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Back to roots

Guarding our legacy

Seeds of the future

The saree saga

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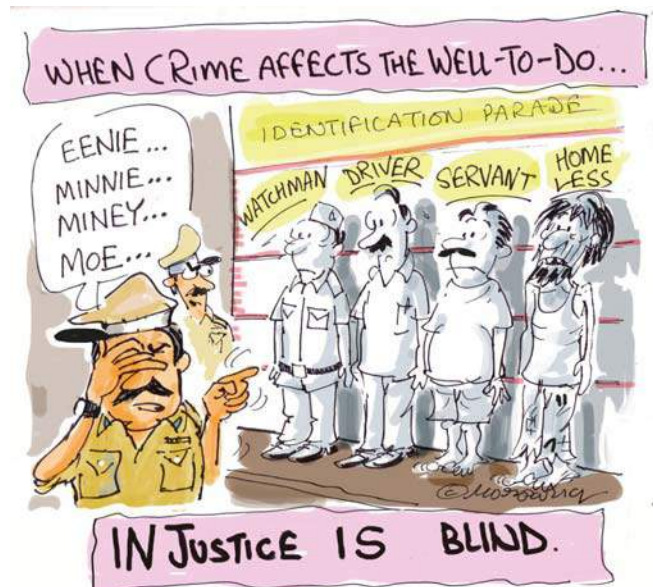
Wondrous woodcraft of India

FACE TO FACE

Venugopal Panicker

Great Indians: Brig. Pagadala Kuppaswamy Nandagopal, MVC / Girija Devi / Kundan Shan

MORPARIA'S PAGE



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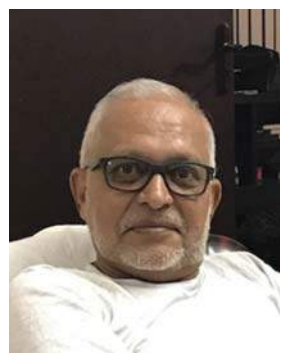
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Brig. Pagadala
Kuppaswamy
Nandagopal, MVC



Girija Devi



Kundan Shah



Managing Editor
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Editor
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Assistant Editor
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Design
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Vaibhav Palkar

Subscription In-Charge
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Advisory Board
Sucharita Hegde
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Venkat R. Chary

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Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde for
One India One People Foundation,
Mahalaxmi Chambers, 4th floor,
22, Bhulabhai Desai Road,
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Tel: 022-2353 4400
Fax: 022-2351 7544
e-mail: oiopfoundation@gmail.com
oiopsub@fouressindia.com

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Guarding our legacy

India's history and culture have been constantly under threat over the centuries. However, the new India is proud of its history, culture and heritage and will do everything possible to retain it despite the surge from motivated lobbies, writes Gajanan Khergamker.

It has been widely reported in sections of the media, that Lord Macaulay said the following about India in 1835 in British Parliament.

"I have traveled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign

and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native self-culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation."

Now, that he said the above or not is hugely debatable, with sections of the media putting up statistics and figures to quash the claim. That apart, the fact remains that the British, like the Mughals and the Portuguese did perpetrate 'conquests of sections of the subcontinent' that went on to be known as India. That a conquest of any land would be incomplete without the ruin and rape of its culture, people, place, heritage and common property is also a given. The British have, all over the world, colonised masses using the same means, not too diverse from the others like say, Genghis Khan and Alexander. But, given that the methods of invasion were mostly bloodless, 'trade' was the front and the 'apparent interest'



The Somnath Temple was attacked several times before being rebuilt in 1951

propped up by the British through the East India Company, the modes of invasion were new, and the narrative made permissible, even enviable, sanctioned by the new 'rules of history' laid down by the British.

So, the old gave way to the new and structures were brought down; religions were classified, and Christianity given the edge through legislation that permitted missionaries to spread their faith with wild abandon, even as the others were restricted in practice and reach.

Why, Somnath Temple, which witnessed myriad attacks and subsequent ruination over the years, was finally rebuilt in 1951, and Dr. Rajendra Prasad performed the consecration ceremony with the words "The Somnath Temple signifies that the power of creation is always greater than the power of destruction."

The present-day construction of the Somnath Temple was completed on December 1, 1995, and the-then President of India, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, dedicated it to the nation. The Shree Somnath Trust even recently declared that non-Hindus will not be allowed to enter the temple premises. The Chairman of the Shree Somnath trust is former Chief Minister of Gujarat Keshubhai Patel and its trustees include Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, former Chief Secretary of Gujarat P. K. Laheri and former Deputy Prime Minister of India Mr. L.K. Advani. There could be no better example of how India's culture and heritage has been systematically attacked and subverted by cultures to assert their identity. Now, all of that would stop.

India remains resilient

The Elephanta Island, known in scriptures as Gharapuri, houses rock carvings of Lord Shiva that were systematically destroyed by the Christian Portuguese soldiers who purposely defaced and damaged the cave temples by using the surfaces as a firing range and target practice.

History is often subjectively portrayed to suit one's convenience. So, contrarian writer Wendy Doniger maintains that "it was the Marathas who tried to remove that plaster and they caused damage to the artwork in the 17th century." And, as is the case, there are takers for that theory too. Takers do not resist the theory claiming it to be foreign and mischievous in face of a long-existing theory even backed with historical evidence of the Portuguese having demolished Hindu temples and structures wherever they went.

Try Goa, for instance, the theory of proselytising 15th Century Portuguese colonials who have been historically known to have destroyed Hindu temples across the state was rubbished by the Roman Catholic seminary and associated leaders who claim that by painting pre-colonial Goa as Hindu territory, "there is a direct attempt to turn the historical facts about conversion against the Church and the Christians of today".

"This political motive of appropriating Goan history is highly reductionist and distortionist in its approach. I have described these attempts as Hindu-ology. In fact, even the word Hindu does not exist in the entire sixteenth century Indo-Portuguese historiography," said Fr. Victor Ferrao, a dean at the Roman Catholic seminary in a paper, titled *The Other Orientalism and the Challenge and Opportunities for the Church in Goa*.

Goa, India's smallest state, has thousands of structures that are associated with Hindu mythology and history. Right from a cave that the Pandavas used during exile at Keri Beach in North Goa, down to Petroglyphs (rock carvings) that are

40,000 years old located at Usgalimal in South Goa, the state is on the way to earning the fame she deserves. And, not for cheap alcohol and drug-laden beaches, sadly associated almost always with Goa.

India's history and culture have been constantly under threat over the centuries. And, rightly so. The world's oldest culture isn't exactly easy to dismiss. It has resisted a surge of demolitions, deadly genocides from the very beginning of time ranging from Muslim attacks to the Jallianwala Baug massacre, and the Bangladesh war. India has remained resilient and every attempt to crush the nation has met with failure.

So, with the recent attention the Taj Mahal has received following motivated propaganda about its selective elimination from the list of Uttar Pradesh's must-visit sites and the uproar that came along with it, coupled with the insistence of Taj Mahal being as 'Indian' and any attempts to delink it from India's history would be met with vitriolic fervour, is not surprising in the least.

Why, breaking the law, even in contempt of a High Court ruling to prevent coverage and transmission of a skewed, lopsided, malicious documentary like BBC's 'India's Daughter' became a fashionable pursuit. The law of the land is now stricter as times have changed, and despite the world media's feisty reportage, on how India has tackled illegal NGOs, even cracked down on those without FCRA licenses and those that refuse to file their income tax returns, is given the silent treatment it deserves.

The New India is proud of its history, culture and heritage and will do everything possible to retain it despite the surge from resisting motivated lobbies. The emergence of the Ganga and its strategic cleansing through legislation and action; the first-time recognition of River Saryu during Diwali after CM Yogi's taking over as Uttar Pradesh supremo; the initiation of the Sardar Patel monument dedicated to India's Independence; the foundation of the world's highest Shivaji Maharaj memorial; the inclusion of Ahmedabad as India's first UNESCO World Heritage City and more bear testimony to the fact that India is in safe hands. Hands safer than most others.

The best indicator of a future is past behaviour. And, India has learnt her lessons well. Aware that buckling before anything



foreign will sound the death-knell for her culture, she has learned to fight back...and fight hard to retain her history! ■

Gajanan Khargamker is the chief editor of DraftCraft - a media-legal firm that tackles offbeat issues and subjects the mainstream media tend to overlook for want of space and initiative.

Seeds of the future

*While choosing modern practices over traditional, care should be taken to see that our basic value systems and accumulated wisdom do not get violated or destroyed which will adversely affect future generations, cautions **Bharat Dogra**. He tells us why several traditional values and knowledge systems remain relevant even today.*

THE pace of technical change has been rapid in recent times, which is visible to all. What may not be widely recognised is the resulting breakdown of long cherished social values and its impact. These changes throw up some important questions – to what extent we should try to preserve and protect traditional knowledge and values? What is the importance of this effort? Is such an effort really needed?

The questions regarding the importance of protecting traditional knowledge relating to agriculture, seeds, soil, animal husbandry, handicrafts, forests, biodiversity, weather-patterns, water conservation and irrigation can be easily addressed. There is absolutely no doubt that the knowledge base which we have inherited from our ancestors relating to these traditional livelihoods is of great importance and should be carefully documented and well protected.

This knowledge base going back to thousands of years contains the accumulated wisdom of hundreds of generations. So many generations of farmers, pastoralists, artisans and gatherers of forest produce made careful observations and experiments regarding their livelihoods in their specific regional context and its environs. One generation inherited this wisdom, added to it, enriched it and then passed on this enriched legacy to the next generation. This knowledge base handed over to us from so many generations is invaluable and irreplaceable.

Discard what is harmful and disruptive

The importance of preserving traditional knowledge may appear to be obvious and irrefutable to many unbiased persons. Yet it needs to be re-emphasised, because in official policy making this has been frequently neglected, for which we have had to pay a very high price. For example, in agricultural policy a very conscious decision was taken to discard traditional crop varieties and bring in exotic varieties to replace them on a vast scale. This resulted in such huge loss of rich diversity of traditional seeds and varieties of various crops like rice that

this has been called a genetic holocaust.

What is more, this was not just a loss of seeds but of the entire farming systems because the various practices which were related closely to traditional seeds had to be discarded along with these seeds as new exotic seeds demanded different practices

and inputs and in fact these were propagated in a big way along with the new seeds as progressive farming while all the earlier practices and seeds were dismissed as backward.

Hence, along with traditional seeds various crop rotations and mixed farming systems which earlier generations had found most suitable, were also discarded in great haste with no consideration at all for the several generations of



The traditional seeds are a sacred repository of India

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Rooting for education

What is the root of education? Right from the Gurukula system to now, how has education been viewed? Dr. Ravindra Kumar examines the culture of education.

THE true meaning and essence of education is the process of manifestation and development of virtues an individual already has. Based on these virtues, education leads to an all-round development of the individual's personality – eventually making his/her life meaningful. True educationists through ages are in agreement with this core objective of education. Going by evidence, even in the most ancient Indian tradition of education, namely, the *Gurukula*, education has been considered as the cognitive development of the learner.

Knowledge, and skill, both important components for development of the innate virtues; the elements of one's proper conduct – values, behaviour and process of his growth along with establishing his superiority as a social being are indivisible ingredients of education. For illumination – manifestation, realisation and development of these, and association of values with human practices remained the foremost task of the *Gurukula* system in ancient times in India. This is evident from the workings of *Ashrams* – the *Gurukulas* of Maharishis like Vashishtha and Bharadwaja in the *Ramayana* period, and from the *Ashram* of Dronacharya in the *Mahabharata* age. It is also evident in the functioning of many institutions and universities of the *Vedic* and the post *Vedic* eras in India, and from the Academy established by Plato in 387 BCE in Athens, which is considered as the first institution of higher education in Europe.

What the philosophers thought

The thoughts of great philosophers, religious leaders, saints and teachers also prove this fact. Here, I would like to quote some of them. Socrates, had said, *"I cannot teach anybody anything; I can only make them think."* Terence, an ancient Roman scholar was of the opinion, *"Children should be led into the right paths, not by severity, but by persuasion."* Eminent Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi mentioned, *"Education is the natural, progressive and proportional development of all powers of man."* Henry Ward Beecher, an American social reformer of the 19th century firmly



The Gurukula system was prevalent in ancient India

believed, *"Education is the knowledge of how to use the whole of oneself. Many men use, but one or two faculties out of the score with which they are endowed. A man is educated who knows how to make a tool of every faculty how to open it, how to keep it sharp, and how to apply it to all practical purposes."*

Albert Einstein, a great theoretical physicist of the last century put forth, *"Education is the progressive realisation of our ignorance."* The Indian monk, Swami Vivekananda said, *"Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man."*

All these statements, it can be said, divulge, more or less, the import of education along with its basic spirit and purpose for all societies. They, directly-indirectly, reveal the truth that knowing, acknowledging and honing one's virtues to be used at their best is education. Education actually serves as a pathway to achieve self-sufficiency in life; in other words, to make life meaningful.

Power of sanity

After comprehending the meaning and basic spirit of education, accepting simultaneously the fact that it is a continuous process of strengthening one's virtues to achieve sanity in one's personality, exhibiting the same in one's thoughts and actions. Sanity includes soundness, rationality and health of the human mind. The state of consciousness relates to sanity also. Both, sanity and the state of consciousness develop rationality in man, make his approach constructive and pave the way for his attachment with righteous acts.

Connecting education with values and behaviour, Maria Montessori went to the extent of saying, *“The first idea that the child must acquire, in order to be actively disciplined, is that of the difference between good and evil; and the task of the educator lies in seeing that the child does not confound good with immobility, and evil with activity.”*

Education can fulfil its true purpose of manifestation of the powers already present in man only if it succeeds in developing sanity, which means appropriate level of rationality, judgement, consciousness and sensitivity, all in tandem. On the strength of sanity man builds his character and creates conducive atmosphere to handle any situation in life successfully. In its absence, education cannot achieve its real goal. It cannot bring self-awakening in man which is required to realise his or her full potential. As a result self-sufficiency cannot be achieved in life.

It is the lack of appropriate development of sanity that man is indifferent from the spirit of self-devotion, sacrifice and service, and he is not free from egotism. It is due to lack of sanity that man is inept in identifying his inner self. Despite

possessing immeasurable capabilities, he is unable to discharge his responsibilities towards humanity.

In the *Patanjalayogasutraani* (4:3) it appears:

“Nimittamaprayojakam Prakritinaam Varanabhedastu Tatah Kshetrikavat”. Meaning thereby, *“A farmer wishing irrigation (of his field) needs not to go far to bring water. Water is already stored near the field, but due to a blockade water is not reaching the field. As the blockade is removed by consciousness – sanity, water itself will according to its nature reach the field.”*

This is the power, importance and quality of sanity. A thoughtful marriage between sanity and education can only make the latter purposeful. In the absence of sanity, education



will remain sterile growing cacti of men, unable to allow one's powers to grow productive for oneself and for the world around him. ■

Indologist Dr. Ravindra Kumar is a former Vice Chancellor of CCS University, Meerut; he is also the Editor-in-Chief of *Global Peace International journal*.

Seeds of the future

(Continued from page 6)

accumulated wisdom involving observations, experimentation and exchange of seeds and ideas of a very large number of farmers and farming communities. Just on the basis of a few centralised decisions taken by policy makers the entire farming systems embodying the accumulated wisdom of several generations of farmers were swept aside in the most thoughtless, unceremonious and ruthless way.

Going by such experience, the importance of preserving traditional knowledge relating to farming and related livelihoods and supporting systems needs to be re-emphasised as not just a peripheral issue, but as an issue of great importance and priority.

Certain forms of social change can be very rapid, pervasive and strong. So given their force and range sometimes it is said that there is not much we can do to check or change what appears inevitable. However, this is somewhat a defeatist attitude. If on the basis of existing knowledge and recent experience of various areas some forms of social change have been found to be very harmful, disruptive and invasive, why should we stop ourselves from making an effort to avoid at least the more harmful aspects of this change?

Another view often expressed is that we should try to take

the good aspects of tradition and the good aspects of modernity so that a social system combining the two can be created.

Making the right choice

What appears convenient, attractive and fashionable, and called modern may not necessarily be the right choice. To make the correct choice we need to ask whether our basic value systems are in place or whether these have been badly violated and destroyed.

Many traditional societies may be regressive in some respects but they also show a higher regard for simplicity, honesty, contentment, and avoid conflicts caused by greed. These values also make room for more caring and less selfish social relationships at various levels. Rapid social changes increasingly have an adverse impact on these values and instead emphasise on consumerism, instant gratification, success and achievement with endless accumulation of material wealth and pursuit of sensual pleasures.

Supporting the foundation of our value systems is of crucial importance for meeting the most important and diverse challenges of our times, and it is fascinating to explore where we can learn from tradition and where modern influences can be more helpful. ■



Bharat Dogra is a freelance journalist who has been involved with several social movements and initiatives.

The saree saga

For the Indian woman draping a saree was a daily ritual till salwar kameez, a pair of jeans and other western wear took over as garments of fashion and convenience.

Uma Balakrishnan tell us how the iconic saree has made a comeback with artisans, modern-day wearers and saree lovers coming together to reinvent this oldest of garments.

I tend to remember people by the clothes they wear.

The way some smells take us back to some places and memories, clothes are memory markers for me, and my earliest memories feature 'sarees'. Worn by my mother, her sisters, their mother...soft cottons worn, starched and worn countless number of times before they were repurposed to swaddle newborns and spread on the floor or mattresses. Stiff Kanjeevaram silks, first worn to weddings and then over the years softened by wear to make them fit for temple visits and train travel.

Sarees used to be ubiquitous and every daily task could be performed in them. Convenience hadn't quite crept up as a factor influencing the purchase, care and wearing of sarees. Blouses used to be fairly uniform with small variations in sleeves and necklines, and you learnt the art of draping a saree much like how we learnt other life skills, by watching and trying your hand at it until it became a daily ritual.

And then came washing machines and *salwar kameez*-es in fabrics one could wash and wear without so much as running an iron over it. In a faster paced world, urbanity and convenience crept up and time got crunched. The simplest of things like draping a saree was relegated to weddings, occasion wear. It became something that had to be taught to young girls on the morning of their school farewells. Girls still getting comfortable with their bodies, and struggling with blouse darts and flowy *pallav*-s. For them sarees became synonymous with fashion shows, cultural events and ethnic days.

The ubiquitous saree makes a comeback

And then slowly the tide started to turn again.

When fast fashion became something we could take for granted and all the brands in the world could be summoned to our doorstep at 60% off in cardboard boxes swathed in tape, women in their perennial search for finding and wearing clothes that make them stand apart, rediscovered the garment that within its drapes and folds flattered every figure, in its plethora of weaves gave them the joy of wearing something that was handcrafted and unique, and its myriad embellishment techniques ensured that every single one of us



The saree has made a magnificent comeback

can find something we love. Blouses still remained a challenge, but then came what I like to call, the wear-anything-as-a-blouse movement. Peasant tops, crop tops, jackets, t-shirts, bras, bustiers, corsets...virtually anything can be worn as a blouse today. And slowly the saree came back into our cupboards.

In coming back to the art of wearing a saree, we have gotten back in touch with a *rasa* called *Shringara*, that we forgot. *Shringara* means love and often also beauty. Narrowly defined it means to enjoy the company of the opposite sex. But broadly speaking, in *Shringara* the word *rasa* literally means good taste. It is the mood in which we concentrate on creating an atmosphere of beauty and enjoyment through company and courtesy combined with objects and ways of art, culture and decoration. Wearing a saree is an act that quite simply puts us in touch with this state of being.

The birth of Shiuli

With so much love for the saree and an in-depth knowledge of fabrics and techniques, it was only natural to start 'Shiuli', handcrafted sarees in 2012. An English professor with a profound love for Tagore's poetry, and an army-man's wife who got to visit the most remote parts of the country – the

result was a discovery of new worlds for me where my love for design, and an aesthetic inclination towards the six yards resulted in Shiuli which I started five years back. I can't remember when it started off really, because I would always enhance what I bought, with some creative design input of my own. I never liked what was readily available in stores. And in each place where my husband was posted, I would always find tailors and work with them to get things made for myself. Friends would persuade me to create something for them too.

I ventured into remote villages, saw design and traditional handwork slowly getting phased out as craftsmen started taking to menial jobs to keep their hearths burning. In 2012, I decided to launch Shiuli, "an extension of who I am. I identified with the flower in Tagore's poem – one that is never plucked but picked after it falls to the ground and spreads its fragrance everywhere. I believe in ethically sourcing from weavers."

The world of "fast fashion" and mall shopping has destroyed the connect with weavers and makers, and raises deep ethical questions about livelihoods. At Shiuli I do all the designing myself and I work with artisanal clusters across the country to execute them, specially in West Bengal, where I work with *khadi* and linen. Pure fabrics like silk and cotton are sourced from their place of origin through weavers' societies and co-operatives. Some of the design innovations include indigo *dabu* and *batik* on Kancheepuram silk. I constantly travel and work at remote workshops within those communities, so that traditional techniques are retained but given a contemporary milieu. Right from the wooden block designs to the colour palette, placement of design and techniques, I am involved in the creation of the saree.

In our designs we have looked at how women wear a saree these days – it basically reflects how it depicts a sense of individuality and freedom, a sense of her own space. We now want a saree that is multifunctional – that is worn not just on three days of a festival, but something which can be worn throughout the year, maybe for a special work date or a birthday at home or a dinner at a friend's place, we are looking at sarees as repeated wear, that is something which doubles up as occasion wear and festive wear. I am as comfortable going out for a drink in a saree as I am stepping out for a wedding. I love to wear sarees with crop-tops and not just be limited to traditional blouses. I pair it with jackets, a *bandh gala*, or a Nehru jacket too.

At its heart, Shiuli is a minimalist, design-centric, limited edition label that is completely handcrafted. This means that every saree we make starts out as a pure white or cream fabric. Onto this canvas, we render shapes, patterns and colours. Being design-centric means that we design and make a limited number of sarees each season and every year, focussing on working with the purest fabric and unique combinations of techniques.

What we love most about creating sarees from scratch, is in pushing the boundaries of what is possible. This has led to some amazing discoveries, some of which have found their way into our line. Hand done *batik* on pure Kancheepuram silk for instance, or *dabu* on handwoven Kancheepuram silk, every Shiuli saree is unique in that it carries our trademark – minimalist aesthetics and a deep commitment to creating something that is timeless and enduring. Design for us is an immersive experience.

An effort to preserve traditions

We travel wherever craft takes us, living in villages and spending our days amongst looms and printing tables. Everyday we learn and learn and learn. We create our own blocks, hand stitch our *shibori* sarees and have developed the design for every single *kalamkaari* and *batik* saree in our line. We ask our artisans and weavers why some things are possible and some are not. And we hope that we are helping them expand the scope of their skills while we absorb from them the deep rooted traditions of weave and embellishment. Every saree we create is a unique synergy of their knowledge and our desire to create something never seen before.

And so the versatility of the saree and the innovativeness of its modern day wearers, has come together, to reinvent the oldest of garments. Despite its many modern adaptations, the saree wearer of today possibly loves it for the very same reasons as their mothers and grandmothers before them. The forgiving folds of its drape, the feminine grace it lends to your gait, the relief cotton sarees offer from tropical summers, the nip in the air you can enjoy when you have a Kanjeevaram draped around your shoulders...the air of being taken seriously when in a saree and knowing that it can pretty much be worn to every place and occasion.

It can be styled edgily or worn classically. Prints, checks, solids...anything works on a saree. Throw a warm enough trench over it and you can wear it in Chicago (I know of someone who does, everyday) wear it with a white shirt and a row of pearls and you are mehendi and sangeet ready, with heels, with brogues and a backpack...no matter how you wear it, it is a garment which will be seen and noticed. And with it, so will you. And maybe that explains our perennial love affair with it. ■

Uma Balakrishnan is a teacher, a yoga exponent and a designer who lives, breathes her passion for everything handcrafted. Her long stints in remote locations in her early years as the wife of an army officer, gave her first hand insights into the trades and crafts that pulsate through India's villages. Now settled in Bangalore, she enthalls her niche audiences with her sarees, her repertoire of stories, her culinary skills, and her commitment to good health through judicious food habits.



The fountainhead of knowledge?

While the interest to learn Sanskrit is waning in India, despite government support, over a dozen universities in Germany and the UK are offering courses in this Indian ancient language. Is that not a strong message for us, the anglicised folks in India? asks G.Venkatesh, who regrets not having learnt Sanskrit in his childhood.

I use the word 'Fountainhead', because I want to allude to the 1943 novel by Ayn Rand, which happens to be my favourite. Wipe the cobwebs, which have gathered over the centuries, over pristine, unsullied knowledge and gaze at the fount of all wisdom. If you can, that is, against the glitz and glamour of the post-modern era. There is a treasure trove to be discovered...seek, and it shall be revealed to you, as the Bible says.

Here is where the revivification of Sanskrit which was a medium of expression in ancient times, becomes indispensable. For the theists, it may pave the way back to Godhead. For the atheists, it may reveal the Truth. Conjectures, both these. The Vedas (meaning 'knowledge', Veden-(skap) in Danish, Viten-(skap) in Norwegian, Vetten-(skap) in Swedish) compiled by our clairvoyant seers and sages, may hold cryptic clues to modern day challenges faced by humans. Homo Sapiens have been evolving over time, finding solutions to problems created by themselves in the first place...and with a miasma of challenges confronting them in the 21st century, perhaps reinterpreting the ancient scriptures differently (who knows, maybe the human mind has missed something?), may hold the key to sustainable development of humankind in the years to come.

With biofuels for transportation (which debuted in Germany in the 19th century) making a comeback, and 'bioeconomy' being the catchphrase nowadays in Europe, and solar energy finding its rightful place and recognition as the fount of everything on terra firma (the Germans again showing the way in this regard), the German initiative to go back to the roots, so to say, to find ways and means to cope with and understand the travails and trials and tribulations of humankind better, was ofcourse, quite expected. As the



powerhouse of the EU (European Union) ventures into new areas of learning and new fields of endeavour, research and development, it is just a matter of time that the 'Started in Germany' tag inspires its neighbours to follow suit.

Personal reflections

Talk of Sanskrit and four things come to this writer's mind.

- As I had to choose between Marathi and French in school in Chembur in 1985, and I opted for Marathi in lieu of French, my father supported the decision, even though that would be a hurdle if I wanted to be higher up in the SSC merit list. However, he was sad that Sanskrit was not being offered as an option for the third language. He ordered reading material for me from somewhere in southern India, and encouraged me to learn Sanskrit. In addition to Tamil, English, Hindi and Marathi, I could have learnt a good deal of Sanskrit if I had organised my time well. I could not. I regret that now. I have managed to learn some European languages along the way, from 1985 till date, but my father would surely have been very happy if I had devoted time to learning Sanskrit in the 1980s.
- In 2005, I happened to be discussing languages with a German friend of mine, Stephan, in Berlin. This was when I was trying to learn German. I remarked German and

Sanskrit, both being Indo-Aryan (or Indo-Germanic) languages, had similarities which were at once observable, even if one did not have a keen eye. Some of the words I remember having pointed to, were *ratha* (chariot in Sanskrit), which has manifested itself as Rad in German; *aksha* (axle in Sanskrit) which is achse in German. What must also not be forgotten is the fact that both Sanskrit and German have three genders – masculine, feminine and neuter (I remember from my Marathi lessons in school that Marathi also has them).

- In 2007, when I was learning Norwegian at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, and noted its relation to German, and thereby Sanskrit, my supervisor – Prof. Helge Bratteboe – reminded me of an incident from Mahatma Gandhi’s visit to Europe and passage through what is Lithuania now. Gandhiji spoke Sanskrit and the Lithuanian statesman spoke Lithuanian and they could understand each other to some extent.
- In 2014, in Trondheim in Norway, when I told a Norwegian acquaintance – Martin Michaelsen – that I speak three Indian languages, he asked me, ‘Sanskrit, Hindi and...?’ I felt a bit sad to admit that I did not speak Sanskrit.

German-Sanskrit ‘bhai-bhai’

Michael Steiner, the Ambassador of Germany in India, writing in *The Indian Express*, not very long ago, observed that asserting and cementing Indo-Germanic closeness must not be left to the historians and philologists, but must be taken up by the bureaucrats and politicians in both countries. He wrote about the ‘linguistic and etymological affiliations’ between German and Sanskrit, despite the fact that the temporal distance between the two languages is thousands of years, and the geographical distance is thousands of kilometres! The acknowledgement of this nexus is not recent by any means. In 1791, Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* was rendered in German and it appealed to intellectuals like Goethe. It will

Prof. Dr. Tor Anders Åfarli from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim (Norway) informs the author that Professor Sven Bretfeld, one of his colleagues has been interested in Sanskrit and introducing it in the university, but has not been successful as yet. Students at NTNU – very few for that matter – show interest in learning the so-called ‘dead’ languages – Latin, Greek etc. However, he asserts that there is a lot of purpose and value in learning old languages in the 21st century – “As a linguist, I would certainly support it. It provides students interesting insights into the etymology of words being used in the modern languages; and valuable knowledge about grammar and language structures.”

The author would exhort the Indian Embassy in Oslo to take an initiative in this regard.

warm the Indian heart to read from a Danish treatise (written by Georg Brandes) that ‘Germany – great, dark and rich in dreams and thoughts – is in reality a modern India.’ In other words, this economic and technological powerhouse which has given the world, the best brains and minds over the years, has succeeded in gravitating closer to the *via media*...discovering the fount of knowledge and striving for the best of all worlds. Steiner wrote about the need for an ‘autobahn in both directions’. German is becoming popular in India for sure; with more students opting to study in Germany than earlier (it was USA by default till the late-1990s). India, unlike Germany is a veritable garden of languages – the diversity is a bit perplexing to Europeans when you explain to them how Indian languages have different scripts, (unlike the European languages which by and large rely on the Roman alphabet). Tamil may be the oldest of them all (though this is often disputed in academic circles), but Sanskrit can very well be considered as the fountainhead of most others. Hindi may be the national language, but knowledge of Sanskrit is likely to open up more and more of India, to the European mind and heart.

On date, as reported in the press, 16 German Universities offer courses in Sanskrit (and about half a dozen in the United Kingdom), and Heidelberg and Hamburg have been specially named in this regard, the latter having an Indian faculty member for over a decade now, teaching Sanskrit. Prof. Dr. Alex Michaels is Senior Professor and Vice President of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities; and he responded to some queries addressed to him over the e-mail by the author (refer to the sidebar item for the Q&A). He told the author that he had interacted with Mr. Steiner about the ‘two-way autobahn’ idea, but feels that Sanskrit continues to be an exotic discipline in Germany and may not be able to compete with Chinese.

Your sincerely chanced upon a sarcastic quip in the blogosphere about whether the Germans are interested in learning Sanskrit because they wish to unearth secrets from the Vedas and Upanishads, as this author has referred to earlier in this article. The quip went thus – *So, you mean Volkswagen found out how to cheat the system in the USA, from Sanskrit texts?* Sarcasm apart, there is always a reason why things happen and why some things are preserved and sustained – the benefits may not be evident at once, they may come over time, serendipitously, unasked for, unexpected.

Small steps towards Sanskrit

Well, before we advance upwards to saying ‘*Suprabhatam*’ in the morning, a small first step in that direction would be ‘*Kaalai vanakkam*’ in Tamil households, a ‘*Suprabhat*’ in

Prof. Dr. Alex Michaels (AM), Senior Professor and Vice President of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Director of the Research Unit – Historical Documents of Nepal, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany, answered the writer's queries over e-mail.

GV: There is a close link between Sanskrit and German for sure. The courses conducted in Germany are of course international in nature and attract students from around the world. So it would not be right to say that it is just Germans who are keen on learning Sanskrit?

AM: Yes. Nevertheless, Sanskrit in Germany is taught at 16 chairs of universities; in England, at about 4 or 6. Surely, Germany is a major hub of Sanskrit learning outside India.

GV: Any statistics (till date) about the total number of students who have availed of Sanskrit education in Germany? Are there Indian faculty members also? How many, as a percentage of the total who teach Sanskrit?

AM: I can just say that an estimated 200-300 new students apply to German universities to learn Sanskrit, every year. There are some Indian (or let me say, South Asian) faculty members, mostly on the lecturer-level.

GV: Herr Michael Steiner (Ambassador of Germany in India) wrote recently that there has to be a 'two-way autobahn'....do you foresee Sanskrit becoming as sought-after among Germans, as German is to some extent today among Indians (competing with French though)?

AM: No this was Herr Steiner's dream. I had discussed this idea with him in the recent past. But, if you consider the fact, Sanskrit studies remain an exotic discipline in Germany. It cannot compete with Chinese, and it will not be taught in German schools. Even in India, interest in learning Sanskrit at college level is decreasing despite a lot of impetus being provided by the incumbent government.

GV: Would it be right to say that learning Sanskrit will open up the Vedas to Europeans...and thereby access to cryptic clues and solutions to problems of the 21st century?

AM: No! The Vedas are interesting in understanding the past, but they cannot be the basis for the solutions to problems being faced in the 21st century. Why should they? The solutions for the future must be right and correct, and they do not need any 'blessings' from the Vedas, Koran or the Bible, in my opinion.

Gujarati or Marathi speaking households or Shubh-prabhat in Hindi, Subhodayam in Telugu, Shuprobhat in Bengali, Suprabhataa in Oriya and so on....instead of the default 'Good morning'! If we learn to say *Guten Morgen* (German) or *Bonjour* (French) or *God morgon* (Swedish), we feel elated. A similar elation has to be experienced with a 'Suprabhatam'. Indian urbanites must first make it a habit to speak to their children in their mother tongue as much as possible, instead of considering it fashionable to lapse into English.

Your sincerely and his brother used to speak only Tamil at home, English in school, Hindi on the playground, and Marathi while travelling out in Mumbai...four languages every day. Of course, Sanskrit could have been a worthy addition to make it a quintet! I did have friends who learnt Sanskrit in school and could very well have practised conversing with them. Alas, that was not to be. Perhaps, instead of regretting, I can start now?

From the fount, to the fount

Ending with a quote from The Fountainhead, attributed

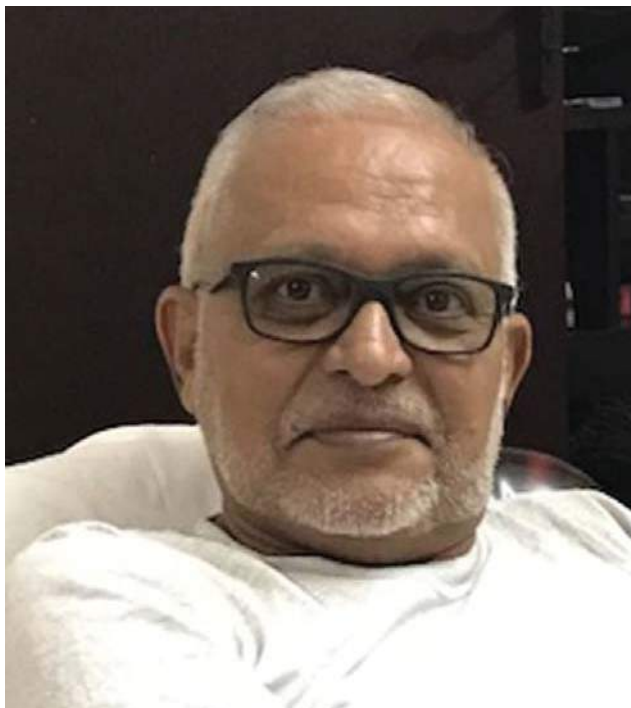
by Ayn Rand to the protagonist Howard Roark, "*Thousands of years ago the first man discovered how to make fire. He was probably burnt at the stake he'd taught his brothers to light, but he left them a gift they had not conceived and he lifted darkness from the face of the Earth.*" Sanskrit may very well be analogous to this fire! If the Europeans are keen on learning Sanskrit, is that not a strong message for us - the anglicised folks in India? As Prof. Michaels has observed, the interest to learn Sanskrit is waning in India, despite support and impetus provided by the incumbent government. Time to do something about that, don't you agree?



I wish I had retained the study material my father had ordered for me in the 1980s...■

G. Venkatesh is Associate Professor, Department of Engineering and Chemical Sciences, Faculty of Health, Science and Technology, Karlstad University, Sweden. He is also a freelance writer for several magazines around the world.

“It is an incredible experience to be anonymous in life. Yes, it has been a satiating experience working among the most deprived sections of the society.”



Venugopal Panicker was popular with his seniors and peers in the bank he worked for years ago. So when he announced he was taking over an ashram ‘Srishti’, in remote Odisha, friends scoffed, considering his happy-go-lucky nature. Today, 25-odd-years since, he has manifested into Swami Om (or simply) Venu Gopal, doing yeoman service.

A. Radhakrishnan in conversation with the reclusive Swami.

What is your philosophy about serving the downtrodden?

Selflessness, sans publicity or expectation. The instinct should come from the core of the heart. My perception towards life changed when, as a banker, I read about Baba Amte in the *Indian Express*. That propelled me to travel alone from Mumbai to Nagpur in 1985. Shri Baba Amte and Swami Chinmayandaji are the two people who have inspired me. Since childhood, I have always had the desire to help the needy and the downtrodden.

What prompted you to adopt this ashram Shristi?

In 1988, Baba Amte organised a ‘Bharat Jodo Bicycle March’ (Knit India March). Seventy five youths from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat, representing 25 states, covered more than 9,000 kms, especially the Northeast for the first time, as part of a national integration programme. After the march, Baba suggested we each adopt an unknown village and help unknown people without any selfish motive. I spontaneously adopted village Boxma in Kuchinda Sub Division, Sambalpur District, Odisha.

Once I identified the needs of the villagers, observing their

lifestyle, I decided to focus mainly on their education and livelihood. Looking back, it has indeed been my greatest achievement, and has given me great fulfillment. Obviously, if reborn, I would again adopt such a village.

How has the ashram served its objectives?

We set up the Women’s Dairy Co-operative Society in Boxma village in 1995, which in time has slowly expanded to 75 co-operatives in different villages in Kuchinda. The societies also include a self-help group, women and child health, and literacy initiatives.

We started a community-based rehabilitation for the blind in 1996, with the support of Sight Savers International, a U.K-based funding agency. Since then, we have covered more than 300 villages and rehabilitated around 500 rural visually impaired people. We have also been organising cataract operations at our hospital for senior citizens, for almost 15 years.

Almost 1,500 tribal boys have benefited in the past 20 years through a tribal hostel for poor children, which provides free food, accommodation and uniforms.

We have a high school, funded by Srishti, where we provide free education to both boys and girls. For the past 25 years, we have also been organising Rural Inter-School Athletic meet to expose rural children to sports activities.

Any success stories?

Ironically, prior to 1995, there was not a single drop of milk produced in the village. When Srishti organised the first Women Co-op Dairy Society, the first-day collection of milk was just 60 litres at Boxma village, but today we collect around 8,000 litres of milk per day through our 75 Women Co-op societies. That in itself is a revolutionary success story. Presently, the procurement rate of milk by the state government is ₹30 per litre. So per day, earnings are around ₹2,10,000 through milk sale, or around ₹7.66 crores per annum!

Village girls, though capable were discouraged to take up higher education or jobs, but Srishti has been successful in encouraging them to take higher education and join professions like nursing, police, teaching, engineering, architecture and railways. This is women empowerment at its best, very crucial for the development of our rural society.

How did you identify the needs of the populace? What were the problems you faced personally setting up the ashram?

The basic problem in all of rural India is health and education. One should be mentally strong to adapt to the new situation when you are a social worker. The reciprocation has been very positive. It's an all-learning experience, which cannot be explained in words.

Do you get sponsorship easily?

There has been an avalanche of support for this noble cause. When your intentions are pure, you will get support from an unknown force, without even seeking. There is no lack of funds.

Should our economic policies have been village intensive, rather than industrial?

India is home to almost 1/6th of the world population; 1.13 billion people, and around 80 percent of this population live in rural areas. I feel, apart from agricultural activities, some small-scale industrial projects would help the unemployed youth.

Why are villages still so underdeveloped?

Poverty, malnutrition and corruption are the culprits. Despite numerous awareness schemes, thanks to ignorance and lack of common sense, people don't want to change. To cite an example, there are government schemes to help widows and senior citizens through pension, but the money is misused by the local Panchayat bodies, Block Development Officer,



Swami Om with the village children

Sarpanch and local politicians, resulting in most funds not reaching the end beneficiaries.

The new government has for the past two years implemented effectively a few projects like toilets for every household. However, there are no skill-based schemes for unemployed youths. Education and health awareness are paramount for developing villages. We need selfless political leaders and bureaucrats, as also the co-operation and participation of fellow villagers.

How would you describe the average villager?

It's a small village, with agriculture as the main occupation. Basically, villagers are simple folk, self-reliant, friendly and humble with limited basic needs, but a mixed type of characters abound.

Thanks to the mid-day meal scheme, children attend school regularly. Mobile usage has become a basic necessity, but sadly, the caste system is still prevalent, and it being tribal-dominated, alcohol abuse is a part of their tradition.

What do you feel is the cause for farmer suicides?

I have not come across any incident of a farmer committing suicide during my stay here, and hence I would desist commenting.

Any thoughts on poverty alleviation?

My experience of living in a village tells me population is the biggest hurdle in our society. Poverty alleviation can be achieved only if we control our population, which is burgeoning.

What is wrong with this present world? Why is it so troubled?

There is nothing wrong. One should be more sensitive towards human suffering. Peace is constant, but the human mind, is cunning and calculating, and creates situations which are unpalatable.

Has the ashram won any awards?

Personally, I don't prefer to go around for awards and recognition, as I love a low profile.

Do you have *mantra* chanting and yoga practice?

Reciting the Bhagavad Gita *shloka*-s is compulsory for our daily morning prayers at the school. Yoga and guided meditation session are also part of our school curriculum.

Why are you a recluse and shun publicity? When you look back, are you satisfied?

It is an incredible experience to be anonymous in life. Yes, it has been a satiating experience working among the most deprived sections of the society. Any kind of service should be selfless and not be highlighted for one's own selfish motive.

Describe your schedule.

I do not follow any rigorous schedule. I visit the villages along with volunteers and if anyone requires any help we fulfill

them. Celibacy has not been a problem, for if you are a selfless worker, your energy is diverted towards your work. That is the secret *mantra*.

I normally have a vegetarian diet of rice, *dal*, and vegetables. Every evening I take contemplative walks. I believe in 'Be Good and Do Good!' Every day is an interesting day in my perspective, only if you are selfless.

Your concept of God and Babas.

My concept of God is Selfless Seva. I do believe in good karmas. As for the fake Babas, no comments. ■



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

A rectangular advertisement for Blue Cross Laboratories. It features a blue and white checkered border. In the center, there is a logo consisting of a blue square with a white cross inside, with the word 'BLUE' above it and 'CROSS' below it. Below the logo, the text 'WORLD CLASS QUALITY MEDICINES AT AFFORDABLE PRICES' is written in bold, blue, sans-serif capital letters. At the bottom, the text 'BLUE CROSS LABORATORIES PVT LTD.' is written in bold, blue, sans-serif capital letters, followed by 'PENINSULA CHAMBERS, LOWER PAREL, MUMBAI - 400 013, INDIA.' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font.

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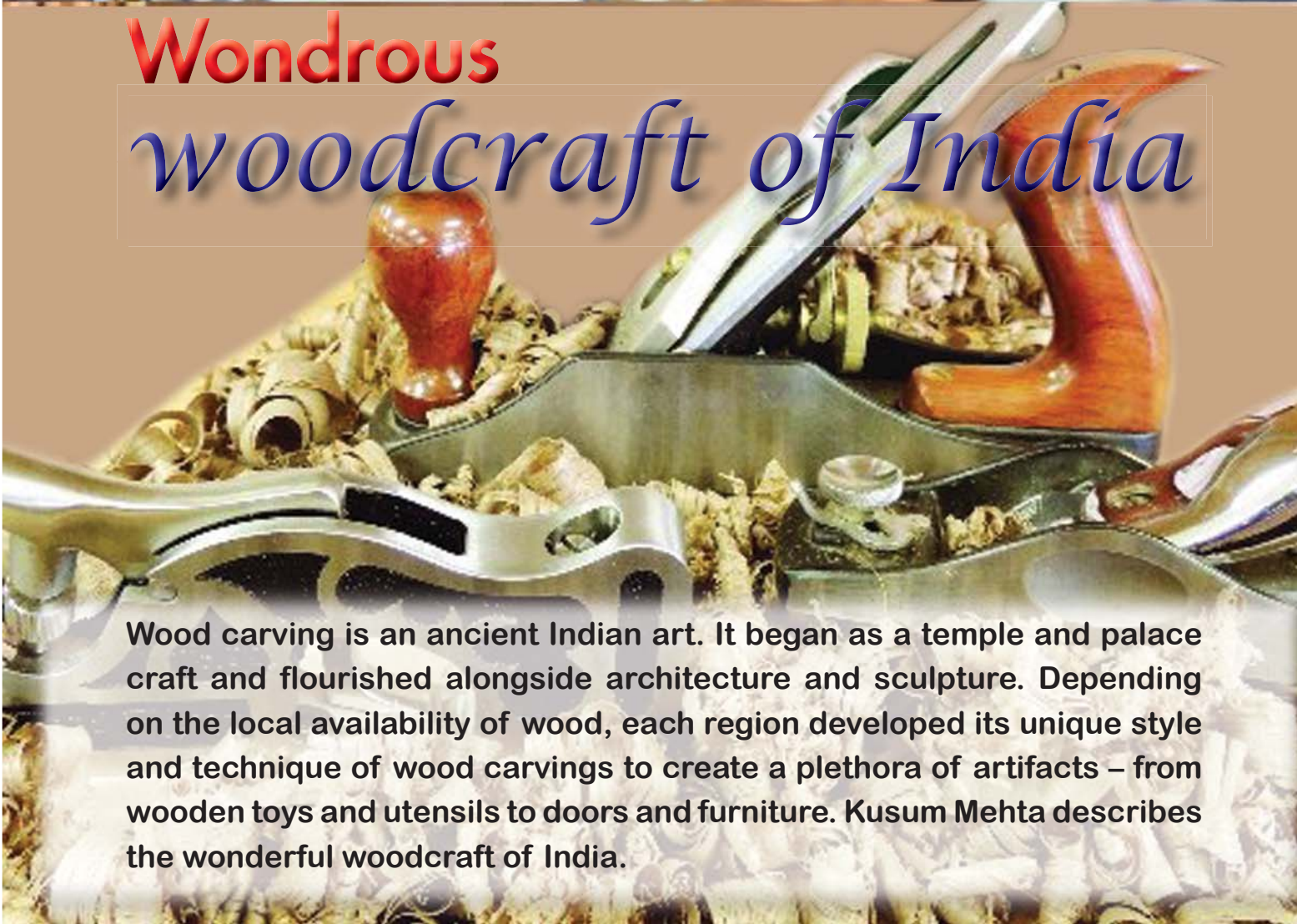
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KNOW INDIA BETTER

Wondrous *woodcraft of India*



Wood carving is an ancient Indian art. It began as a temple and palace craft and flourished alongside architecture and sculpture. Depending on the local availability of wood, each region developed its unique style and technique of wood carvings to create a plethora of artifacts – from wooden toys and utensils to doors and furniture. Kusum Mehta describes the wonderful woodcraft of India.



The *khatamband* roof of Pir Dastgeer Sahib in Srinagar, Kashmir

THE tradition of wood carving has existed in India from ancient times. It is certain that it was practised in this country long before sculpture in stone, going back to pre-Mauryan times. The early wood-carved temples bear witness to the craft. Monuments like Ashoka's palace at Pataliputra, and the magnificent temple at Bodh Gaya are fine examples. The carvers of Madurai, Tamil Nadu, known as *asari-s*, claim to be direct descendants of Vishwakarma, the celestial architect.



Walnut wood carving is a speciality of Kashmir

India has a luxuriant range of wood, for each locale has its own particular properties of grain and strength. The discerning wood worker has evolved styles and items that particular types of wood lend themselves to, providing considerable range in wood work.

Kashmir

Walnut trees grow abundantly in Kashmir and so carving on this rich, medium-soft, delicately toned wood is a specialty of the place. In Kashmir, houses are lined with wood, with ceilings in geometrical patterns and lattice-worked windows made up of pieces of wood locally known as *pinjara*. The state also produces items like furniture, screens and bowls, mostly prepared from walnut wood. Decorative wood panels on ceilings and pillars are called *khatamband*. The minute and perfect floral designs, delicately carved in low relief, adorn table tops, cigarette and cigar cases, pipe-racks jewellery caskets, table lamps, handkerchief boxes etc. The beautiful geometrical and floral designs are now world famous.

Gujarat

Ahmedabad in Gujarat is witness to some of the finest ornamental carvings of balconies in old homes. Sankheda is an important centre for lacquered furniture. The surface



Sankheda furniture is painted with designs on a lacquered background

is painted with designs on a lacquered background. This is used to give a silver-like effect. Bedposts and cradles and toys for children are also made here. Surat has a tradition of marquetry work, which is also called *sadeli*. Marquetry is the art and craft of applying pieces of veneer to a structure to form decorative patterns, designs or pictures. The finest example of Gujarat carpenters, elaborate and intricate, yet aesthetically perfect, is to be seen in Rani Sipri's tomb and the mosque of Sidi Saiyed, both in Ahmedabad.

Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh has a fine tradition in temple wood carving, and luckily some of the ancient temples still survive in places like Chatrahi and Bharmour in Chamba district. A rare sight is the cluster of temples with flats roofs and rising *sikharas*, the intricate etchings on the pillars and door with a flavour of the Basholi style, showing great ingenuity.



An example of Himachali carved table

At present however, the wood carvers show their skill though domestic ware like water pitchers, eating bowls, etc., for wooden vessels are still in use – the village Koon near Bharmour is noted for them. Chamba specialises in large wooden boxes for grain storage, shaped in geometrical shapes.

Punjab

Punjab has always been famous for its wood carvings, the chief centres being Amritsar, Bhera, Chiniot, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana and Jalandhar.

The work turned out cheaply in *shisham* and Himalayan Cedar, in fairly low relief and hardly any undercutting. The patterns may be floral or exhibit mythological subjects and grotesque animal forms in the case of Hindu and Sikh work.

Uttar Pradesh

In Uttar Pradesh, some of the centers of wood carving are Aligarh, Azamgarh, Nagina (Bijnor), Bullandshahar,



The wooden figures of Isar and Gauri for the Gangaur festival are made in Bassi, near Chittorgarh

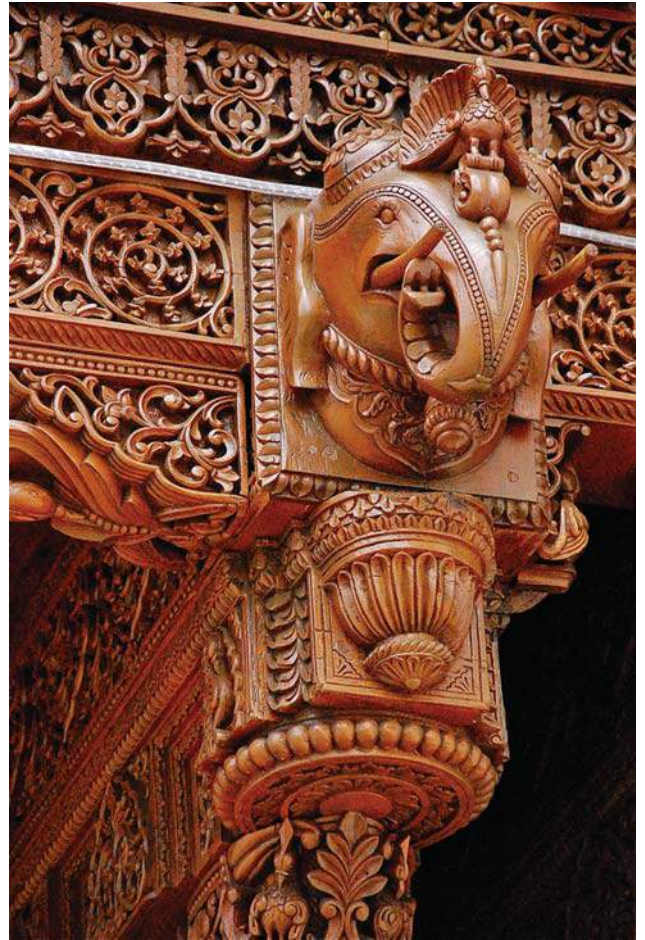
Ghazipur, Lucknow, Mathura and Saharanpur. The wood most commonly used are *shisham* and *sal* for carving, and also ebony, *neem* and white wood for furniture making. Saharanpur is a big production and commercial centre. Nagina exhibits a very graceful style of carving in ebony, and many articles like table, chairs, boxes etc., are annually produced. The decoration is chaste, delicate and crisp, almost always floral, with occasional geometrical tracery.

Rajasthan

In Rajasthan's Pipad city and Bhai Sajanpur in Pali district, paper thin bowls are prepared for Jain *muni-s*, from *rohida* wood. A variety of figures like Isar and Gauri for the Gangaur festival in Rajasthan are made in Bassi near Chittorgarh, almost entirely devoted to wood carving. Bassi is also famous for centuries for making of figures, especially the



The famous Rajasthan puppets are also made in Bassi



The wooden carved pillars of Kerala

renowned Rajasthan puppets. Udaipur is famous for wooden toys and has a long tradition in lacquering in zigzag and *dana* technique. Its wares are in gentle shapes graceful designs, and soft shades.

Kerala

The best in Kerala wood-carving is seen in religious figures, whether it be in a temple or a church. The motifs are mainly of elephants in a variety of postures and sizes, from the microscopic to the huge. There are figures of women at work on various occasions. The wood used for such figures is *kumbli*, while rosewood or teak is used for animals. Rosewood beds are a speciality. The effective style of decorating wood is binding chests and boxes with brass bands, plain or with patterns.

Assam

Assam is a thick forest area with an old tradition of wood work noted for its special styles and objects. Rather unusual and quite striking is the special wooden house called Manghar or Kirtanghar (House for worship or singing



The oldest and the largest wooden building in Asia is probably the Padmanabhapuram Palace, Kerala

religious songs). It contains a throne-like seat often shaped like a peacock, raised in tiers ranging from three to nine, supported by sculptured lions, while the lowest tree rests on tortoises.

Assam is also famous for its finely carved chests for storing everything from ornaments to vessels, for small seats to sit on and stool-like tables to go with them, book-rests, *hookahs* and delicately decorated sandals.

Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu there are a number of places noted for woodcraft. Virudunagar is famous for its traditional style. It has now started making articles for household use too. Devakottai and Karaikkudi make traditional panels in different sizes. Nagarcoil and Suchindram have traditional carvers who also make figures. Madurai is famous for its rosewood carvings.



An elephant carved out of rosewood in Kerala

The style is marked by its bold forms, the details being minutely and painstakingly worked out.

Andhra Pradesh

Nirmal town in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh has a profusion of wood work, and was known as the land of toys. It is an ancient craft which originated in the 14th century. The wood used is *burgu* and *ponki*, both very light and the glue for sticking the various parts of the toys is prepared by grinding tamarind seeds. While the original articles made were for traditional household use, they were brilliantly tinted and designs painted on them with the technique and flavours of classical miniatures that gave them a rare distinction.



A Nirmal toys showroom in Adilabad district

A sophisticated version of Nirmal work was developed in the city of Hyderabad, when spraying with modern colours was adopted. A whole new range of items were introduced

like boxes, trays, coasters etc. The wares in both places go by the same name, though the two are wide apart in style. Andhra Pradesh is also famous for the Kondapalli dolls made



The Kondapalli toys of Andhra Pradesh are famous



Channarayana in Karnataka is famous for its wooden toys

by the local artisans. The process of making these dolls is long and painstaking. The dolls are then painted with oil colours. Birds and animals too are made from wood and painted with oil colours.

Karnataka

Karnataka is famous for sandalwood and rosewood

articles. Rosewood lends itself better to carving in the round than any other technique. Mostly modern furniture pieces and considerable variety of other articles in great demand are made in rosewood. Karnataka has superb examples of structural carving from ancient temples to modern places, with the massive over-door frames, bracketed pillars and architecture in several styles, varying in treatment and technique.



Mysore's sandalwood sculptures are delicate and increasingly rare



The Chandimantaps, which were the centres of rural culture, had pillars, brackets etc. made out of beautifully carved wood

Channapatna holds an honoured place in lacquer ware. It is an old industry art practiced by craftsmen called *chitrakars*. Hale is the main wood used for its fairly soft body and close grain. The painted zigzag and *dana* techniques are practiced here. Artifacts are also made from sandalwood. The soft sandalwood is probably the most suitable material for fine and detailed carving, and it is engraved, inlaid or veneered and made in to a variety of beautiful and artistic articles. The most important centre for sandalwood carvings is Shimoga district. Sandalwood being an extremely expensive material, the art of sandalwood carving is rapidly dying out, and has been restricted to a few families.

Maharashtra

In Maharashtra, Nashik is famous for wood carvings and

carved timber houses, in which every beam, window, door bracket and cornice is artistically decorated with carvings, generally based on the form of the sacred lotus.

Goa

Goa has a good tradition in wood carving judging from the old structures. After the advent of the Portuguese, this talent was turned largely to superb quality furniture making in the western style, mainly for export. The designs used are however purely oriental – floral, animal and human figures. Main places of production are Vernem, Bardez and Cancolim.

Madhya Pradesh

Stories of daily life and happenings in the surroundings were carved on wood, and this is how wood craft in Madhya Pradesh began. In the state many of the old houses, even in small villages have front doors carved in teak on which minute floral designs are delicately chiseled. The tribals of Madhya Pradesh are extremely gifted in wood art and make a variety of articles such as utensils, combs, tobacco containers, spears, panels etc., from wood. Musical instruments like dhols, drums, clappers etc., are made of Kumbi wood which is found locally.

Bengal

Wooden sculpture of a very high order is an integral part of the cottage industry of rural Bengal. This sculpture is mainly seen in the cornice brackets, beams and pillars in the village community halls also known as *Chandimantaps*. The wood used is mainly of *bel* and *neem*. The figurines are of gods, goddesses, while motifs are of flowers and animals. ■



Kusum Mehta is a Jaipur-based freelance journalist.

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Citizens' Movements



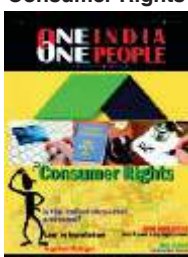
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The forgotten people

*Prisons, an integral part of our criminal justice system, receive little or negligible official attention. Even less is the attention paid to women prisoners, writes, **Kamayani Bali Mahabal**, highlighting the patriarchy which operates in this field too.*

IN India prisons came into focus in the early 1980s, when as part of the National Police Commission, K.F. Rustomji highlighted prison conditions and the plight of undertrial prisoners. Activists like Sheela Barse filed public interest litigation petitions on custodial conditions, and judges like Justice P.N. Bhagwati and Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer passed landmark judgments. These steps brought much needed relief to thousands of undertrials, who were released on personal bond or simply discharged. However, the situation on the ground seems to get worse by the day.

A recent report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) on the state of prisons in India underlines the dysfunctional state of the country's jails. Year after year, dry statistical tables, which barely make it to the media, paint a grim picture of official neglect and personal tragedy in our 1401 prisons.

The NCRB's most recent figures found India's 1401 jails held 419,623 prisoners when the countrywide capacity was 366,781. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)'s analysis of state-by-state numbers is even more alarming; some state prisons house twice as many prisoners as they can hold, and a number with 500 percent occupancy. A look at the following statistics underlines the challenge:

- Seven in 10 prisoners in the country were either illiterate or educated only upto high school.
- Nearly 70% of the Indian prison



The Yerawada women's jail in Pune; there has been a rise in the numbers of women prisoners

population had not yet been proved guilty.

- Across the nation, there was just one guard for every ten prisoners.
- One medical staff for every 225 prisoners, and
- One correctional staff for every 702 prisoners.

Further, a prisoner dies every five and a half hours which highlights the neglect, violence and personal tragedy behind prison walls.

Women prisoners on the rise

According to the September 2015 report by the World Prison Brief and Institute of Criminal Policy Research, since the year 2000, the population levels of women prisoners have grown much faster than male prison population levels. The numbers of women and girls in prison have increased by 50 percent in the past 15 years. India too has seen an increase in population of women prisoners. With a population

of 11094, women inmates formed 3.5 percent of prison population in 2001. Fifteen years later, Indian prisons house 17834 women inmates, an increase of 61 percent. Therefore their share in prison population has gone up to 4.3 percent. In the last decade, 477 women inmates have died inside prison. Fifty-one women inmates were reported dead in prison in 2015.

Women going through the criminal justice system are called the "forgotten offenders". They are said to be forgotten because they are a minority in the system. The prison structures and services that have developed are based on the characteristics of male criminal population. The problems and concerns of women, have never influenced the nature and range of facilities and programmes, subjecting women prisoners to more onerous conditions. Additionally, based on the image of "fallen women" they have been considered less redeemable and

less worth retrieving. As they are less dangerous or disruptive, and easier to deal with, they are easily neglected. In the name of 'paternal protection', women are subjected to greater security than they require for public safety. Hence the opportunities offered to them are substantially inferior to those provided for their male counterparts in all areas: education, recreation, occupational programmes, social and cultural programmes, employment opportunities, and even medicare.

India's women prisoner population has ballooned 61% over the past 15 years, far outstripping the male growth rate of 33%, but infrastructure growth hasn't kept pace. Women are mostly confined to small wards inside male prisons, their needs are always considered secondary to those of the general inmate population. They remain low on policy priority, and hence the coverage of facilities such as sanitary napkins, pre and post-natal care for pregnant mothers is patchy.

Deplorable condition of prisons

In most Indian jails, for example, pieces of cloth are used in place of sanitary pads. There is shortage of women wardens, superintendents, assistant superintendents, doctors, and counsellors. As a result, there are huge gaps between the needs of women inmates and the administration providing them. There's also a large gap in the range, level, and quality of vocational training given to women inmates as compared to men. The diet of women inmates is rationed and the ratio they get is smaller as compared to their male counterparts.

Medical care is the other aspect which must be underscored. As medical staff is limited, women prisoners continue to be examined and treated by male doctors, though the Prison Model Jail Manual enjoins that every woman offender shall be examined by a Lady

Medical Officer once a month, besides on initial admission and readmission after bail, leave, or emergency release. Very limited attention is available for pregnant prisoners in prenatal and post-natal care, and access to outside specialists, particularly gynaecologists and obstetricians. Those who want abortion, under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, are unable to obtain it easily.

Women tend to feel the impact of being imprisoned that much more acutely than men do. This is, in part, because of the greater stigma attached to women in prisons and, in part, because of the lack of social support and the psychological stress of being separated from family and children. Prisons can cause major damage and disruption to the lives of vulnerable women and their families. Most of them are in prison for non-violent offences and pose no risk to the public. Therefore, consideration should be given to the development and implementation of non-custodial strategies for women, particularly during pregnancy, or when they have young children.

Prisoners too have a right to life

Women face lot of difficulties in prisons – from bad infrastructure to overcrowding. Further, all kinds of convicts are kept together. Women, in tribal areas, face even greater discrimination. They are usually implicated on false charges. At times, police take women family members into custody when male culprits are missing. Families of women prisoners have to travel a long distance as they are kept in far away cells; in some jails like in Chattisgarh, men and women are kept together, but there are no separate prisons for women. There is only one open-air prison for women in the country in Pune.

The model jail manual released last year makes it clear that the state

is under an obligation to protect the residuary rights of prisoners after they surrender their liberty to a legal process. One can only reiterate a principle already enshrined in it; the management of prisons must be marked by firm discipline, but with due regard to the human rights of prisoners. Prison reforms are not only about amenities and conditions; they must also address the prisoner's right to life. The prison manual also calls for women doctors, superintendents, separate kitchens for women inmates, and pre- and post-natal care for pregnant inmates, as also temporary release for an impending delivery. None of these guidelines is consistently implemented across district and state jails.

When the state deprives inmates of their liberty, it takes on a sovereign duty to provide for their health care without any discrimination based on their legal status. It is time to entrench health policy of inmates as an integrated component of the national health policy and ensure that they receive the support, care and treatment they are entitled to.

Prison health-care services ought not be stymied with budget constraints, and poor staffing and medical facilities. Qualified health professionals – independent of the prison administration – are essential to provide services to inmates. Reviewing our criminal justice system would invariably have to include a transformation of our approach from its current punitive form to a rehabilitative and reformatory one, which would facilitate social reintegration of inmates. In the words of Madiba (Nelson Mandela), "A nation should not be judged by how it treats its

highest citizens, but its lowest ones". ■



Kamayani Bali Mahabal is an expert in gender, health and human rights issues.

Managing air trash

Managing air trash is a huge challenge for the growing aviation industry. While a few green initiatives have been taken, airlines in India can take a cue from their foreign counterparts in recycling and upcycling waste to reduce their carbon footprint, writes
Usha Hariprasad.

PLASTIC cans, tins, paper plates, water bottles all neatly dumped in big black plastic bags and carried out – this was the spectacle that greeted me first when I went to board a flight recently. The flight crew took three such bags out before the passengers were given a clear signal to get inside the plane. During my two hour journey on board the flight, I saw more trash. Passengers asking for a glass of water/ juice, tetra packs, meals, noodles in a cup – all generating sizeable amount of trash and I was left to wonder what happens to all this trash?

The aviation industry is a rapidly growing sector in our country and is soon aiming to reach the top three by 2020. Last year the domestic carriers carried around 100 million passengers, this inspite of the demonetisation move in November.

There are many reasons for this growth. Better regional connectivity, revise in aviation policies by the government, modernisation of airports, low cost carriers etc., are boosting the aviation Industry that at present occupies the ninth position in the civil aviation market in the world. With such rapid development and growth projected for the industry, the impact on the environment can no longer be sidelined. The waste from cabin, food etc., generated at every commercial flight is colossal – more so in long haul flights as compared to short haul flights.

Airport waste

So what kind of waste does an



Like most waste (above), airline and airport waste also ends up in landfills

airport generate?

The Federal Aviation Administration in its recycling synthesis document mentions the following types of waste generated at the airport: Municipal Solid Waste (MSW), construction and demolition waste, green waste, food waste, deplaned waste, lavatory waste, hazardous waste and spill cleanup and remediation waste. The MSW encompasses food waste, green waste or yard waste, bottles, furniture etc. Hazardous waste consists of solvents, pesticides etc., while spill cleanup and remediation waste are generated due to clean up activities.

Airline waste

The deplaned waste is the waste

generated inside the aircraft. Beverage cans, meal containers, plastic bottles and cans, newspapers, napkins, waste food, paper towels etc., to name a few. Paper waste, plastic items, polystyrene cups, food covers, account for the majority of the waste. Most of these can be easily recycled. Stuff like cardboard, plastic, aluminium etc. are recyclable. Paper waste can be segregated, sorted and recycled. Magazines and newspapers can be collected as well. Metals like aluminium cans, foils also can be recycled. Food waste that sometimes accounts for 20% of cabin waste can be recycled as well. Only thing is, it should not be mixed with non-recyclables and plastics. Instead, proper arrangements should be done to

compost it. Plastic trays can be easily upcycled as well.

Challenges in managing waste

So what hinders the airlines from recycling and reducing its ecological footprint? Recycling, upcycling, reuse after all reduce waste and saves energy.

Most of the airports lack a proper disposal system to recycle waste. The recyclable waste gets mixed with the ones that cannot be recycled, and often get burnt. Or they may end up in landfills.

Plus there are other obstacles too.

- Airlines depend on airport facilities for waste management. Lack of proper facilities, low awareness among public, and the different participatory agencies enhance the problem further.
- Certain security rules don't help either. For instance, the banning of water bottles at security. Many passengers opt to leave the bottles behind.
- Also there is no standard policy across airports on waste management. This means no centralised agency is taking responsibility.
- Airline operators, cabin crew and other agencies should also be educated on waste management principles.

Learning from foreign airlines

Airlines in India can take a cue from its foreign counterparts. United Airlines for instance, recycles its paper and plastic waste from flights and also upcycles its old banners into travel bags. Alaska Airlines recycles its cups and bottles and has plans to reduce its waste by 70% per passenger by 2020. UK airports like Heathrow and Stansted also have a 70% recycling goal. Some airports in UK also have an onsite waste to energy plant to generate energy from waste. While some airlines have



This mountain of garbage is a ubiquitous sight in our cities

green teams that lead environmental campaigns, some have partnered with recyclers to upcycle trash and thereby prevent trash from filling landfills.

All is not lost

Quite a number of initiatives have come up in recent times in our country. The National Green Tribunal imposes a fine of ₹ 50,000 if an airline is found dumping waste mid-air. In fact, in most of the modern aircrafts the draining of toilet tanks gets activated only when flights are on ground.

The future looks promising as well. Fulcrum BioEnergy is working to create jet fuel from trash. Smithsonian in an article titled *Could Garbage Fuel Airplanes* reports that sometime in 2019 the biofuel plant will be operational. This means green energy from garbage.

Back home, Indian students have come up with a gasification plant that mimics the human intestines. It takes in waste, decomposes it and produces gas. There is an outlet to expel the burnt gas. As this works on board the flight, the organic waste gets converted into energy efficiently, thus reducing the carbon footprint of air transport and lightening it as well.

How can people contribute?

We can contribute too. Here are some tips.

- Instead of dumping plastic bottles at the security, you can empty it and after security check it can be re-filled with water from a water fountain.
- We can also use the recycle bins kept at the airport and properly dispose waste.
- We can choose to reuse plastic cups on board the flight. There is a cup holder kept for the purpose.
- Some frequent flyers that I know choose to take their own snacks. Some even go further, refusing to take the tissues onboard; instead, they take a handkerchief along with them.

Recycle the present, save the future! ■

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.



The millennial question

The skills required in today's job market are both hard skills and people skills. Are the much-distracted Millennials equipped enough? Prof. Rajini Anand critiques Generation Y.

FOR years we were told 'once a career is chosen, the person is stuck with it'. In today's world however, the statement does not have much relevance, as the scenario in the job market has undergone a paradigm shift. Opportunities for exploration and growth in career are plenty. The Generation Y, also known as the Millennials, are a different set of demographic composition with their unique sets of attitudes, beliefs and aspirations. They are eager to climb the career ladder quickly, and choose to move jobs based on alternative lucrative choices and growth prospects. As a result, a decade of loyalty to one organisation is a thing of the past.



Today's generation needs a very wide array of skills

Art and craft for job sustainability

Sustaining a job and climbing up the ladder require more than an educational degree. Statistics reveal that barely 10 percent of the 30 lakh students who pass out every year are considered employable in today's competitive world. The underlying reasons boil down to two distinct things: art and craft. By art, we mean the hard skills i.e the knowledge to get the job. This could mean a degree in engineering, management, the sciences etc. This certainly gives the required entry ticket into the corporate world. But when it comes to sustaining the job, the craft, also known as the soft skills are crucial. The skills could be good attitude, flexibility, adaptability, communication, people skills etc.

The combination of this art and craft

is known as employability skills, where: Employability skills = Knowledge in a specific career+ essential soft/ life skills.

Employability skills are the non-technical skills and knowledge essential for effective contribution in work. They can comprise of skills such as communication, self-management, problem solving and collaboration. These skills are equally essential for success in academia.

The essential life skills include:

- Decision making – Shows you know how to evaluate options.
- Problem solving – Shows leadership role to find a positive solution.
- Goal setting – Shows you know how

to set up a plan to achieve specific goals.

- Critical thinking – Shows you know how to be objective and think logically.
- Communicating effectively – Shows you know how to work with others.

Requirement of these vital skills is from the employer's perspective, but if one were to take a more reflective approach, these skills are needed for the below mentioned reasons:

- To gain initial employment
- Sustain employment
- Switching jobs if required

Generation Y

Generation Y is a digital generation

which likes to remain connected all the time. Therefore, they are constantly in a world of distractions and 24/7 entertainment. Training this generation can be quite a challenge. Some of the issues faced while training them are:

- Oversized expectations
- They get bored easily
- They lack awareness of etiquette and manners
- They have an attitude

Bridging the gap

Now that we know that a gap exists, it is important to address the issues by having a fruitful collaboration. It is here that coordination amongst stakeholders such as faculty, students and industry and directors, is essential. The institute-

industry interface too, needs to be strong. Educational institutes need to conduct more guest lectures for the students by calling experts from the industry.

It is important to shape students' personality by including soft skills training as a compulsory subject in their curriculum. Involving them in non-academic activities like social clubs, events, and outbound projects can go a long way in improving their holistic skills.

The concept of learning in today's world has to be reinvented. The gap between theory and practice also needs to be bridged by moving beyond theory to the realm of 'learning by doing,' where the trainee gets a firsthand experience of practicing what has been taught. This plays a crucial role in retaining concepts

and ideas.

The students need to be motivated all the time and exposed to more experiential learning methods like simulations, discussions, role plays and Just-a-minute activities to give them a taste of real life scenarios that depict several challenges which a participant will eventually face after course completion.

Acquiring hard skills is only a beginning, while there is no full stop to gaining soft skills. The employability of a candidate can be enhanced only if he

or she possesses a good measure of both. ■



Prof. Rajini Anand is Faculty Member, Indian Business School (IBS), Mumbai.

WHO AM I?



A celebration of dissent

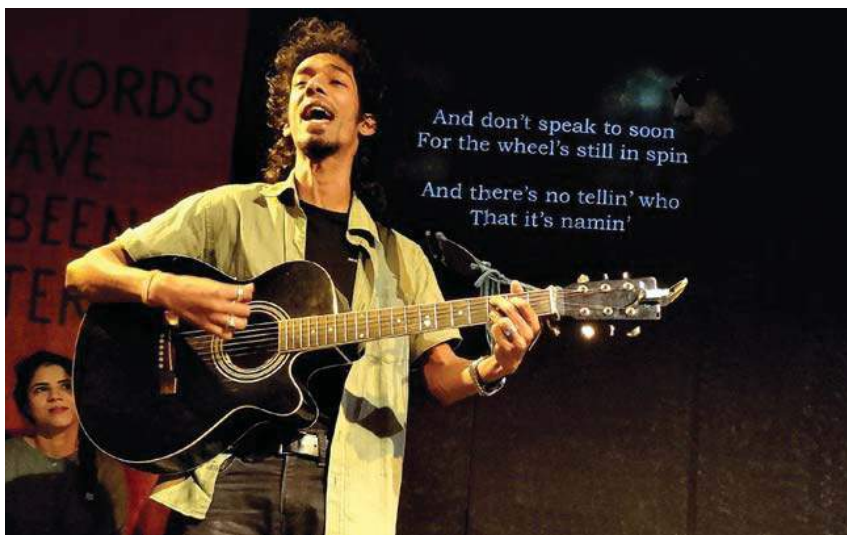
'Words have been uttered...' is a novel show that celebrates dissenting voices in India and outside, who have taken human history forward, writes **Prof. Avinash Kolhe**.

ANY democratic country when it begins its journey, moves from freedom to more freedom. This is what was expected from India too. The artist community enjoyed tremendous freedom during Pandit Nehru's regime. Even Mrs. Indira Gandhi, despite her dictatorial tendencies, was quite open to criticism. But in the 21st century, instead of more freedom, we are witnessing restrictions on freedom of speech and expression. Every day, we read about a film being banned here or some film being removed from International Film Festival there, or a cartoonist being arrested. It seems that we are living in regressive times. Taking this reality into account, Sunil Shanbag, a senior Mumbai-based theatre director and producer has put together a novel show, *Words have been uttered...*

This show comes under the banner of Tamasha Theatre and is a centrifuge of dissent, and a celebration of dissent. Sunil Shanbag, Irawati Karnik and Sapan Saran have scanned the global scene, past and present, to identify the dissenters who challenged the system during their times, and suffered for their views, opinions and positions. No wonder the show has Galileo, Bob Dylan, lady saint Janabai, Lal Singh Dil and many others like them. Shanbag has used poetry, readings from plays, video footing, dance and songs to drive home this point. It is a group presentation which lasts for about two hours with a small interval. Sunil and his team have used Hindi or English translations for their play.

Of dissenting voices, then and now

Words have been uttered... starts



This show put up by Tamasha Theatre is a celebration of dissent

with a piece from Brecht's play *The life of Galileo* in which Galileo (1564-1642) is forced to withdraw his discoveries about Sun being stationary and earth rotating round it, a scientific truth contrary to Biblical wisdom. Galileo argues in favour of the heliocentric system of Copernicus, a heretical stance that resulted in his house arrest for the last eight years of his life. Though Galileo submitted to the orders of the Church, nearly 350 years later the Roman Catholic Church in October 1992 accepted that Galileo was right. But then he had to suffer for his views. Since then Galileo has become an icon of dissenters all over the world.

One of the rebel poetesses from medieval Maharashtra, Janabai had declared 'I have let my veil drop to my shoulders/ Bare-headed I shall walk through the market/ In my hands the cymbals, on my shoulder the veena/Let who will try and stop me now/ Come wish me well, anoint my wrists with oil/ Jani says: I have become your whore,

Keshava/ I have come now to wreck your home'. Such rebellious voices set the tone of Shanbag's play.

Then comes Bob Dylan's world-famous song 'Times they are a changing' which is sung and played on guitar. Dylan's album was released in 1968 and this song immediately became the anthem of counter-culture movement raging thorough Europe and USA. The poet said "Come together 'round people/ wherever you roam/ And admit that the waters/ Around you have grown...for the Times they are a changing/ Don't stand in the doorway/ Don't block up the hall....It'll soon shake your windows/ And rattle your walls/ For the times they are a changing".

The show comprises of 28 pieces culled from various sources with one common theme: dissent. It could either be challenging religious power or state power. These 'naysayers' took the human history forward.

(Continued on page 33)

Welcome to Movieland!

*The movies screened at the annual MAMI festival go beyond the scope of entertainment and become instruments of social interaction and cultural exchange. The entire experience is like planning a vacation into movie land, exults **Nikhil Katara**.*

MUMBAI has been tagged with many names like the city of dreams, and the city that never sleeps. But once a year, Mumbai also transforms into a city that becomes home to films from across the world. The Jio MAMI film festival opened its gates to cinema aficionados across the country on 12 October 2017. MAMI (Mumbai Academy of Moving Image) festival, which had started on a small scale almost two decades ago, has grown phenomenally and associated with many names in the film industry, to make a global event of repute.

The PVR franchise proudly hosts movies across all its multiplexes, and the traditional single screen theatres like Regal are also a part of these screenings. The fervour with which movie goers consume cinema in these seven days that comprise the festival, be it from India or from another country, can be undoubtedly looked at as a new religion, that of cinema. The convention is that of movie makers, philosophers, poets, and just plain film lovers. The transits between movies and the wait in the queues for the next film has known to forge great friendships and initiate interesting conversations. The festival beckons the love of cinema and fills the air with stories from all across the globe.

What the festival achieves is an amalgamation of cultures, political views, aesthetic choices, religious commentaries in the guise of film. The movies aired at the festival go beyond the scope of entertainment, and become instruments of social interaction and



Actor Vidya Balan at the Jio Mami Film Festival, 2017; but this festival is more about good cinema, than stars

cultural exchange. The films come from Russia, the United States of America, France, India, Columbia, Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom among other countries. Each country offers a window that lets the viewer into the world that is inhabited by its people.

The festival categories

The festival's schedule has many categories. 'India Gold' showcases the best of Indian films, 'The international competition' showcases first time fiction and documentaries, 'Dimensions' showcases short fiction and documentaries, 'A tribute' section pays homage to legends who have just passed away (This year it paid tribute to Om Puri), 'After dark' showcases suspense and action packed movies, 'World cinema' has the best of world movies in one forum, 'India story' tells tales from all across India, 'Discovering India' is the cinema made by Indian

diaspora, 'Rendezvous' focuses on French cinema in particular, besides these, there are stories focusing on children cinema, stories from the homeland in Marathi, and alternative cinema. In all, every section is full with movies, and it is impossible to watch all of them in the little time that there is in the week. Hence the audiences need to be wise and well researched. The kind of movies that attracts them needs to be the purpose of their research. The schedule has to be made bearing in mind which movies are playing in which theatre. So all in all the entire experience is like planning a vacation into movie land.

Some of the most attractive movies this year at the Jio Mami film festival were :

The Mother: Darren Aranovsky's masterpiece tells the tale of a poet at a normal comfortable home where he invites many people, to the displeasure

of his wife. The philosophy of the film emerges when the house starts to break down under the benevolence of the poet, while the mother of his child suffers in the bargain irreparably.

Ashwatthama: The Indian legend of Ashwatthama forms the underlying myth that is the thread that binds this tale. A child loses his mother at the onset, while she narrates to him the gruesome myth of the undead and immortal Ashwatthama. He searches this myth in his life, and lives it.

Loving Vincent: A phenomenal movie that is fully hand painted. The story is that of Vincent Van Gogh, and his unfortunate death. The movie unfolds as a whodunit, as Vincent's portraits, and discuss the possibility of it being a murder. The aesthetic of this film is path breaking in cinema. The film has been painted in 65,000 frames. Every frame in this movie is a painting, literally.

The Loveless: A couple find themselves in a loveless marriage, the brunt of which is borne by their child.

Their search for love leads them into other relationships. Their hate manifests into their child's abrupt loss, as he goes missing. Search efforts go awry and their new relationships find the old lovelessness.

The Other Side of Hope: In what is a startling comedy that breathes into the complex refugee situation in Finland, this story tells the tale of a Syrian travelling salesman who finds himself in a strange country. The brilliant nature of humour in this movie transcends being funny, and showcases the absurdity of it all, as hope is as abstruse as life is.

The Florida Project: The Florida Project is perhaps one film that has one of the most heartrending performances this year at MAMI. It tells the tale of Moonee and her mother, as their happiness is hit by the dark realities of the world. The film is a telling tale, as the impeccable performance of the six-year-old opens up a whole new world of hope and loss.

These were just a few of the movies that were showcased at the festival which opened with Anurag Kashyap's *Mukkebaaz* and closed with Hansal Mehta's *Omerta*. The MAMI film festival began and closed with the brilliance of cinema transcending borders and exchanging thoughts, and promising to return next year with more movies. Let's hope the selection next year is as impeccable as this year was. ■

Nikhil Katara initiated his journey as a writer with his own production titled *The Unveiling*, a science fiction drama in the year 2011. To strengthen critical learning he initiated an MA programme in 'Philosophy' at the Mumbai university with optionals in Kant, Greek Hellenistic Philosophy, Feminism, Logic and Existentialism. His play *Yatagarasu* opened at Prithvi Theatre in 2016. He is a consultant facilitator at J's paradigm (a novel performance arts institute) and writes book reviews for the Free Press Journal.



A celebration of dissent

(Continued from page 31)

The title of the play comes from a famous poem in Punjabi by Lal Singh Dil that says 'words have been uttered/ long before us/ and will be/ long after we are gone/ chop off every tongue/ If you can/ but the words/ will still have been uttered.'

Then there is a long poem by Sachin Mali 'Dear Democracy' in which Mali exposes the dirty side of democracy which is nothing but a sham democracy. This poem was performed by Hemant Hazare and was an able rendition.

Any discussion on Indian dissenters cannot be complete without the mention of Ismat Chughtai and Sahir Ludhianvi. And when one mentions Ismat Chughtai the Lihaaf Trial held in Lahore court comes to mind. She wrote this short

story in 1942 and was taken to court for depicting lesbian relationship.

Nearer to our times came an excerpt from late Prof. G P Deshpande's play *Uddhawasta Dharmashala*. In this Marathi play, the protagonist Prof. Vishwanath Kulkarni, a Marxist, is being tried for unionising the non-teaching staff of the university. Remember the Moscow Trials in the 1930s or the McCarthy era in USA in the 1950s? These are modern-day inquisitions where a dissenter is hauled over the coal for holding a contrary opinion.

No wonder things have not changed much for the dissenters. Even today, artists/writers/painters are either forced to apologise for their work or leave the country. A writer like Perumal Murugan

decides to declare his own death. The likes of Gauri Lankesh, Govind Pansare, Narendra Dabholkar and M.M. Kalburgi are getting killed in broad day light just because they refused to walk with the crowd and continued to question the dominant mood of the times. These dissenters, through work and exemplary courage, hold the light for generations to come. May their tribe multiply.

The team that has mounted this show includes: Director, Sunil Shanbag, Artists, Ayesha Raza Mishra, Jaimini Pathak, Mansi Multani, Nachiket Devasthali, Iravati Karnik, Yasir Iftikhar Khan, Sapan Saran, Hemant Hazare and Rohit Das. ■



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



DISASTERS IN HISTORY-5

Landslide in Peru

May 31, 1970, was a regular Sunday afternoon in Peru. People huddled over their radios to catch the last moments of a World Cup football match. At 3.23 pm, their world came to an end.

The Ancash underwater earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale rocked Peru. It lasted barely a minute but 83,000 sq. km. of cities and towns were destroyed. But for the people of Yungay, the worst was yet to come.

The earthquake triggered a landslide in the northern wall of Mount Huascaran, the tallest peak in Peru. A massive piece of glacial ice and rock, about 900m wide, and over a kilometre long, slid down the mountain, picking up 80 million cubic metres of rock, ice, snow and mud on the way. The landslide travelled 14.5 km before hitting Yungay at about 300 km/hr. Yungay was completely buried under 50m of debris. Of the population of 18,000, less than 100 survived. A Peruvian relief pilot, flying above the town exclaimed, "Yungay no longer exists!"

It took the world two days to hear of the disaster. Rescue workers worked with their bare hands. By the time food and medical



supplies arrived, many died due to the lack of help.

After the disaster, the Peruvian government declared the site of Yungay a national cemetery and

forbade excavations in the area. In 2000, the government declared

May 31 as Natural Disaster Education and Reflection Day in memory of the worst catastrophe to strike Peru.

FAST FACTS

- Landslides are mainly caused by heavy rainfall, earthquakes and volcanoes.
- Eminent Odissi dancer, Protima Bedi lost her life in a landslide at Malpa, Uttarakhand in 1998.
- In 2013, landslides triggered by flash floods to River Mandakini

caused havoc in Uttarakhand nearly destroying the holy town of Kedarnath and killing thousands of pilgrims.

- A burst of heavy rainfall triggered a landslide in the early hours of July 31, 2014. The entire village of Malin in Pune district was buried under mud killing more than 150 people.

AMAZING LIVING WORLD

Although its name means 'little mountain monkey' in Spanish, the monito del monte is not a monkey but a marsupial native to central Chile and Argentina.

During winter, the monito del monte gorges on food, doubling its body weight in a week's time. Most of the excess fat is stored in the base of its tail. This enables it to survive without food for long periods of time.

The animal is tiny; it grows to barely 20cm in length. It feeds mainly on insects and occasionally on fruit. It is thought to be the sole dispersing agent for the local mistletoe whose fruit it feeds on. Scientists believe that if it were not for the monito del monte, the plant would become extinct.

Mountain Monkey



The monito del monte is believed to have evolved 60-70 million years ago and among American marsupials, it is the most closely related to the highly diversified Australian lineages.

INDIA

CURIOSITY

How is *kulfi* different from ice cream?

Both ice cream and *kulfi* are frozen dairy desserts but if you've tasted both, you'll know that ice cream is creamy and soft while *kulfi* is always hard.

To make *kulfi*, milk is first sweetened, then thickened and reduced by boiling and poured into small clay pots or *kulfi* moulds. It is then frozen by burying the pots underground with ice or by putting them in the refrigerator. *Kulfi*-s have a distinctive taste because of the caramelisation of milk and sugar that happens during the lengthy cooking process.

Traditional ice cream recipes involve the use of eggs which *kulfi*-s don't have. Ice cream is made by preparing a custard from milk, eggs and sugar. This custard is then frozen. But unlike

the *kulfi*, ice cream is made by continuously churning the custard during the freezing process. How good an ice cream is, depends not only on the taste but also the texture. The churning process adds

air to the ice cream mixture, making its texture smooth.

The origins of the two desserts also differ. While *kulfi* was invented by Arabs, ice cream originated in Europe.



STORY TRAP

The Courtroom Drama



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

Balwant Sharma was thrown off his seat when the bus he was travelling in came to a sudden stop. He injured his right arm and claiming that he could no longer use it, sued the transport company for ₹10 lakh. In the court, the lawyer who was representing the transport company asked Sharma to

show the court how high he could raise his arm. Sharma raised his arm to shoulder level.

"Now," said the lawyer, "show the court how high you could raise it before

the accident."

Sharma raised his arm above his head.

"This only shows he's lying your Honour!" thundered the lawyer. "We can all see that he can raise his arm. It is not damaged at all! I request the court to dismiss the case!"

But the judge did not agree. Why?

Answer: The court has to decide whether the accident has impaired Sharma's right arm. But in the picture he has raised his left arm.

HA!



BRAIN BOOSTER

$$3 \text{ flowers} + 3 \text{ flowers} + 3 \text{ flowers} = 18$$

$$3 \text{ clocks} + 3 \text{ clocks} + 3 \text{ clocks} = 9$$

$$3 \text{ bananas} \times 3 \text{ bananas} - 3 \text{ bananas} = 6$$

$$3 \text{ clocks} \times 3 \text{ flowers} - 3 \text{ bananas} = ??$$

Answer: 4

BRIG PAGADALA KUPPUSWAMY NANDAGOPAL, MVC

An inspiring and valiant officer (1927 – 2014)

BRIGADIER P.K. Nandagopal was born on 15 January 1927 and educated at Voorhees High School, Vellore. He joined the Military Academy at Mhow and was commissioned in 1945 into the Madras Regiment. He was later transferred to the Sikh Light Infantry (Sikh LI) Regiment. He raised 6 Sikh LI in October 1963 and led it in the 1965 War. The unit was deployed in Chhamb in the sensitive Akhnur sector. In August 1965, a large number of Pakistani soldiers and militants infiltrated at many points. Their aim was to create unrest and expected the local people to rise in revolt. The battalion faced intense enemy shelling and disruption of communications on 15 August and stuck to their posts valiantly on the ceasefire line in spite of heavy casualties. This act won for them the admiration of all troops and enabled the brigade HQ to regroup and take offensive action. The battalion was tasked to take back Maira and Natahan posts which had been taken by the enemy. One company of 3 Mahar and one troop of 20 Lancers were placed under command of 6 Sikh LI for this operation. The posts were retaken on 17 August after vigorous action.

On 1 September, Pakistan launched Operation Grand Slam, a massive armoured offensive to capture Akhnur. The newly raised 6 Sikh LI in Chhamb bore the brunt of this invasion and held on with grit to their position and delayed the Pakistani advance in this sector. The unit had suffered about thirty percent casualties. The artillery and air support failed on the day and it was no longer possible to hold on. The unit withdrew before midnight on 1 September on orders of the brigade HQ. Due to disrupted radio and line communications, the withdrawal orders did not reach some of the soldiers in time. They died fighting to the last bullet till killed or taken prisoner. This was a proud record for a newly raised battalion and they withdrew with their heads held high. The best compliments to the unit were paid in the Pakistani Defence Journal "wherein the Commander of the Pakistani 102 Brigade was severely criticised for getting held up at Burejal locality held by two companies of 6 Sikh LI for a day."

The Pakistan Army had occupied Kalidhar Ridge after the

ceasefire. The feature overlooked the road Akhnur-Sunderbani-Rajouri and 6 Sikh LI were ordered on 28 September to take three features adjoining the Kalidhar Ridge. The battalion regrouped immediately to undertake the attack. Colonel Nandagopal led the attack and captured two objectives. Two counter-attacks in heavy strength and supported by artillery fire were beaten back with large casualties. Due to heavy casualties, they had to fall back from one of the hills. The battalion succeeded in clearing this hill inspite of intense enemy shelling on the night of 3 October with the help of 11 Mahar. The battalion continued to press forward and climb the steep slopes against accurate enemy artillery fire and opposition by infantry. They captured three more features by 1800 hours that day and held on to them. Colonel Nandagopal led the attack from the front and was involved in hand to hand fighting. He received two blasts and suffered injuries on his face, shoulder and head. He received a bullet injury on his hand.

He led the final assault on Kalidhar Trig Point 3776 on 5 October and cleared it by mid-day. Colonel Nandagopal was awarded MVC for his determination and courageous leadership. The regiment was awarded the Battle Honour Kalidhar in 1965. A memorial to commemorate the Kalidhar Battle has been erected at Sunderbani in Rajouri district of J&K.

It was a result of the inspired leadership of Colonel Nandagopal that after having earned glory in the 1965 War, the unit did well in the 1971 War and contributed significantly in counter-insurgency operation in Jammu and Kashmir. It received silver salver from the Governor and commendation from the Chief of Army Staff. In view of the excellent operational record, the unit was deputed to serve in Congo where it won unit citation from the Force Commander. He continued to take active interest in social and defence issues even after retirement. On 14 March 2010, he participated in returning the medals to the President with a request to review the pension as promised earlier. He passed away on 16 June 2014. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



GIRIJA DEVI

The Queen of Thumri (1929 – 2017)

GIRIJA Devi, the iconic Queen of *Thumri* died, aged 88 at Alipore, West Bengal of cardiovascular ailments on 24 October 2017. An Indian classical singer of the Seniya, Purab and Banaras *gharanas* of Hindustani classical and non-classical vocal music, she performed the *purabi ang thumri* style, typical of the tradition, and helped elevate its status. Her repertoire included the semi-classical genres *kajri*, *chaiti*, and *holi*, and she sang *khyal*, Indian folk music, and *tappa*.

In a career spanning more than half a century, she brought the evocative *thumri* derived from the word *thumakna*, meaning to walk with dancing steps, to the frontlines, out of *kothas* to the proscenium stage and gave it respect. She lived an art form, which by nature and design is marked by *adaa*, flair, and perhaps even a mild flirtation.

Born on 8 May 1929 to Ramdeo Rai, a zamindar, who played the harmonium and taught music, the family relocated to Banaras, when Girija was two years old. The city became an integral part of her life and her music, a city whose culture, sights and sounds became an integral part of her *gayaki* and her world view.

Girija took lessons in singing *khyal* and *tappa* from vocalist and sarangi player Sarju Prasad Misra from the tender age of five. She also starred in a movie '*Yaad Rahe*' aged nine and continued her studies under Misra in a variety of styles, till his death in the early 1960s. She made her public debut in 1949 on A.I.R., Allahabad, after marriage, but faced opposition from her mother and grandmother, because of the taboo on upper class woman performing publicly, but was encouraged by her husband. She however, agreed to not perform privately for others, and gave her first public concert in Bihar in 1951.

She later worked as a faculty member of the ITC Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata in the 1980s and of the Banaras Hindu University during the early 1990s, and taught several students to preserve her musical heritage.

But soon the strains and demands of domestic life interfered with her practice and so she went away to

Sarnath for a year, where she continued to take rigorous music lessons from her *guru*. That deep, spiritual practice, *sadhana*, changed her life and she returned to Banaras with a new insight of what *sur*, a musical note, really meant.

But the tragic death of her husband in 1975 shocked her. She stopped performing, but with the prodding of friends she went back to the stage. This resulted in her looking inward, introspecting and getting further insights. From then on, she devoted herself to understanding the importance of poetry and lyrics in singing.

Affectionately called *Appaji*, Girija Devi in an off-white *Banarasi* sari and a tight, thin plait of silver hair hanging down her the back, would flash a smile, all the while crooning a *dadra* in *Raga Gauri Bhairav*. She could have been anybody's grandmother. Flashing a toothy smile, wiping *paan* stains from near her mouth, she would laugh, but also get angry at small things, and hated cooking. She was ever the generous, warm-hearted, loving *guru* and guide, the mother-like figure, so gentle, with her down to earth wisdom sought by so many.

Her whole life revolved around the River Ganga, singing peans of its many moods and moments. Even till her last days, her sincere wish was to continue to learn, grow and to evolve.

She was bestowed a lot of awards like the Padma Shri (1972), Padma Bhushan (1989), Padma Vibushan (2016), Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1977), Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (2010), Maha Sangeet Samman Award (2012), Sangeet Samman Award (Dover Lane Music Conference), GiMA Award 2012 (Lifetime Achievement) and the Tana Riri Puraskar.

Yet, listening to her music, one realises that no award can fully capture the essence of this artiste or her immense contribution to music. A true seeker, Girija Devi's wish for a music academy however remained unfulfilled. Her demise has left a deep void. She is survived by her daughter Dr. Sudha Datta. ■

— A.Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, poet, and short story writer who loves to make the world a better place.



KUNDAN SHAH

A cult filmmaker (1947 – 2017)

KUNDAN Shah is perhaps the only Bollywood filmmaker who has given us the ideal black comedy disguised as entertainment, in the entire history of Indian cinema. He passed away in Mumbai on 7 October 2017, a couple of weeks before he was to celebrate his 70th birthday. The reasons why people have all but forgotten this great filmmaker is: (1) He stopped making films for several years, (2) His later films flopped wherever they were released, (3) His marketing was very poor, and (4) The entire style, approach and attitude of the industry had changed since he began way back in 1983 with his wonderful film *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron*.

Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron was produced by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) on a meagre budget of ₹ 7 lakhs and featured actors who were with Shah when he was a student of the Pune Film and Television Institute. He also was the co-writer of the film, with Satish Kaushik. The film introduced Indian cinema to satirical comedy for the first time, and was well accepted as not being slapstick.

Noted film critic Maithili Rao rightly comments, "Its cult status has only grown over the years and the satire – for all the choreographed mayhem, the film's indictment of corruption is cause for despair – remains relevant to this day."

Ironically, *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* was a commercial failure when it was first released perhaps because in the 'happily-ever-after' ambience of that time, the 'sad' ending did not gel with audience. Today, reality and sad endings are accepted by the audience. His second film *Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa* for which he wrote the screen play was a love story with a lot of punches that also made it a kind of different family drama with touches of realism. For the first time, a very fresh and new talent Shahrukh Khan plays a hero who is a failure at everything, in exams, in love, in life and as a son to very naïve and good-natured parents. Shah bagged the Filmfare Critics Award for the Best Film for this film and Shahrukh was noticed as a natural and spontaneous actor who could play

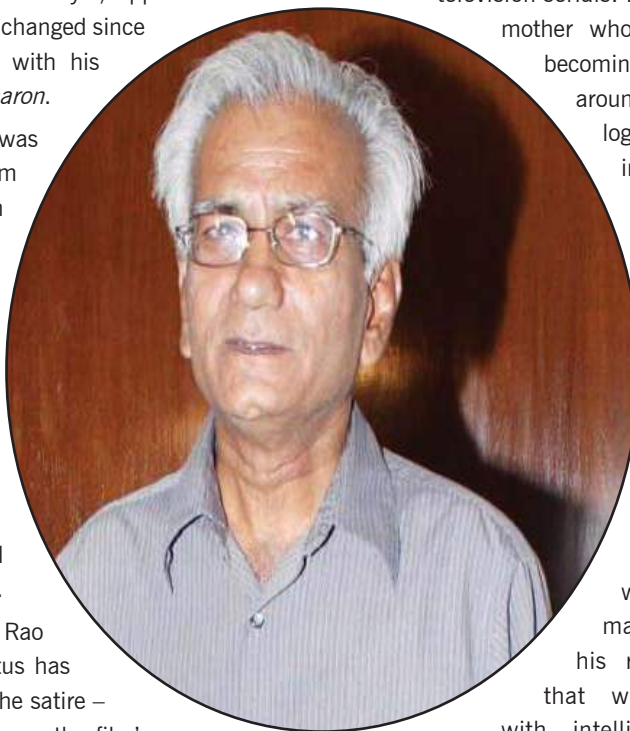
any role the way the director wanted him to.

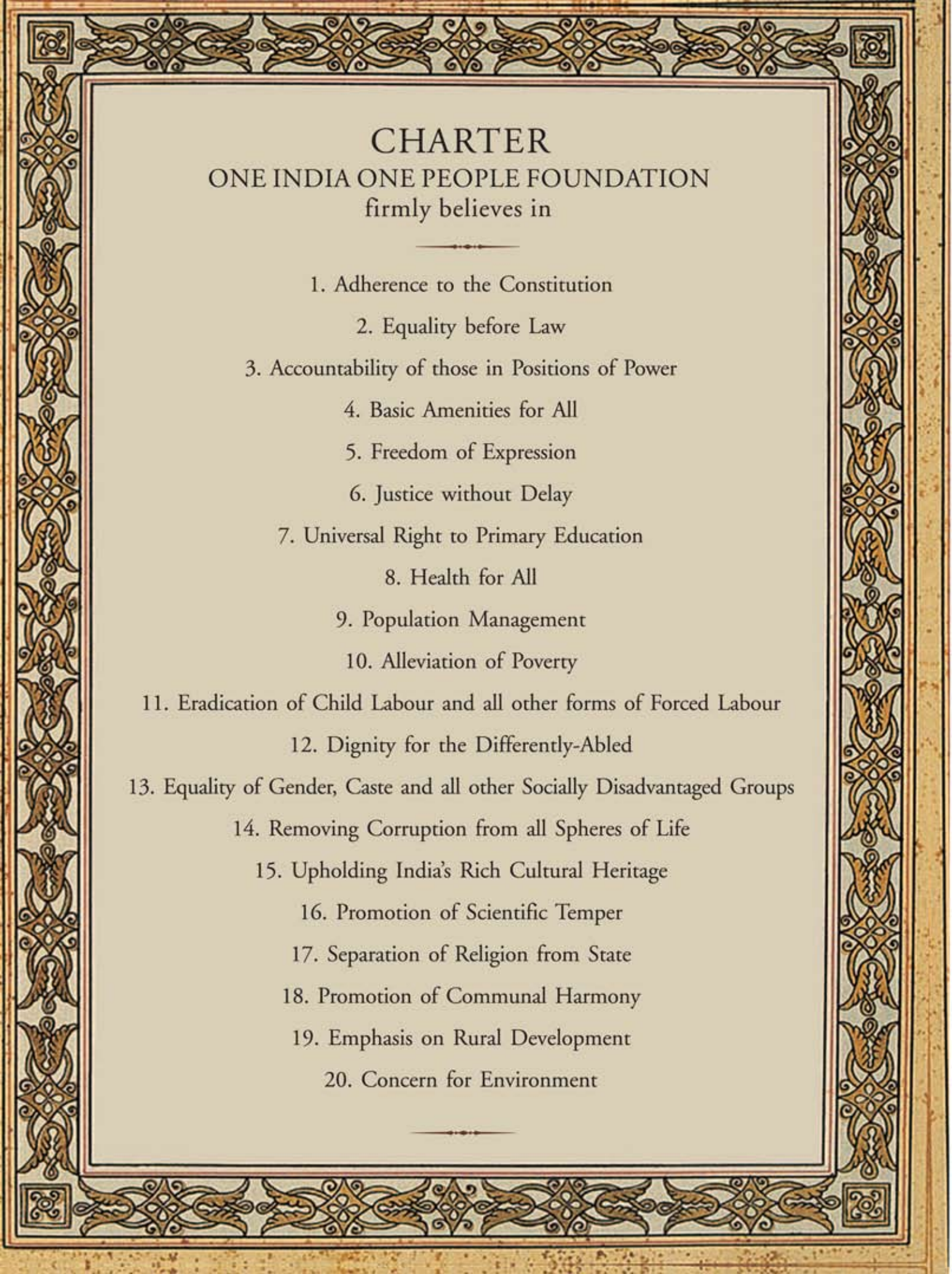
In 1998, Shah directed his third feature film *Kya Kehna* which had a social message on the changing moral values among the urban youth. Actor Preity Zinta established herself as an independent leading lady of the film with Saif Ali Khan pitted opposite her in a thoroughly negative role. But despite the lavish budget, this was not the Shah we had witnessed in his earlier films and in his wonderful television serials. It pleaded the cause of the unwed mother who is stigmatised by society for becoming pregnant while her lover moves around scot-free. But the film had a logical lapse – why should a girl still in school get pregnant instead of concentrating on her studies? But times had changed and the film released in 2000, was a big box office hit.

The films that Shah directed after this one were all flops and fell by the wayside, forgotten, but not forgiven. He almost disappeared into oblivion after these films. But Shah will be remembered by the mass television audience for his revolutionary television serials that were very entertaining, filled with intelligent comedy and excellent performances and characterisations. Among them are *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, *Circus* and *Nukkad*.

Wagle Ki Duniya adapted from cartoonist R.K. Laxman's pocket cartoon of the common man was so popular that its limit of six episodes on television had to be extended to 13, and Anjan Srivastava of IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) became a household name and character for all time. One critic remembers that Shah's cupboard was spilling over with film scripts in various stages of completion but in a cruel and throat-cutting industry constantly in unfair competition, where you are as good as your last film, there were few producers prepared to back Shah's unconventional approach to cinema as entertainment. ■

– Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author, who has won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema.





CHARTER

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1. Adherence to the Constitution
 2. Equality before Law
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 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
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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?

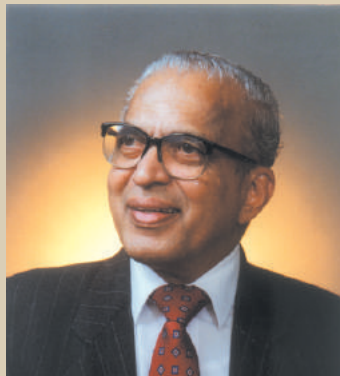
Am I the Commander-in-Chief first or an Indian first?

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?

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Be a Proud Indian. Make this country Great, Strong and United.*



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

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

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