankings are by www.earthporm.com. And wondering where India figures? Well, no Indian city figures even in the top twenty safest cities of the world! Why aren't we surprised?

The charm of Chennai

*Chennai, the southern capital city, has come of age. Once mocked as the place of 'Madrasis', 'lungis' and horrendous heat, today, it is perceived as a traditional, yet, an evolved city, which is also perhaps the safest for women. **Liz Thottan**, an avid traveller and surfer, sings paeans to her city.*

INDIA has the most misogynistic men in the world, thanks to the god like status given to a male child from the time of his birth. I am not saying this off the top of my head. But some facts that I got to learn while studying the psychology of men in India a few years back. The need was to deal with men within my own family, and to understand and be more compassionate to deal with the country I was born in. It's not easy as a woman to live in India. We have to be cautious, aware and own a huge presence of mind at all times.

It is also a very conservative country. We are conditioned to think in ways that does not make sense to the rest of the world. The male is the dominant factor in every family. A female has to behave in certain ways that have been designed by not just the ancestral males, but also the ancestral females. Every voice of a female present and in the past has been and will be stubbed by the authoritative male of this society. It therefore is a very complex, demeaning and disrespectful country at large for a female to survive, flourish and bloom to her full potential.

Now you may pin point a finger at me and say I am generalising. Yes, I am talking about what at least 90% of the women born in India go through at some point in time in their lives. Ninety percent does give me the right to generalise I hope.

With this as a background of Indian society, imagine the financial revolution that we have been going through in the

last 20 years. With social media, internet, fancy jobs and the poor or the lower middle class getting their hands on every luxury out there, young girls want to live the life of Carrie Bradshaw (of *Sex and the city*), mimicking the Western world now that they have access to their own money. This also gave women the confidence and the conviction that they can

be better than men, and they can be leaders in their own world.

These days men want working women as their bride. Not because they have evolved to understand an independent woman, but because a working woman means he can be a couch potato and be treated as a god even in married life. Men by and

large are becoming lazier with this trend. Just an observation.

With all these complex changes in the Indian society, there has been an increasing amount of molestations, rapes and killings. Nirbhaya case in Delhi a few years back became the face of this changing India. How safe is this country for women? Survey after survey conducted since then, tries to find which is the safest city for women to work in. Very often the one city that pops up on top of this list has been Chennai. I am not saying this because I live in Chennai. Let's be practical here. Why is Chennai the safest city in the country? I used to run a paying guest accommodation for ladies in Chennai. And one of the reasons that women from the North decided to come to Chennai to work, in spite of its traditional, conservative lifestyle, was the safety factor.



Women on the Marina Beach, Chennai; the city is considered relatively more safe than other Indian cities

Chennai, the safest?

What makes Chennai a safe city? From my analysis, it has got a lot to do with its culture. People by and large in Tamil Nadu are shy, humble and realistic. I find them a lot more docile, compassionate and helpful by nature. Their loving nature spills over to being respectful towards women. They are more appreciative of women than shun them. It is truly a non-aggressive State, and its capital all the more so. If we draw comparison to the two mass movements that were held within a matter of few days in the month of January, actions did speak louder than words. The New Year's celebration in Bangalore and the Jallikattu revolution in Chennai. Need I say more?

I have been a resident of Chennai for 32 years. During my school years, I have had the usual casanovas following me, not to harass, but merely to talk to me. I was this new comer from Mumbai, and back in those days, a Mumbai girl was a dream girlfriend to have, I guess.

In my corporate life, all my work involved night shifts, right from my Taj Coromandel days, till my last job with Blue Dart Aviation. Long hours and late nights have been a part of my job. I cannot remember of one instance where I felt threatened or scared in a late night taxi drive or a bike ride in the middle of the night. More often, I have only felt protected than scared! Some of the drivers would make sure that I entered the house, before they would go away.

A spot survey about Chennai's safety

As a part of this article, I did a general survey within my friends group to see what they had to say.

"Always felt safe in Chennai, I am by nature a cautious person and that only adds to my security. The night life does not spill into the streets and cops are here and there, and the people of Chennai make you feel comfortable all the time..", says Bindu Sathianesan, a hardcore 'Chennaiite', who now resides in Dubai.

"Chennai is one of the cities, I felt safe in. Though people always complain about the weather and language, it is one of the few cities in this country that respects women and makes them feel safe. I remember I used to stay in a PG with only girls, and we used to go out all the time. There were hardly any instances where we were ogled at or teased.

One of my girl friends and I used to go to late night shows on a bike, and get back to our PG at 1am or so. I never felt scared in this city. Though people are old fashioned, this culture has not given way to sleaze balls of the society (as in Delhi), where parents have to be worried about their girls coming home! I would love to go back to Chennai any day!" says Deepthi, who hails from Hyderabad, and now lives in Bangalore.

"As the mother of teenage girls, I have had no worries about raising them in Chennai. I always talk to them about harassment and provide orientation regarding why they need to watch out and where they must be cautious, and so on. Never letting anyone, be it a man or a woman, touch them, was the first lesson. We don't live in fear and ofcourse we don't venture out after 11 pm as well", says Chitradeepa Anantharam, who works for *The Hindu* in Chennai.

Most of the women felt it is also necessary to dress appropriately depending on the surroundings. Now many of you will argue and ask, "Why do we have to change our style to please anyone?" Here is my take on it: We don't have to change our style, but we need to change the mentality of Indian men. Till that is a 100% success, we always have to be on our guard. It's not about the women, it's about the men. Till they come of age, be logical, be sensible and be safe!

The role of the police

But besides all this, the absolutely efficient Chennai police force plays a major role in the safety of Chennai. They are everywhere, be it day time or night. And they are always on the vigil, and at the same time, extremely friendly and helpful. They do not cause fear among its citizens, rather, they come across as a friend in need. Therefore, it is very easy for women to approach them for help.

The cultural, traditional and intellectual background of the people of Chennai makes it a very convenient city to live in, for a woman. This, I, a proud Chennaiite, can completely vouch for. ■



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

No place for the elderly?

*Often, senior citizens are abused in their own homes, a growing and disturbing trend in India, where the elderly are living longer lives. **Shoma A. Chatterji** discusses some case studies and suggests ways to keep our senior citizens, emotionally safe and secure.*

SOME years ago, a beautiful television clip on elderly citizens showed a series of visuals of elderly people without dialogue or commentary. In the end, there was just a single line that appeared in the frame. It said, "It is not Death they are afraid of, it is Life." A telling comment on the insecurity old age brings along with it, when the state, society and family brush off their responsibilities towards people who need to be taken care of, never mind whether they are healthy, or in need of medical care or not.

Tragic case studies

On February 18, Durgaprasad Chatterjee, a terminally ill septuagenarian jumped to his death from the 7th floor of a private hospital. He knew he was dying of cancer. He was depressed, he felt alone, and felt his treatment would be a heavy burden on his family. He took what he thought was the easy way out. Just a day before, Kalpana Bardhan, 72, quietly stepped out of her home in the early hours of the morning with a can of kerosene. She walked up to the park in the neighbourhood, emptied the kerosene can on herself and then lit herself up. Morning walkers watched the macabre incident unfold in front of their eyes, but did nothing to save her. She lived with her children, but the neighbours did not report any conflict or cruelty.

Among the elderly willing to share their stories with the rapporteurs on the 'Elder Abuse in India (2013) Report' was J.S. Bhatia, then 80. He had always looked forward to a happy and content retired life with his children. Reality painted a grim picture because he soon found that he was subjected

to abuse, refused food, and finally abandoned by his son and daughter-in-law. Bhatia, then 81, shifted to an old age home. Bhatia is no exception, but is an example of the rule of elderly being not only neglected by children and family members, but also physically abused. According to statistics, around 20% elders from Delhi, and 23% across India have claimed to

have had personal experiences of being abused.

A recent Calcutta High Court ruling may bring a smile to thousands of ousted parents. In a relief to thousands of elderly parents pushed out of their own homes to old age homes by their sons, the Calcutta High Court ruled that children living in their parents' house have to listen to them and respect them, or else find their own separate

accommodation. The ruling by Judge Jaymalya Bachi came while hearing the case of prolonged mental and physical torture of Subhaschandra and Birati Halder of West Bengal, at the hands of their son Subhendu and daughter-in-law Ria. The couple had approached the High Court first in 2014, alleging police inaction against their son and daughter-in-law, despite reports of torture. A High Court ruling on April 17, 2015, by Justice Indraprasanna Mukhopadhyay, ordered the police to warn the son and daughter-in-law. However, when summoned, the young couple brought along their son, begged for mercy and made the old couple emotional by using their grandson.

The matter seemed settled until the torture recommenced. Unable to bear it anymore, the old couple again approached



Elderly people in an old age home; out of choice, or cast aside?

the police on December 6, 2016, and an FIR (First Information Report) was filed. The son and daughter-in-law were arrested, but later released on bail, sources revealed. The landmark judgment has brought a ray of sunshine hope not only to the old couple, but to thousands of ousted parents languishing in old age homes in the state. Many of them plan to reclaim their properties, ousting their sons and their families.

The grim statistics

According to the 2011 Census report, the percentage of people above 60 years of age is 8.6% of the population. In 2009, the percentage of old people in the country was 7% and by 2050, it would increase up to 20% of the total population. Although the life span of an Indian at birth is 63 years, at 60, it becomes 78 years. That is, a person who lives up to 60 years has a chance of living 18 years more.

Facts reveal everyday that senior citizens are not given proper respect, care, affection, security and health related facilities, factors elderly people require much more than adult citizens who are not senior yet, do. According to a news report by Vaibhav Ganjapure (*Times of India*, January 8, 2017), crimes against senior citizens are increasing at a rapid pace. He reports that around 1000 incidents of elderly abuse were recorded over the last five years in Nagpur alone.

The Report *Elder Abuse in India (2013)* released by NGO Help Age India revealed that as many as 70% of the respondents said they were abused, but did not report the matter. "Maintaining confidentiality of the family matter" was the major reason behind not reporting abuse (for 33%), followed by "fear of retaliation" (for 39%). Many did not report abuse, as they "did not know how to deal with the problem." The most common forms of abuse experienced by the elderly were disrespect (41%), verbal abuse (32%), with a shocking 27% also facing physical abuse, including beating/slapping. The study was carried out in nine cities viz., Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Bhopal, Chennai, Patna, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

The report goes on to add that with more old people living longer, the households are getting smaller and congested, causing stress in joint and extended families. Even where they are co-residing, marginalisation, isolation and insecurity are felt among the older persons due to the generation gap and change in lifestyles. Increase in lifespan also results in chronic functional disabilities, leading to a need for assistance by the older person, to manage even the simple chores of daily living.

Why should 60 be the retirement age?

Government service and its allied organisations are fixing the cut-off date of retirement from active service at 60. Why, when health care and a healthy lifestyle have extended the life-span of the elderly? Why be forcefully laid off much before

they feel that they cannot pull along with active work any more? Why turn them into dependent citizens when they are capable of sustaining their independence? A considerable percentage of adult children of elderly citizens are settled away from their roots in India and beyond. Their responsibility towards their elderly parents is mostly confined to sending money and gifts and perhaps making annual visits for short stays. Is this enough for the safety and security of elderly people?

"Able and willing children who are financially affluent are not cruel towards their parents, but cannot look after them because the parents are unwilling to leave their roots to settle down with their children in a different place. The other reason is that they do not wish to bring their parents to live with them, because they are scared of value and lifestyle differences stemming from generation gap," says Sudeshna Roy who has made a lovely film on a Bengali Old Age Home for the affluent elderly.

In their paper *Risk factors for suicide in elderly in comparison to younger age groups* (*Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 57, Issue 3), P.N. Suresh Kumar, P.K. Anish and Biju George inform us that the elderly population has a significant risk of suicide when compared to any other age group. Despite this, suicide among the aged receives scant attention. Hence, identification of suicide risk factors specific to this population, they feel, will help in the development of suitable prevention strategies for this group. A significant number in the elderly group had attempted suicide more than a week after a stress-related incident.

Ageing well

There are positive ways of combating the social and psychological impact of ageing. The minute one begins to get alarmed about approaching 60, the age that marks the clock beginning to tick the other way, a minute spent recalling a few familiar faces popping up in the Indian media – electronic or print – will do away with the alarm bell. The late M.F. Hussain sold a 100 paintings at a first-time-ever price of Rs.100 crores – 75 of these paintings existed only in his creative mind. Khushwant Singh, till he reached 90, was sitting cosy inside his bulb and writing raunchy books and columns. Zohra Sehgal at 90 wrote her memoirs and continued to make her presence strongly felt on the big and small screens, till a few months before she passed away. Filmmaker Aparna Sen at 70-plus continues to direct films. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen continues to jet across the world with his theories on poverty and education. The most classic example is the white-bearded Amitabh Bachchan, who pops up in every other ad and appears in umpteen films, who illustrates with his life and lifestyle, his positive approach to ageing.

(Continued on page 21)

Safety ahoy!

India's drowning statistics are rather alarming – a whopping 30,000 die due to drowning every year! Yet, lifeguard presence on our beaches, for instance, are gestures in tokenism. Karn Ragade discusses beach safety at length.

AS many as 30,000 people die in India due to drowning every year, which is said to be the second major cause of unnatural deaths in our country. Maharashtra tops the list with 4,822 drowning deaths in 2014, followed by Madhya Pradesh (4,299), Karnataka (2,162), Gujarat (2,116) and Tamil Nadu (1,899). These five states account for 51% of drowning cases across India. The shocking statistics (from a survey conducted by the National Crime Bureau Records), draw attention to the severe lack of safety mechanisms on our beaches.

India lacks a 'beach policy'

India has many popular beaches which are frequented by revellers throughout the year. The footfalls are high, especially during weekends and public holidays. The survey shows that despite the fact that death due to drowning has been on the rise in the last decade, India does not have a beach policy to safeguard the lives of its citizens. After the tragic death of 14 students of a Pune college at Murud beach on February 1, 2016, the Maharashtra government had announced that it will draft a fresh policy and guidelines for beach safety, focusing on signage and information about dangerous spots on beaches. But not much headway has been made since then, and our beaches continue to be unsafe.

Having spent a year or so at Rashtriya Life Saving Society (India), an 18-year-old organisation which aims at equipping people in basic lifesaving techniques, we have come to realise

that it is not that people do not want to acquire basic safety skills in and around water bodies, but they see it as an unproductive and less important skill. A large number of drowning accidents resulting in death are due to low awareness of safety. BLS (Basic Life Saving) skills should be made an integral part of the schooling system today. It seems to be more of a necessity than a need.

Drowning, a global killer

According to the World Health Organization's, *World Drowning Report 2016*, drowning is the 3rd largest global killer in the world and claims more than 3,72,000 lives in a year. Multiple reasons have also been identified for the same, some of which include:

- Gender mortality – Males have a higher tendency and risk of drowning than women.
- Access to water – People who live next to open water sources are at a higher risk of drowning.
- Flood disasters – Drowning accounts for nearly 75% deaths in floods.
- Travelling on water – People travel

across water bodies with minimum safety gear, which is high risk.

The India story

With a gigantic coastline of nearly 7,500 kilometers and multiple star properties, adventure facilities, water sports training institutes etc., set up across almost the entire coastal belt, safety should be of utmost concern in India. Unfortunately,



The popular Goa beaches like Calangute have good lifeguard presence; but most beaches in India are left unmonitored

it is the most neglected aspect. There are not enough lifeguards on our beaches, nor adequate equipment to tackle emergencies. Just because a person dons a lifesaving jacket does not mean he is safe from danger. We have to understand that a lifejacket is only a piece of equipment and not *Sanjeevani booti* which can restore life. To be conscious about what one is doing in and around water bodies is the first aspect of safe beaches. Second, there is a rigorous level of training required to be able to assist a person in case of an emergency, before any medical assistance arrives. We know this as First Aid. There is a lot more to it than tying bandage or using age-old grandma's practices to heal wounds. An intense understanding of possible scenarios and probable actions are required to save lives, in and around water bodies.

Our beaches are unsafe

A harsh truth is that our beaches are anything but safe. In most places lifeguards are "trained" to become just cosmetic elements of a beach where there is footfall. There are very few beaches in India that can assure that their lifeguards are 100% trained to save lives in case of an accident. Many of our beaches are unmanned or do not have enough trained lifeguards transforming a day of fun and frolic into a nightmare if a drowning incident results in loss of life.

Mandates do not have to be drafted by authorities to emphasise and ensure that our beaches are safe. It's all about putting humanity and some basic principles into practice. Though there is no fixed distance that a lifeguard should monitor, it is rather surprising that one lifeguard (LG) or two are expected to man a beach of about three kilometres. Considering a person is drowning about 800 metres inside the water and the current is pulling him; with two LGs at a

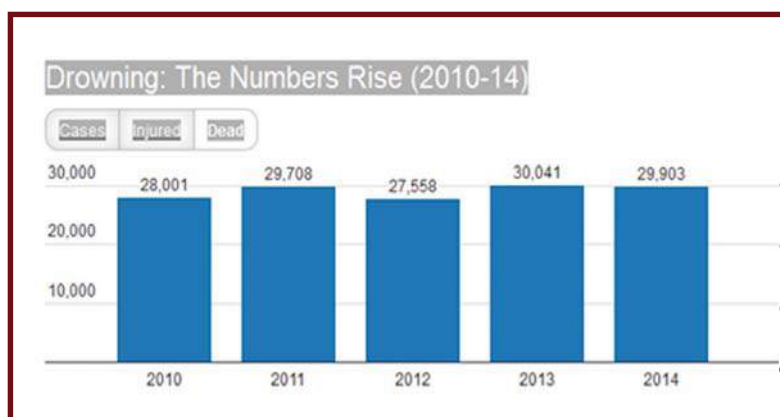


Nippers is about learning new skills, gaining confidence and having fun in a safe beach environment. For Nippers, the beach is the classroom. They gain confidence by passing the 'tests' of swimming, board paddling, beach sprinting, dolphin-diving, spotting a rip, having fun with new friends, and discovering things about themselves.

distance of almost three km away from the victim, what are his chances of being rescued? We can do the math ourselves.

The loss of young lives in the water body drowning scenario in India is alarming as the below figures show. We lose over 30,000 youngsters to drowning almost every year. The figures could be much higher as many of the deaths due to drowning go unreported. (See graph below)

Beach safety awareness is very low in India. People who do not know to swim venture into the sea, without knowing the topography or checking the time of high tide and low tide. They should be alert to the potential dangers. Talking to locals and checking on the danger spots is always helpful. It is imperative for each and every one of us to be empowered with basic lifesaving skills. We never know when we may have to use them. Appropriate and thoughtful assistance given to a victim in the 'Platinum Period' (15 minutes after the incident), can result in his survival until medics arrive and do their part.



The above figures from a survey conducted by the NCRB (National Crime Bureau Records) between 2010 and 2014 show how the rate of drowning deaths fluctuate between 28,000 and 30,000.

Wisdom from the West

Our beaches can only be safe if we decide to keep them safe. We often compare ourselves and aspire to follow the lifestyle of the Western world. Let us begin by valuing life. Countries like Australia imbibe lifesaving skills in 'Nippers' (a junior activities programme for children between the age of 3 and 12) where the parents and local population volunteer. Everyone is a Lifeguard and all Nippers undergo training to be able to be safe and at the same time enjoy themselves in and around water. We must take our cue from them and work towards creating safe beaches.

(Continued on page 21)

Whither, girl power?

*Ironical as it may sound in a country that boasts of the highest number of professionally qualified women anywhere in the world, harassment of women sees no abatement. This is despite sustained campaigns and efforts by the government and other agencies in India, says **Santanu Mishra**, Co-Founder of Delhi-based Smile Foundation.*

In a country that is marching ahead to be in the top bracket of developed nations, it is indeed sad to note that there is hardly a day when we do not come across media reports about persecution of women. Women are at the receiving end not only as individuals, but also in groups.

As a society we need to take a hard look. In one of the most ignominious examples in the recent past, we cannot forget the mass molestation in Bengaluru on New Year's Eve, multiple cases of sexual violence in the national capital of Delhi. Such reports keep flowing from all parts of India, putting the nation in a state of constant disgrace with regards to half of the country's population.

The Nirbhaya case in Delhi brought the entire country together and emotions took to the streets of Delhi. It was rightly considered a watershed moment. But more than five years have passed, and perhaps nothing much seems to have changed on the ground.

India's sex ratio (male to female) is an alarming 1000:944. Literacy rate is abysmally low with only half of the female population able to read and write. Close to 1.5 lakh women become victims of various crimes annually. Further, an estimated five crore women face mental and physical cruelty. Although the legal marriageable age for a girl in India is 18 years, she hardly has a say in her own marriage. What could be a more glaring contradiction in a country which has more women as doctors, surgeons, scientists and professors than the United States? India is also proud of the Kalpana Chawalas, Indra Nooyis, P.T. Ushas, Sania Mirzas, Aishwarya Rais, Kiran Majumdar Shaws, Kiran Bedis who have won laurels not only in India, but internationally.

Nothing, however, could be more unfortunate than the fact that discrimination of women starts right at her home.

Numbers don't lie

She ventures out to the street and she's not sure what harassment would greet her at the corner. If she bears a daughter, she doesn't know why the rest of her life won't be the same again! The tragic saga continues; generation after generation, leaving little chance for Indian society to take a giant leap.

As a matter of fact, gender-based discrimination and societal behavior leading to physical and psychological harassments, emotional violence bordering on cruelty is never scant in a woman's basket of woes. Social evils begin at the womb with female foeticides, infanticides, sexual harassments, rape and dowry related tortures, putting an end to her misery only at the tomb!

Now, let's take a closer look at some of the available statistics. According to the data by the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau), Crimes against women increased 34 percent over the last four years. Assault on women accounted for a quarter of cases last year, increasing by 82 percent since 2012. The NCRB added three more heads in 2014 under which crimes against women were reported: Attempt to commit rape (4,437), which increased 5% in 2015, abetment of suicide by women (4,060), an increase of 4 %, and women subjected to domestic violence (461), which increased 8%.

Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal reported the most crimes against women in 2015, with 35,527, 31,126 and 33,218 cases, respectively. The increasing numbers of



(L to R): Kalpana Chawala, Indra Nooyi, Kiran Bedi, P.T. Usha and Aishwarya Rai; they have won laurels internationally

these reported crimes are extremely horrifying, but deep down there is a silver lining, as correctly pointed out by Ms. Varsha Sharma, a senior Delhi police officer, as quoted in a BBC report: "The number of cases is rising because it means women are refusing to suffer in silence."

Irrespective of modifying the present set of laws or incorporating the compulsory subject of moral science in the curriculum of the children, the woman is left alone to struggle and defend herself in the time of crisis. Even in the company of reliable acquaintances, a woman must learn to fight the battle alone in case of unforeseen incidents like molestation or rape.

The UN theme

This year, on International Women's Day, the United Nations has chosen the theme for the year – 'Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030'.

What does it mean to the women in India? Are they at a stage where they can aim to achieve gender equality by 2030? Or is gender equality a distant dream?

A woman – it is still difficult to imagine one in isolation. It is still difficult to view one without her husband, children, family, without the context of the society she lives in. She's still viewed through the prism of societal morals, and is still judged by the weights of the value systems set by her in the society she exists in.

If we try and analyse the current scenario, we are experiencing what is called a *cultural lag*. A place where the culture has been unable to keep pace with innovations - technological and otherwise. Does that mean we live in a society with a culture that stifles women and her expression?

In the recent judgments by High Courts and the Supreme Court of India, we see that there are efforts being taken to bridge the existing gender gap in the society. Judgments like 'Vishakha' underline the need to address the safety of women as they embark on their journeys to self-dependency. But are these steps being taken towards making a gender equal society – the proverbial too little too late?

For this process to be sustainable, it must begin from within. Women need to stand up if they want to be seen, speak out if they want to be heard, and take themselves

seriously if that is what they desire from the society. They need to self-reflect and not be shy of accepting the hypocrisies around and within.

The genesis of Swabhiman

Smile Foundation, since its inception in year 2002, has been supporting child education interventions at grassroots level. However, societal, cultural, parental pressure and gender biased attitudes, behaviour and practices, always came in between the girl child and empowerment.

Swabhiman, meaning self-respect in English, was initiated in 2005 to address these challenges through a simple yet effective approach. Functioning as an NGO for women, Smile Foundation has strategically formulated the programme to save the girl child, empower poor, and support women empowerment. The programme is specifically aimed at realisation of both individual and collective self-esteem and inner strength for marginalised and socially excluded women and adolescent girls, through innovative community practices.

A tailor-made strategy called the '4 S Model' has been developed under Swabhiman. The '4 S Model' is an acronym for four novel approaches, namely, Seeking Healthcare as a behaviour, Support for education, Supporters in men through male involvement, and Sustaining the change in communities.

The programme identifies adolescent girls and women from the community and develops them into Change Agents, who in turn actively contribute to the community mobilisation process.

So far, Swabhiman has successfully made a difference to the lives of over 150,000 women and girl children. ■

Santanu Mishra is the Co-Founder and Executive Trustee of Smile Foundation and looks after the overall operations, planning and strategy of the organisation. An IIM-A alumni, he had a successful stint in the corporate sector as a finance professional before devoting most of his time in the social sector. Smile Foundation began its journey formally in 2002, pioneering the principles of good governance in the non-profits and the innovative concept of Social Venture Philanthropy (SVP). In the year 2005, he quit his fulltime corporate career and got completely involved in making Smile Foundation a structured, and successful non-profit organisation.



A woman's arsenal

Given that India is largely unsafe for women, especially those travelling or commuting solo, there are an arsenal of tools and 'weapons' women can carry for their personal safety. We all know about the pepper spray. If sprayed on the attacker, it causes irritation on the skin and eyes. The pepper spray on the face causes acute coughing, sneezing and irritation of nose and throat; it is non-toxic, but inflammatory gas, and causes temporary irritation, with no long-lasting effects. It can spray up to a distance of 3 meters. Another useful tool is a lipstick shaped, portable torch, especially if you are passing through a dark stretch, like an ill-lit part of the railway platform or a street. Did you know that there is a 'safety rod' which delivers a painful, but non-lethal electric shock? It is advertised as the perfect defense against vicious dogs and molesters. There is a similar tool, a torch, which gives light and can also deliver an electric shock.

Fatal journeys

India's figures for road accidents and fatalities, is very high, a good portion of which involves tankers and vehicles carrying hazardous materials. Babji Choudhary gives an account, and what must be done to enhance road safety.

ROAD Safety is an issue of national concern, considering its magnitude, gravity and consequent negative impacts on the economy, public health and the general welfare of the people. India is home to the largest number of road fatalities in the world. According to the National Crime Records Bureau of the Government of India, 1,41,526 persons died and 4,77,731 persons were injured during the year 2014, involving 4,50,898 road accidents. Hundreds of road accidents involving hazardous materials were reported from different parts of India every year.

The tragic case studies

A Natural gasoline tanker accident on the Western Express Highway in Mumbai in 1991: Although about 25 years have elapsed, the case of a road accident, which occurred on the Western Express Highway in Mumbai towards the end of 1991, is still in the memory of many and it was a classic example how ignorance can lead to a gruesome disaster, in which 67 people perished. In this accident, a tanker which was transporting natural gasoline liquid, overturned, and the material started leaking heavily. The general public (mostly tribal), living in the hamlets near the road ignored the plea of the driver/cleaner and started collecting the liquid. Somebody might have thrown a lighted matchstick inadvertently, and the liquid caught fire.

Explosion due to collision of a tourist bus and an acid tanker in Goa on 16th January, 2008: At least 12 people, including 10 non-resident Indians (NRIs) from Britain and France, were charred to death and 10 other people seriously burnt in Goa when the tourist bus in which they were travelling collided with a tanker filled with acid, leading to an explosion and fire.

The gruesome accident involved four vehicles, including the tourist bus carrying 22 people, the tanker carrying acid, and a goods truck.

An LPG Bullet Tanker caught fire at Perne, Karnataka on 9th April 2013: Six persons were killed on the spot and four injured when a bullet tanker carrying liquefied petroleum gas overturned and the gas leaking from it caught fire at Perne on Mangalore-Bangalore National Highway. The accident occurred, when the tanker driver lost control while negotiating a sharp bend. While the gas from the tanker leaked and



The LPG Bullet Tanker which caught fire at Perne, Karnataka

caught fire, three LPG cylinders kept in a godown nearby also exploded due to the heat generated.

Oil tanker explosion on Mumbai-Ahmedabad Highway on 23rd March 2014: Seven people were charred to death on the spot while 13 others were injured in an Oil Tanker explosion on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Highway.

The oil tanker went up in flames in Dahanu's Charotanaka. The leaping flames from the burning vehicle also gutted a portion of a hotel, located nearby.

An ammonia tanker skid off Mumbra Bypass Road, Thane, on 24th May 2015: A tanker carrying compressed liquid ammonia skid off the Mumbra bypass road and toppled, releasing large amounts of ammonia. The driver lost control of the tanker while taking a turn on a narrow road to avoid collision with an incoming truck and fell in to a 14-feet deep gutter. The tanker was carrying 14,850 kgs of ammonia. As No one was hurt. Fortunately, the gas did not spread.

Statistics of road transportation accidents in India

Experience reveals that as not all injuries are reported to the police, the actual numbers of injuries requiring hospital visits may be as high as two to three million people. The situation in India is worsening, and road traffic injuries have been increasing over the past 20 years. This may be partly due to the increase in number of vehicles on the road, but mainly due to the absence of a coordinated evidence-based policy to control the problem. The data shows that the number



The ammonia tanker which skid off the Mumbra Bypass Road

of fatalities has continued to increase at about seven per cent a year over the past decade except over the last couple of years. If the estimate of road traffic fatalities in India (official) in the year 2014 is taken as 141,526, then the estimate of serious injuries requiring hospitalisation would be 2122,890.

Preventing accidents

The consequences of road accidents are much more serious when the vehicle is loaded with hazardous goods. Hazardous goods pose a potential danger to life and property. Major road accidents have clearly demonstrated that hazardous chemical carriers, when involved in accidents, cause disastrous consequences like fire, explosion and spillage, resulting in loss of life and property, besides environmental pollution. Such accidents demand immediate availability of essential information to take appropriate counter measures. Thus, there is great scope for improving safety in transportation in general and transportation of hazardous goods in particular. Besides the poor infrastructure, poor enforcement of provision of Central Motor Vehicle Rules and other applicable rules and regulation, lack of awareness about the dangers of hazardous chemicals and what to do in an emergency, is also a matter of concern. The quality of professional drivers is very poor. These drivers hardly have any educational qualification or specialised training. They come from very poor families and are held in very low esteem in society.

Incidentally, statistics reveal that in India, drivers are responsible for more than the 70 % of the road accidents involved in vehicles. Hence we must pay much more attention in improving the quality of drivers.

With this in view, the Kalyan Ambernath Manufacturer Association (KAMA), NSC-Action Centre, has undertaken the task of promoting safety in transportation by increasing the competency level of the drivers and making them aware of the hazardous nature of the goods and the safety measures to be undertaken. Emphasis is given on making the drivers aware, in case of accidents, on how to warn the general public about

the dangers associated with the goods, and make them take care of their personal safety. During the training programmes, stress is also given on display and interpretation of emergency information panel board on vehicles. They are also made familiar with the various statutes concerning them, the transporters and the consigners as stated in Central Motor Vehicles Rules 1989.

KAMA conducts such training programmes for drivers (as per the three-day syllabus mentioned in the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989). For trained drivers, a one-day refresher training programme is conducted, succeeding which, a certificate is issued for one year which is endorsed by the RTO (Regional Transport Office). This certificate entitles the driver to carry hazardous goods on road. These training programmes are conducted at regular intervals at Century Chemicals, Kalyan, on Sundays, once in two months. Till date, KAMA has conducted 81 batches covering 5,151 drivers.

Conclusion

India has a number of statutes relating to the transport of hazardous chemicals. The transport of hazardous chemicals by road is very popular in India and the vehicles used include pressurised tankers, trucks trailers etc. Amongst the statutes, the Central Motor Vehicles Rules are the most important. There are elaborate rules regarding the transport of hazardous chemicals. However, these rules are not strictly complied by some consigners, transporters and drivers. It means that these groups are either deliberately ignoring the safety provisions in CMV and other related rules, or carry out their activities due to ignorance or lack of awareness. In any case, it calls for strict enforcement of rules relating to the transport of hazardous chemicals and also calls for actions to create/increase awareness amongst consigners, transporters and drivers.

The real pressure and motivation to improve driving skills can come only through licensing authorities, by adopting stricter, more comprehensive and scientifically based tests, laying stress on road rules and regulation and traffic control devices. In addition to this, recognised institutions can further add to increase the competency level of these drivers by imparting training on the precautions to be taken during loading,

unloading, and transportation of hazardous goods and make them aware of handling the situation in case of emergencies, in order to save life, property and environmental degradation. ■



Babji Choudhary is Sr. Manager (SHE), Century Rayon, and Chairman, SHE Committee, KAMA, NSC Maharashtra Action Centre.

Safety ahoy!

(Continued from page 16)

Developing a healthy beach culture

At an administrative level I feel the government must draft stringent rules and regulations to be implemented across the Indian sub-continental belt with appropriate punishments for disregard of rules, to make our beaches safe. At the same time, all important safety equipment should be made mandatory at all beaches. This should include rescue tubes, ropes, foam boards, megaphones for warning, buoy rings, Inflatable Rubber Boats (IRBs), surf boards etc., and most important, a dedicated team of volunteers which is skillfully trained and empowered to save lives the right way. Safety signage at our beaches are sometimes in the most dilapidated condition. The signboards have to be clearly visible and at vantage points, which will act as a warning to revelers.

Many organisations have come forth in the recent past to ensure that a proper beach culture is developed across all the coastal states. This has to begin by building awareness about beach safety. Rashtriya Life Saving Society (India), an official branch of the Royal Life Saving Society,

and a member of the International Life Saving Federation, has taken the lead to create a beach culture among many coastal states across India. Their projects like SwimNSurvive which are based upon the ethos of delivering water safety training to children between the age group of 10-16 years, have been quite successful. They have also trained over 10,000 children over the past eight years since the project implementation. Drishti, a lifeguarding and patrolling organisation in the state of Goa has its lifeguards spread across all its beaches with demarcations for safe and rough waters. The organisation has been playing an important role in ensuring beach safety. We need to learn from our mistakes, take a cue from developed countries, and make serious efforts to make our beaches safe and minimise loss of lives in and around water bodies. ■



Karn Ragade is a faculty member of English Language and Literature for the Middle Years Programme at the prestigious Victorious Kidss Educaress, a model IB school in Pune. He has spent many years in social service. He continues to pursue his interest in the same by volunteering with organisations to rekindle maritime awareness among masses, and also by supporting basic first-aid training.

No place for the elderly?

(Continued from page 14)

Dr. Rupa Talukdar in her paper, *Senior Citizens, a Brief Statement on them and How is their Present Status* states that "It has been proved after experiments among the old, aged volunteers, that with old age, general knowledge increases, logical reasoning and spatial insight remain almost unaffected, and emotional stability expands, because elderly use the frontal part of the brain which controls emotions, more than the young. The ability to read fiction does not deteriorate significantly and vocabulary peaks at the age of 85. If older people get something wrong, they are likely to perform the task because they are more focused on the rewards/happiness that comes from good solutions.

Ageing is looked at as a traumatic period of life. But with time, we have realised that ageing is no trauma. It is in fact, a healthy transformation of roles from that of a son to father and on to that of grandfather. The trauma 'aspect' comes from the Western concept of death as finality. Oriental philosophy however, looks at death as an end of one chapter

and not as the end of the book. Clocks keep ticking away, so one must do what one can to stay active in the autumn of one's life. As there is no cure for old age, early prevention of degenerative changes holds the key to sustained physical, mental and social well-being in later life.

Finally, safety, preventive, corrective or curative or all three, for the elderly, lies in their own hands, and the police, the state and the legal machinery along with the immediate family, can only offer a support system. ■



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.

Subscription

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Pulicat

A lagoon, monuments and the Dutch connection

The quaint backdrop of the sea, waters of a brackish lake lapping at your feet, the town of Pulicat fondly called Pazhaverkadu in Tamil, entices you with its large lake and its unparalleled history. Dotted with a few century-old mosques, temples of 11th and 13th century, churches dating back to the 1700s, the picture postcard town is a must-visit, if one appreciates nature and has an eye for heritage.

Text & photos: Nivedita Louis





The obelisk and plaque marking the boundary of Madras in front of Dare House, Parrys, Chennai

WHY don't we go on an impulsive trip? You will enjoy it", queried one of our heritage group senior members, Venkatesh, and I nodded my head without batting an eyelash. A heritage trip on a peaceful Saturday, with like-minded enthusiasts – What more can one ask for? The plan was to meet at Parrys Corner, the most prominent landmark of North Chennai, and I was there well before time.

I gaze lazily at the pillar before the famed Parrys building – the Dare House that marked the boundary of the fortification the British made to protect the Esplanade from the French. The date of the masonry obelisk pillar reads, "Boundary of the esplanade – January 1, 1773". As promised, one of our group

members had come in early to show me the plaque erected in memory of the bombing of Madras by the ship SMS Emden on September 22, 1914. Though war clouds had threatened Madras so often during both the World Wars, it was this German light cruiser that actually managed to bomb the city, injuring a shepherd, his goat, and two others. The plaque can now be found on the compound wall of Madras High Court, near its beach road entrance.

Taking pictures of it, we then dig into *idlis* and *sambar* of the famed Murugan Idli Shop at Armenian Street, with gusto. "No food on the way till we reach Siruvapuri for lunch, an army marches on its stomach said Napoleon", Venkatesh announces and chuckles, as we gulp down everything we can. Our journey commenced in two cars, and we drive past the seven wells – Chennai's first regulated water supply system executed in 1772. A military residential complex stands at its place now as we whizz past and slow down at Ebrahim Street, Royapuram. Tucked away along the roadside is a small park with rickety gates, and a flight of stairs. As we climb over centuries of neglect, we are told this is the only remaining part of the North Wall of Madras, completed in 1772 by Paul Benfield. The wall ran for six kilometers and had 17 bastions at its height of glory, touted to protect the city from the French and Hyder Ali. Plans of further expansion were shelved after the demise of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. Remnants of the wall remain even today, about 60 feet long, which is now called the *Maadi poonga* or the terrace park. Clicking a few pictures of the same, we continue our journey up north.



Remnants of the North Wall of Madras, now the 'terrace park'



The serene Puzhal Lake

The 150-year-old Puzhal Lake

Our next stop is the Puzhal Lake – a reservoir that collects water from the Kortalar River. Built in 1876, this water reservoir now stores water from Krishna and Telugu Ganga for use by Chennai city. We drive further north and reach the Shiva temple run by the Chinmaya Mission at Nallur village. The temple itself is built in a distinct structure of a giant *lingam* towering about 50 feet high. The acoustics at the temple mesmerises one. The priest's 'Om' chanting reverberates in the entire structure, imparting a certain divinity to the surroundings. Though of no historical value, this stopover was spontaneous, and I am glad we did stop here, for the unique acoustic experience.

Our next stop is the air strip at Sholavaram. Sholavaram's airstrip was used as a runway during the Second World War by the Royal British Air force for anti-submarine operations. The nondescript runway was later used as a race track for motor sport, till a new track was commissioned at Irungkattukkottai nearby. Now it has been closed for public and is being used by the military. With a cursory glance from the road, we proceed to Thamaraipakkam Check Dam.

The laterite checkdam

Built across the Kosasthalaiyar River, the huge laterite checkdam with weirs was constructed in 1868. It was extended later on, but unfortunately, not a drop of water could we see in the dam. What we did see is an abandoned PWD inspection bungalow dating back to 1915, the walls in good condition, but the tiled roof having given away. Careless graffiti deface

the walls of the structure, which still boasts of large manicured shrubs along the entrances. I could very well imagine an engineer sitting on the verandah smoking his pipe, children playing around, and a cool breeze wafting from the dam. The original plaque erected during the opening of the dam lies on the dusty path, with the date inscribed, crying for attention. The automatic weirs must be a treat to watch, during the monsoons. Water from Korattalaiyar is stored here and diverted via Sholavaram and into the Red hills reservoir.

Our next stop is Tirukallil. The temple and deity of the Tirukallil Temple, Sivanandeswara, have found mention in the Devaram verses sung by Thirugnanasambandar, the Shaivite



King Vikrama Chola's inscription, Sivanandeswara temple, Tirukallil



Sivanandeswara Temple, Tirukallil

saint. Prayers in this temple bring fame and peace says his poem. The small tank in front of the temple – the Nandi *Theertham* is kept well-fenced. As we enter the temple, the priest calls out to us and performs *aarti*. I note tiny letters adorning the ceiling of the sanctum sanctorum which is in a

queer hexagonal shape, now white washed with total disregard for whatever inscriptions remain etched there. As we roam around the temple, we strain and decipher successfully the name Kopperukesari Vikrama Chola (dating back to probably 12th century), beneath the old blue fading paint. There is another



The 1915 Inspection Bungalow, now abandoned, at Thamarapakkam



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Pandya inscription too, which we are unable to read, our necks and heads reeling from the strain. The practice of painting everything saffron and white in our temples is a bane. We do not pay attention to what is beneath the paint. Conserving what little inscriptions and thereby history we have left with us, remains a distant dream, for we are totally unaware about how to preserve our heritage.

The Siruvapuri stopover and then, Pulicat

We are almost exhausted by now, as the afternoon sun blazes on. We pull over at Siruvapuri, planning for a hasty lunch, but end up spending an hour chit-chatting about Jimmy Carter and democracy. Past one o'clock, we drive towards our destination – Pulicat. Pazhaverkadu is a coastal town, much known for its 450 sq km salt-water lake and the migratory birds that flock there for much needed water and breeding.

A bird watcher's paradise, its close proximity to Chennai, about 59 km, makes it a great weekend destination. It can also be reached by train – it is 20 km by road from the nearest railway station, Ponneri. However, the history of the town is as rich as its eco-tourism.

Pulicat has been mentioned during the Chola period. The

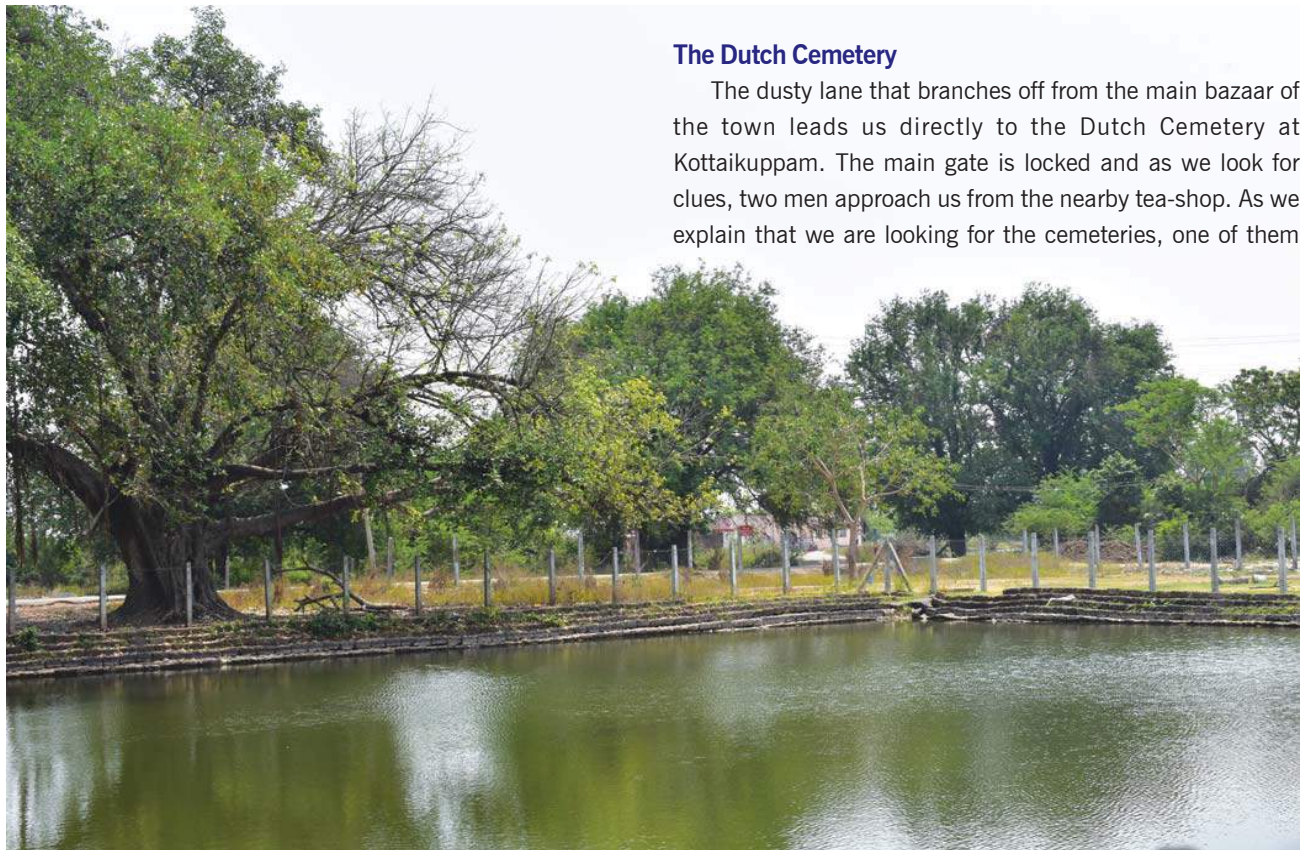
Interestingly, during 8th Century, a group of Arabs who escaped from the monopoly of Caliphate, fled from Medina and settled down at Pulicat. The descendants still live in the town today, called the Labbai clan.

Thiruppalaivanam Temple six kilometre away from Pulicat, built by Rajendra Chola has inscriptions of Chola period (10th century) mentioning the coastal town as Puliur Kottam, which in due course changed to Palliacatta, and then to Pulicat. It came under the rule of Vijayanagara kings during 14-17th centuries. It was under the rule of Krishnadevaraya that the port was named Pazhaverkadu, the name that holds water even today. Interestingly, during eighth century, a group of Arabs who escaped from the monopoly of Caliphate, fled from Medina and settled down at Pulicat. The descendants still live in the town today, called the Labbai clan. The unique Arwi script of writing Tamil in Arabic script probably originated here. Quite a difficult form of writing that was not easy to decipher, the writings in Arwi were used for secret communications during our freedom struggle. People in parts of south Tamilnadu and

Sri Lanka still use this script for religious writings. From the Cholas, Vijayanagar kings, Portuguese, the town moved into the hands of the Dutch, during whose period it was a fort in all its glory, and then to the British, who treated it as their tourism spot. Pulicat was also home to the famed Palayacot *lungies* from which originated the famed Madras checks.

The Dutch Cemetery

The dusty lane that branches off from the main bazaar of the town leads us directly to the Dutch Cemetery at Kottaikuppam. The main gate is locked and as we look for clues, two men approach us from the nearby tea-shop. As we explain that we are looking for the cemeteries, one of them



The Nandi Theertham temple tank, Tirukallil



Obelisks and tombs, Dutch Cemetery, Pulicat



The entry arch to the Dutch Cemetery, Pulicat

dangles the keys and opens up the gates for us. He remained our guide throughout the trip and was really proud to show us around the town. The gates lead to a semi-circular arch that has two skeletons inscribed on the sides. On the left is a Dutch verse and to the right is an inscription dated 1656. The impressive new cemetery is about 300 years old, and is at the south-west corner of the now extinct Geldria Fort. About 77 of them line up, in varying sizes and shapes, with distinct inscriptions in Dutch, Portuguese and English. The oldest of them probably dates back to 1646, and the latest one to 1777. Two obelisks stand majestically, and three more arched cemeteries add to the skyline. The inscriptions are complete

with names of the buried ones, their age, the places where they were from, and the place and date when they died. It is interesting to find places like Rotterdam, Nagapattinam, Machilipatnam, Colombo, and obviously, Palliacatta, mentioned on the tombstones. The caretaker shows us a small opening in one of the cemeteries, a secret underground tunnel that is said to lead to the fort opposite the cemetery. The map of Fort Geldria is embossed on one of the tombstones! Opposite the cemetery is a vast wasteland, sluggish with backwaters, strewn with old brick walls, which the locals say is the old fort. Digging the place has been impossible, as the underground water immediately gushes out, when dug.

The next place of visit was the most interesting part of the tour for me – the Our Lady of Joy Church in Kottaiuppam. Touted as the first parish of the Roman Catholic Church on the Coromandel Coast, I am very eager to see the remnants of the old church. The massive concrete monstrosity before me almost stings my eye, as I race inside the church looking for even the most nondescript detail left by the church authorities during demolition of the old church. With disregard for the value of the old structure originally built by the Portuguese in 1515, the new structure is two-tiered, with no sign of the beautiful Gothic structure that once stood at this place. The inscription describing the church dating back to 1515 is also nowhere to be found. If found, the inscription could prove this as the oldest church on the Coromandel Coast, built a year



The renovated Our Lady of Joy Church, Pulicat; could this be the oldest church on the Coromandel Coast?

before the Luz Church at Chennai in 1516.

Haggard and weary, we move to our next stop, the St. Antony's Church, said to be built in the year 1717. The small but neatly painted church still maintains its Renaissance style, with tiled roof, high ceilings, windows housed in semi-circular arches, and large wooden doors. There is a small TV



The St. Antony's Church, Pulicat, which was built in the 17th Century

room nearby, a period attraction when village *panchayats* were provided with a television for the public to watch.

The ride on the lake

From here, we ogle at the large pottery jars placed in the courtyards of almost all the houses that hold drinking water. Soon, we reach the lake shores. From here, we board the fishing boat, a ride that cost us ₹1000, into the lake and from there to the sea. About 96 percent of the lagoon falls under the state of Andhra Pradesh, and the lagoon used to naturally open out into the sea. Due to heavy silt, now the lagoon mouth is dug manually, enabling it to join the sea. The Buckingham Canal is a part of the lagoon on the west, and three rivers – the Arani, Kalangi and Swarnamukhi, drain into the lagoon. Once rich with mangrove forests, now devoid of all greenery, the boat ride is all sweaty and salty on a humid February afternoon. With no shade or cover, I take shelter under my *dupatta*. There are old abandoned piers that show the date of construction as 1943, as the boat moves further into the lagoon. Slowly, the breeze ruffles our hair and birds start circling us. Sea-gulls, cormorants, storks, egrets, river terns...the colonies of birds attract us, and as we arrive at a tiny islet, where the boatman announces we can get off for a break and we jump out of the boat in awe.

The small islet is a beauty, the shores lined up with conches and shells of various shapes and colours. It is a rainbow of



The Lighthouse of Pulicat; this white and blue structure, stands tall, warning of shoals near the coast

colours on white sand, and the group gets all playful, clicking groupies, collecting shells, drawing on sand and gliding in the waters. The boatman has a tough time cajoling the history-buffs-turned-kids back to the boat, and the travel back is equally fascinating as we bounce in the water, disturbed by an armada of fishing boats venturing out into the sea for fishing. The light house at a distance attracts us, its dark blue and white hues standing in tall pride. The new light house was built in 1985, and was primarily built to warn of the shoals existing four nautical miles off the coast. It is separated from the town by a small channel. Our plea to get closer to the light house is warded off by the boatman who claims the sand bar is very shallow – about 30-40 cms, and is very dangerous to get close to the shore. Though disappointed, we agree to his warning and complete the boat ride.

The Chinna Masudhi, and the many temples

A coffee and fifteen minutes later, we find ourselves inside the Chinna Masudhi (small mosque). This

mosque was built in 1708 as per the inscription just above the entrance arch, and its star attractions are an old 19th century *azaan* tower from which the Muzzein sang his prayer calls, and a sun dial belonging to the year 1914. The marking and inscription in the sun dial are in Persian script that reads the name of the installer as Haji Mohammed Hussain Saheb of Muthialpet, Madras. We try to decipher the language of the



Huge water pots to store rain water in the Pulicat village

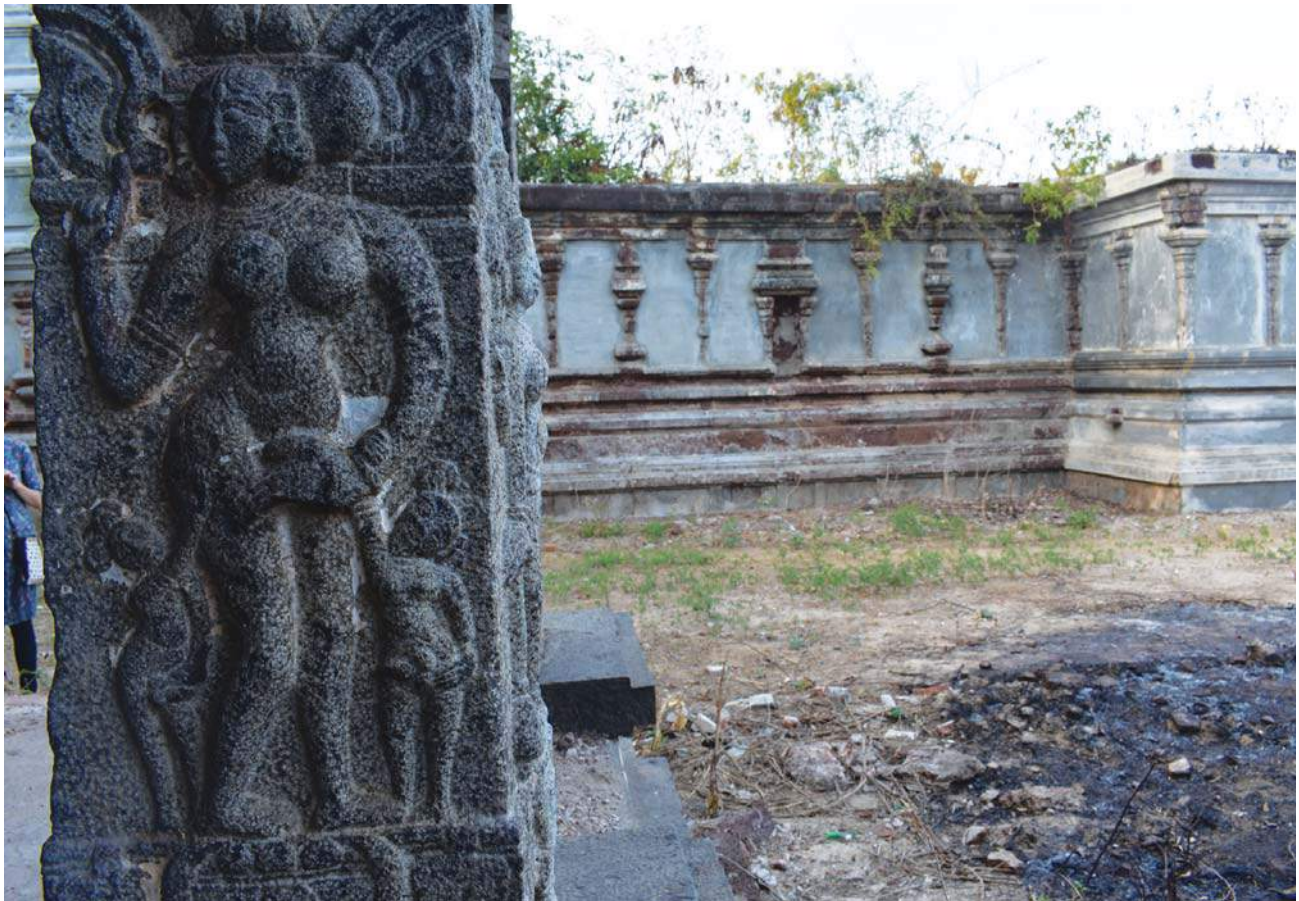


Chinna Masoodhi or Al Masjidul Mushraf Mosque at Pulicat

script and fail miserably, and I resign myself to watching a game of marbles being played by little boys.

We move to a dilapidated old temple next, called the Adhinarayana Perumal Temple. The temple probably dates back to either Vijayanagar period or to the late Cholas. There is an inscription in Telugu on the ceiling of the Thayar Sannidhi (sanctum *mandap* of the Goddess) that mentions about the period of Vijayanagar King Balavandakulu. The Dhvajasthamba, sacrificial pillar, and Garuda Sannidhi, stand in shambles, and

so does the main temple. The outer Artha Mandapam is all that we can see, and we are spellbound by the intricate carvings on the supporting beams. Scenes from the Ramayana adorn the entire beam on all four sides, right from Ram's Pattabhishekam (ascension to throne) to his *vanvaas*, the enticing of Sita by the deer Mareecha, Sita in Ashokvan, Hanuman meeting Sita, the war between Ram and Ravan in clear detail, the killing of Ravan, Sita entering the pyre, Lava-Kush and finally the happy re-union of the family. We stand



The Adhinarayana Perumal Temple, circa 11th century, is in ruins



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Ramayana sculptures on the walls of the Adhinarayana Perumal Temple

mesmerised by the perfection of the tiny figurines on the beams and tread past the shrubbery into the Thayar sanctum. This resembles a mini Angkor Wat – the wilderness and trees eating into the space of the mandap, beautifully carved with mermaids, Ram with bow, dancing girls, monkey with jackfruit, Garuda and many many more figurines.

The temple was built with red laterite, which is endemic to the Konkan coast, and it is a surprise to find almost all temples of this area built using it. A haphazard effort has been made by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department to restore the temple using concrete and cement, which was quashed by the court on petition by concerned citizens. The temple is in danger of falling down anytime soon,

the rank vegetation eating away its insides. Immediate intervention by ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) would be of much help to save this temple.

We move to the last stop of our trip – the Samayeswarar Temple. Said to be built in the same period as the Adhinarayana Temple, this Siva temple is also in a bad shape. The main entrance has trees crisscrossing the structure, and it looks as if it is the vegetation that is holding together the main entrance. We enter the temple through another side, distraught at the 'restored' new temple. Thankfully, the outer hall of the temple remains undisturbed, with pillars that have carvings like the Narasimha emerging from inside the pillar, a monkey hanging upside down on the pillar, Kannappa Nayanar and many more.



Sculptures at Samayeswarar Temple, Pulicat



The step well at the Samayeswarar Temple



Fishing boats by the Pulicat lagoon; the town of Pulicat has a lot to offer too

Here too, the supporting beams have tiny figurines carved on them, and I am elated to spot a cow ringing a bell – depicting the story of Manu Needhi Chola, and the cow that came looking for justice to him. The various *vahanas* of the Gods lie in total abandon at the mandap and as we walk around the temple, to our left is a step well. Made of bricks and lime mortar, the circular well has an adjoining podium from which descend a flight of stairs into a tunnel, giving closer access to the water below. This is unique to the temple, as we have not seen this kind of arrangement elsewhere in Tamil Nadu temples. Tired, yet in a state of bliss, we head back home.

The town of Pulicat has a lot to offer other than the usual boat ride and fish fry. It has centuries of history waiting by the sands, for the enthusiastic traveler in us to discover. A natural harbour, the town celebrates an annual Pulicat Day, a few

days after the World Wetlands Day, to stress the need for saving the delicate Pulicat lagoon. The lagoon and its ecosystem are under serious threat due to pollution and sedimentation. The moisture of the lake is not sufficient to attract the rain clouds, and there has been severe damage to the climatic balance. What is needed on the conservation of the ecological front is increased public awareness and governmental support.



Conservation and protection of the historical sites is also imperative, if we want to pass on our rich legacy and heritage to our children. ■

Nivedita Louis is a writer, blogger and social activist by choice. Bitten by the travel bug, and smitten by nature, she loves travelling and cooking. She blogs at www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com.

Our Last Six Issues

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“I felt that through the life of legendary folk singer Pratima Baruah Pandey and her voice, I will be able to preserve for posterity, both the folk songs as well as our Rajbangshi dialect.”



Bobby Sarma Baruah is a woman with a mission and a vision. Her mission is making meaningful films that will take slices of life of women in Assam, beyond borders, to the India that does not know much about the culture, lifestyle and philosophy of people in the Northeast in general, and Assam in particular.

Her vision is to create a kind of cinema that is a finely nuanced blend of the sociological, the emotional, the radical and the aesthetic. This sounds too ambitious a dream, but if one has to go by Baruah's two feature films, namely *Adomya* and *Sonar Baran Pakhi*, she is a woman who delivers what she promises to. She speaks to **Shoma A. Chatterji** about her journey so far.

Let us hear a bit about your background as a filmmaker.

After forming my own production company in 2006, I made several short films, music videos, television serials and around 30 documentaries, before I ventured into feature films. I have now a roster of two feature films as director, producer and scriptwriter.

Tell us something about your first feature film *Adomya*, which was awarded for being the best film in the spiritual category at the 13th Dhaka International Film festival.

It is about Juri, a recently widowed woman who has contracted HIV from her engineer husband, who died of AIDS just six months into their marriage. She is also expecting a child who may or may not have the virus. Thrown out by her in-laws and cast aside by a socially backward village society, she has to cope with the stigma, her new-born daughter being ostracised, and ultimately of her own loneliness in the aftermath of the traumatic events. The script is tilted towards the central character, a woman, who is a victim and whose struggle only

shows a need to live life against the odds, including multi-faceted ostracism, which may echo true life stories. *Adomya* was screened as the official selection for more than 15 international film festivals all over the world.

What inspired you to make *Sonar Baran Pakhi* which is a sort of biographical feature on the noted singer Padmashri Pratima Baruah Pandey? Was she related to you?

No. She was not related to me. I love our folk songs very much, so for me, those songs are the main inspiration and specially the Rajbangshi dialect, a very rare dialect in Assam and all over India. I felt that through the life of legendary folk singer Pratima Baruah Pandey and her voice, I will be able to preserve for posterity, both the folk songs as well as our Rajbangshi dialect.

What is it that pulled you to Pratima Pandey to make an entire fictionalised feature on her?

Pratima Baruah Pandey (1935-2002) was a woman, an artist



A still from the film *Sonar Baran Pakhi*

and a musician with a free spirit, who liked to live life her own way. She came of royal stock and knew everything that a royal princess is trained in such as horse-riding, rifle shooting and so on. From whatever I could gather from my research, she was a very talented artist. Within such families, smoking, drinking and hunting are a part of their usual lifestyle. But Pratima's first love was nature, which inspired her to create and sustain her own kind of music. She rebelled against her regal ancestry for the folk music and songs composed and sung by the grassroots people of Assam, such as the *mahout* or the elephant driver, the boatman, songs sung by cowherds, etc. She strived to rescue these songs from oblivion and bring them public recognition. She succeeded in this while she was alive.

Why did she do so few playbacks over her career?

She sang many songs for films in and out of Assam. She specially sang for HMV and for All India Radio (AIR). But due to lack of proper preservation and a good archive, her songs are not available everywhere. Only HMV and AIR have her recorded songs. Besides, technology was not as modern as it is today. I used Pratima Pandey's original tracks in the movie, so all songs are sung by her which I collected from AIR.

What statement are you trying to make through this film?

My intention is to preserve her voice and original folk songs through this film. As a creative person, I think it is both my duty and my responsibility to archive the culture and

traditional forms of music of Assam through the film so that people across the world will know and hear and see through this film the kind of traditions we have within our culture, and specially the folk songs.

The music is outstanding and is a leitmotif in this film. What kind of research did you conduct about the folk music for this film and how long did the research take?

It took me almost two years for the whole project as I had to do in-depth research. I went to Gouripur to meet some of the musicians who accompanied Pratima Pandey in her performances. I got some information and data from them. I visited the family members too specially her husband Sankar Pandey, her sister Dukhu Didi and Pratima's daughter, along with all her relatives. I visited AIR to gather information. I consider myself to be very lucky to have heard her voice through her interview recorded when she was alive. I even read many books and journals about her during my research.

Other than the flute, which other instruments are mandatory in the folk songs of Assam in general, and Goalpara in particular?

In Assam, folk instruments of all kinds are used by performers, but in Goalpara I personally noticed that performers using the *Dotara*, the *Sarinda* and *Dhol*. We shot the film in 2015 at locations in Kolkata and Assam over 20 days for the shoot.

Why did you name the film *Sonar Baran Pakhi* which actually means 'The golden-coloured bird'?

The name *Sonar Baran Pakhi* was inspired by one of her famous songs. Her voice is uncommon and distinctly different, and till this day, no one can sing like she did. We miss her voice which had a unique quality in terms of tenor, pitch, tuning and so on.

What did you find unique about her character other than her multifaceted talents?

Pratima remained unaffected by the fame and the acclaim that came her way. Laurels like the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the Padmashree and many more titles were bestowed on her by cultural bodies across Assam. Her naive nature and down-to-earth personality ensured she continually remained in the hearts of the common folk throughout her life.

As a lover and practitioner of cinema, what did you hope to accomplish through this film?

I intended to capture the uncommon threads of life of this gifted artist who, despite being a girl child and being born and brought up in a royal family, braved all odds, mingled with *mahouts* (elephant drivers), *moishals* (buffalo boys) and *naworias* (river boatmen) in a rural ambience. From the folklorists' point of view, her renditions of those fascinating folk songs at national and international platforms with unbridled passion, keeping intact the indigenous flavour, made all the difference. This, I felt, called for a feature-length portrayal of her life and works. ■



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.

WHO AM I?



The day never ends

*A day in the life of a woman in a North Indian village, is an eye-opener, says **Anvi Mehta**. She found that women toil at domestic chores from dawn to night, while men do only seasonal work in the fields. She also found how a social taboo actually comes to the aid of these overworked, undernourished women.*

WOMEN's empowerment, a term which is widely used in urbanised India, is still a word unknown to its rural counterparts. While we are fighting for equal rights, the women in rural India go through physical, mental and emotional stress each day.

It was my first day in a village of Champawat in the district Uttarakhand. I saw a group of men in the main market area, gathered around to play cards. I thought it was a thing that men did in the morning, a community activity of sorts. I spent the later part of the day visiting households to talk to the villagers and understand their lifestyle. Everywhere I went, I saw women busy in some task or the other. Either they would be performing a domestic chore, tending to their cattle or working in their fields. It was a rare sight to see women resting or sitting in their porch sipping tea. On the other hand, men seemed to be at leisure almost all day. While returning to the market in the evening, I saw the same group of men with a few additions, still playing cards. It was shocking to see able bodied men, wasting their time and not doing anything productive.

Slowly, as my interaction with the villagers increased, the women shared their woes. "Men here only plough the field and do labour work occasionally. Most of the times, the men have no work; they gather and play cards or carrom. They drink in the evening, and if we try to stop them, we face verbal or physical abuse", said a 30-something woman who lived in one of the interior villages.



Women in rural India toil for hours in the fields and at domestic chores

A demanding daily schedule

Most of the women in these villages have not travelled beyond their districts, a major reason being their responsibilities towards their family. They have a rather energy consuming schedule, they continuously work from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. They walk a minimum of 15 km a day with a load on their shoulders or heads. They are both physically and mentally at work, all their life.

When I asked a woman about her daily schedule, she explained her life in a few sentences. "We wake up at 5 a.m., walk for a kilometre or more downhill to fetch water, carry two to three buckets of water back home, milk our cows, prepare food, ensure our kids are ready for school, walk to the forest and carry fuel and fodder on our shoulder or head, cook lunch, give food

to our cows, and do some washing of clothes or spreading of cow dung in the house, work in the fields, milk the cows in the evening, fetch water again and cook dinner." She said all this in almost one breath, finally mentioning that the number of activities depends on seasons too.

The ample amount of work has often taken a toll on the health of the women here. Be it a 14-year-old or a 60-year-old, women are often seen carrying heaps of wood on their heads or carrying hundreds of litres of water, however taxing it is.

Improper nutrition, ill health

The families in the villages have reduced their farming activities due to water scarcity and climatic conditions. This has brought a severe change in their eating habits. Nutrition rich local

food like *mundhwa* (millets) and *dal* have been replaced by wheat and rice. Because of low financial resources, women in these families tend to eat the least.

"I eat after the family does", says Gita, mother of two, who has symptoms of anaemia, but is neglecting it. All she cooked for the day was rice and *dal*, whatever is leftover after the family of five has eaten, will be her food.

Because of government interventions, a few families have chickens and goats, which sometimes fulfil their protein requirements. The children in most of the villages get their afternoon meals in the schools, but women have no source of nutrition at all. As per a general survey conducted in the villages, one in ten women fall or meet with an accident while carrying fodder and fuel from the jungles. These falls result in serious injuries, sometimes they are even fatal.

Yes, there is a cooking gas subsidy, but women still cook on *chullahs*, causing respiratory problems. Even if there is gas connection in the house, it is not used regularly as the gas filling station is 20 km away. These practical problems cause an adverse impact on the health of women using the *chullah* twice a day.

My mother said that she was born in a house and not a hospital, but that was 50 years ago. Shockingly, the villages haven't improved much in the last 50 years; here too, the women give birth in houses. There is no pre or post natal care, causing most of the children to be under weight and mothers to fall sick. Despite all these health problems, women in the villages continue living like everything is normal. It is only I, visiting from the city, who skips a beat when I see a pregnant woman carrying buckets of water uphill.

Low self-esteem

"Women can only do house work,

these days they are getting influenced by the culture in the plains, but we won't let our women wear jeans and work," said a 40-something man in an awareness meeting we had held. I thought the jeans comment was a dig at us, but this statement showed how very little freedom is given to women in these villages.

Despite performing 80 percent of the tasks, women here believe that they are only good for carrying fuel and fodder. The amount of self-confidence they have is not even enough for them to stand for their basic rights. Women here are deprived of owning property, they only maintain the fields which are owned by their fathers or husbands.

Another reason for the low self-esteem is their lack of education. Though the newer generations are struggling to complete graduation, they are yet not able to take their decisions out of free will.

Another reason for the low self-esteem is their lack of education. Though the newer generations are struggling to complete graduation, they are yet not able to take their decisions out of free will. "I used to make paper flowers and sell them to earn some money for myself when I lived with my parents. After marriage, it is difficult to convince my folks to let me go to the market alone. The men here often doubt their wives, there are brawls because they think their wife is interested in another man. No work does this to their minds. I feel like I am tied down", added a woman. I could see her eyes filled with disappointment. Even after all these problems, women do not come together to fight for their freedom, they

think independent thinking is not for them.

Menstruation, a taboo or a saviour?

Not entering the kitchen, not going near the water sources, and not touching anyone else in the family – these are a few practices followed when women are in their monthly cycles. They do use cloth pads and are aware of maintaining hygiene during those days, but they ardently follow the taboos which are attached to the regular monthly cycle of a woman.

"This is what gives us a rest for at least four days in a month", said Deepa, who was sitting in a corner knitting a sweater for her two-year-old. She was resting; after a month, she had got a break for four days. At this point, I wondered if we should fight against these taboos. Were these rules set for women to give them a break from their otherwise arduous life?

A silver lining

"Things are changing", Masri amma told me once. She said that she was married at the age of 12, but now villagers are aware that girls should be educated first. I met a woman named Priyanka, whose husband forced her to complete her education, learn to operate computers and ride a moped. All this is very rare in this part of the district. But such examples are a hope that through right education and awareness, the condition of women in Chamapawat would get better. ■

After completing her engineering, Anvi Mehta interned for a newspaper and has been freelancing since then. Currently working in Uttarakhand as a Fellow, she travels to document cultures and arts.



Not my cup of tea

*As with most consumables, tea is also adulterated, finds **Usha Hariprasad**. She brewed a rosy red cup of tea and realised the bitter brew...er, truth!*

I am a tea addict. No, I don't drink gallons of tea every day, but I go exploring the market for the perfect tea blend. The other day at the oldest city market of Bangalore, I found an interesting Darjeeling tea variety. When I brewed it the next day, the tea turned out rosy red. I was delighted. But the next day I had a suspicion. Was the tea mixed with colourants? If yes, was it a done-thing? Most importantly, was it safe to drink a tea laced with colours?



A cup of black tea; refreshing or not?

Processing of the beverage

All varieties of tea come from the plant *Camellia Sinensis*. Two varieties of the plant *Camellia Sinenis* and *Camellia Assamica* are generally used in production of tea. The Black tea, White, Green, Oolong – these are derived from the same plant. What differs is the processing technique that gets followed after plucking the tea leaves to get the final product. And the variety of plant used.

There are a few common steps like withering, oxidation, fixing, rolling, drying, ageing etc. After the tea leaves are plucked they are first withered to reduce moisture content. Withering is done drying the leaves out in the sun or in a controlled room indoors. Here hot air is used to wilt the leaves. This process also ensures that the leaf compounds break down, and intensifies the flavour of tea.

The browning of tea leaf begins in oxidation. This is done in a controlled room with a set temperature and humidity. Here, tea leaves are allowed to ferment. Depending on fermentation levels, tea leaves may retain the colour

green; if oxidised further, they change to colours brown and black. Tea colour and strength depend on the level of oxidation. In the Rolling process the leaves are rolled, kneaded either by hands or via machines. This is done to release oils and further improve taste. Tea is then dried and aged. Drying helps preserve tea by improving its shelf life. Ageing is akin to fermentation and is done for some special varieties like Oolong.

The steps differ for various styles of tea. For preparation of white tea, only withering and drying is allowed. In case of black tea however, withering is followed by rolling and then oxidation.

Additives added to tea

For scented teas flowers like jasmine, rose etc., are added. The flowers are generally teamed up with the tea leaves during oxidation. Herbs like mint, spices are added to get different tea variations. Sometimes teas are also blended with other variations. Black tea could be blended with tea dust, whole leaves etc. But there is no mention of adding colours anywhere.

Colours not allowed in tea

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) allows synthetic colours in foods like sweets, but not in tea. Tea Board, India, strongly advises that FSSAI guidelines be followed and no colours be added to tea that may create problems in food safety, human health, tea trade and quality. So why are colours being added?

There are various reasons. Colours are most often added to sometimes make inferior tea look attractive. The tea also looks stronger, richer and lures customers into buying such products.

This year in January, more than 1.5 tonnes of adulterated tea was seized at Coimbatore. The trader had added synthetic brown colour to the product. Last year FSSAI had seized 2.3 tonnes at Ayanavaram, Chennai. Sunset yellow colour had been added to the tea. Black Tea could be laced with lead. Some of these chemicals could be life threatening. Banned colours, textile dyes could be added to tea products. Unfortunately in the long run, consumption of such products could lead to cancer and liver disorders.

(Continued on page 43)

Anger!

Anger is a draining emotion, and makes us prone to irrational acts. Alarming, young kids and teenagers seem to be the most angry today, says a concerned
A. Radhakrishnan.

THE face becomes flushed, and the brow muscles move inward and downward, fixing a hard stare on the target. The nostrils flare, and the jaws clench. The external expression of anger or wrath can be found in facial expressions, body language, physiological responses, and at times, in public acts of aggression.

Anger is like a boomerang!

Anger, like a boomerang, comes back to us. The people we are angry with may or may not be hurt by our anger, but it definitely saps us of our own energy. It is an intense emotional response and involves a strong, uncomfortable and emotional response to a perceived provocation, hurt or threat.

Some are conditioned to react through retaliation as a way of coping. In most cases, the described provocations occur immediately before the anger experience. It is also used as a protective mechanism to cover up fear, hurt or sadness.

Anger can be hasty and sudden, settled and deliberate, or dispositional. It can also be passive and aggressive through dispassion, evasiveness, defeatism, obsessive behaviour, psychological manipulation etc.

Anger management writer, William DeFoore described anger 'as a pressure cooker': "We can only apply pressure against our anger for a certain amount of time until it explodes." It slows down the healing process. High secretion of stress hormone cortisol could be partly responsible. Studies have also linked ill-tempered behaviour, whether brow-beating or road rage, with higher

incidence of coronary heart disease, hypertension and stroke, especially among men.

Animals make loud sounds, attempt to look physically larger, bare their teeth, and stare, and this is designed to warn aggressors to stop their threatening behaviour. Rarely does a physical altercation occur without the prior expression of anger by at least one of the participants.

Uncontrolled anger can, however, negatively affect personal or social well-being, and impact those around them. It causes a loss in self-monitoring capacity and objectiveness. Angry people are more likely to make risky decisions, are less trusting, and slower to attribute good qualities to outsiders. Suppression of anger may have harmful effects and find another outlet, such as a physical symptom, or become more extreme. Anger ironically also makes people think more optimistically. Dangers seem smaller, actions seem less risky, ventures seem more likely to succeed, and unfortunate events seem less likely.

Ancient Greek philosophers, Galen and Seneca regarded anger as a kind of madness, but agreed on both the possibility and value of controlling anger. Aristotle, on the other hand, ascribed some value to anger that has arisen from perceived injustice, because it is useful for preventing injustice.

In Judaism, anger is a negative trait. Medieval Christianity denounced wrath as one of the seven cardinal sins, but some Christian writers regarded the anger caused by injustice 'as having some value'. In Protestantism, anger can

serve as 'a spiritual friend and a spiritual guide.' In Hinduism, anger is equated with sorrow, as a form of unrequited desire. In Buddhism it is 'being unable to bear the object, or the intention to cause harm to the object.' Anger in Islam is considered to be instigated by Satan. To spiritual teacher Meher Baba, 'anger is the fume of an irritated mind, caused by the thwarting of desires.'

Minor triggers, tragic outbursts

Anger, therefore, is dangerous. Long queues at ATMs without money leads to short temper fuse. A 50-year-old police constable was beaten up by subordinates offended by his refusal to throw them a party at 1 a.m. Mobs beat a director of a Nalanda school to death after bodies of two school children were discovered in a nearby canal.

Grappling intolerance and rage, adolescents are targeting their parents with sudden violent outbursts. Call it momentary madness, but the fact is most kids cannot deal with the emotion of anger. A global trend, one in 12 adolescents in the U.S could be suffering from IED or Intermittent Explosive Disorder.

A 15-year-old girl planned to stalk a boy on the social media site Facebook, after he broke up with her. When her parents tried to talk her out of it, she broke their flat screen television set and hurled a paperweight and pen stand at her mother. A 14-year-old boy killed his mother because she was often upset with him for not doing well in his studies. A 15-year-old boy from Palghar killed his father as he refused to buy him a mobile.

Teens who constantly suppress feelings of anger or lose their temper, are more likely to be overweight by eating to be calm. Unable to express their anger in a healthy way may make them isolate themselves from peers by being withdrawn, and engaging in less physical activity.

With work-life stress on the rise, parents are increasingly venting their rage on their kids. However, they would do well never to hit their child, or publicly humiliate their child, and ask themselves, if their reaction is in proportion to the event?

Conversation is restricted to *khaana khaaya, homework kiya, abhi so jao* (had your meal?, have you done your homework?, now sleep...)...if parents spend their time after work watching TV, what does this do to their emotional connect between their children and them?

And there is road rage too. In Delhi, a 42-year-old bus driver was bludgeoned to death after his bus brushed against a young man's bike; a 38-year-old man who brushed his bike against a car was assaulted and killed before the eyes of his two sons aged 11 and 13; an enraged motorcyclist followed his victim home and attacked him, his wife, and brother after the four-wheeler driver didn't let him overtake.

Celebrity tiffs are a common thing in Bollywood with female fights over hair stylists and jealous male dress designers having a slugfest. In Hollywood, Rihanna called a journalist a 'menopausal mess' because her bad girl persona was criticised. Jennifer Lopez once threatened to physically harm a presenter if he made her look bad with gags. Naomi Campbell, to reign in her explosive temper, practices Kabbalah, a spiritual movement rooted in Jewish mysticism.

In the sports world, Virat Kohli is a man in touch with the zeitgeist, and that's how most players come from the factory of new India these days. Short fuse, ready to display overt aggression, and almost creating an image out of it.

Anger management

Anger can hopefully be thwarted by the following:

- The greatest remedy for anger is delay. Acute anger episodes can be controlled by counting or backward counting
- Learn to forgive
- Concentrate on your spiritual nature
- Meditate
- A good regime of moderate exercise will help anger dissipate
- Have proper balanced diet
- Good communication helps

- Yell in private. It works wonders
- Put on your playlist, turn up the volume and dance away
- Keep those smiley stress balls and keep squeezing them.
- Run up and down the stairs
- Accept you get peeved easily
- Learn to laugh at yourself
- Look for humour in situations
- Master the art of ignoring with a smile
- Remember nothing can affect you till you let it affect you
- Nothing is as important a peace of mind
- Get rid of the grandiose idea that you run the universe. The world and people are the way they are
- Those who suffer from uncontrollable anger should seek professional counselling from time to time

Arguments and conflicts are unavoidable in relationships, but how you fight makes all the difference. That's anger management for you. ■

A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune-based freelance journalist with four decades of mainstream print journalism, poet, short story writer and counsellor. When not on social media, he loves to make people laugh.



Not my cup of tea

(Continued from page 41)

Heavy metals in tea too

In addition to this, heavy metals too get absorbed in tea leaves from soil plantations. Tea leaves could contain metals like cadmium, chromium, lead, arsenic, selenium etc. Chromium is known to cause cancer of lungs and bronchitis, lead can lead to anaemia, selenium can cause selenosis. This though is not in our control. Organic labels too can be misleading sometimes as there may be presence of pesticides.

Detecting colours in tea

So how do you detect if a tea is adulterated or not? There is a simple test. If a tea is laced with colours then if it is added to a glass of cold water, it will change the water colour instantly. An article in the Hindu titled '*What's that in your coffee cup?*' mentions that a pure tea imparts colour only in hot/warm water. Another method to test an adulterated tea is to put tea leaves on a filter paper. Add few drops of water on it. If you see colour stains on the tissue then there is all probability that water

soluble colours have been added to the tea powder.

Tea is rich in antioxidants. But adulteration can destroy its goodness. So as an alert consumer, be aware. Buy from a trusted source, check the labels. *Jago graham jago!* ■

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



Fun with our past

The book 'ArchaeoGiri: The Bridge Between the Archaeologist and the Common Man' by Shubha Khandekar, is a pioneering attempt at turning India's vast archaeological wealth into human voices through cartoons. By generating dialogue among historical characters stepping out of academic papers and scholarly textbooks, ArchaeoGiri creates humour and unique insights into the secrets of the past, says Divya Prasad. This is the way history should be taught, she states.

ARCHAEOGIRI begins with a quote from Harriet Beecher Stowe: 'The past, the present, and the future are really one: they are today.' Although the reading of history should lead us to this point, we frequently miss the link and get lost in the data that, when interpreted, is somehow devoid of its essential humanity. Shubha Khandekar, trained in archaeology (she participated in excavations in Shringaverpur, Inamgaon and Chandore), and having worked as a journalist, brings both her experiences to a panoramic travel into the past, and reports on it the way a contemporary cartoonist from the remote past would have done; giving us a glimpse into what would have caused

tour from the Stone Age to our own times; a span of two million years, and that is some exciting time travel through cartoons. Hence one learns how being a dentist or a mother goddess could have been the cherished career goals for prehistoric kids. Or that a hunter would

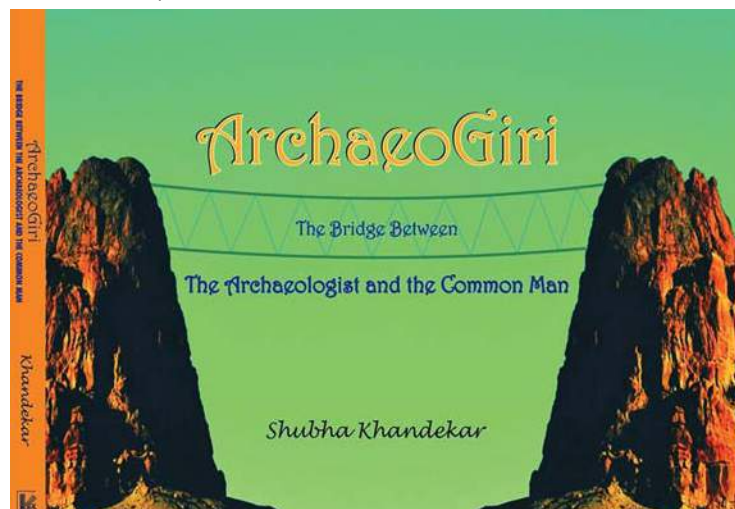
in upbringing would be blamed on the spouse. Illustrating the complexities of life in the Middle Stone Age as depicted in the thousands of paintings in the rock shelters of Central India, a cartoon shows a man thrown off by a bull, with onlookers commenting on how, when

he could not decide on whether to tame the bull, hunt him or paint him, it was the bull who did!

When microliths appeared, hand axes would have become dated. There is a charming cartoon in which the prospective groom protests that even in the age of microliths, the bride's father demands the obsolete hand axes as bride price, belittling

the finer, more advanced microliths as 'silly little thingummyjigs'.

These cartoons make you laugh and then get you thinking. We throw stones now, at glasshouses and otherwise. It needed the ingenuity, sophistication and versatility of the Stone Age man to fashion these into tools to make choppers, blades, points, sickles, harpoons and arrowheads. He would lament his successors' sheer waste of resources and the dying of the handicrafts!



The book brings history alive in a fun, humorous way

historical characters to grumble, gossip or guffaw. Supported by short and lucid text that brings you up to date with the latest developments in Indian archaeology, from the Stone Ages to the contemporary debates on how we look at the past, the cartoons, as the Foreword by renowned archaeologist M.K. Dhavalikar states, make the stones speak.

A guided tour of history

The cartoons take you on a guided

have sneered at a gatherer as the former wouldn't stoop to picking tamarind for a pregnant wife. As a prehistoric child prodigy draws an animal with heads, feet and tails of different animals, the exasperated father points a finger at the over-protective mother, saying, 'It's all your fault. Had you let me take him on hunts, he would have known that such animals don't exist.' Of course, the prehistoric couple would have argued about children and, as in our own times, any perceived shortcomings

Generally, all school students who have been introduced to history know about Chandragupta's marriage to a Greek princess, who was exchanged for 500 elephants as a return gift. Imagine her plight in a faraway foreign land; the forlorn princess is offering an elderly compatriot who comes visiting her, 600 elephants to buy her out of the place, protesting against the scorching heat of Bihar and the unbearably spicy food!

Buddha's representations do not belong to his times. He was first depicted through such symbols as the Bodhi tree, footprints and the 'Dhamma' wheel. His images date from the time of Gandhara Art, which flowered a few hundred years after he had died. One of the cartoons titled 'Headers and Footers' shows a Greek sculptor proudly displaying the Buddha's head he created, to which the *dhoti*-clad BCE sculptor responds that at least he does not pretend to know what Buddha looked like! One cartoon shows an irate donor admonishing the impudent engraver, who would rather immortalise his love for Sundari, to stick to the given text about who donated the cave.

We all know Asoka for his rock and pillar edicts, and his message of non-violence. This would have forced a change in food habits and livelihoods. A cartoon shows a Piyadasi Pure Veg

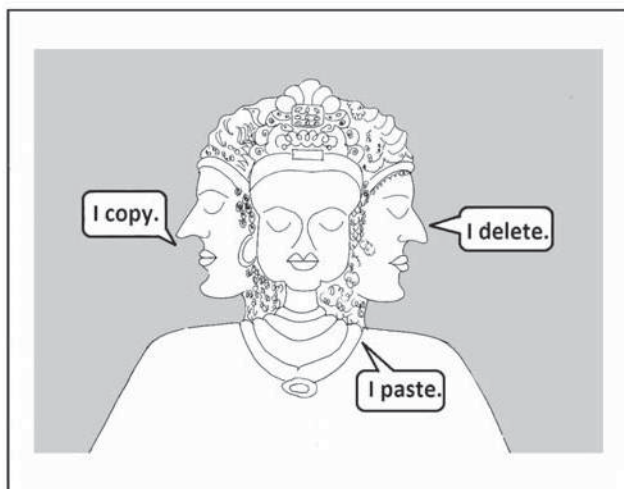
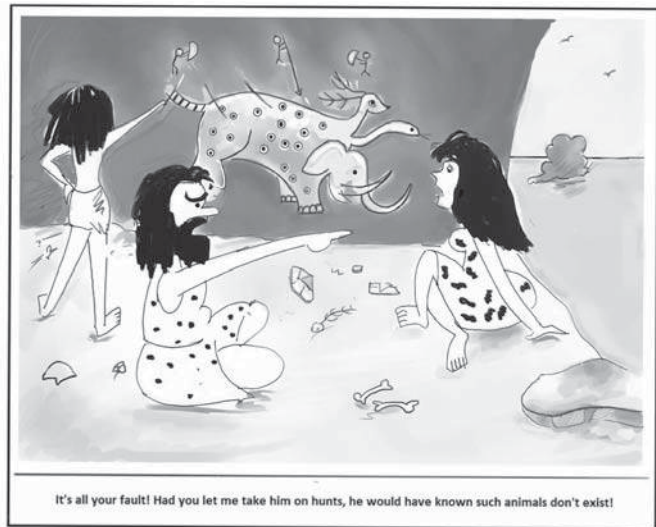
Restaurant owner awaiting footfalls, suffering the double whammy of bankruptcy and the wife's predictable 'I told you so.' The famous Trimurti from the Elephanta Caves spout the 'Copy', 'Paste, and 'Delete'

commands, which summarise the mythological obligations of the holy trinity with exceptional thrift.

Each reader will find his own favourites among the cartoons to chuckle at, but there are two at the very end which particularly catch your attention. One shows the Public Holidays Department considering a Vibhishana *ghar wapasi* day. The other has two horses contemplating taking the road to Mohenjodaro where Ashutosh Gowarikar has offered them the entire granary.

The cartoons also raise the issues of doctored histories, coloured chronicles and political interference in what is the exclusive domain of archaeologists and historians. If the past is to be rewritten based on ideological preferences and put into our prejudiced templates, we are only depriving ourselves of the picture that may emerge from a dispassionate analysis of data.

The cartoons, however, tell you that you need not let the experts, whether of the Left or the Right disposition,



overawe you, and there is a common sense way of looking at the vast stretch of history and time preceding us. The book sends a strong message that we must let the past be and not drag it into the present.

ArchaeoGiri is an irreverent, informative and entertaining take on India's past and its writing: a must read for scholars, students and lay enthusiasts alike. It is a book that you can pick up any time, open any page and enjoy. This is how history should be taught, with wit, humour and a lot of common sense. The history teachers could possibly look at the cartoons and find new ways to communicate to their students. The cartoons would certainly enliven the classroom. Certainly, the cartoons could be very good ads for the ruins of history. Imagine the horse cartoon put up at a Harappan site! ■

Having done her M.A in History and M.Phil from the Department of Chinese and Japanese Studies, Delhi University, Divya Prasad joined the bureaucracy through the civil services examination in 1984. She worked in the ministries of Defence, Panchayati Raj, Shipping and the Unique



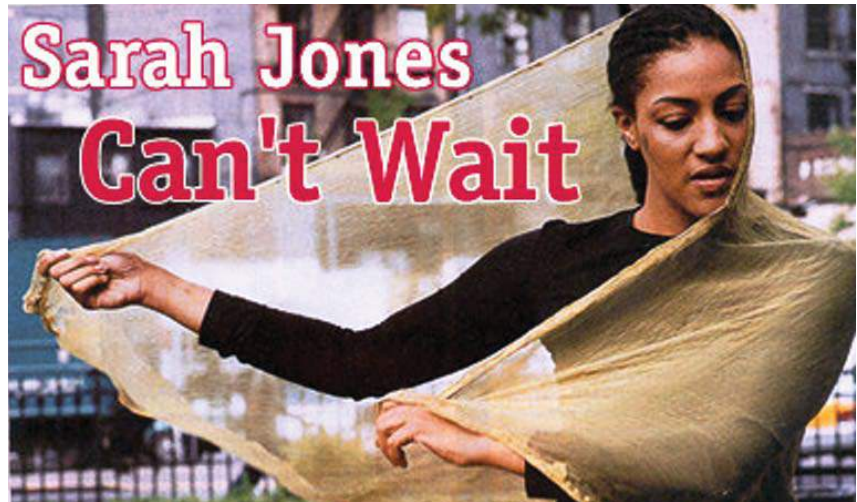
Identification Authority of India, in various capacities. She retired in 2015 and is currently working with an NGO in two municipal schools in Delhi.

The shape-shifter

A one-woman play about violence against women, *Sarah Jones Can't Wait*, has caused a lot of buzz in the world of theatre, says **Shoma A. Chatterji**. She reviews the play which has the actor brilliantly playing eight women from around the world, with minimal props.

WOMEN *Can't Wait* is a one-woman performance by Sarah Jones. The 27-year-old Sarah comes on stage, sans make-up or costume, decked up in a black shirt and black tights, with a luminous, lemon green veil as the only prop for the 50-minute performance. The play is the result of a brain-storming session between Jessica Neuirth, Executive Director of *Equality Now* and Sarah Jones, a poet-turned-actress based in the US. *Sarah Jones Can't Wait*, earlier named *Women Can't Wait*, is a powerful statement on violence against women, that mainly focusses on discriminatory laws in several countries across the globe, denying equal rights to half the world's population. Jones wrote the script herself, and Gloria Feliciano directed her performance. It is a performance commissioned by *Equality Now* as part of their international campaign against discriminatory laws in 45 countries. The performance highlights the impact of discriminatory laws on the daily lives of women and girls in eight countries around the world.

Born in Baltimore and brought up in Boston, Washington D.C. and New York City, Sarah has been performing since she was a child. Her first poem, on the politics of Ronald Reagan, came out when she was six. Five years later, she found herself acting in a Shakespeare play. She then switched over to writing. Returning to New York in 1995, after attending Bryn Mawr College, without any formal training in acting, Sarah began to perform the spoken word at the Nuyorican Poets Café. She later won the Nuyorican Café's Grand Slam Championship, and was selected for the national semi-finalist Nuyorican Slam



This is a brilliantly acted out play, which provides ample food for thought

Team, beginning to perform nationally and working with luminaries like Paul Simon and Gil Scott-Heron.

Shortly afterwards, inspired by New York City, Jones wrote *Surface Transit*. "New York City is an impossible mix of cultures, races, languages, religions, and all their individual prejudices, conscious or otherwise," says Sarah. Neuirth happened to catch a show of *Surface Transit* and was captivated by the performance. Jones portrayed eight very different New Yorkers and used their chance encounters in the city's transit system to explore racial and sexual discrimination. "She was brilliant", says Neuirth, adding, "What really struck me was how she brought the complicated issues behind the characters to life." She approached Jones to find out if she would be interested in putting together a dramatic piece for the UN special session, and Jones agreed. The result was, *Women Can't Wait*. Jones plays eight women who have come to the United Nations – from India, Japan, Kenya, Jordan, France, Uruguay, Israel and Brooklyn, N.Y. – to tell their stories.

The stage is set

The stage is set with a podium and a microphone into which Sarah 'addresses' the imaginary UN session in the accent suited to the country she comes from. Her body language, the tone and pitch of her voice, match the body language and the voice of the woman she is impersonating.

For instance, she covers her head to become Parveen from India, working up the courage to speak out about marital rape committed on her by her husband against which the law of the country offers her no protection at all. In an instant, she transforms the *chunni* into a scarf tied jauntily around her neck, turning into Emeraude, a vivacious French lady who defies the law banning women from working nights in France. "I am a dedicated criminal," says this teacher, tongue firmly in cheek, referring to her dedication to her teaching job at a night school. Tomoko from Japan wishes to marry the man she is in love with. But the country's law maintains that she cannot do so unless her first

(Continued on page 48)

The pioneer

Maharashtrian rationalist and mathematician Prof. Raghunath Dhondo Karve was also the pioneer of family planning in India, a fact not known to many. Prof. Avinash Kolhe reviews a play based on him.

MAHARASHTRA can rightly boast of tall social reformers like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Justice M.G. Ranade, G.G. Agarkar and many others. All these people had severely criticised inhuman practices prevalent in Hindu religion and society like caste system, child marriage, the practice of Sati, etc. But none spoke of family planning and a healthy sex life as the preconditions for a healthy society. That responsibility fell on Prof. Raghunath Dhondo Karve (RDK) (14 January 1882-14 October 1953) who was the eldest son of Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, founder of SNDT Women's University.

Prof. Karve led the life of a lonely person though he was married to Malatibai. He had to face social ostracism, was forced to resign from professorship in Mumbai. Though he was always almost broke, he never gave up his cause and persevered. His life and times offer a challenge to writers and playwrights. In 2001 Amol Palekar



***Samaj Swasthya* was also the title of the magazine Prof. Karve edited**



A still from the play *Samaj Swasthya*

directed a movie *Dhyasparva*, based on the life of RDK.

And now 'Natakghar', a Pune-based drama group decided to mount a play on the life of Prof. R.D. Karve, titled *Samaj Swasthya* (health of society). This is the title of the magazine Karve edited to propagate his ideas about family planning, STD, safe sex, etc. He had to face police action often and was also fined by the judiciary.

'Samaj Swasthya'

Playwright Ajit Dalvi took up this challenge and we now have a two-and-half hour play 'Samaj Swasthya' in Marathi, which is more of a court-room drama, as he was dragged to court often for views which were nothing but revolutionary during the 1930s and 1940s. Not only this, the fearless professor never fought shy of taking on big names like Mahatma Gandhi. RDK had criticised Gandhiji for his views on celibacy. No wonder RDK spent much of his life in courts defending and losing cases filed against him.

RDK was a professor of Mathematics and a thorough rationalist. He realised that unless Indians learn about family planning and safe sex through contraceptives, women will continue to live life only for producing babies, whom they cannot properly feed and raise. He started the first birth control clinic in India in 1921 in Mumbai, the same year a similar birth control clinic was opened in London! In all these activities he was ably supported by his wife. She helped him financially and both had to face social ostracism. The couple also chose to remain childless. In 1927, they started a magazine *Samaj Swasthya* and edited it till RDK died in 1953.

The play

The play opens when RDK had to appear in court for the first time for his ideas of family planning and use of contraceptives. On the other side of ideological fence are orthodox elements from Pune who use religious texts and literature to argue their point. The orthodoxy was led by Aahitagni

Rajawade, and they convinced the judge that RDK's views are dangerous to the society. RDK was fined, the first in a long list to follow.

Atul Pethe has directed this play. Pethe, a progressive artist, is known to bring such plays to life, regularly. In the past, he directed *Surya Pahilela Manoos* (Man who has seen the Sun) on the life of Greek philosopher Socrates. He along with Dalvi, devoted a lot of time to put this play together and had read many issues of *Samaj Swasthya*, and as much material on RDK as was possible. This is their labour of love. The product is indeed praiseworthy and shows the audiences as to how the more things change, the more they remain same. Even today, we have orthodoxy keeping our society backward. Even today, we see how nobody listens to sane voices,

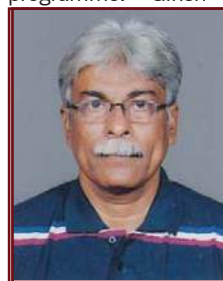
and how they are threatened!

The role of RDK is rendered sensitively and imaginatively by Girish Kulkarni with Rajeshree Sawant-Wad playing RDK's caring and loving wife, Malatibai. Set Design by veteran Pradeep Mulaye is outstanding and creates the atmosphere of the 1930s and 1940s' court rooms and residential homes in middle-class Mumbai, staying primarily in Girgaum.

The costumes by Madhuri Purandare bring to life that era when Marathi educated men invariably wore coats. Dalvi's hard work shows in the dialogues and various crisp scenes. It is quite a challenge to pick the most dramatic moments from RDK's life and present them on stage in the duration of two-and-half hours. Dalvi has managed this well. Pethe is an old theatre hand, a veteran

of directing many challenging plays. He founded Natak Ghar in 2013 in Pune to produce meaningful and thoughtful plays. In 'Samaj Swasthya', Pethe has scaled new heights. The audiences leave the hall wondering about the plight of social reformers like RDK and how our society manages to produce them and then torture them. And yet in due course, recognise their sterling contribution. Today, RDK is known for his pioneering work on family planning, which later became our national programme. Girish Kulkarni essayed

the role with matured ease. ■



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

The shape-shifter

(Continued from page 46)

husband gives her written consent to divorce him. Being the batterer that he is, he is loathe to let go of his vulnerable victim, trapped more by the laws of the country, than by the violent husband. Hala from Jordan speaks about her sister Leila, whose 15-year-old brother pumped six bullets into her stomach and got sentenced for six months. Her crime was that she ran away from home to escape getting married to a man old enough to be her father. It was an 'honour killing' decreed the court, and the teenage brother grew into adulthood with his sister's blood on his hands, without any sense of remorse for having done what he did. Alma from Uruguay says how her daughter was forced to marry her own rapist because the law of her country exonerates a rapist if he marries his victim!

There is Bonita from the US, Shira from Israel and finally, 13-year-old Anna from Kenya who balls up the *chunni* to resemble a doll she carries along with her wherever she goes. She haltingly talks of the female genital

mutilation girls in her country are subjected to, and for which, there is no legal protection whatsoever. Without using the space of the proscenium for movement, Jones manages to keep her audience electrified and hypnotised by the performance. What's amazing is that she does this apparently without much effort on her part. By the time the performance comes to a close, one can almost cut through the thick silence that pervades the auditorium, till the real Sarah Jones speaks up in her own voice and makes a hole into the silence. "The voices of the eight women and their chronicles of injustice are hanging in the air like the lament of a Greek chorus," writes Tom Quinn, a US critic.

On stage, Jones is the gifted impersonator, shape-shifting from one character to the next. Just as in *Surface Transit* she wanted to get the voices out of her head and into the world, in *Women Can't Wait*, she fluidly moves from being the Punjabi Parveen to the Kenyan Anna. Her lines are generously sprinkled with acid touches of black humour, thereby preventing the performance from becoming dull

and dreary, and yet getting her message across, loud and clear. The lines drawn between and among the different women are clear. Yet, there is considerable blurring too, driving home the point that all women are after a point, reducible to one common whole. Sarah Jones's performance is a performance of transference, of transition, of change and of demanding others to change. "One of the things that inspires me to write is the dearth of material that treats everybody – Black, White, Latino, mixed – as people instead of some add-water-and-stir stereotype," she says. Let hers be the last word. ■

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.

Shut it down!

*The widespread consumption of violent pornography is not a matter to be scoffed at, says **Bharat Dogra**. Even at the risk of being accused of moral policing, such pornography must be clamped down upon, he states.*

ONE of the most important socio-cultural changes of recent times relates to the very rapid increase in access to very diverse forms of pornography, including violent porn. Like all other important social and cultural changes, this change should be examined for its possible impact by unbiased researchers. Unfortunately, such careful research and well-informed debate is not very visible in India, with the result that, two highly distorted views, have dominated the discussion.

The first such distorted view is based on the moral policing approach. This view fails to distinguish between various forms of porn, ranging from mildly erotic and sensual to extremely violent, and condemns all porn, often even asking for a ban on all porn. The second, equally distorted view goes to the other extreme, shutting its eyes to the increasing evidence of the harmful impacts of certain types of porn, holding that no harmful impact exists. Unfortunately, this view is being promoted in several not-so-obvious ways by powerful interests who benefit from the proliferation of porn.

The truth about violent porn

Such a view ignores many studies that already exist about the adverse impacts of proliferation of certain types of porn, particularly violent porn. For example, there is the study by Seiya Morita in the context of Japan, which makes two important points. Firstly, on the basis of the available data, it seeks to establish a statistical co-relationship between the increase in the proliferation

of porn, and the increase of sexual crimes. Secondly, on the basis of a survey of culprits of sexual crimes, this study establishes that nearly a third of them, while watching pornographic videos, had felt a yearning for doing something similar in real life.

Then, in the more specific context of India, we have a lot of anecdotal evidence and news reports about actual sexual crimes and confessions of culprits of these crimes. There have been increasing reports about the circulation of videos of several women and girls, including students. In some cases, these have led to further violence and even suicides of those who have been defamed.

Then, in the more specific context of India, we have a lot of anecdotal evidence and news reports about actual sexual crimes and confessions of culprits of these crimes.

A surprising increase in sale and circulation of video clips depicting rapes has been reported from not just big cities, but even smaller towns. There is increasing suspicion that many rapes and other crimes against women are taking place with the specific aim of preparing such videos.

So one very urgent issue that needs to be researched and debated is the

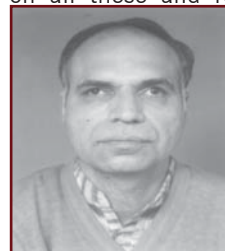
extent to which proliferation of certain kinds of porn has led to or may have led to an increase in sexual violence against women and children (female as well as male children). Also, it needs to be examined more specifically, to what extent this proliferation of porn is related to the increase in the trafficking of women and children.

Another important area of research is how exposure to certain forms of porn has different impacts on different categories of people. Here, more specifically, it needs to be researched how the sudden intrusion of porn in culturally conservative families and communities can be very disruptive, particularly those forms of porn which relate to incest and various prohibited relationships. The links of this to several violent crimes should also be explored. Yet another important area that should be explored is the extent to which porn can become highly addictive and the impact of such addiction on specific groups like students.

Last, but not the least, we need to examine the impact of the proliferation of porn in terms of much reduced possibilities of good cinema, TV and literature, as well as the wider cultural implications of this. Rational, research and facts based discussion on all these and related aspects is

important, and badly needed. ■

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



Times they are a' changing

The Indian Republic started on a robust promise of justice and equality. But has it lost its way, especially in recent years, wonders **Ram Puniyani**.

AS a nation, we have to ponder: What has been the direction of our politics in the last few decades? Does it conform to what was expected of our republic as outlined in our Constitution? Are we living up to the dreams and visions of the freedom fighters and the founding fathers of India?

Founded on equality and justice

What we need to recall is that the Indian republic came to become one through the long period of struggle against the British rule. Those participating in the struggle were people of all religions and regions. The movement itself was founded on the principles of equality and justice. While those who were part of the upcoming India, the industrialists, the workers, the educated classes, the peasants, the *adivasis*, and *dalits*, aspired for the republic based on secularism and democracy.

These sections were the mainstream of the anti-colonial movement, the movement for 'India as the nation in the making'. In contrast, sections of feudal elements, kings and landlords, were opposed to the values of equality; they threw up the politics of feudal values, couched in the language of religion. In contrast to 'India as the nation in the making', they wanted to build a Muslim nation or a Hindu nation. They kept aloof from the freedom movement and helped the British policy of 'Divide and Rule'; this is what led to the tragic partition of the country.

The Indian Constitution is the core of the Indian Republic. It is the document which expresses the aspiration of national movement. The Constitution makers referred to most of the modern

constitutions of the world and came up with this document, calling it as 'India, that is Bharat'.

Republic under attack?

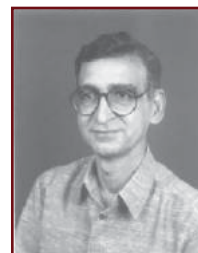
The first major value of the republic which came to be criticised is the one related to pluralism, diversity and secularism. Globally, right-wing politics has been asserting itself; the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini was the first major indication that vested interests are going to use the cover of religion for retrograde pre-industrial political values. As such, the decade of 1980s has been a major turning point in the history of mankind. Inspired by the Soviet Revolution, many countries came forward to put an end to the feudal traditions. While the language was that of socialism, the agenda was that of ending landlordism and promoting the industries with the assistance of the state. China, Vietnam, Cuba being the major examples. In India, socialism guided the state policies to bring in public sector, which in turn promoted creation of a vast number of jobs paving the way for participation of *dalits*, women and *adivasis* in particular, in the so far forbidden public space. It opened up the space for vast, industrial and educational development of the country, this is what gave an edge to India as a major economic power in times to come. The initial three decades of the Indian Republic were dominated by issues of the society; the problems of the downtrodden were on the center stage.

One step forward, two steps back?

During these decades, the republic focused mainly on the libertarian values, equity and dignity for all.

The fundamental rights and directive principles were interpreted in the direction of concern for the rights of all citizens. During the decades of 1990, globally and nationwide, the globalisation of the economy led to the dominance of the corporate sector, leading to a decline in the concern for rights of average people and religious minorities in particular. While earlier, India was sort of an example for marching towards a just society, during last two decades in particular, the march has been reversed. Worldwide, we see that those leaders having rightward shift, those influenced by narrow nationalism are coming up, it may be Italy, France, Turkey or even United States for that matter.

It is precisely in these times that in India, the secular democratic republic is being challenged and Hindu nationalism is being asserted. This Hindu nationalism is pushing back the policies of social welfare and the policies of affirmative action for weaker sections, minorities in particular. Countries like Pakistan had been dominated by such politics all through. The matter of concern now is that the Indian Republic, which had shown the way to South Asia in matters of values of justice, is mired more in issues of identity. It's time we shift the focus back to issues of people, and weaker sections of society, along with nurturing pluralism and diversity. ■



Ram Puniyani a former Professor at IIT, Mumbai, is also involved with social issues, particularly, those related to preservation of democratic and secular ethos in our life.

The ISI of Pakistan

Faith, Unity, Discipline

THE ISI OF PAKISTAN By Hein G. Kiessling

Harper Collins Publishers, 2016

PROFESSOR Kiessling, a German political scientist and historian, author of the book under review, lived for 13 years (1989-2002) in Pakistan, including four years in Quetta, to study Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The ISI was established by Major General Robert Cawthorne, the then deputy chief of staff in Pakistan's army, as an intelligence gathering agency in 1948, as a result of Pakistan's failure in its first war (1947-48) against India. However, unlike India's Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW) established in 1968, ISI has played and continues to play a role in domestic politics, in addition to external gathering of intelligence.

The hydra-headed monster

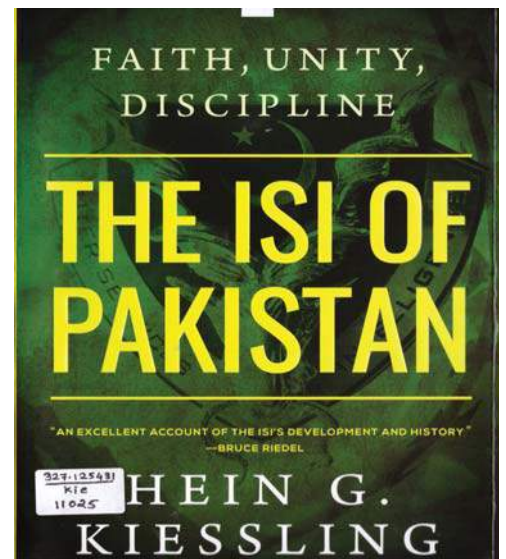
The first decade of the ISI was without much significance. It was, however, involved in planning and executing "Operation Gibraltar" during the military rule of Ayub Khan that we Indians know as Pakistan's second war, in 1965. It was based on the anticipation of an internal "rebellion against Indian rule" in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). It was "initially rejected" by Ayub Khan who had then observed: "All I asked them was to keep the situation in Kashmir under review. They can't force a campaign of military action on the government". Though, finally in July 1965, it did take place, but failed completely.

The debacle of the secession of the East Pakistan after the Bangladesh War of 1971 was another big failure of the ISI. On the other hand, the author says it was a great victory for

the R&AW. But the ISI came into limelight after the Soviet Union's (SU) Afghan invasion in 1979. The author quotes Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski's memo to President Carter: "We now have the opportunity to give the USSR their Vietnam War". Thus, Pakistan's ISI collaboration with the American CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) in driving out the SU from Afghanistan, in a sense laid the foundation for its ultimate disintegration. Gorbachev in 1985 decided to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. The CIA provided funds, weapons and training to Mujahideen fighters. The author quotes American sources to the effect that "the US cash flow exceeds those for all other covert actions." Pakistan also never before had it so good. The author says, "15-40 percent of the weapons intended for the Mujahideen never left Pakistan", while 30 or more percent of the "assistance were stolen on the transportation routes which run through Pakistan".

What makes one qualified for the post of ISI Director? Based on his interviews with former directors, the author says: Director is "different from other military men, reference being made to his intelligence, conceptual and analytical ability as well as his zest for action." Major General Hamid Gul was appointed to the post during the time of military dictator, Zia-ul-Haque; then onwards, the position began to get more and more attention, within and outside the country.

For want of space, let me mention only two more recent issues of global interest, to discuss ISI's involvement. First, the Mumbai cross-sea terror attack



of 26/11, and second, the presence of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. Unfortunately, anyone who has followed the Mumbai attack of 26/11 does not get any more authentic information than what is already in the public domain. He confirms the known fact that ISI and army were fully informed of the plans in advance. He discounts the idea that there is "an ISI within the ISI", as an idea created by the ISI itself to increase its power of deniability.

Osama bin Laden lived in Pakistan for quite some years and as the author says: "Only a minority believed that both services knew nothing", about Osama living in Abbottabad till his killing by the US on 2 May 2011. Osama was in all probability, protected by a small unit of ISI, just like it had protected Mullah Omar till his death in 2013. ISI might have thought of doing the same with Osama. But, the author says, the planners "underestimated the will of the Americans to retaliate for 9/11..." ■

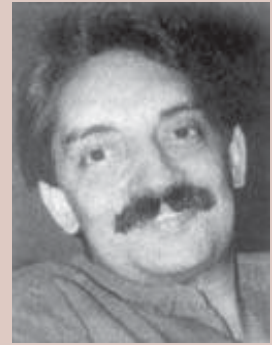
Dr. P.M. Kamath, formerly, Professor of Politics, University of Bombay, is currently, Hon. Director of VPM's Centre for International Studies (Regd.), affiliated to Mumbai University. He is an Adjunct Professor in Department of Geopolitics and Interna-



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

Tiger fire

The forest is a true temple, and worthy of our devout worship. But will we do our utmost to conserve this priceless treasure?



Bittu Sahgal
Editor, Sanctuary magazine

SITTING with the late Kailash Sankhala, the then Director of Project Tiger, I learned for the first time three decades ago, that *langurs* in the northern half of our subcontinent have their tails curled in a large 'C' bent over their backs. However, in the South, their tails form a large 'S'. Why? No one has quite been able to explain.

I also learned from this amazing naturalist that the Hanuman *langur* possesses a three-chambered stomach that helps it to digest the difficult-to-digest leaves that constitute the bulk of its victuals. Evolution granted it forward pointing eyes to judge distances, so that a leap from one branch to another becomes less life threatening. Colour vision and an acute sense of smell help the *langur* to know when fruit hanging on a favourite tree turn ripe. *Langur* "Aunts" in a troupe and young female sub-adults play surrogate mother to infants, so that the real mother can feed without let or hindrance. And when a herd of *chital* deer wander by, the *langur* will not drift away, choosing instead to feed close to the deer, thus benefiting from one of the forest's most effective joint-predator alarm systems. And yes, they have a language of their own. Subtly varied alarm calls warn troupe members of threats from tigers, snakes or humans. Armed with long canines, more for fruit cutting than fighting, *langurs* use teeth to great advantage by baring them in an aggressive display designed to avoid physical conflict.

Among wild creatures, *langurs* have adjusted their behaviour remarkably well, and have even begun to take advantage of the human tendency to feed them. It's anyone's guess, however, if this *langur* will ever understand that it will die when it eats the food-stuffed plastic bags thrown by thousands of mindless tourists and Hanuman worshippers who throng the forests and temples in the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve.

When I now visit forests, I am always caught between two poles. Should I celebrate the obvious beauty I see before

me, or mourn the destruction that is imminent? Every once in a while, a primal instinct pushes me to parts of the planet where I can experience raw nature. It is here that I feel most alive. Where I can remind myself why the gift of life was granted to me.

The birth of such urgings was probably triggered by countless family trips to Calcutta's Botanical Gardens, where the famous banyan tree became a seven-year-old's universe, and the mere sight of the Hoogly River's mud banks sent young adrenaline pumping, because crocs lived there. Such urgings stayed with me through the seventies, before *Sanctuary* was ever a gleam in my eye.

I saw my first tiger over 30 years ago, in Kanha. It was the month of June and the air was pregnant with promised rain. We were tracking tiger pugmarks in the pre-dawn gloom, drenched by tall-grass dew, and assaulted almost continuously by the smells and tummy expletives of Ram Pyari, our riding elephant!

And then, there it was.

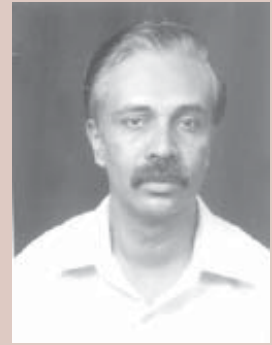
I spent an hour gaping open-mouthed at the year-old cub that curiously explored its leaf littered *nullah*. When he moved away, we followed for 200 hundred metres or so, till the young cat was united with mother and sister.

In 15 minutes I was enslaved by tiger fire and liberated from tawdry human ambition. I recall hours spent sitting quietly with Manglu Baiga, keeper of Kanha's forest secrets, at Shravan Tal, and Bahmnidadar, absorbing the magic. Manglu taught me that nature was mother, father and child all in one. That being in a forest was like being in a temple. That I was no less a child of the earth than the tigers I had come to see.

I went to Kanha a tourist. I returned a nature worshipper. If I had my way, I would create circumstances in and around our most popular wildlife areas that would enable every single visitor to share my fate. ■

Campus politics: Boon or bane?

While it's good to see students participating actively in campus politics, they should also resist attempts by political parties to dictate or influence the discourse.



C. V. Aravind

is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.

TIME was when universities were nothing more than centers of learning. Student unions were always in existence, but their activities were mainly confined to ensuring the welfare of the student fraternity. Some of these unions were backed by political parties, but politicians were always kept at arm's length.

The situation in universities today is vastly different. In some universities, campus politics has reached alarming proportions with unions taking their battles to the streets and often indulging in violence. Political ideologies have grown firm roots and unions have been endeavouring to ingrain certain strains of thought in the minds of the students, so much so that rebellions against authority and animus towards each other have become the order of the day. Political parties, meanwhile, are busy fishing in troubled waters, with leaders entering campuses, participating in organisational activities and throwing their weight behind student bodies that are affiliated to them.

Even prestigious institutions like the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) through whose hallowed portals some of India's greatest leaders, intellectuals and scholars have passed, have turned into hotbeds of political activity with students openly clashing with each other and creating an atmosphere where mob frenzy has taken the place of peaceful discourse. Both right-wing and left-wing activism have entered the picture and students are in a dilemma about which side to lean. A truly alarming trend in recent times has been the germination of movements that have been indulging in raising 'pro-*azadi*' slogans, making attempts to denigrate the country, the national flag and the anthem, critiquing the government in a harsh manner, praising forces that are inimical to the nation and so on and so forth. Only a microscopic minority might subscribe to these theories, but there can be no two opinions on the need to weed out these

tendencies which only tend to corrupt young minds and lead them astray.

Today's generation has a tendency to question the status quo and this is a welcome sign, as meek acceptance of everything that is dished out to them is only akin to meek surrender. Students showing spine is a healthy sign of the prevalence of democracy and freedom of expression in a nation like ours, and a perfect example of this was evident in the 'Jallikattu' agitation unleashed by students of colleges in Chennai recently; a spontaneous movement to ensure the revival of Jallikattu, a traditional sport in Tamil Nadu which had been banned by the Supreme Court on a petition by People for Ethical Treatment of Animals. (PETA), just sprung up out of the blue. The world's second largest coastline, the Marina beach in Chennai turned into an ocean of faces as young students, both boys and girls waged a relentless, silent and non-violent battle against the ban that finally led to the state government issuing an ordinance to restore the sport. The real highlight of the agitation was that the students, though part of a leaderless protest, kept the politicians at bay in a clear sign that they had little faith in these people's representatives.

Students today form a large vote bank for all political parties as consequent to the reduction of voting age from 21 to 18, almost all college students have voting rights, and what better way for parties to woo them than by carrying out their propaganda through the unions in colleges and universities.

Students should not allow their campuses to be defiled by permitting entry of anti-social and anti-national forces and should steer clear of anything that would make them deviate from their mission in life. They should not for even an instant forget that their principal aim in enrolling themselves in universities is to excel in their academic and extra-curricular pursuits. ■



SPOTLIGHT

Beat the heat the traditional way

WHEN the scorching sun beats down mercilessly and you wipe the sweat off your tired brow, don't you wish you were inside the cool confines of an air-conditioned room? Find out how our ancestors kept themselves cool long before modern air-conditioning was invented.

Water Effect

Trust the ancient Romans to conceive the first mode of air conditioning. The master builders constructed aqueducts — long stone channels which carried drinking water from the nearby hills to the towns. Wealthy Romans arranged to have pipes from these aqueducts circulating the brick walls of their houses. This effectively kept the rooms cool. The same concept was also used by Indian palace builders, notably the Mughals.

In 747 AD, an Emperor of the Tang dynasty installed a 'Cool Room' in his Imperial Palace. It used water-powered fan wheels and rising jets of water from fountains to lower the room's temperature.

Iran is known for its dry climate. So its ancient rulers devised effective ways to escape the harsh summers. Their 'cool' designs were best displayed in the classic Persian gardens in which water played a vital role. Features like cooling fountains and water channels not only added to their beauty, but also offered visitors a soothing retreat from the heat.

How do people living in hot places survive the heat? Since olden times, they have adopted natural methods to cool their homes. These passive cooling strategies are great energy savers.

Traditional Indian houses are built around courtyards. A courtyard facilitates natural ventilation, working on the

principle of convection of air. Acting like a chimney, it allows warm air to escape while the dense cool air sinks below and circulates around the rooms surrounding it.

Building earth-air tunnels is an economical method to cool houses without air-conditioning. Unlike air temperature which varies with seasons, the ground temperature at a depth of four metres remains constant at around 20°C. Earth-air tunnels use this feature to cool residential as well as agricultural and industrial units.

Pipes embedded four metres below the surface draw in air and cool it before circulating it through the home. Earth-air tunnels are used in conjunction with solar chimneys which enable hot air to escape, creating space for cool air.

If you thought that people in deserts and villages live in mud houses because they cannot afford better building materials, you couldn't be more wrong. Walk into a mud hut and you will immediately notice a distinct drop in temperature. Mud helps to insulate the interiors from the heat of the sun.

Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Spain and parts of Africa have lived in adobe houses for centuries. These regions have hot days and cool nights. In such conditions, adobe is the perfect choice as a building material.

Adobe bricks are made from sand, clay, water and straw and then baked in the sun for several days. A well-built adobe wall delays the transfer of outside heat into the home during the day. After sunset, the warmed wall keeps the inner living space toasty for many hours.

Grassy solution

For Indians, vetiver spells relief in summer. It is a fragrant grass, also known as *khus*. Its wiry roots are woven together into mats and used as blinds commonly called *tattis*. The vetiver *tattis* are hung in doorways and windows and kept moist by regularly dousing them with water. The hot breeze becomes refreshingly cool and scented after passing through the grassy curtains. Vetiver pads are also used in coolers.



BOOKLOOK

Royal Wedding Jitters



Title: Notebooks of a Middle-School Princess: Bridesmaid in Training

Author: Meg Cabot

Publisher: Macmillan

ISBN: 978-1-4472-9248-7

Which girl doesn't dream of becoming a princess at some point in her life? Olivia Grace is actually living the dream.

Olivia's half-sister, Princess Mia Thermopolis of the fictional kingdom of Genovia is getting married and it is up to her to help plan a perfect wedding. Only a week away, it seems to be a disaster in the making — Mia and her Grandmère (grandmother) 'disagree' on the colour of the bridesmaids' dresses, iguanas have invaded the palace garden and Olivia still feels like a fish out of water grappling with the ropes of royal protocols.

Olivia must join the Royal Genovia Academy as part of her princess training. She fears she may become the first in her family to flunk out of the Academy. She has to hold her own at the school where she rubs shoulders with other princes and princesses of the world. She has her moments of insecurity like any pre-teen, contending with her jealous cousin Luisa who tries sabotaging her efforts and her blossoming friendship with the handsome Prince Khalil. And above all, Olivia wants to make sure that she is the best bridesmaid ever.

Bridesmaid in Training is the second book in the series written and illustrated by Meg Cabot, author of the best-selling The Princess Diaries series. It strikes a chord with youngsters who have a hard time fitting in with new friends. As Olivia learns, all's well that ends well.



Excerpt:

I'm not saying that everything is perfect, of course. Nothing is perfect, not even being a princess and having people love you and living in a palace in the Mediterranean with orange trees outside your bedroom window.

Like right now, for instance, Grandmère and Mia are having another one of their fights. (Sorry, I mean disagreements. Grandmère says royals never fight. They have 'disagreements'.)

This disagreement is about Mia's royal wedding, which is exactly one week away. 'No, Grandmère,' Mia was saying. 'I told you before. No purple.'

'But purple is the colour of royalty, Amelia. And it's a royal wedding.'

WINNING WAYS

The Story of the Pencil

A boy was watching his grandmother write a letter. At one point, he asked, "Are you writing a story about what we've done? Is it a story about me?"

His grandmother stopped writing her letter and said to her grandson, "I am writing about you, actually, but more important than the words is the pencil I'm using. I hope you will be like this pencil when you grow up."

Intrigued, the boy looked at the pencil. It didn't seem very special.

"But it's just like any other pencil I've ever seen!"

"That depends on how you look at things. It has five qualities which, if you manage to hang on to them, will make you a person who is always at peace with the world.

First quality: You are capable of great things, but you must never forget that there is a hand guiding your steps. We call that hand God, and He always guides us according to His will.

Second quality: Now and then, I have to stop writing and use a sharpener. That makes the pencil suffer a little, but afterwards, it is much sharper. So you, too, must learn to bear certain pains and sorrows because they will make you a better person.

Third quality: The pencil always allows us to use an eraser to rub out any mistakes. This means that correcting something we did is not necessarily a bad thing; it helps us to stay on the road to justice.

Fourth quality: What really matters in a pencil is not its wooden exterior, but the graphite inside. So always pay attention to what is happening inside you.

Finally, the pencil's fifth quality: It always leaves a mark. In just the same way, you should know that everything you do in life will leave a mark. So try to be conscious of that in your every action."

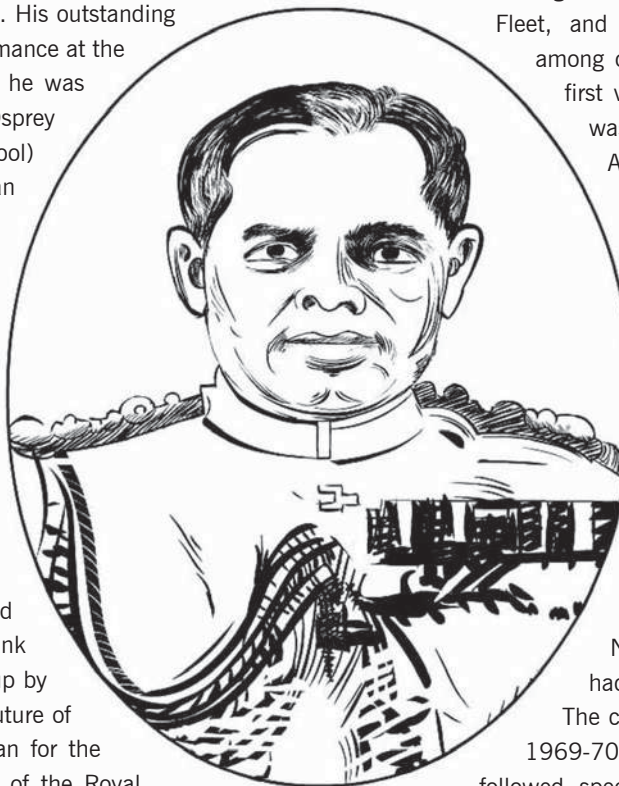
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ADMIRAL A.K. CHATTERJI, PVSM, AVSM

An admirable officer (1914-2001)

A.K. Chatterji was born in Dhaka on 22 November 1914. He had his early education in Ravenshaw Collegiate School, Cuttack, and Brojo Mohan College, Barisal. He was awarded a scholarship for standing first in the Dhaka Division and passed his B.Sc. (Honours) in Physics from Presidency College, Calcutta. He again stood first in the Federal Public Service Commission examination in 1933, and was selected for the Royal Indian Marine. After training with the Royal Navy, he was commissioned on 1 September 1935. With four years service, he attended a course in anti-submarine warfare in the UK. His outstanding grasp of naval warfare and performance at the course was well-recognised, and he was appointed instructor at HMS Osprey (the Anti-Submarine Warfare School) in the UK. He was the only Indian officer to receive this honour. During 1941 to 1944, he served on various ships in the Atlantic Ocean. In 1944-45, he assumed command of the ship HMIS Kathiawar, a Fleet Mine-Sweeper, and participated in the Burma campaign.

In 1947, after attending the course at the Naval Staff College, UK, he was appointed as Director of Naval Plans and Intelligence at Naval HQ in the rank of Commander. The plan drawn up by him became a blueprint for the future of the Indian Navy. The Outline Plan for the Development and Reorganisation of the Royal Indian Navy was based on four roles: to safeguard Indian shipping, to ensure delivery of supplies, to prevent any landing by the enemy, and to support the Army in sea borne operations. It envisaged two fleets. Each fleet was to be built on a light fleet cruiser. It also included plans for naval aviation and submarines. It could not be implemented then due to limitation of budget allotment and reluctance of the Western powers to supply these weapons. UK authorities insisted that the Indian Navy was not mature enough to operate sophisticated weapons like submarines. They considered the Indian Navy to be a coastal defence force, with the Royal Navy to be responsible for oceanic and maritime defence.



He served as Naval Adviser to the High Commissioner for India in London from 1950 to 1953. His next assignment was as commanding officer of the cruiser INS Delhi. The young officers on board watched with mouths agape, his easy handling of the ship.

He attended a course for senior officers at the Imperial Defence College, and on return took over as the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff in February 1958, and was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral in March 1959. The next assignment

was as Flag Officer Commanding of the Indian

Fleet, and he paid a visit to Thailand among other countries, which was the first visit of an India ship there. He

was promoted to the rank of Vice-Admiral in January 1964, and took over the command of National Defence College. He

took over the command of the Navy on 4 March 1966, and

was promoted to the rank of Admiral on 1 March 1968, the first Navy Chief to

hold that rank. It was one of the many firsts he had achieved in his career. As

Chief, he set about to acquire ships and weapon systems required for a Blue Water

Navy, the concept for which he had visualised as Director, Plans.

The central aim of the Navy Plan for 1969-70 was self-reliance. He vigorously

followed specific acquisition of ships. The missile boats inducted during his tenure were fondly

called AK boats after his initials. These boats played a crucial role in the 1971 War in bombing Karachi.

He was a hard disciplinarian, and commanding officers tried to emulate him in later life. His personality is best described by his grandson, "He was a real extrovert. He got energy from being around people. His life was never focussed on himself."

He retired on 28 February 1970, and passed away on 6 August 2001. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd)

SURJIT SINGH BARNALA

An inspiring leader (1925-2017)

SURJIT Singh Barnala, who was born into a wealthy family in Punjab on 21 October 1925, and passed away on 14 January 2017, graduated in Law from the Lucknow University, and practiced for a few years as an advocate, before plunging headlong into politics as a member of the Akali Dal. A true patriot, he also participated in the Quit India movement that fought for the country's freedom from the British yoke. He was politically active in the late 60s and lost his first major election in 1952 by a mere four votes. His first ministerial assignment came in 1969 when he was appointed as the Minister for Education in the Gurnam Singh government in Punjab. During this tenure he was instrumental in setting up the Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar. He was voted to the Lok Sabha in the 1977 general election, and was inducted into the cabinet by Prime Minister (PM) Morarji Desai, who allotted the important portfolio of Agriculture to him. A whole string of other portfolios including Water Resources, Irrigation, Food, Consumer Affairs, Environment and Forests, Power, Rural Development and Chemicals and Fertilisers were also tagged on to the Agriculture Ministry. A high watermark during his stint as Union Minister was the signing of the Ganga Waters Agreement with Bangladesh. He came close to becoming the PM in 1979 after Morarji Desai resigned as President, and toyed with the idea of installing an interim government headed by Barnala as PM, but that did not materialise.

Returning to state politics, Barnala became the Chief Minister (CM) of Punjab and served in that capacity for almost two years when the Shironmani Akali Dal was voted to power. The period that he was the CM witnessed Punjab militancy at its peak, and his deft handling of the situation won him a lot of praise. He then served as Governor of Tamil Nadu from 1990–1991, for a period of just nine months. As the Governor of Tamil Nadu, he defied a *diktat* from

Prime Minister Chandrasekhar to dismiss the ruling DMK government by invoking Article 356, and was transferred to Bihar which he did not accept, preferring to resign from his post. He again missed an opportunity to become PM when regional leaders came up with his name, but his own party headed by Prakash Singh Badal foiled his plans by allying with the BJP instead. In the following year, the BJP and its allies proposed his name for the Vice President's post but he lost to Krishna Kant in the election. After

being elected to Parliament in 1998 as a nominee of the Shironmani Akali Dal, then an ally of the BJP he was appointed as the Union Minister for Chemicals & Fertilisers, Food & Consumer Affairs in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee cabinet. He distinguished himself by his adroit handling of the portfolios allotted to him and was rated as one of the most efficient ministers in the cabinet. He had one of the longest stints as Tamil Nadu governor from 2004 to 2011 and endeared himself to the people of the state. Barnala was elected to the Lower House on three occasions, in 1977, 1996 and 1998.

At the time of his death, Surjit Singh Barnala was the patron of a four party alliance in Punjab, the 'Sanja Morcha'. The veteran politician was a prolific painter and specialised in landscapes and political portraits and many of his creations still adorn the walls of the Raj Bhavans where he had resided in his capacity as Governor. He also authored a couple of books, one titled *Story of an Escape* and the other *My other two daughters*, which was also translated in Braille. Surjit Singh Barnala was a cultured politician who set high standards in matters like probity and maintaining the dignity of the various offices that he held during a long and eventful political career. ■

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



TAARAK MEHTA

Master of clean, wholesome humour (1929-2017)

TAARAK Mehta, columnist, humourist, writer and playwright, best known for the column *Duniya Ne Undha Chasma* in Gujarati, also translated and adapted several comedies into Gujarati, was a well-known figure in the Gujarati theatre.

The humorous weekly column first appeared in *Chitralekha* in March 1971, and ever since has been looking at contemporary issues from a different perspective. He published 80 books over the years, three books were based on the columns he wrote in the Gujarati newspaper *Divya Bhaskar*, while the rest were compiled from the stories in *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah*.

In 2008, SAB TVB, a popular entertainment channel in India, started a show *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* that was based on his column, and soon it became the flagship show of the channel. The daily soap brought a whiff of fresh air in an era dominated by countless *saas-bahu* sagas, and it remains one of the top, longest running shows on Indian entertainment television.

Born in Ahmedabad in December 1929, he died at the age of 87 years on 1 March 2017, after a prolonged illness. Even though physically very weak due to age-old problems, his wit and humour were intact. His family donated his body for medical research.

Awarded the *Padma Shri* in 2015, the *Gujarat Sahitya Gaurav Puraskar* in 2011, and *Nilkanth Hasya Paritoshik* in 2017, he made Gujarat laugh. A much-loved name in literary circles, he became a household name across the country, and abroad too.

It takes special ability to make people laugh, but Mehta did it effortlessly. And even when he went through troubled times in his personal life, this gifted writer didn't let it affect his writings. Mehta even suffered from glaucoma for a long time, but this eye problem couldn't damage his humorous 'vision'. In spite of these setbacks in his personal life, he continued to make the nation laugh till his very last breath. A wonderful conversationalist, he could take humour to

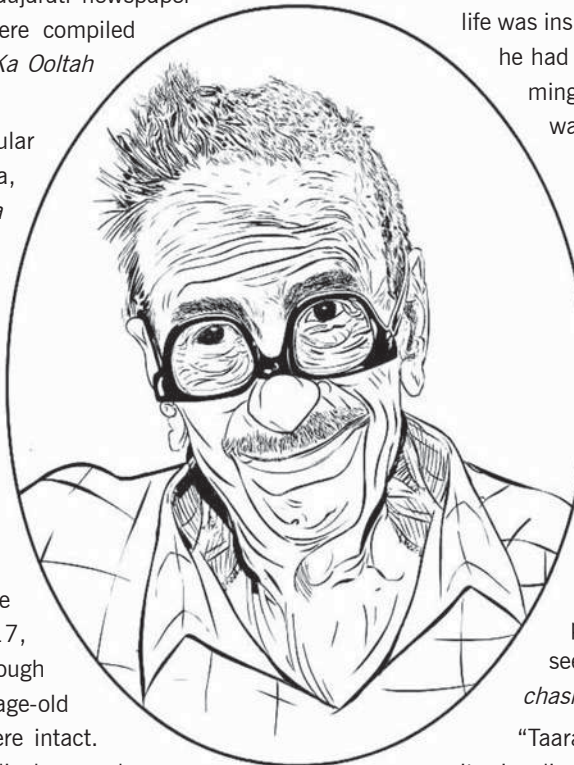
an unimagined level, and felt it should be organic. A very warm and affectionate person, sans expectations, he always welcomed everyone whole-heartedly. He eschewed politics, nor did he have any ill words to say about anyone. Selfless to the core, he didn't crave for any awards, nor was he envious of his contemporaries. His phenomenal literary contributions helped him express his thoughts without any inhibitions. Words cannot do justice to the stature of his writing and its impact on the readers, but can only be measured by the immense love he received from them. His zest for life was inspiring. Even though unwell and old, he had a wonderful smile on his face, and mingled with people with unparalleled warmth and love.

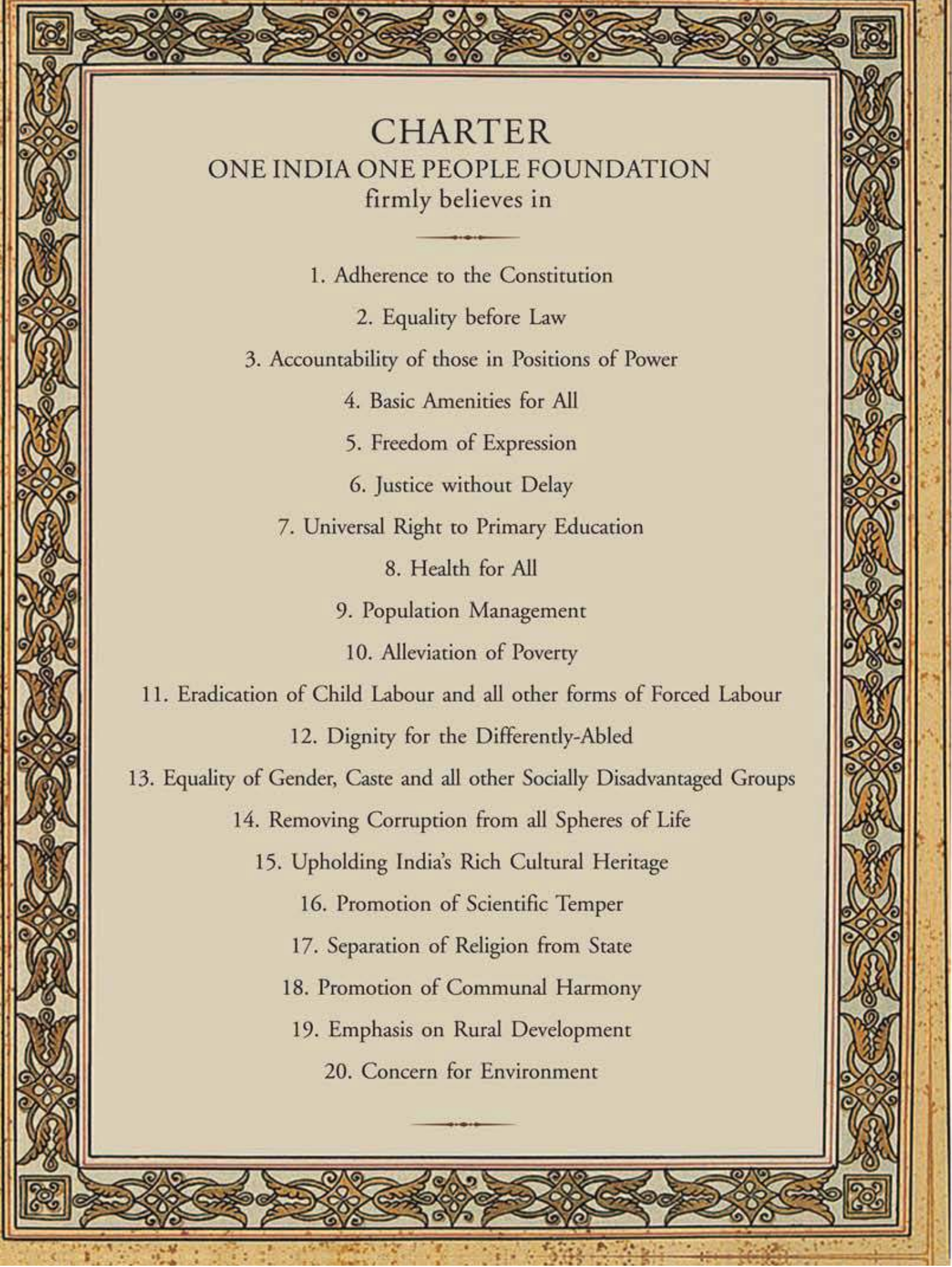
His style of humour was adorable. Many readers, when sad, felt upbeat and positive after reading his books. A legendary writer, his contribution to Gujarati literature will always be remembered.

Mehta who came to Mumbai to be an actor, got interested in theatre and eventually found his niche as a columnist. He always explored himself as an artist. His philosophy was that when nothing seems fine, all you need is an *ultah chashma* to see the brighter side!

"Taarak Mehta's work reflects India's unity in diversity, said Prime Minister Modi, condoling Mehta's death. "He never left the side of satire and pen." With the demise of Mehta, who had the unique gift of viewing the world through his 'ooltah chashmah', the curtains fell on an era of clean humour and quintessentially middle-class oriented writings, which entertained millions of readers for years. Without resorting to double-meaning jokes and below the belt humour, considered necessary in today's times by many, Mehta managed to bring a smile on the faces of readers from different generations. And he did it day after day, year after year. A big loss indeed for Gujarati literature, but he will be always in our memories. ■

– A. Radhakrishnan a Pune based freelance journalist, poet and short story writer, who loves to make people laugh.
(Sketches of Great Indians by C.D. Rane)





CHARTER

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION

firmly believes in

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

WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

(October 9th, 1930 – February 23rd, 2007)

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE