

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

## For God's sake

Being secular

Is religion violent ?

Religion in Mahatma's India

**KNOW INDIA BETTER**

Munsiyari: The little place of snow

**FACE TO FACE**

Maji Gowda

Maya Gowda



# MORPARIA'S PAGE



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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### **"Symbolic of respect for the nation"**

The National Flag is symbolic of one's respect for the nation. However, there has been a new trend to sell flags, made of paper and plastic, as Independence Day or Republic Day approaches.

With a sense of national pride, people buy such flags, but the very next day we find these flags being trampled on roads, in dustbins and elsewhere. By allowing this to happen, people forget that they are insulting the National Flag of the country. This disrespect towards our flag must come to an end.

– Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai

### **"Kudos to your July issue"**

Kudos to your July issue on Defence (*India's bravehearts*). I really enjoyed reading it. While our military is strong and no doubt patriotic, there is an urgent need to allot the right amount of funds to them.

Budgets should not be entangled in red tape, we are doing a signal disfavor to our nation if that happens. While we have to try and mend fences with Pakistan, we have to be also fully aware of the threats on our northern and eastern borders. The standoff at Doklam between India and China only goes to highlight how important it is to equip our military with the latest technology, as also bolster the courage of our soldiers on the Front. Hope the powers-that-be take full cognizance of this. Long live our soldiers!

– H. V. D. Nath, Bangalore

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## WHO AM I?

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



*Earth...*



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# God is no butcher!

*Let's keep religion private, and enjoy only its fruits, counsels* **Nivedita Louis.**

SO, what's your name?", a seemingly innocent question and I shift a trifle disturbed. "Nivedita", the slight quip isn't enough. The lady is a born prodger. "As the disciple of Swami Vivekananda?" she lowers the bait. This is one fish that knows its waters well. "Hmmm..." is my answer. "Your parents are followers of the Swami?" she continues. The fish is now swimming in dangerous waters. "No, my mother had a great liking for Sister Nivedita", I plaster my best smile. The persistent woman continues – "Is that all? Just Nivedita?"

Right, this is time for the fish to beat a hasty retreat. "The name is Louis", this time over, I grind my teeth and bite out the words. "Oh!" is all she says. Her judgment is now delivered with her queer coolness, with which she waves a quick good bye!

What is in a name? If you think nothing, then you are in a utopia called "Achcha Bharat"! If you are sure your name has that catch, welcome to "Swachcha Bharat". People don't query about name for nothing. It is a ploy to get to know your religion. The feeling of being 'alien' to one's own country makes one feel like getting into the next space ship out for Mars. Trust me, being judged for one's religious identity is like standing on a scale where you are always found 'obese'.

Social media and its bag of lies always interest me. Mark Zuckerberg would have never thought his Facebook would be used to 'propagate' religion. The post that ends with "Share this 50 times for true blessings" and "The person who didn't share this vomited blood and is now critically ill" are reasons enough to make it viral. And oh, add to it the photo-shopped pictures that show 'God's face in the clouds', 'religious symbol on the moon', 'crying statue', 'God drinking milk' types. The only picture of a symbol that I have seen on the moon is the *ayah* who fries *vada*-s, as shown to me by my grandmother!

To the common social media addict who is brainwashed with his religious radicalism, Christians are the 'left over' British who at the drop of a hat can fly out to England. A Muslim is one who belongs to Pakistan and is holding a

passport to Karachi. A Hindu is the real 'son of the soil'. Rest all, please leave the country, okay?

Those were the days when we celebrated all religious festivals with fervour. Diwali – we lit lamps, burst crackers, wore new dresses and exchanged sweets. Christmas – new dress, cakes and crackers. Eid – new dress, *biryani* and *phirni*. Festivals these days are confined to new dress and TV. So long as the lady of the house gets her new *saree*, any festival is fine with her. So long as the children get their sweets, any day is festive for them. It makes me mad when I don't get my share of 'Ramadan gruel' during the holy month. I call the reluctant neighbour on Diwali day, asking, "Hehe...so, are the sweets ready? Shall I send my son over to collect, in case your son is busy?" Argh, but come Christmas and I hate it when someone calls up and asks, "Is the cake ready?"

Religion was meant to 'discipline' the savages. Unfortunately, it is now the savages who 'discipline' religion. Religious texts are being doctored for the convenience of the preachers and priests. Prophets and Saviours would now be wondering up above, "Holy, when did I say that?" Saints of all

order would be turning in their graves if they hear what they had 'purportedly told'! The priest who started with a bicycle ten years ago now owns a "Church"! Never have I heard more 'doomsday' conspiracies than on railway platforms. The pamphlet showing Hell and its fury was enough to give me cramps and fever eons ago. Someone wisely said, "Religion is like underwear, don't wave it in my face". This is one lesson we all must learn, if we are to keep the very fibre of religious tolerance alive in this country. Love your religion, fine with me. Love your agents, okay with me. Don't cross

the *Lakshman Rekha* of the average Indian's 'tolerance' by your repeated posts on "God will gouge your eyes out". He is no butcher. Thanks! ■



**Nivedita Louis is a writer, blogger and social activist by choice. Bitten by the travel bug, and smitten by nature, she loves travelling and cooking. She blogs at [www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com](http://www.cloudninetalks.blogspot.com).**

**To the common social media addict who is brainwashed with his religious radicalism, Christians are the 'left over' British who at the drop of a hat can fly out to England.**

# Being secular

*Secularism is hardly a very popular word in today's India, even though it is guaranteed by our Constitution. **C.V. Aravind** dissects India's secularism debate and prods the much-banded word 'pseudo-secularism'.*

**R**ELIGION has been defined as a belief in a God or a group of Gods, and as an organised system of beliefs, ceremonies and rules used to worship a God or a group of Gods. The general feeling is that one turns to religion for comfort in times of stress, and a visit to a place of worship, theists believe, would bring inner peace and solace.

In our country, the Constitution guarantees everyone the right to freedom of religion, and as a fundamental right one can pursue the religion of his or her choice without fear of persecution, which also implies that the right to remain an agnostic

too is sacrosanct. India is the birthplace of religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, and as per the 2011 census, Hindus constituted 79.8% of the population, Muslims 14.2% and the other religions constituted the rest 6%. India thus is a pluralistic society where all major religions co-exist, and there is unity in diversity.

Religion, therefore, should rightfully remain in the private domain, and its pursuance is largely left to the individual's wisdom and choice, and as India is a secular state, persecution on grounds of religion is punishable under the Indian Penal Code. Religious intolerance of any kind is ultra vires and the intervention of the state in religious matters, except perhaps to ensure that the rights of religious minorities are protected, is unwarranted, and any such activity could be construed as a threat to religious freedom. The state however, has the bounden duty to come down heavily on those fanning the flames of communal hatred, or indulging in acts that can be prejudicial to the rights and privileges of any religious sect.

## Religious conversions

When the Britishers ruled our country, a number of Christian missionaries landed on our soil, and their avowed mission was not just to propagate the Christian faith, but also to convert people to Christianity. To a very large extent these

conversions were restricted to the lowest strata of society whose upliftment was linked to their abandoning their religion and embracing Christianity.

With time however, such activities came to a standstill as they were thwarted by militant groups belonging to the

majority Hindu religion; the incident in which an Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons were allegedly burnt to death in Orissa (now Odisha) on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1999, by Hindu zealots belonging to the Bajrang Dal on grounds that he was engaging in conversions, created a furore across the country and the world. A strange twist in more recent times was the *ghar wapsi* movement unleashed by certain fringe groups where Hindus who had converted to other religions were brought back into the fold with great fanfare and jubilation. Incidentally, the individual's right to change his religion is also protected and no offence can be made out against those who choose to abandon their faith and cling to another.

## The role of religion in contemporary India

In recent times, religion has transcended from the private space into the public domain, and not only predominates the social discourse, but has also become an electoral weapon,



The Sabarmati Express carnage that led to the horrific Gujarat riots in 2002



whereby appeals are made to religious entities to cast their votes based on religion or caste. The practice has been frowned upon by the country's apex court, which in a reiteration of an earlier judgment, has decreed that no votes should be sought by any political party by appealing to religious faiths professed by the voters. Stringent penalty in the form of disqualification will hang like a Damocles's Sword over the heads of the candidates who have been found to have gone against the *diktat* of the Supreme Court. However, like a number of laws that have been observed in their breach, political parties continue to swear by caste politics and vitiate the atmosphere by appealing to caste sentiments during election time.

### Religious intolerance

Majoritarianism is a dreaded word in religious circles as in simple parlance it means that a religious majority if it chooses, can ride roughshod over the minorities and trample on their rights with impunity. In our nation, a very large majority of Hindus have neither the intention nor the inclination to use the weight of their numbers to crush the minorities or deny them their legitimate rights. However, the existence of fringe groups that are wedded to the idea that Hinduism is in danger and needs to be protected at all costs, is a fallacy that has created an atmosphere of unease and insecurity in the minds of the minority segments. The riots that followed the razing of the disputed shrine in Babri Masjid to the ground on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1992, and the Mumbai bomb blasts that ensued in the aftermath were clear instances of religion being used to foster hatred between communities and to settle scores adopting violence and arson as weapons.

Even today, the issue of Babri Masjid–Ram Janmabhoomi continues to hang fire, and claims and counter claims over the disputed site continue in the form of suits in the courts. The clamour to build a Ram Temple at the site too continues unabated, and the sane voices that seek a solution to the imbroglio by constructing a Ram Temple and a mosque adjacent to each other at the site, continue to be drowned in the cacophony raised by fanatics on both sides.

Years later, the torching of compartments of a train in Godhra, Gujarat, which took a toll on *karsevaks* returning from Ayodhya, was followed by the Gujarat riots where the minority Muslim community was targeted, and again hundreds of lives

were lost. The carnage that came immediately after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards which saw as many as 2000 innocent Sikhs being massacred, was another instance of religious intolerance and extreme cruelty being inflicted to avenge a murder.

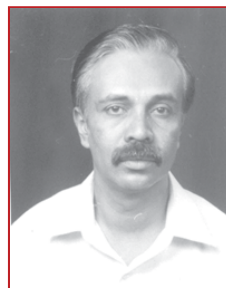
### The secularism debate

The word 'secularism' has a different connotation nowadays, and it is the term 'pseudo-secular' that has greater currency and denotes not just tolerance of all religions, but appeasement of the minority communities. How this can be justified is perplexing as secularism hardly slants towards any community, and could only stand for ensuring equal rights to all as prescribed in the Constitution. While 'Hindutva' as an ideology is all very fine, the concept of 'Hindu Rashtra' in a secular country is hardly tenable.

### Should religion be in the public domain?

There can be no two opinions that religion should be within the four walls and should not enter the public domain, as it then becomes a yardstick to judge people and also results in an animus between different castes and communities.

Crimes committed in the name of religion should not be tolerated, and the long arm of the law should reach all fanatics who indulge in violence at the drop of a hat and terrorise the weaker sections of society. Vigilantism has today become an offshoot of religious prejudices and the country is witness to brutal lynching of perfectly innocent citizens under the garb of 'protecting cows, ending cow slaughter, etc. The lynching of a Muslim on the charge that he was storing beef in his house and that of a teenager in a train on the grounds that he could be a beef eater, are instances that prove that religious terrorism is on the rise, and has to be leashed immediately. These incidents might be sporadic, but every time the perpetrators



of such crimes go unpunished, there is a definite chance of such crimes spiraling. Religious tolerance is the need of the hour, and the spirit of the Constitution should be upheld at all times. ■

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

### Did you know?

*Did you know that Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah had this to say to the people of his new nation: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the State."*

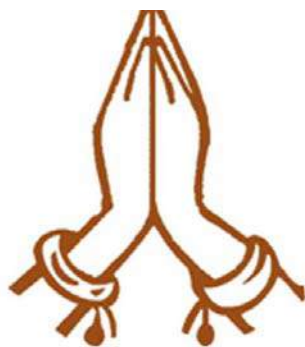
# Religion as a science

*The Hindu religion has many rituals and symbolisms attached to it. But each of these has a scientific or spiritual basis, says **Bramhachari Ved Chaitanya** of the Chinmaya Mission. Science and religion are not separate, and one can't exist without the other, he asserts.*

**T**RUE religion must possess two important limbs, namely, its philosophy and its ritualistic injunctions. Philosophy is the theoretical aspect of religion, which gives the scientific, logical and rational analysis of the world, man and reality. Ritualistic injunctions, however, deal with the practical aspect of religion, which explain the practices to be followed for reaching the ultimate goal in life. Ritualism without philosophy is a bundle of superstitions, and philosophy without ritualistic practices is mere imagination, a utopian dream!

Unfortunately, we commit a blunder of projecting only one of these two aspects; call it a religion, and then attribute its decadence and failure to the religion as such. This is what we have seen happening around us for many years now. Albert Einstein said, "Science without religion is lame, and religion without science is blind". Yet, somehow, we have come to think that religion is not scientific, and science is against religion.

True religion, therefore, is a happy and intelligent blending of philosophy and ritualism. Ritualism is not a mere physical performance of some illogical ceremonies. Each of the ritualistic practices has some scientific, spiritual and symbolic aspect to it. The philosophical truths and ideas are difficult to digest for many. Hence, for the majority, these ideas are explained and brought into their lives through various simple ritualistic practices. For instance, philosophy says, the Ultimate Reality or the Higher Consciousness is present in all living beings and non-living objects! Now, this truth may not be understood directly. Hence, a practice is introduced in *Sanaatana Dharma* (Hinduism). Whenever we meet each other, we greet by saying 'Namaste' with folded hands. The



word 'Namaste' means the divinity in me salutes the divinity in you! So, we not only recognise the same divinity in all, but also show respect towards each being that expresses the divinity. Extending the same concept, if our foot touches anyone by mistake, we prostrate to them.

## The scientific aspect of religion

This refers to religion's logical and practical usage in our day-to-day life. When a modern man doesn't see this aspect, he rejects the entire practice as a mere blind belief or some stupid malpractice. For example, we are told from childhood that we should not eat food kept outside during the time of solar or lunar eclipses. We are told to spend the eclipse-time in the constant remembrance of the Lord by doing various *sadhanas*. Scientifically, in the absence of the Sun or moon, the bacteria attack the food and it becomes stale. Also, the earth's energy mistakes the eclipse time to be the full cycle of the Sun or moon and hence, what will happen over the complete span of full cycle of 28 to 30 days happens in those 2 to 3 hours of eclipse. So, there is a drastic change in the cooked food during eclipse. All the nourishing elements in the food turn into poison. This scientific fact may not be intellectually understood by everyone. But, still it is essential to keep people safe by not allowing them to eat during the eclipse. Hence, this ritualistic practice has been added.

## The spiritual aspect of religion

The spiritual aspect refers to connecting everything that is happening in the world to oneself or to one's Self. There is a lot of inner spiritual meaning hidden in every ritualistic practice, and even in various *paurnic* stories of the *sanaatana dharma*. When we go to a temple, there is a ritual of going around the main deity (*Pradakshina*), making a circle in a clockwise direction. The spiritual point that the masters wanted to convey is – Keep the God in the centre of all your activities, and keep Him always on your right side. During the *puja*, we also go around ourselves, indicating that the same God also resides within us!

Everyone knows the famous story of Ramayana. There is no denial of the fact that the Ramayana actually happened and has many things to apply in our day-to-day life. But it also has a lot of spiritual essence. 'Ayodhya' means a place where there is no battle or conflict; which refers to a heart that has peace and harmony. 'Dasharatha', who can control his chariot in all ten directions, refers to a mind that controls all the senses (organs of perception and action). 'Kausalya' refers to



an intellect, which is concerned about welfare of all and which brings prosperity. In such a heart and to such a mind and intellect, a son is born: 'Rama', who is the Supreme Self, who delights everyone. In this way, each character and the story of Ramayana can be connected to one's inner life!

### The symbolic aspect of religion

This refers to depicting the formless through some logically fitting forms. All the idols that we see, are these symbols of the nameless and formless supreme reality. An idol, however, represents an ideal! Not understanding these deeper ideals



makes us believe that our ancestors were mere idol-worshippers. All the religious symbols and idols have a deeper depth for us to discover, over and above their mere external shape. For instance, scriptures speak of three main deities, called as the

Trinity. Brahma, who is in-charge of creation, Vishnu, who is in-charge of sustenance or maintenance, and Shiva, who is in-charge of dissolution or destruction. If we notice carefully, each of them has been given a form which suits their function. Brahma has four heads, because to create something new we mainly need more brain or ideas. Vishnu has four hands to maintain this already created world. He also takes maximum incarnations to maintain order in the universe. But for Shiva, neither four heads nor four hands are required. He only has the third eye so powerful that the whole world gets destroyed when it is opened. Even their consorts help them in their job. Saraswati, the deity of knowledge supports *Brahma* in creation. Lakshmi, the deity of wealth supports Vishnu in sustenance. And Durga or Parvati, deity of power, supports Shiva in destruction. The greatest achievement of man in the field of philosophy is his comprehension of the idea of the infinite, and his attempts to bring the infinite down to some sort of understanding at the finite level! Out of various symbols created to represent the Reality, the oldest, closest and probably the

all comprehensive symbol is 'Om'. *Om* is called as the name or sound symbol of *Brahman* (The Supreme Reality). However, it also has a form.

They say that all the *Vedas* can be revived through *Om*. Such is the depth and capacity of this symbol. The monosyllable *Om* is the result of harmonious combination of the three basic sounds (*Akaara*, *Ukaara* & *Makaara*) which contain in themselves all the sounds which can be produced by the human system, and it can be seen that the entire vocal mechanism of the human beings comes into full play, when one pronounces the sound *Om*. Along with an ocean of wealth of knowledge that is comprised in *Om*, chanting of *Om* also has some scientific effect in and around us. It increases our concentration power and helps us to enter the greater depths in our meditation. It purifies the environment around us and creates positive vibrations that can benefit the people around us. It has cardiovascular benefits too, as it reduces the blood pressure and makes the heart beat in regular rhythm. Only a few of the benefits are mentioned here, though there are many more!

The basic purpose of religion is to help a person in achieving the ultimate goal of human life, and to create harmony in the whole universe. This purpose will be served only when we understand the religion in its entirety, along with its scientific, spiritual and symbolic aspects. May we by God's grace and Gurudev's blessings come to realise the Supreme Reality! *Om tat sat!!* ■

Bramhachari Ved Chaitanya is the Acharya of Chinmaya Mission, Navi Mumbai centre. His main interest is application of Vedanta in daily life. He has completed his graduation in Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering from Pune University and has also worked for a year in Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) before joining the residential Vedanta course in Sandeepany



Sadhanalaya, Powai, in 2011. After completion of two years of rigorous training under the guidance of Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayanandaji and the tutelage of Swami Advayanandaji and Swami Sharadanandaji, he received the Brahmachari Deeksha on Ganesh Chaturthi day in the year 2013. Being a versatile orator, he conducts regular study classes for elders, balviharas for children and workshops for youngsters in English, Hindi and Marathi.

### India's vastness of religions

*The Indian subcontinent is the birthplace of four of the world's major religions; namely, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. According to the 2011 census, 79.8% of the population of India practices Hinduism and 14.2% adheres to Islam, while the remaining 6% adheres to other religions (Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and various indigenous faiths). Christianity is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest religion in India. Zoroastrianism and Judaism also have an ancient history in India, and each has several thousands of Indian followers. India has the largest population of Zoroastrians (i.e., Parsis and Iranis) and Bahá'í Faith in the world, even though these religions are not native to India.*

(Source: The Internet)

# Is religion violent?

*Does following a religion lead to violence and strife? Do religions preach violence? Violence is due to vested interests, not religion, asserts **Ram Punyani**. And he goes on to prove his statement.*

**W**E are living in times when violence in the name of religion is a major phenomenon in the world. From last nearly two decades, violence under the cover of religion has been dominating the world mind space. It came to great prominence after the attack on the twin towers in the United States, which led to the tragic death of nearly 3,000 innocent lives. In the aftermath of that, Osama bin Laden thanked Allah for this and called this tragedy as Jihad. Subsequently, the US media coined a phrase 'Islamic Terrorism'. Violence in the name of religion has been dogging the South Asian states from the last many decades, leading to persecution of Hindus and Christians in Pakistan, Hindus and Buddhists in Bangladesh, and Muslims and Christians in India. What has religion to do which such varieties of violence?

## Religion and human society

As such, religion has been one of the major phenomena of human society since 3,000 years. Its rise had two major foundations; one, the moral values, and two, the faith and rituals. The moral values brought in the norms of human behaviour in the society. The institutions and ideology which developed around religion have been used by the feudal power system to derive legitimacy to rule the society. In earlier times, we can see that probably all the religions were used by kings to expand their empires. It is not just Christian kings who had Crusades, Muslim kings resorted to Jihad and Hindu kings Dharma Yudh. These were bloody acts of violence.

## Genesis of terrorism in oil rich countries

Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan in the 1970s triggered a reaction from the United States. As the US army was demoralised due to their misadventure in Vietnam, US resorted to encouraging fundamentalist forces to fight Russian armies in Afghanistan. For this effort, some Madrassas located in Pakistan were made the base of indoctrinating the Mujahidin, which later went on to become the Al Qaeda. The indoctrination was done by using a version of Islam, Salafi Islam, where the primary focus is given to the fighting against apostate through



## Is peaceful co-existence a mere utopia?

violence: Jihad. Theologically, Jihad stands for spiritual struggle against sin; in contrast, the meaning drilled into young recruits was that to kill 'non-believers' is Jihad. The project was funded by the US. It is this breed which came to be led by Osama bin Laden, who initially fought against the Soviet army, and later also became the fountainhead of other terrorist groups like the Islamic State or ISIS.

The major victims of this type of violence in the name of religion have been Muslims, and this violence is primarily located in West Asia, which is the storehouse of oil. While there are many other Muslim majority countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, the major events took place and are focused in West Asia. Today it has become like a cancer, spreading to different West Asian countries. The Maulanas in India and Islamic theologians of various streams have called this terrorism as 'un-Islamic'. They quote from the Koran (chapter V, verse 32) which tells us that even if you kill a single innocent person, it is like killing entire humanity. The global lust for oil resources by countries led by the United States, in conjunction with Salafi Islam and the Madrassas located in Pakistan, are the three foundations of this Islamist violence. A phrase that gained currency was, "All Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims", thereby associating Islam with terrorism. As such, people from many religions have been undertaking acts of terror, be it the Irish Republican Army, the LTTE, the Khalistanis, the terror acts by many Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka-Thailand, and also such acts by the likes of Andres Behrling Brevik in Norway.



### Violence in the name of religion

Back home, one has witnessed the anti Sikh violence of 1984, the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pundits in 1990, the Mumbai violence of 1992-1993, the Gujarat carnage of 2002, the Kandhamal violence of 2008, the Muzzafarnagar violence of 2013, etc. These are just a few of the horrific acts of insanity which we have seen taking place in the name of religion. As such, India has been a plural, diverse society since centuries. Here, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Parsis and Buddhists among others have been living in the spirit of togetherness. No doubt, there have been incidents of ethnic strife earlier like between Shaivites and Vaishnavites, between Shias and Sunnis. Some rift between Hindus and Muslims has also been present, but the violence in the name of religion began after the coming of the British, as they introduced their 'divide and rule' policy, brought in communal historiography, where the rule of kings is seen through the prism of religion.

A large section of Hindus was shown the selected incidents of tyranny of Muslim kings. The interpretation of history was picked up by the communal organisations, which primarily came from the declining sections of Raja, Nawabs and the feudal elements from both the religious communities. They were joined by a small section of upper caste/elite classes, and a few from the middle class. Some contemporary issues related to pig in the mosque and beef in the temple, music in front of mosque etc., were used to whip up communal hysteria, and violence resulted. Interestingly, the source of this ideology was based in Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism, emerging from declining sections of society who felt threatened by the upcoming changes of education among the Shudras and women and the low caste, slipping away from their hegemony. The violence acted as a polarising factor in the society along religious lines.

### Indian nationalism versus sectarian nationalism

It will be interesting to know that during this period, a majority of Hindus and Muslims were part of the national movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi can easily be called the greatest Hindu of his times. Muslim leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, in matters of nationalism, were upholding the pluralism and diversity of the country. They also tried to assuage the wounds inflicted by the communal violence. The core values of Islam and Hinduism promote non-violence values like 'Vasudaiva Kutumbakam' (Hinduism) or 'All men are brothers' (Islam).

### Sectarianism today

Currently, communal tendencies among Muslims have been emerging and getting a boost from the feeling of insecurity. The majoritarian nationalism has become stronger around the issues of identity of Hindus like Ram Temple or the holy cow. As such, what looks as battle between religions is as such a struggle between the values of pluralism, which are based on liberty, equality and fraternity on one side, and the modern version of feudal hierarchical values, communal politics, on the other. Sectarianism wants to harp on the great ancient glory where the society was marked by inequality, particularly of caste and gender.

One can say that the morality of religions is the biggest

casualty of terrorism in the name of Islam. Same applies to communal violence in South Asia, including India. ■



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# Religion in Mahatma's India

*There was no one more acquainted with the pulse of India than Mahatma Gandhi. He knew why secularism was the only option for the diversity that was, and is, India. Tushar A. Gandhi probes the Mahatma's prolific words on this subject.*

*"Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion, which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and whichever purifies."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Young India*: May 8, 1920.

*"By religion I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our maker."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Thus Spake Mahatma Gandhi*: P. 137

**T**HERE is much talk about religion and its practice. But these days we seem to be drawn more and more towards the ritualistic religion than towards the spiritual, philosophical aspect of it. Present day India seems to be gravitating towards a religion of rituals and indulging in a race of religious dominance, both which threaten the idea of India. Today, the practice of religion has become mechanical, code bound, ritualistic. This is the easy way of practising religion, just like the easiest manifestation of being recognised as a Gandhian is wearing *Khadi*. Similarly, with religion, the symbols like the *tilak* symbolise Hinduism, castes Jainism, the beard Islam and the crucifix Christianity.

The practice of the philosophy of those religions has become secondary. There is a race for superiority amongst religions. Hinduism, which is considered to be an ideal manner of living life, is increasingly becoming intolerant, Islam which by name means Peace, is torn asunder by strife, Christianity which embodied mercy and charity today, is shutting its doors to refugees, homeless and hopeless.

## India's secular roots

India was born with the secular ideal, later it was enshrined in the preamble of its Constitution. But today secularism is the most hated and abused term in our public and political life. Those who swear by it, practice it insincerely, and those who abhor it, do their best to subvert its spirit, its essence. Like everything else, we have politicised religion too. The cancer of fanaticism and intolerance is corroding the spirit of our nationhood. Is this religion? Is this religiosity? The time has come to question our conscience.



**Gandhiji was a true Hindu, and also truly secular**

*"Indeed there are many religions, as there are men. But when one goes to the root of one's religion, one finds that in reality, religion is one."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Bapu Ke Ashirvad*: December 27, 1945.

This is the ideal of secularism, the oneness of religion. When we accept that although there are different labels under these labels we are all the same, that is when we will establish true secular credentials. Secularism isn't just keeping equidistant from every religion, but it means equally respecting every religion and its practice. Officially, secularism means equal distance from all religions, but personally secularism means equal respect for all religions.

*"Religious neutrality means that the state will have no state religion, nor a system of favouritism."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Young India*: June 11, 1931.

Today, when one sees a chief minister or a senior official sitting in his office wearing religion and caste specific clothes or symbols, it is bound to create a suspicion in the mind of a petitioner of a different faith or caste, of the likelihood of receiving justice or succour. France prohibits the wearing of any religion identifying clothing or symbols in public, it does not prohibit religious practices in private life, but in India, which is officially secular, public offices are overwhelmingly adorned with religious symbols and there is an overt exhibition of the faith of the incumbent. This again is a convenient



exhibitionism of religion, rather than the practice of its spirit.

There is an anxiety in certain quarters as more and more Hindu rituals are being incorporated into formal education curriculum, on the other hand, there are government aided Madrassas which are akin to Christian Bible Schools.

Bapu has said: *"I do not believe that the state can concern itself or cope with religious education. I believe that religious education must be the sole concern of religious associations. Do not mix up religion and ethics. I believe that fundamental ethics are common to all religions. Teaching of fundamental ethics is undoubtedly a function of the state. By religion I have not in mind fundamental ethics, but what goes by name of denominationalism."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Harijan*: March 23, 1947.

Once education is tainted by a bias towards a religion, and it is an official act, then we instil religious bigotry in the impressionable minds, there have been several cases of this being implemented in state education curriculum. This is dangerous, it breeds ignorance and contempt for other religions, leading to prejudice and hate. Intolerance is born of this.

### Growing intolerance?

*"Why should we blaspheme God by fighting one another, because we see him through a different media – The Quran, The Bible, The Talmud, The Avesta or The Gita. The same Sun beats on the Himalayas as on the plains. Should the men of the plains quarrel with men of the snows because of the different feel of the Sun?"*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Young India*: September 18, 1924.

In the past few years, there has been a great concern expressed about growing intolerance in our society. It is a matter of grave concern. The fanatics have hijacked our society, honour killings, caste violence, gender discrimination, violent and brutal road rage, sectarian violence, lynchings, mob violence, subjugation by violence, terror of the *Khaps*, *fatwas* and their brutal implementation, all these are symptoms of moral and ethical corruption, a society in decay, and they all stem from the propagation of a false religion, worship of a false God.

Talking about the India of his dreams Bapu said: *"I do not expect India of my dream to develop one religion. i.e., to be wholly Hindu, or wholly Christian, or wholly Mussalman; but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Young India*: December 22, 1927.

### The promise of rewards

Every religion preaches salvation and promises rewards for leading an ideal, pious and codified life. Every religion, like the corporate world, lures by a system of rewards. While in

the corporate world, the rewards accrue periodically and are of the material kind, in religion the rewards are promised in the afterlife. Every practitioner's goal is to pack their credit side, they believe in it without any confirmation that these rewards exist. For the Hindus *Swarg* and *Moksha*, Christians Heaven and Salvation, and Muslims *Jannat*, as if even in the afterlife where we leave all the physical manifestations behind, our souls will carry our religious identity and the balance sheet of life along, to a heaven segregated by religion.

*"I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus, nor Christians, nor Mussalmans. There all are judged, not according to labels or professions, but according to their actions, irrespective of their professions."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Thus Spake Mahatma Gandhi*: I:P. 129.

Criticising the emphasis on the afterlife in denominational religion and the other world, Bapu said: *"A religion that takes no note of this world and only harps on the one beyond, does not deserve the name."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Bapu Ke Ashirvad*: December 15, 1945.

A belief that forces one to live one's entire life earning the rewards promised in the afterlife. This is actually immoral, a corruption of the spiritual spirit of religion. It negates the essence of religion, which is the process of self actualisation of every individual. Our lives are a sum total of our deeds on earth, that is our only legacy, our true bequest. As there isn't a millionaire's heaven nor a pauper's heaven, neither an intellectual's heaven nor one for idiots. There is no religion after death, no life after death. Relationships, material trappings and intellect are all earthly trappings for the betterment of this life and do nothing, make no deference in the afterlife, all these are with us 'till death do us apart', so is religion.

Summing up his understanding of religion and what man has made of it Bapu says: *"After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that: (1) All religions are true (2) All religions have some errors in them, and (3) All religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to as my own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Satyagraha in South Africa*: P. 17.

### The cow slaughter debate

The question of cow slaughter has been raised ever since Independence, it has caused strife too. Cows enjoy a divine status amongst Hindus, but for non-Hindus a cow is just an animal and to many it is merely food, even amongst Hindus. In many states cow slaughter has been banned, but the slaughter of fallow cows and bulls is allowed. We are an agrarian society and in organic, sustainable, traditional

agriculture, a living cow is a boon, it provides milk and fuel for the family, fertiliser for the farm, but for the small farmer it is also a source of income when it turns fallow, non-productive or in times of scarcity, a source of income. This system also ensures the disposal of fallow livestock and the regeneration of the breed. But now a total ban on cow slaughter has been promulgated in many states, and the existence of the subsistence farmer is in peril. Cows have become a symbol of religious extremism. People have been murdered, lynched, on the mere suspicion of eating or possessing beef. People have been brutalised and murdered for transporting cows on the suspicion of them being taken for slaughter, if the transporter is a Muslim, then it is a definite death sentence.

Bapu was an ardent *bhakt* of cows, and had this to say: *"Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomenon of human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man, through the cow, is enjoined to realise his identity with all that lives."*

– M. K. Gandhi *Young India*: October 6, 1921.

Thus Bapu equated the cow with all living beings and the environment at large. He averred that, *"I will not kill a human being to save a cow, as I will not kill a cow to save a human life, be it ever so precious."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Thus Spake Mahatma Gandhi*: P. 94.

## A Hindu Rashtra?

There has been a lot of talk about the process of converting India into a Hindu *Rashtra* having began, initially there were whispers, now the voices are louder, the concerns are justified. The move reflects in official policy, especially on the question of cow slaughter. Bapu warned thus: *"The Hindus want Swaraj in India and not a Hindu Raj. Even if there was a Hindu Raj and tolerance as one of its features, there would be place in it for Mussalmans as well as Christians... I would therefore deem it unpatriotic even to pursue a dream of Hindu Raj."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Young India*: September 18, 1924.

One must also realise that the question of beef isn't just a Hindu, Muslim, Christian question, there are beef eaters even amongst the Hindus, there was never any taboo against eating beef amongst many of the tribes who are vaguely included in the Hindu fold. The Dalits, whom Hindus have always denied even a human existence, eat beef.

Immediately after Independence, Bapu pointed out the dangers and immorality of making India a theocratic Hindu *Rashtra*. He warned, *"India is the land of the Hindus, but also of the Mussalmans, the Sikhs, the Parsis, the Christians, the Jews and all who claim to be of India and are loyal to*

*the Union. If we can prohibit cow-slaughter in India on religious grounds, why cannot the Pakistani government prohibit, say idol-worship in Pakistan on similar grounds? I am not a temple goer, but if I am prohibited from going to a temple in Pakistan, I would make it a point to go there even at the risk of losing my head. Just as Shariat cannot be imposed on non-Muslims, Hindu law cannot be imposed on non-Hindus."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Harijan*: August 10, 1947.

Bapu understood India as few have in the modern times. He understood the realities of sustaining the national identity of India given the diversities and contradictions that exist cheek by jowl within it. He understood the threat of religious dominance and exclusivity. And he was very clear in his understanding that if India was to survive, religion would have to be as he said, 'Between man and his maker, a private matter.'

## Conclusion

I feel that today the idea of India is under threat because religious fanaticism and intolerance are rearing their head in our society and polity. The day India abandons its belief in secularism, will be the end of the idea of India. Seven decades is not a big period in the life of a nation. We pride ourselves in our thousands of years old heritage and civilisation that is under threat today, because we are abandoning the quality that sustained our civilisation even during adverse times, tolerance, respect and acceptance of the other. Hindu traditions fought the evil within itself more than it ever fought threats from outside. For centuries we have peacefully coexisted, that is the reason of our longevity. *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* does not mean subjugation of others, but an acceptance of all as our own along with the differences and respect and trust of their different practices and way of life, that is true Hinduism.

I conclude with what Bapu wrote, just 15 days after the birth of the nation: *"Hinduism will be wrongly served if, compelling legislation is resorted to in such matters. Hinduism can only be served by doing unadulterated justice to man, to whatever religion he may belong."*

– M. K. Gandhi. *Harijan* August 30, 1947.

Today, merely seven decades later, we have forgotten it. ■



Tushar A. Gandhi a social activist, is the great grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and the Managing Trustee of Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, Mumbai.



# Not in the name of God

*In a highly religious country like India, preaching atheism may seem like an utter contradiction. But **Rakshit Sonawane** makes a good case, considering the highly polarising religious elements at work in our society.*

THE metamorphosis of mankind from primitive cave-dwellers to 'global' citizens has created a complicated man-made world. The pillars of this world include languages, customs, nations, socio-economic arrangements, political systems, technology and religions. Among these, religion is a dominant influence passed on to a child by the family as a tamperproof emotional template of beliefs and behaviours. These beliefs can condition minds to the extremes of nobility or cruelty in the name of religion. For instance, noble *diktat*-s like compassion in Christianity and ban on charging interest in the Quran. The examples of cruelty are the Holy Crusades of Christians, laws of Manusmriti of Hindus, and the Islamic Jihad. To ensure order in a community, religion may have been an effective tool, but it also has been a tool of exploitation of weaker sections and women, with divine sanction.

In ancient India, long before the advent of Islamic invaders and Christian missionaries, there were two sets of religious ideologies. One was the Brahminical tradition of Vedas that dictated 100 per cent reservation by birth (not ability), in learning and scholarship for Brahmins; in fighting wars for Kshatriyas; in trading for Vaishyas; and in serving the upper three categories, for Shudras (present day OBCs). Below the caste system were the untouchables (now, Scheduled Castes) who were forced to live on village boundaries as slaves. This system was patriarchal, based on inequality, determined the worth of a person by virtue of his/her caste, and ensured Brahmin hegemony.

The other school of thought – like Charvak and Lokayat – which rejected the Brahminical order, reached its zenith during the Buddhist period. Over 2,500 years ago, Buddha rejected religious theories, Vedas, Varna, rituals, animal sacrifice and blind faith, advocating a Godless world of non-violence, compassion, equality and morality, thereby envisaging a world of virtuous atheists.

## The atheist tenet

Traditionally, an atheist has been demonised and considered undesirable by established religions (except Buddhism); because he/she cannot be mentally controlled as he/she has no fear of God or the Judgment Day. There is also a common belief that all religions are good, divinely ordained and tolerant. This is a myth created by conservatives. Religions can unite and divide. For instance, Lord Krishna says in the Bhagvadgita: '*Shreyanswadharma Vigunaha Pardharmatswanusthitat/ Swadharme Nidhanam Shreya, Paradharmo Bhayavaha*' (III.35) (Irrespective of the character of our religion, it is still better than any other religion. It is better to die in our own religion, because any other religion is horrible.). The Quran opines against marrying a non-Muslim (II.221); and calls all non-believers, enemies (IV.101).

According to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, "...To hold that all religions are true and good, is to cherish a belief which is positively and demonstrably wrong...Nothing can be a greater error than this. Religion is an institution or an influence and like all social influences and institutions, it may help or it may harm a society which is in its grip...Everything depends upon what social ideal a given religion as a divine scheme of governance holds out." (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol 3, Pg 24).

Buddha did not propound a theory of the origin of the universe, but stressed on virtuous behaviour without rituals, violence, animal sacrifice or blind faith. He expected his followers to question everything, even his doctrines and care for animals and ecology. During the Mauryan Empire under Emperor Ashoka, trees were planted; rest-houses were created for travellers along with shelters for animals with provision of water, fodder and healthcare. Animal sacrifice was banned and efforts were made to wean people away from oppressive traditions. It was the next step in human evolution – of a civilised society with equality, liberty, brotherhood – in which disputes would be

**Traditionally, an atheist has been demonised and considered undesirable by established religions (except Buddhism); because he/she cannot be mentally controlled as he/she has no fear of God or the Judgment Day.**

settled only through peaceful dialogue, not by the sword. Buddha also demystified meditation, which was traditionally linked with chanting of *mantra*-s, God's name, etc., by introducing Vipassana – meditation based just on quietly focusing on one's breathing, without tampering with it. Buddhism happens to be the only religion that comes close to scientific temperament.

### The scientific Buddhist philosophy

It ushered in a revolution in Indian society under Ashoka and also spread to other countries, where it gained roots and survived, albeit in varied forms after being appropriated with local ethos. However, though Buddhist India tolerated other religions, it invited the wrath of orthodox Brahmins. A coup was engineered during Ashoka's descendant Brihadraath's regime, and Pushyamitra Sung captured power to start a counter-revolution in favour of Brahmins. By the time foreign invaders and missionaries arrived, Buddhism had declined. In due course, it was reduced to ruins because of the onslaught of Islamic invaders and orthodox Brahmins, who even captured the Mahabodhi shrine at Bodhgaya.

During the British period, when soldiers and officials explored the country, they found ruins of Buddhism; like Ajanta caves discovered in 1824; Buddha's statues found buried 10 feet underground at Shravasti in 1875; and Ashoka's Lion capital (which is now the national emblem of India) found severed from its pillar at Sarnath in 1904.

When India became a republic in 1950, the founding fathers ushered in a new revolution by creating unity in diversity under the Constitution, ensuring equality, liberty and fraternity to all citizens. The Lion Capital of Ashoka became the national emblem and the Ashoka Chakra found a place on the Indian flag. Besides, in 1956, Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism in its purest form, alongwith over five lakh 'untouchables'. On the eve of the conversion, he refused to accept the dominance of monks, and after a lengthy argument with Bhante Chandramani (who conducted the ceremony) it was decided to create a new category of 'Bouddhacharya' or 'Bouddhopasak'(who would be laypersons with ability to recite Panchsheel and not dependent on rituals for livelihood), to conduct Buddhist ceremonies – to ensure that Buddhists are not exploited by monks.

Almost seven decades later, the accumulated backlog of human development created by Indian traditional society is yet to be cleared, as those who had been deprived of education, freedom and dignified life – like the tribals, dalits, women, nomads and shudras are still struggling for a place in the mainstream. The hitch is that under the pretext of protecting ancient traditions and festivals, the

masses have been turned into organic robots operating with the software of outdated religious tenets. While politicians of all hues hail Dr. Ambedkar, none of them have accepted his remedy written in *Annihilation of Caste*, of amending oppressive holy texts. He is being appropriated selectively by those who want to turn the clock back. Do religions have scope for amending their doctrines to keep pace with the changing world? Yes, they have, albeit too little, too late and by humans! For instance, in 1992 the Pope accepted Galileo's theory of Earth, planets and the Sun (that was against the Christian belief of the universe) propounded in 1633, and rectified its mistake of persecuting Galileo in 1633.

The prevailing situation in which terrorists justify killing of innocents in the name of Islam, jingoistic Hindu leaders dictate norms of behaviour in the name of cultural nationalism, and fringe groups go around lynching people, efforts are necessary to raise the bar of emotional intelligence among the masses to ensure that they get a proper perspective, become tolerant, and are not carried away by sentiments. Buddhism is an option, and mentally, all rational people are practicing Buddhists, irrespective of their inherited religions. But ironically, a majority of Buddha's followers have become worshipping Buddhists, not practicing ones. The only remaining option is that of atheism, without destructive/oppressive emotions, for a peaceful world of coexistence and harmony.

### The atheist option

A person who is an ethical atheist, does not require a religion to survive, and can save energy, time and money otherwise spent on religious activities. But, to take on religious bigots, sections 295 (a), 153 (a) and 298 in the Indian Penal Code pose a hurdle as they prescribe punishment for 'hurting religious sentiments'. These sections require rethinking to facilitate freedom of expression to counter exploitation by the priestly class in the name of religions and raise the bar of 'beliefs' among the masses to transcend barriers, which make them tools in the hands of political and religious mercenaries. ■

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(The author does not intend to hurt the religious feelings of any individual or institution. The aim is only to create awareness against exploitation of masses by religious bigots.)



# Religion and the Indian Constitution

*What does the Indian Constitution say specifically about religion and its practice in India? How does secularism work in practice? Irfan Engineer explains.*

**R**ELIGION wields great influence in South Asia. It has not only served as a force bonding people into a community, but is also a carrier of customs and traditions. This growing influence is evident in celebration of festivals and observation of rituals. Religion enters every sphere of life from birth to death – the conception of ideal society, how one lives and interacts with other human beings, how one relates to one's creator, what one eats and wears, what are one's duties in life and towards others, procreation, life hereafter and numerous other aspects are determined by religion.

## Can religion and politics be separated?

If religion influences so many spheres, separation of religion and politics is a tough call in South Asia. Politics is expected to attain religious outlook. Religious leaders have been adopting and embracing new technologies while sustaining their core beliefs. Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad engaged with religion in order to mobilise followers in the struggle for Independence. Religion gave spirit to the freedom fighters to face hardships inflicted on them by the mighty British Empire to attain freedom. It made people fearless and motivated them to make sacrifices for liberation.

Religious spirituality inspires one to love the creator, and in the process annihilate one's ego. To be lost in love of God means love all creations of God. The Sufi and Bhakti movements, Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity are examples of religious spirituality. However, religion can also be divisive when it is used to promote sectarian and fundamentalist outlook. Religion can also be perceived as commanding the followers to live an ideal religious life and either cut themselves off from those who do not share notion of this ideal society, and even struggle against them. There are supremacists within every religion who call upon their followers to achieve this ideal community and be at war with others. Hindu nationalists, Muslim nationalists, the *jihad*-ist, Zionists, all fall within this category.

India is home to many religions and diverse religious

tendencies. Liberty, equality and fraternity were the calls of freedom movement, and a vision to build a new nation on these values. This meant struggle against patriarchal feudal culture and caste-based hierarchical structure. These feudal-patriarchal values had good appeal among those who propounded religious nationalism. Emerging from Partition along religious lines, the Constituent Assembly had a job on hand to draft a secular Constitution acceptable to people of India.

Secularism in Indian context did not mean decline of influence of religion and religious observances. It meant that while all persons would have the freedom to practice their religion, the state would not discriminate between citizens on grounds of religion. Ideally, citizens would respect all religions equally. This non-discrimination by state and equal respect for all religions by citizens collectively, came to be known as *sarva dharma sambhav*.

## The Constitution of India

The Constitution grants freedom to every person to profess, practice and even propagate their religion subject to some reasonable restrictions – viz., public order, health and morality (Art. 25). While every individual has the right to profess, practice and propagate his or her religion, religion is observed collectively and needs space for social functions. The space for collective observance is ensured by Article 26 which provides that religious denominations or sections thereof have the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes and to own and acquire movable and immovable properties and to manage its own religious affairs.

The Constitution of US also allows freedom to its citizens to practice any religion. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the making of any law respecting an establishment of religion and ensuring that there is no prohibition on the free exercise of religion. This has been termed as a 'wall of separation between Church and the State' by Thomas Jefferson, and cited by the Supreme Court of the US in its numerous judgements. Article 25 of the Indian

Constitution however, empowers the state to enact laws to regulate or restrict any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice. The State in India can also enact laws for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Drawing from these provisions of the Constitution, India has enacted legislations to ensure progressive march towards gender equality giving rights to Hindu women to inherit equal share in ancestral property, temple entry for all sections of Hindu community, banning *sati*, right to divorce to Hindu women and regulated endowments in popular shrines, including Tirupati Tirumala and Ajmer Sharif Dargah. These legislations were fiercely resisted and contested on streets as well as in the Supreme Court. The apex court upheld most of these legislations. However, the Supreme Court drew a fine line between reforming Hindu religion and reforming religion out of existence. It evolved the test of retaining 'essential religious practices'. Those reforms that obliterated essential religious practices were struck down as violating freedom of religion.

In order to ensure secularism, there are laws that make hate speeches and outraging religious feelings of a community a punishable offence (S. 153-A 153-B and 295A of IPC). It is

also an offence to assert that a particular religious community were not loyal citizens or to demand that right to vote of any religious community be taken away (S. 153-B of IPC). Similarly, canvassing for votes on the basis of religion is deemed to be corrupt electoral practice and election of a candidate can be set aside (S. 123 of Representation of Peoples Act).

On the whole, democracy and secularism has worked well in India nudging the society towards equality of caste and gender. Among progressive changes brought about by the state include temple entry legislations, Atrocities Act to ensure justice to victims of caste based oppression, legislative reforms to ensure justice to victims of sexual assaults and domestic violence, prohibition of child marriages, legislations for affirmative action for the benefits of women, children, SCs, STs and OBCs, reform of Hindu family laws.

Yet, many challenges remain.

Aggressive 'cow nationalism' is threatening the secular fabric of the country. Reform of Muslim Personal Law to ensure gender justice for Muslim women also remains a challenge. ■



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# Free to pray v/s free to speak?

*Our Constitution guarantees us freedom of speech and expression, but sometimes, in practice, it can hurt others. Yet, how justified would we be in clamping down on our freedom, asks **Gajanan Khergamker**.*

**F**REEDOM of religion isn't just about assertion. Sadly, the constitutional freedom is often scrutinised in public fora where its legality is measured against another constitutional freedom, that of speech and expression.

That Indian playback singer Sonu Nigam's public tweet deploring the use of loudspeakers for *azaan* by mosques, loud *aartis* in temples and *gurdwaras* was met with incensed rage by irate Muslims, was a given. Much on the same lines was expected from the liberal 'fence-sitters'!

## The legal position

The legal position on the use of loudspeakers by mosques, churches, temples, political parties, private parties et al., in Mumbai, is clear as crystal. After the Bombay High Court directed the civic body BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) to demarcate the 'silence zones' in 2009, the same were notified for Mumbai city; boards announcing the same were put up at each location.

The civic body also uploaded maps that identified 1,503 silence zones, which comprise areas within a 100-metre radius around hospitals, educational and religious institutions. A division bench of the Bombay High Court comprising Justice Abhay Oka and Justice Ahmed Sayed said citizens can claim compensation if their complaints about noise pollution are ignored by enforcement authorities.

Now, by the logic and the letter of the law, it is clear that all religious institutions in Mumbai are categorised as silence zones, and have to abide by noise pollution rules. Sonu Nigam's tweets in the public domain and within social media, were construed as attempts to wedge disruption in 'the peace', which is actually a convenient nod to the 'anomaly in law', the extraneous use of loudspeakers in a mosque or any other religious institution being outright illegal.

Syed Sha Atef Ali Al Quaderi, Vice President, West Bengal Minority United Council as quoted in a report is alleged to have said, "If anyone can shave his hair, put a garland of old torn shoes around his neck and tour him around the country, I personally announce an award of ₹ 10 lakh for that person. I would have reacted the same way if one had talked ill about the sound of bells coming from a temple as well. If we all

become so intolerant about each other's religions, we will soon have a bunch of atheists in our country. People like Nigam should be driven out of the country."

## A curb on freedom?

Now, that squarely comprises an attempt to curb one's (Sonu Nigam's) freedom of speech and expression as guaranteed by Article 19 of the Indian Constitution. However, few would, at this point of time, stand by Nigam's right to freedom of speech and expression.

The *azaan* summons the faithful to peace and tranquillity, but when made through loudspeakers, turns into a cause of concern. A Navi Mumbai resident Santosh Pachalag had earlier petitioned the Bombay High Court in 2014, through a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against the 'illegal use of loudspeakers' by mosques in his area.

An RTI (Right to Information) plea revealed that 45 of 49 mosques in the area didn't have permission to use loudspeakers, and on the petition, the Bombay High Court directed the police to remove 'illegal' loudspeakers from mosques. Also, in a heart-warming gesture, many in the Muslim community too welcomed the verdict. Several religious institutions, in violation of the Noise Pollution (Control and Regulation) Rules, 2000, have used loudspeakers much above the permissible decibel levels (50 dB during day and 40 dB at night for silence zones, and 55 dB during day and 45 dB at night for residential areas).

Earlier, in 2005, the Supreme Court had issued guidelines that included restrictions on the use of loudspeakers in public spaces at night to bring down the decibel levels. The then Chief Justice of India R.C. Lahoti who headed the bench, banned the use of loudspeakers between 2200 and 0600 hours in public spaces. The court also issued guidelines to the police on how the same should be implemented.

The guidelines included restrictions on the use of loudspeakers in public spaces and norms for the use of high-volume sound systems, generators and vehicles. There was a ban on the use of noisy firecrackers late at night during festivals like Diwali, and a ban on using loudspeakers between 10 pm and 6 am.

(Continued on page 22)



# Screening religion

*Hindi cinema has often trifled with, and sometimes plunged headlong into religious conundrums. But it has managed to tread a reasonably stable path through this quagmire of India's religious identities, says Shoma A. Chatterji.*

**T**INSEL town of Bollywood is characterised by one USP – no one turns a hair here when a Muslim film star marries a Hindu girl or vice versa. Much to the disappointment of avid readers of yellow film glossies, most of these marriages are for keeps. But when this extends to the portrayal of communal harmony or disharmony on celluloid, the buck seems to stop at clichéd stereotypes. The most predominant cliché comes across in patterns of speech and accent – the Sikh belts out Hindi dialogue in a strong Punjabi accent, peppering it with *papajis* and *kudis*. The Parsi lady's lines designedly smack of a Gujarati-ised Hindi. The Christian spices his speech with lots of “God” and “Jesus” and “man.” The Muslim speaks normal Hindi-film Hindi depending on what character he is portraying. If he is a Kabuliwalla, his Hindi is strongly Pathani, lines delivered in a loud baritone. But if he is a mafia don, his Hindi is as Mumbaiiya as that of his Hindu henchmen.

## The depiction is the message

Motives for including a Sikh taxi driver or *dhabawalla*, or the friendly Muslim neighbour, or the rough-talking but tender-hearted Christian nurse or nanny, are purely commercial – the mass audience out there is a virtual melting pot. They are shelling out gate money. So why not give them a taste of themselves on screen? This is sometimes used as a tax-exemption gimmick. Incredible but true, that often members of all minority communities are given small cameo roles in a mainstream film with an eye on the National Award for the “best film” in this particular category. This brings us to a question raised by a cinema researcher from the Jadavpur University for his research paper, “Are minorities intentionally projected as villains and anti-socials in Hindi cinema?” he asks. The topic was provoked by a random sample survey conducted by Afzal Jamal among post-graduate students in Kolkata recently. The majority came out with “yes” for an answer. And here was a topical subject for research with Hindi mainstream cinema as the base.

To a certain degree, one tends to agree that minorities are projected as villains. But one does not agree that this is intentionally done. Hindus are also portrayed as anti-socials and villains. Take a look at *Satya*, *Company* and *Ghulam*. In



**A.K. Hangal's Imam *chacha* was a ubiquitous, yet endearing character in the film *Sholay***

*Sangharsh*, the villain played by Ashutosh Rana is a Hindu fundamentalist-turned maniac. If you go back to the seventies, Amitabh Bachchan was a Hindu in *Deewar*, but his friend, philosopher and guide who gave him that brass medallion for good luck was a Muslim. In *Sholay*, both positive and negative characters were Hindu. But the priest of the *dargah*, portrayed by A.K. Hangal and his son, played by Sachin were Muslim, and both these characters were positive characters without a trace of villainy in them. In the film *Josh*, the entire caste of the film is presented as Goan Catholic because the place setting of the film is Goa. But the director has played a politically correct card by making the villain played by Sharad Kapoor, a Hindu and the hero, Shahrukh Khan, a Goan Catholic.

In real life, the underworld, the mafia population and terrorists mostly belong to a particular minority. Chhota Shakeel, Abu Salem, Dawood and his gangsters and henchmen give away their communal identity through their names. Interestingly, they never bother to change these to more acceptable and ‘safer’ Hindu names. Arun Gawli is a Hindu, but by and large, notorious leaders are from this community. If you read newspaper reports on gang wars, terrorist activities, smuggling of drugs and arms, extortion, abduction and kidnapping, trafficking of girls and women across the borders, a large section belongs to a minority community in real life. This has its own reasons: (a) Poverty juxtaposed against the temptation of making big money fast, (b) Suppression and oppression of its women, and (c) Lack of education and unemployment. They accuse the administration of majority bias in employment infrastructures other than the reserved

quota. Any quota, they claim, ignores them completely. If one probes a bit deeper into the ramifications of this allegation, one will discover that they are not really far from the truth.

Minorities are presented more as stereotypes than as anti-socials. More often, they are reduced to cartoons and caricatures of their real life counterparts, and this representation is more dangerous and harmful for all concerned than presenting them as villains. The Anglo-Indian woman for instance, is always a typist/secretary of loose morals, or she may be a cabaret dancer, or the gangster's moll.

Certain clichéd stereotypes define the Indian Christian character in mainstream cinema. Mainstream cinema has successfully reduced the Christian minority in India to a convenient monolith – a homogenous entity that does away with their ethnic divisions into Indian Christians, Roman Catholic, East Indian, Anglo-Indian, Syrian Christians and so on. Umberto Eco calls these clichés 'explicit codes' – characters depicted in terms of certain outward features. In films featuring one or more important Christian characters, one will find these common elements – the mandatory church, the altar, the priest, the Holy Cross, Christmas or Easter festivals. The characters are projected as caricatures and paper cutouts of real people from the real world.

But how does one begin to 'promote' communal harmony through a Hindi film distanced from any kind of political or commercial axe-grinding? A filmmaker cannot afford to place posters within his film with sentences like "*Hindu Muslim Bhai Bhai*," can he? Nor can he raise slogans through characters in his films. Many films have used these crude methods, and have failed to carry the message across. Subtlety and understatement is the name of the game. Or, at times, an imaginatively conceived storyline that effectively raises – and sometimes answers – questions of communal identity and harmony, offers a better example.

### Using religion subtly

Mahesh Bhatt's *Tamanna* and *Zakhm* are two examples of films that explore the communal identity question and the schism between two communities, without being abrasive or articulate about them. The story of *Tamanna* is about a female child discarded by her affluent Hindu father to be brought up by a Muslim eunuch. She is brought up as a Muslim but later, when her mother arrives to take her home, she chooses to stay back with her adoptive parent. This subtly put across a message of communal harmony reportedly inspired by a real-life case. *Zakhm* explores the dilemma of a son born out of an illegitimate liaison between his Muslim mother and his Hindu father. The mother dies during the communal riots in Mumbai and how her last rites should be performed in a riot stricken city where the two communities are out to kill each other,

forms the locus of the story. Both films are openly commercial, filled with music and melodrama. But the message of humanity that comes across is telling.

Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* is an excellent example of how a Hindu-Muslim marriage based on love cannot only end happily, but can also unite two families. It also points out that when a riot takes place, it does not discriminate between and among its victims on the basis of their religious faith. Shyam Benegal's *Mammo* offers a wonderful representation of a middle-class Muslim family where *Mammo* does not restrict her social work to people belonging to her community alone. She helps the maid who is battered by her alcoholic husband without thinking whether the maid is Hindu or Muslim. *Sardari Begum* does not quite offer any message of a union between Hindus and Muslims, but does carry one hint where a Hindu, the owner of the recording company proposes marriage to Sardari who refuses – not because he is a Hindu - but because he is not prepared to accept her daughter as part of his matrimonial baggage. On the other hand, her husband is fleshed out as a conman and a cheat who strips her of her own money and wealth.

*Zubeida* is a moving, humanistic and sympathetic account of a Muslim girl victimised by Muslim men – her father, her husband and her father-in-law, while her second husband, the Rajput prince, does offer her love and a home, though his priorities still lie with his senior queen, a Hindu. *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* is another example of a Muslim-Sikh marriage that ends happily. But the love theme is overshadowed and rendered almost invisible by graphic scenes of violence that spoils the main message of love. The Muslim girl turns into a pawn in the chess-game of the ego-fight between her Sikh husband and Muslim father.

The best 2001 lesson in communal and caste harmony in Hindi mainstream cinema can be found in Aamir Khan's *Lagaan*. It is not really based on religion or caste questions. It is based rather, on feelings of nationalistic fervour expressed through the apparently simple device of a cricket match played 100 years ago in a remote village somewhere in India. But under this surface spirit of entertainment, Aamir Khan and his director Ashutosh Gowariker have very cleverly woven in layers of caste and communal harmony, thus underlining the message of solidarity against colonial imperialism imposed by local British officers on a poor peasant community already reeling under the pressures of a chronic drought situation. *Lagaan* has a Muslim (portrayed by Zubeida who is a Punjabi Hindu), while Bhuvan, a Hindu character, is performed by Aamir Khan, who is Muslim in real life. The Sikh enters some time later in the film to give representation to the Sikh community. There is also the untouchable whose physical handicap is turned into an asset for the match. Once he is

accepted as a bowler in the team, this acceptance extends to the high-caste members of the team, and his 'untouchability' disappears without anyone being conscious of it. The priest's assistant is a deaf-mute young man. The black villainy of the white British officers is cleverly undercut by the kindness and generosity of Elizabeth who teaches them the rudiments of the game risking her relationship with her brother. The messages are so subtle that you almost do not notice them. There is no underlining, no melodrama, no speeches on Hindu-Muslim unity or even any visible anti-British stance. Perhaps, these are precisely the reasons why *Lagaan* is an

institution in itself, a film that will survive many of its peers, predecessors and successors in Hindi mainstream cinema for many years to come. ■



**Shoma A. Chatterji** is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for 'commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues' among many awards.

## Free to pray v/s free to speak?

(Continued from page 19)

The CJI, writing for the bench, also said the decibel level of megaphones or public address systems should "not exceed 10 dB (A) above the ambient noise standards for the area, or 75 dB (A), whichever is lower."

In *Om Birangana Religious Society ... vs The State And Ors.* on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1996, Judge Bhagabati Prosad Banerjee had elaborated, "So far as right of religious organisations to use loudspeaker or amplifier is concerned, that right is not an independent right under Article 25 of the Constitution of India. Article 25(1) of the Constitution of India provides that subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this part, all persons and equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion."

"It is a matter to consider whether the public are captive audience or listeners when permission is given for using loud-speakers in public and the person who is otherwise unwilling to bear the sound and/or the music or the communication made by the loud-speakers, but he is compelled to tolerate all these things against his will and health. If permission is granted to use microphones at a louder voice, such a course of action takes away the rights of a citizen to speak with others, the right to read or the right to know and the right to sleep and rest or to think any matter."

The judgment clearly details the reach of freedom of speech and expression as guaranteed under Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India, which is invoked each time one resists noise or cacophony generated for religious, personal, professional or political reasons.

Judge Banerjee said, "Freedom of Speech and Expression includes, by necessary implication, freedom not to listen and/or to remain silent. One cannot exercise his right at the cost and in total deprivation of others' rights. A right cannot be

conferred by the authorities concerned upon a person or a religious organisation to exercise their rights suspending and/or taking away the rights of others."

The freedom of speech and expression isn't absolute. Article 19 of the Indian Constitution in the very next clause maintains that nothing shall affect the operation of any existing law, or prevent the State from making any law, in so far as such law imposes reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred by the said sub clause in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

Concurrently, Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination of any citizen on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. It also maintains: No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to:

- Access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; and
- The use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of state funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.

Practicing religion or the act of propagating it should not, however, affect "public order, morality and health." The Article doesn't put any restriction on the government when it comes to making any law to regulate "economic, financial, political or other secular" activities, which may be associated with religious practice.



To strike a balance between the two in India, is like doing a tightrope walk, for this government, the next or any other. ■

**Gajanan Khergamker** is an independent Editor, Solicitor and Film-maker. He is the founder of the International Think Tank DraftCraft.



KNOW INDIA **BETTER**

# Munsiyari

## *The little place of snow*

*Munsiyari is a little gem nestled in the mountains of Kumaon in Uttarakhand. One can't discover its little secrets if one visits it as a typical tourist. Visit it as nature enthusiast, a trekker, a seeker of knowledge, a person of curiosity, and you will find it unveils itself to its almost perfect beauty and myriad tales and secrets.*

**Text & Photos: Anvi Mehta**







**A panoramic view of Munsiyari**

*"We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us"*

– John Muir

**M**OUNTAINS are always an attractive tourist destination. Apart from Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir, which are both very famous tourist destinations, Uttarakhand is a developing mountain state that has many hidden gems just being discovered. While we have the Valley of Flowers, Auli and Chamoli in the Garhwal belt; tourism in Kumaon is still not as developed, except for Nainital, Bhimtal and Jim Corbett. (These are places closest to the railway station and airport).

Over the past few years, the tourism industry is picking up, mainly due to online promotions. Now, places like Kausani, Ranikhet and Munsiyari are seeing an increasing number of tourists. These places are developing off beat packages for tourists that include a stay in a village, a home-stay, and visits to places of local importance. This has ensured an experience which attracts tourists to these places, despite long distances from the mainland.

### **A gem called Munsiyari**

Munsiyari, a small conglomerate of revenue villages nestled in the laps of the Himalayas, is one of the hidden gems of Kumaon. Surrounded by Tibet and Nepal on two sides, Munsiyari was of utmost importance for the traders in the historic period. It lies in between the salt route from Jowhar valley, Tibet, which extends to the Milam Glacier through Gori Ganga. It was after the 1965 war with China that all trade with Tibet ceased, and the area was restricted. But now it is being promoted as a little paradise of Uttarakhand, by the state government.

Munsiyari, at an elevation of 2290 metres, is an upcoming tourist destination owing to the spectacular view of the Panchachuli peak from the hill-station and the relatively untouched beauty. The climate in Munsiyari remains pleasant throughout the year. While there is snowfall during the winter season, summers are relatively warmer, and there are heavy showers during monsoon. However, due to recent changes in climate, Munsiyari is also getting affected by erratic snowfall, reduced rain showers, and increasing heat during summers.

While it was always popular with mountaineers and glacier enthusiasts as it served as a base camp for glaciers like Milam, Ralam and Nimak, it is now making a mark as a prominent place for family and group tourism.





**A meadow in Munsiyari**

### **Munsiyari's people**

The conglomerate of villages has 15 to 20 clusters within a few kilometres of the market area. These villages consist of Rajputs and Brahmins who are considered to have come from the lower regions and settled here. The local population is the Bhotias, the clan from Tibet and Nepal, who migrated after the modern day borders were set up. The Bhotias follow Goddess Nanda Devi and are the major traders of the area.

The occupation of the people is agriculture and cattle. Munsiyari is known for its organically grown potatoes, and after Spiti Valley, it is one of the most popular places for potatoes. Though the locals say that production of potatoes has reduced in the last few years, owing to changing climatic conditions, water scarcity and attack on crops by wild animals, there are a few potato farms that one can visit.

There are many shepherds in Munsiyari who take their sheep and go to the higher elevations during summer, and return before the onset of winter. These shepherds on their return get herbs and medicinal plants which are only found in the higher regions of the Himalayas. These herbs and medicinal plants were earlier brought for local use only; it is after the sudden surge in tourism that they are being sold to outside

public. *Laljadi* (a stem used as an anti-inflammatory), and *kidajadi* (a fungi that is used as an aphrodisiac and has other healing properties), are the two main items which are brought down by the shepherd community.

Munsiyari is also known for Angoori rabbit farms; these rabbits are reared for their wool. The hand-knit woollen apparels are usually made of the Angoori wool, which is also the softest, and keeps the body warm.

To experience the local culture and food, one must choose a homestay over a resort. The local food has a Nepali-Tibetan touch to it because of the close proximity to the border regions. But, one can savour the *pahadi* (the mountain people's) food which is *bhatt ki chudkani*, *namkeen chai*, *aloo ke gutke*, *bhang ki chutney* and so on.

### **Reaching Munsiyari**

To reach Munsiyari, one has to either take the route from Thal, or else choose the one from Dhanachuli. The route from Thal passes the Kalamuni peak, the highest in the *tehsil*. It is a beautiful route and has mainly broken pathways with water streams flowing by. Often, when the skies are clear, Munsiyari greets tourists with a breathtaking view of the snow-clad Himalayas.





**A view of the mountains from Mesar Kund**

When we decided to go to Munsiyari, it was a day long travel from Lohaghat, Champawat. We had to change the jeep thrice before we could reach the hill-station. From Champawat we went to Pittoragarh (the district headquarters); Pittoragarh to Thal, and finally Thal to Munsiyari. While transportation is available from all three locations regularly, the probability decreases post afternoon.

Once in Munsiyari, you need at least a week to cover the

basic treks and tourist places in and around the market area.

Nearest Railway Station: Kathgodam (278.6 km)

Nearest Airport: Pant Nagar (312.7 km)

*There is less availability of state transport buses from Kathgodam to Munsiyari. Either you have to take the shared taxi which usually starts early in the morning, or you have to book a private car.*

Though every inch of the place has its own beauty, right



**The trek route from Sarmoli to Mesar Kund**





**The new Mesar Kund pond; this was revived by the locals in the last decade**

from the landscapes to the people, everything is very interesting; below are listed a few places that should definitely be on your to-do list:

### **The Mesar Kund**

The *pahadis* are known for their stories, they are excellent story tellers. Every place has a story to it, be it a lake or a

temple. The Mesar Kund is yet another beautiful place with an intriguing history to it.

The Mesar Kund is a small lake (*kund*) situated 3-4 km from the market area (at Sarmoli and Shankh Dhura). There are two trek routes to the *kund*, one from the roadside, and the other through the village of Sarmoli. We had taken the latter, and it was a moderate 500 metre trek through rocks

### **The tale of the Kund**

As per locals, there was once a *yaksha* (nature spirit) who lived in the lake. Many years ago, the villagers living around the lake destroyed it. This did not go well with the *yaksha* and he cursed the villagers with a long drought period. For several years, there were no rains and the area suffered a severe dry spell. This is when the villagers performed a ritual and apologised to the *yaksha*. It is only after the *yaksha* was appeased that the drought ended. Since then, a holy ritual takes place at the *kund* each year.

There is also an alternate tale which only a few locals talk about, in which a hermit named Mesar lived near the lake. It is said that one day he spotted two young women who had accidentally reached the lake while collecting fodder. He instantly fell in love with one of the maidens; he lured her to live with him. The other girl, frightened that her friend has been kidnapped, rushed to her village and brought back a few villagers. Though the villagers asked the hermit to return their daughter, the girl did not want to go back because she was happy with him. The villagers started to



**The old Mesar Kund pond**

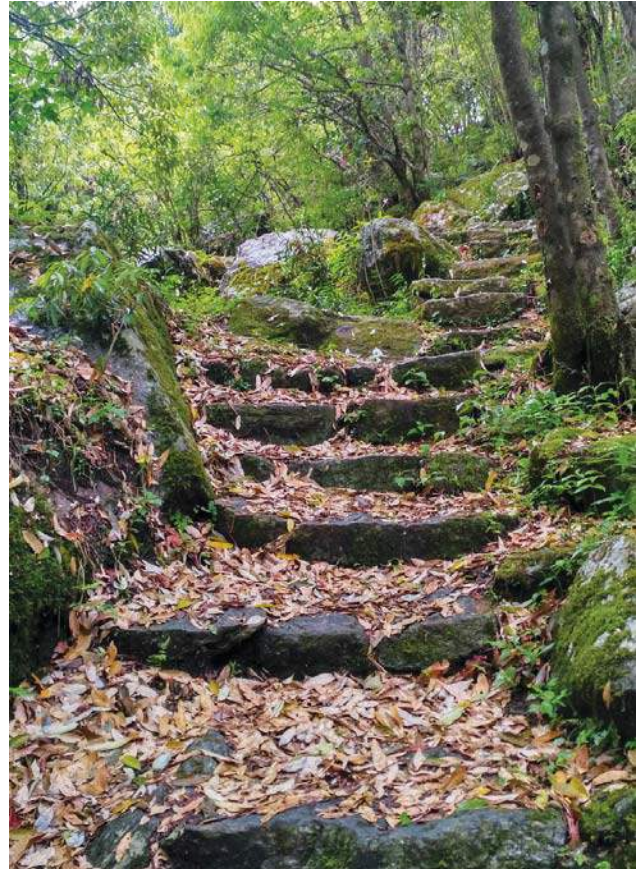
destroy the lake, when the hermit got angry and cursed them that their families will always see a death at every birth. Since then, it is said that the families of the unknown village come to the *kund* every year and perform rituals to please the hermit and prevent any misfortune to their families. This story is perhaps just a myth. But the hermit Mesar, is worshipped as a form of God.





**The entrance to the Nanda Devi Temple, the gate before the forest area begins**

and streams. It was a 20-30 minute walk from the village, and is quite scenic. The view of the Himalayan peaks from the elevation is truly surreal, and one reason why one must take



**The trek to Nanda Devi**

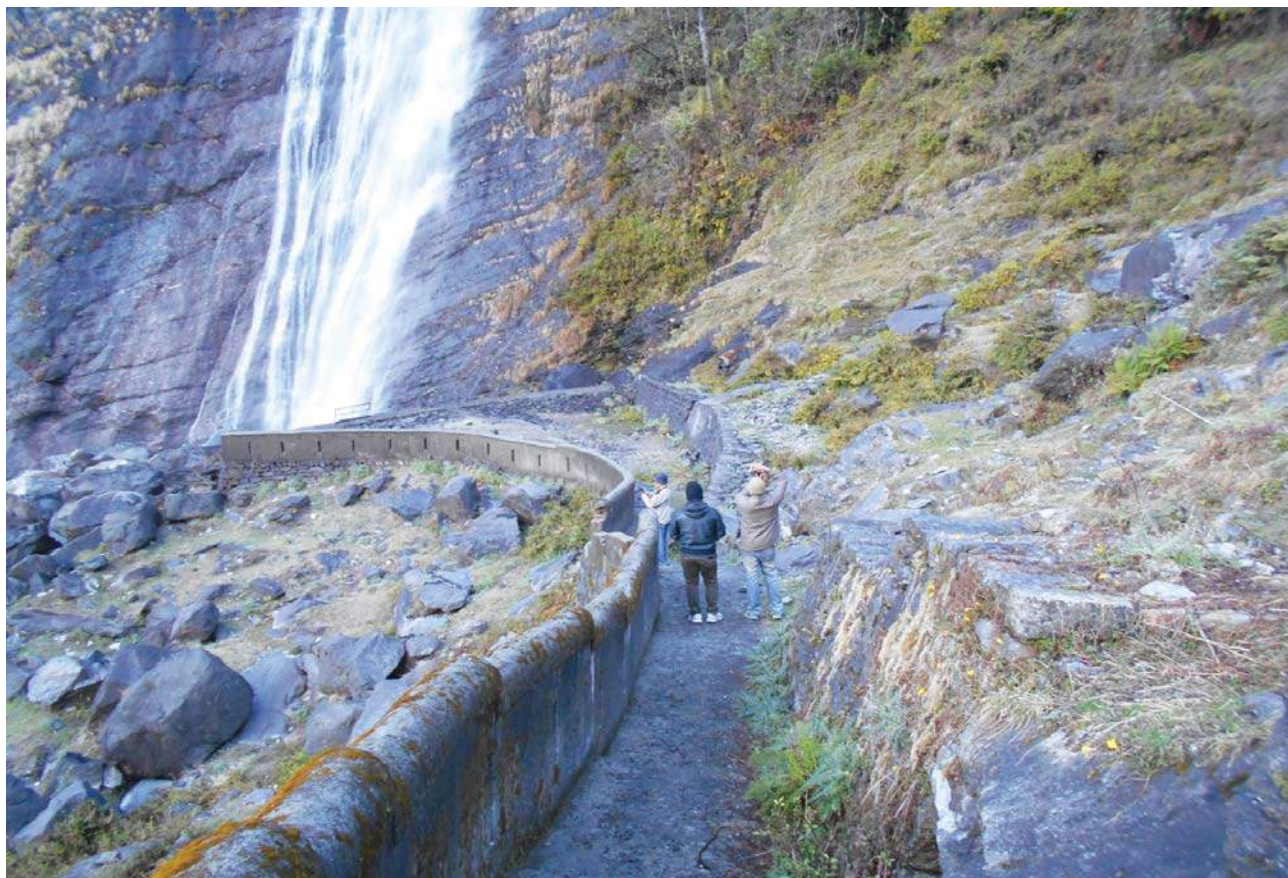
this route instead of the marked trail.

As per locals, the Mesar Kund was a huge water body which got degraded over the past few years. When we reached,



**The Nanda Devi Temple, against the background of the Panchachuli peaks**





**The Birthi Falls**

we saw two parts of the lake. One is known as the old Mesar Kund which had drastically reduced in size due to silting and eutrophication. The other one is the new *kund* revived by the locals in the last ten years. This part also has a shelter for tourists to sit and enjoy the location. But, due to the constant deforestation and soil erosion in the higher areas, the water in the lake is reducing. If no action is taken soon, the beauty of the place will only remain as a picture in our travel albums.

The local Van Panchayats of the two villages make sure that the area is cleaned regularly. There are cleanliness drives in which tourists also participate. It is because of the constant efforts of the community that the *kund* could be revived. In the olden days, it was supposed to have been covering the whole area but now it is diminishing at a rapid rate.

### **The Nanda Devi Temple**

Nanda Devi is one of the most worshipped and holy goddesses of the state; a temple dedicated to the goddess is located at Munsiyari. The temple faces east towards the Panchachuli peak, and is situated far from the market area.

There are two routes to reach the temple, one is via the road and then a short climb to the top. The other is a forest route which starts near the post office and ends at the temple

gateway. This is an interesting walk as the forest is dense, and sometimes you can meet shepherds camping in tents. They have many stories and experiences to share.

The temple site is looked after by a caretaker, and is one of the cleanest temples around. The place offers peace and serenity like no other location. The temple building is white coloured with paintings of Lord Ganesha. The idol of the deity is inside the sanctum sanctorum, and it is said that Nanda Devi is in her divinest forms here. The highest footfall is during the festivals of Navratri and Diwali, where even pilgrims from the local villages come to worship the goddess.

Throughout the temple premises, there are small enclosed structures where one can rest and enjoy the view of the Panchachuli range. There is also an elevated structure where one has to climb approximately 50 m high. The whole Panchachuli range is clearly visible from this spot, especially during early summers and after snowfall.

### **The Birthi Falls**

About 35 km from Munsiyari, at the Thal-Munsiyari route, lies the Birthi Falls. It is a 400 feet above sea level falls which can be clearly seen from the road as well. Along with the road access, these falls can be approached via a day long trek route





**The Thamri Kund, a perennial water body**

from Munsiyari, which is 17 km away, and can be covered in an hour. The falls are accessible during the months of October-June, when the water quantity is relatively less, and one can actually take a dip in the water. During monsoon, it is said that the falls cover most of the area, and it is dangerous to enter the waters because of its ferocious flow. The falls also offer a good view of the Himalayas, and can be developed as a major tourist attraction.

When we visited the falls, we could climb the rocks and go till the waters. The falls are spell binding, and a must-visit to anyone who loves waterfalls and water bodies. Also, once back from the waterfalls, a cup of tea and a hot plate of 'maggi' is a must at the entrance stall. The owner is a cheerful person, who loves talking about Munsiyari and the places around.

### **The Thamri Kund**

Just like the Mesar Kund, Munsiyari has one other perennial water body, which is much more protected and away from the tourist radar. The Thamri Kund is located at Betuli Dhar Ridge, which is one of the most ravishing water bodies in Munsiyari. The *kund* is located in the deep alpine forests and it takes six to seven hours for one to go and come back from the lake. It is located in a relatively dense forest, and one can sometimes spot animals like deers and bears at the lake side. If you want to see this lake, you must start your trek early in the morning to make it back before it's dark. A dedicated route is marked by the forest department; hence, no guides are needed. But, if you want to know more about the local stories and tales from

the past, hiring a guide would do no harm.

### **The Khaliya Top**

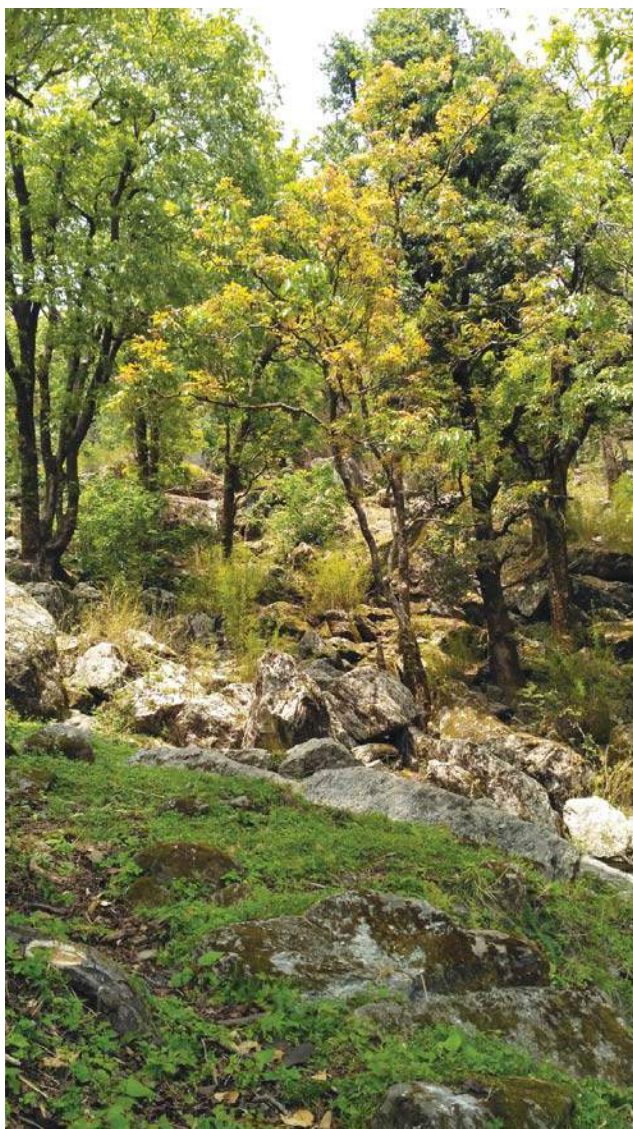
A six kilometer trek from Balanti Farms of Munsiyari, the Khaliya Top is known for its beautiful alpine meadows. It offers hikers a view of the snow-clad mountains during early summers, where one can take pleasure in watching the panoramic view of the Panchachuli, Rajrambha, Nanda Kot and Hardeol peaks.

The trek is through forests and one must hire a guide to complete it on time and return before the night falls. There is no place to stay at the top except if you are carrying equipment to camp through the night. If you do so, staying at Khaliya overnight will be the best experience for you. But, camping is possible only during winters and summers, as monsoon witnesses heavy showers in the area.

The trek through the forest is moderately difficult, and it gets tougher as one crosses 3,000 metres. There are chances of getting altitude sickness; one must be very careful while doing this trek if you are not used to change in temperatures and higher altitudes.

The forest route is beautiful as there are many varieties of trees and birds to spot. If lucky, one can also spot deer, forest cats and *baral* (mountain goat), *kakar* and *monal* in the forest on their route to Khaliya. The route is filled with the smell of pines, oaks and cypress which is completely mesmerising. If you choose to do this trek during spring, you will see the blooming of white, pink and red coloured rhododendrons (the state flower of Uttarakhand). This is an ideal trek for beginners





**The rocky trail on the trek to Khaliya Top**

in the Himalayan landscape. Though due to rainfall, we could not complete our trek, we intend to do it on our next visit to the hill station.

### **The village of Sarmoli and its inspiring story**

About three kilometre from the market area lies the village of Sarmoli, which is known for its community activities and homestays. The women of the village have come together as a group and started various activities like collection, packaging and sale of local food items, herbs and medicinal plants; artists sell woollen products, community events like bird watching and marathons are organised. Every year, during the summer season, events like Khaliya Top Marathon, a butterfly and bird watching festival, an art and food festival and a Mesar Forest Fair are held. We attended the festival this year, and found that it was a good community effort. One of their activities is



**The approximately 200-year-old oak tree in the forest of Munsiyari**

involving locals in the tourism industry. There are homestays set up by women in their houses. We stayed in one of those homestays, a furnished room with a clean washroom. It was a very decent arrangement, and families can very well opt for it instead of the regular hotels and resorts. The food provided by the family was also cooked in their kitchen, and had a local feel to it. The best part of the homestay was the packed lunch that we could take along anywhere our itinerary took us for the day. Most of these women also work as guides to the tourist places, in case you are looking for one.

If you are interested in knowing more about the women and their community activities, do visit their office cum work space at Sarmoli village. There is a lot to learn from these women and their work is nothing less than an inspiration. One can also shop for Yak and Angora wool products hand knit by local artists, local grains and spices, and other locally available





**Women of Sarmoli, who run their own business of woollen merchandise and local products**

products from these women. It is a social enterprise encouraging women entrepreneurs.

This savvy community maintains a page on Instagram, called Voices of Munsiyari. This is by far the only Instagram page I know which is handled by the full community. A few 'handlers' from the community upload pictures of their daily lives and the happenings in Munsiyari. The page is a must follow for any social media enthusiast.

### **Madkot and Darkot villages**

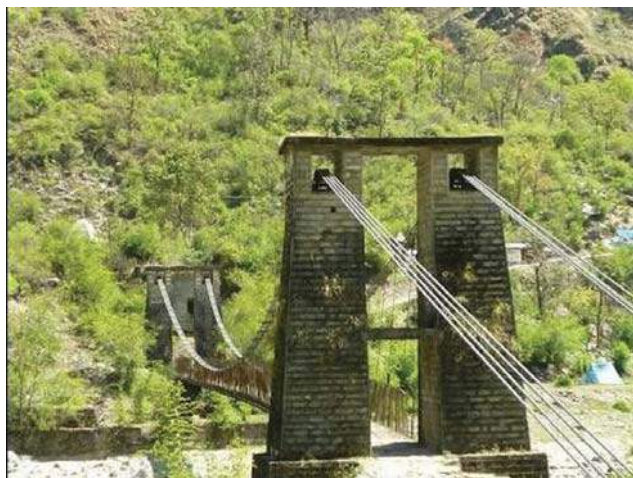
About 22 km from the market area of Munsiyari is a small hamlet called Madkot. Apart from the splendid view and the green lush farms, the village is known for its hot water

springs. The hot water spring is located at the banks of Gori Ganaga River and falls on the route towards Dharachuli. The hot water or thermal springs have high sulphur content which can heal or cure skin ailments and eruptions, and thus there is always a tourist rush to the village. The water is known to cure ailments that can inflame or cause pain to joints, muscles or tissues like arthritis. Unfortunately, we could not visit the place due to rain, but we were told that the hot springs are not well maintained. There is litter all around the springs which hampers the experience of bathing in one.

To reach the village, one can take one of the jeeps or buses that are available at regular time periods. One can also walk to the village, but the forest route is not marked, and the roads are not good. Darkot is another village which is on the Madkot-Munsiyari route, and is six kilometres from Munsiyari. It is a small village with heritage structures, and one can witness the Kumaoni couture here. It is a good destination for those who want to go on a small trek and experience the lush green beauty of the villages. The speciality of the village is hand-knit Pashmina shawls and merchandise.

### **The elevated Betulidhar**

Another place which is a must visit especially during the spring season, is Betulidhar, which is at an elevation and offers a good view of the peaks. During spring the place is full of rhododendrons and is a beautiful sight to see. The rhododendrons are red in colour, but as one goes up to higher



**The scenic route to Madkot village**



**A view of Panchachuli peaks after a shower**

altitudes, the colour starts fading to a light pink and white. The flowers are used to make medicinal juices useful for ailments like diabetes. You can even ask a local to source this juice.

### More things to do in Munsiyari

While the places listed above are part of the activities to do in Munsiyari, one can do additional activities like trekking, river rafting in Gori Ganga and bird watching. The hill-station is known for trek routes including the ones mentioned above. Any trail you go, you will end up either in a *kund* or a *bugyal* (meadow). There is a good market for shopping of Pashmina, yak wool and ordinary sheep wool products made by local villagers. The place is also known for organic and good quality potatoes which are famous all across the state. The potatoes are available once the monsoon begins.

### Best season to visit

Any time of the year is good to visit Munsiyari, as every season has its own uniqueness. But to trek to the glaciers, summer is a good option. You can also go on winter treks during snow fall, especially to the Khaliya Top and Thamri Kund. The place witnesses two to three feet of snowfall each year. ■



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

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# Through this prism

India is the birthplace of many religions, like Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism, among others. Religion provides social cohesion to help maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs. But the definition of religion has changed over the years, and today's youth form their own beliefs based on principles of these religions which align to their own sets of values.

**Vyankatesh Kharage** gives us a kaleidoscope of images which coalesce to form his version of religious India.



## **Holi in Vrindavan**

Holi in Vrindavan is a grand affair, and the Banke Bihari Temple is its epicenter. I came across these colourful drenched friends near the temple. Holi signifies the victory of good over evil, the arrival of spring, end of winter, and for many, a festive day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive, and repair broken relationships.

## **A Sewadar of the Golden Temple**

Holy Guards known as Sewadars are present at all Sikh Gurudwaras, and I came across this Sewadar at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. We spoke for a few minutes where he told me about Sikhism and the role of the Sewadars. They keep a vigil over the devotees following the guidelines for the Holy Dip in the Amrit Sarovar (holy lake). They are entitled, legally, to carry these conventional weapons, to represent as soldiers of their Gurus (10 religious masters of Sikhs)







## The Golden Temple

Sri Harmandir Sahib, also known as Sri Darbar Sahib or Golden Temple, is named after Hari (God). Before offering prayers inside the temple, the devotees have to take a dip in the sanctified pond inside the premises. It is believed that taking this dip not only keeps all kinds of diseases at bay, it even washes away one's sins.

## The Peace Pagoda

The Peace Pagoda is a monument to inspire peace, designed to provide a focus for people of all races and creeds, and to help unite them in their search for world peace. Nichidatsu Fujii, a Buddhist monk from Japan and founder of the Nipponzan-Myôhōji Buddhist Order, was greatly inspired by his meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, and decided to devote his life to promoting non-violence. Over 80 Peace Pagodas were built across the world, and were built as a symbol of peace in Japanese cities, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This photo was taken at the Peace Pagoda in Darjeeling, where the monks were performing their evening rituals.





## Radhe Radhe!

According to legends, young Krishna went up to his mother, Yashoda, and cribbed about Radha being fair while he was dark complexioned. Yashoda advised him apply to colour on Radha. So, Lord Krishna and his friends went to Radha's village, Barsana, to apply colour on Radha and the other Gopis. The Gopis used to beat them with sticks in a playful manner. The tradition continued over the years and is still celebrated as the 'Lathmar Holi' in Barsana and Nandgaon. Men from Nandgaon go to Barsana to tease the women. They in turn beat the men with sticks. These men protect themselves with shields. "Radhe Radhe!" you'll get used to greeting and being greeted when you are around Mathura-Vrindavan. I came across this ecstatic gentlemen dancing around the Nandgram temple. As soon as he saw me, he stopped, posed for a photograph, and then continued dancing again. Radhe Radhe!

## The Buddhist monks

When a person wishes to join the Buddhist Order, he is first ordained as a novice. As a symbolic act of his renunciation of the worldly life, he is asked to shave off his hair and put on a robe appropriate to the monastic tradition, which he has entered. At the end of this period, the novice may receive the higher ordination as a monk (*bhikkhu*) or a nun (*bhikkuni*). This photo was taken at the Bhutia Busty Monastery in West Bengal. It belongs to the Red Sect of the Buddhist Lamas. The young monks' own unique personalities can be reflected in this shot.



Vyankatesh Kharage is a finance professional in Mumbai, who is fond of exploring and experiencing cultures across the globe. He is engaged in bringing change in the education system in India. Catch his travels and experiences on Instagram: @travelsylum.



*“Our bestselling titles are definitely classics like Jane Austen, George Orwell, etc. I like to read a lot too, and my favourite genre is crime novels. I like Raymond Chandler and Rex Stout.”*



**Mayi Gowda**, 42, runs the largest second hand book store of the country in Bangalore. Even more important, it is perhaps also the most loved bookstore with its legion of fans and regulars who come browsing into this friendly and pleasant paradise for book lovers. Starting out from a pavement,

today he owns two brick-and-mortar stores, which seem a contradiction in today's world of e-books and online retailing. **E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan** spoke to Mayi Gowda to understand what he's doing differently.

**Tell us about your early days.**

I am from a village near Mysore and from an agricultural family. I did my schooling in the village, but came to Mysore to do a Diploma in Engineering from a polytechnic. I came to Bangalore in 1995 to pursue further studies in Engineering. I finished it and joined a private company, but worked there less than a month. While pursuing Engineering, I was also selling second hand books on the pavement, to earn some money and help my family. When I decided to leave my job, I took up book selling as a full time job. I opened my first book store on Church Street in 2002.

**Tell us about your first book store.**

It was a 200 sq. ft. space in a building in Church Street, and I started out with 1,500 books. When customers came to the shop, I would have to step out due to the paucity of space! From here, in 2004, I moved to a larger space, a 400 sq. ft. space in the same building. And about six months later, we moved to the much larger, 2,500 sq. ft. location on Church

Street itself. The book store is called Blossom Book House. We started out with second hand books only, but now we keep new books too.

**What's the unique aspect about your book store?**

We keep a wide variety of classics and second hand books, which are much in demand. We give good discounts on new

**Golden Blossom!**

On the wall of the Blossom Book Store hangs a framed letter by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, handwritten to an unknown person thanking them for a gift. The letter is dated 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1931, the year that Tagore turned 70. Mayi Gowda found this letter inside a book he had purchased from a South Mumbai book store. The book was the limited edition 'Golden Book' which was released on Tagore's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday with tributes to him from renowned persons from around the world. This letter is a small part of history, a possession of which Mayi Gowda is very proud.







**Mayi Gowda and Author Amish Tripathi, promoting the latter's book *Sita***

books, more than other book stores, since we keep only a 20 percent margin, while most others keep a 40 percent margin. Hence, we get repeat customers.

#### **Have you observed changes in the reading habits?**

Yes! Earlier, customers used to read and re-read their books. But today I find, they read and then literally put it away. They are onto newer books. Not many seem to re-visit their books. Otherwise, I find that people are back to buying books. I know there are e-books and e-readers. But my customers say they like to hold a physical book in their hands and hence their repeat visits. I am told that e-books form less than six percent of the total book sales of the retail giants. That says it all.

#### **In this age when lots of book stores around the world have shut down, you have opened a larger outlet. How were you able to do it?**

About a year ago, we opened our 8,000 sq. ft. store on Church Street itself. We were not able to handle the weekend crowds in our earlier place, hence we shifted. So for us, it has worked to the contrary. We find that we have many, many regulars and people like to spend a lot of time browsing. They invariably buy books too since we have such a wide collection, to which we keep adding. Our prices are also very competitive. Today, we have four lakh books in our collection, a quarter of which is new books. The rest are second hand books. We get celebrities too...people like Ramachandra Guha and Girish Karnad visit my store often. Since we are a second hand book store, we buy back books from our customers too, whether they had originally bought it from our stores or not.



**The new store**

#### **How big is your business today?**

My business generates a turnover of ₹60 lakh per month from both stores. We have 22 staff members altogether. So from the initial 1,500 books and two staff members, we have grown to this.

#### **Which are your bestselling titles? What do you yourself like to read?**

Our bestselling titles are definitely classics like Jane Austen, George Orwell, etc. I like to read a lot too, and my favourite genre is crime novels. I like Raymond Chandler and Rex Stout. My 11-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son love to read too. They visit the store often and pick up books.

#### **What was your family's reaction when you started out on this journey?**

They were upset when I left Engineering to do this. They didn't understand books. They didn't visit me the first few years. But now they are with me and they have understood what I do. They are very happy with my profession now.

#### **Do you plan to go online at some point?**

Going online is very difficult, as we need dedicated and trained staff. But if our customers email us and request us for books from any part of the country, we will courier it to them. We will only charge them the courier charges. They can email us at: mayigowda@yahoo.com ■



**E. Vijayalakshmi Rajan is Assistant Editor, One India One People.**



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# The titular President

*The recently concluded Presidential elections in India once again threw up the caste card as a factor in the election of our 14<sup>th</sup> President. Prof. P.M. Kamath analyses the process.*

THE 14<sup>th</sup> President of India was elected by the Members of Parliament (MPs) and elected members of the state legislatures on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2017. The Election Commission of India (ECI) that is charged by the Constitution to organise elections declared on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2017, that Ram Nath Kovind, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate was President-elect. He defeated United Opposition of India Parties (UOIP) candidate, Meira Kumar. It was well-known that NDA had numerical strength to get him elected. He secured 65.65 percent votes, while Meira Kumar gained 34.35 per cent. Hence, the ECI announcement was only a legal and public confirmation of a foregone conclusion.

The new President was sworn in by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court on 25<sup>th</sup> July. Since we Indians, are blessed with a Republic, literally any one can aspire to be the President. Under the Constitution of India, a few qualifications are needed to be the President. From the point of view of this piece, first, he (wherever he is used, invariably it also means she), is to be a citizen of India. Unlike the American Constitution, it doesn't prescribe him to be a 'natural born' citizen. In an immigrant society, Americans were suspicious of a new immigrant trying to become president. Second, he ought to be 35 years of age, and third, he needs to possess qualifications prescribed to be elected as a member of the Lok Sabha.

## Selective qualifications

There is thus, obviously, no



Ram Nath Kovind, the 14<sup>th</sup> President of India (left), with PM Narendra Modi

academic qualifications prescribed; as an example, the late Gyani Zail Singh, though a non-matriculate, became the President of India. According to Indira Gandhi's Private Secretary, P.C. Alexander, Indira Gandhi chose him for his loyalty to her; he had publicly said that if she asks him to sweep the floor, he would ungrudgingly do it. Additionally, as she was then facing a political crisis in Punjab, making a Sikh President, she thought, would help her to overcome that community's anger against her caused by Operation Blue Star to flush out terrorists holed up in Amritsar's Golden Temple.

On the other hand, there have been scholarly persons like Dr. Rajendra Prasad, S. Radhakrishnan, or Zakir Hussein, R. Venkataraman and a few others. In recent times, the late Dr.A.P.J. Kalam was not only a humane, highly qualified and a scholarly man, he turned out to be a popular, and literally, the

peoples' president.

Now that Kovind is elected president, what considerations might have gone into his selection as a presidential candidate? What has dominated the decision making is, 'How does his selection further promote political agenda of the party in power?' The ruling BJP during its first journey into power in the 1990s rode into power on the Hindutva horse! But now it's *Sabka saath, sabka vikas*. This has appealed to a large number of people in the country. Vikas does not occur overnight. Yet, at least PM's three programmes – *Jana Dhan Yojana*, *Swachh Bharat*, and *Ujjwala* among others have caught the imagination of not only beneficiaries, but even political observers who have appreciated it. Hence, even though Muslims in the country, especially in the last Uttar Pradesh elections have voted for the BJP, it is the constituency of Dalits and the Most Backward

Communities (MBCs) that the BJP would like to make a part of its broad national base.

However, it is not the first time a Dalit has been chosen to be the President. Congress had chosen a diplomat close to Nehru-Gandhi family, as Vice-President in 1992. In 1997, the then ruling United Front (UF) government headed by the Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda, though consisted of 13 political parties did not enjoy enough strength in the Lok Sabha; hence, had to depend on external support from the Congress and the Communist Party of India (Marxists) to survive in power. Real tragedy then was no one, not even Marxist leader Jyoti Basu could exactly know, according to his confession, how many parties and factions supported the government!

Yet, each faction and party was pushing for its own candidate based on caste, religion and region etc. Deve Gowda wanted then Karnataka Governor, Khurshid Alam Khan. Under those circumstances, finally they agreed to convert then Vice President's candidature of K.R. Narayanan for the President's post. I am sure a majority of conscious citizens would have thought him as a diplomat and an educator. But the moment he was nominated to the Presidential post, it was advertised that he was a Dalit! A national figure was reduced to the stature of a sectional candidate!

Hence, today when the Congress party criticises the BJP for using the Dalit factor, it is a case of the kettle calling the pot black! Isn't it a fact that the Congress party chose Meira Kumar to demonstrate not only that its own candidate is a Dalit, but was also a better qualified Dalit with higher political lineage, as a plus point? The situation was salvaged by Meira Kumar herself by repeatedly stating that it was not a contest between Dalits but an ideological contest!

Regional considerations have been always important; hence having selected a northerner in Kovind, PM Modi being from west, has chosen Venkaiyyah Naidu for instance, a southerner as the next Vice-Presidential candidate. These considerations are not unique to India, but can be seen in all democracies. In the US, a northern candidate, for instance, John F. Kennedy, chose Lyndon Johnson, a southerner as a vice presidential choice, or last year, Donald Trump, a northerner, chose a midwesterner, Mike Pence, as a vice-presidential running mate.

There was also a mention that, this is the first time a RSS man and a BJP member has become the President. Undoubtedly, Kovind has been silent but has hard core supporters of both these organisations. That is evident from the fact that he has gifted his ancestral home to the RSS. He has been a staunch supporter of the BJP, having joined it in 1991, soon after he contested on the BJP ticket in Ghatampur assembly in the UP, but lost it. Again in 2007, he tried his luck in UP's Bognipur. He didn't resign to join another party if he had lust for power.

Hence, his loyalty to the party and work as the convener of the BJP Dalit Morcha, won him a seat in the Rajya Sabha, where he spent two terms between 1994 and 2006. He also had been a sitting Governor of Bihar for three years just before filing his nomination. This background testifies his sufficient exposure to politics and administration! The PM had also known him for the last 20 years; that is expected to help to maintain cordiality between the PMO and Rashtrapati Bhavan.

### Conclusion

The election of Kovind is a great event in Indian contemporary history, seen from any perspective. Seen from the perspective of the BJP, election of a party loyalist as Indian President for

the first time is a major milestone for it in its development chart. Personally, for PM Modi getting him elected might help him to maintain cordial relations with him. But to expect that could always remain like that in future is an extremely difficult proposition. For instance, in a reverse case, Zail Singh gave PM's post to Rajiv Gandhi, as his loyalty bonus to Indira Gandhi; but later their relations got into troubled waters because of mutual suspicions. Zail Singh refused to sign the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill in 1986, which the President thought could lead to censoring personal mail. Zail Singh had even toyed with the idea of dismissing the Rajiv government! It is not uncommon for friends to become foes and foes to become friends in politics.

Personally for Kovind, from a mud-house to the Rashtrapati Bhavan is the equivalent of Abraham Lincoln's story of 'Log House to White House'. Villagers from Kovind's birth place have already expressed their hopes for *vikas* (development) of their village! That may happen, but will *dalit*-s be liberated all over India? For that he may have to make *dalit*-s wait till the nation moves to embrace a Presidential system – in other words, he moves from a Titular Presidency to an Executive Presidency! Somewhat similar to Lincoln liberating the African-Americans from slavery, though he himself was neither an African-American nor a slave! Ironically, there lies a lesson: *Dalit* liberation doesn't need a *dalit* in power! ■

Dr. Kamath is former Professor of Politics, Mumbai University and currently, Chairman and Hon. Director, VPM's Centre for International Studies (Regd.), affiliated to Mumbai University.





# The plastic cow

*In the holy cow-charged rhetoric of today, wouldn't it be better if the cow was taken better care of, not just put on a pedestal and worshipped? Cows and other cattle are dying painfully of plastics consumed from garbage piles, while we waste precious time and resources chasing the beef eater. **Shoma A. Chatterji** reviews a documentary made on this subject.*

**I**N a politically volatile environment where the cow has come to occupy centre stage for extremely debatable and polarised reasons, it is sad to discover that there are areas that hurt the cow, but are either ignored, or marginalised or entirely unknown to the man on the street. *The Plastic Cow* (2012), a documentary film directed by Kunal Vohra and commissioned by the Andhra Pradesh-based Karuna Society for Animals and Nature, sheds light on the problem of how plastic bags are endangering the lives and health of innumerable cows in our country.

The Karuna Society has been receiving help from Winsome Constance Kindness Trust, Australia. The documentary is a small part of a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court, which is seeking a ban on plastic bags as an animal rights issue. Admitting the plea in May 2012, the Supreme Court likened plastic bags to an atom bomb, a statement reported around the world. Karuna Society is one of the main petitioners. The other petitioners are – Clementien Pauws who is the President of Karuna Society, Phillip Wollen, President of Kindness Foundation, and Pradip Nath, the President of Vishakhapatnam-based animal rights organisation VSCPA.

## The plastic danger

"Plastic bags are an environmental threat," explains Vohra, adding, "They end up in the stomachs of thousands of cows loitering on the streets. These are



**The documentary *The Plastic Cow*, sheds light on the hypocrisy of the cow protection brigade**

cows that have been discarded because they have stopped milking. Dairy owners look for food in open garbage dumps. Cows have a very complex digestive system. These bags, which they consume whole from the rotting scraps of food, get trapped inside their stomachs and lead to a slow and painful death for these cows. My film is also a comment on the religious hypocrisy around the cult of the holy cow."

The cow till this day is regarded to be a symbol of wealth and prosperity and this has been current since Vedic times. She is considered to be a benign and maternal figure, the *gau mata*. She was very dear to Krishna, a cowherd and among the most popular and loved of all Indian gods. Any temple dedicated to Lord Shiva is incomplete without Nandi, his mount, and the universal bull; be it popular mythology, the scriptures or religion itself, the cow has always been accorded an exalted status in India.

The film looks at the impact of our dependence on plastic bags, which we use and discard carelessly every day. Not only are these bags a huge environmental threat, they end up in the stomachs of the thousands of cows we see on the streets across India. Discarded because they're not milking at the time, or because dairy owners are unwilling to look after them, these cows have to forage for food, which, like other scavengers, they find in open garbage dumps. Owing to the cows' complex digestive systems, these bags, which they consume whole including the rotting scraps of food they contain, get trapped inside their stomachs and cause them to die slow and painful deaths. The film makes each one of us who dump our daily waste in cheap plastic bags, guilty of killing the cow. It makes the milk drinker as complicit as the beef eater in this mass killing. One staggering find is that around 50 kilos

of plastic is routinely found inside cows during surgeries. The fat cows we see roaming the streets are not fat because they are well-fed, but because they are bloated with all the plastic waste they ingest at garbage dumps!

### A social issue

The film focusses on the views and opinions of many social workers, rights activists and animal rights functionaries. Among them is Delhi-based animal rights activist Rukmini Sekhar who is actively involved with the Plastic Cow Project under which the film was produced in 2012. She says, "Recent comments of politicians and others in TV debates and newspaper reports on the need to protect the cow in India makes me laugh at their hypocrisy. It is the poor animal that has become a pawn in these discussions. The biggest loser on the issue is the animal; but nobody seems to really care."

Jayanthi Iyengar who brought the Plastic Cow Project to Noida in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2012 with the aim of spreading awareness among people against the rampant use of garbage bags to save the cows says, "I have tried reaching out personally to everyone from the then-CM of UP to the Noida District Magistrate to schools, but have hardly achieved results I can talk about. A local NGO was concerned and performed over 100 street plays on this project across Noida, but could hardly make a dent into public concern about cows and the danger to their lives through consumption of plastic bags."

The film goes on to stress that this was not the situation till some time ago, and perhaps better for cows, when a large part of the population sourced its milk from local dairies. However, with the launch of Operation Flood in 1970, small dairy owners, especially in cities, found themselves under pressure and in an unequal competition with mechanised behemoths churning out



**This image of cattle foraging among garbage is common across India**

thousands of litres of milk to supply across the country. Thanks to rapid development and urbanisation the physical space available to run dairies began to shrink alarmingly. As dairy owners struggled to maintain a steady output of milk production to retain their customers while hygiene, quality and animal rights were slowly given the short shrift. Besides denying calves their share of the milk and pumping cattle with oxytocin and other hormonal injections to induce greater supply of milk, many dairy owners are now forced to operate from cramped cubbyholes, let the cattle out on city streets to fend for themselves.

**The Karuna Society looks after approximately 500 animals they own, and also offer free medical care and shelter for the sick, injured and abused animals. With support from the Kindness Trust, Australia, they also run a wildlife centre.**

Sociologist Dr. Amita Bawiskar says, "The presence of the cows on the streets, inspite of many attempts to remove them and to remove the dairies,

most of them illegal, has failed because dairies are also an integral part of the urban economy. Municipal officials, electricity officials, etc., actually allow the dairies to survive by taking bribes from them. So, as long as there is this illegal nexus between people, and as long as people want to drink milk straight from a cow or a buffalo, instead of buying it from polythene packs, I think cows will continue to roam the streets and live off the plastic bags."

The Karuna Society looks after approximately 500 animals they own, and also offer free medical care and shelter for the sick, injured and abused animals. With support from the Kindness Trust, Australia, they also run a wildlife centre. When a cow from the first lot of animals that Karuna Society received from the Anantapur municipality in 2010 died, Clementien and her colleagues realised just how real the danger from plastic is. ■

**Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National**



**Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for 'commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues' among many awards.**



# Organically yours, Sikkim

*The tiny East Himalayan Indian state of Sikkim holds lessons in environment, which the rest of the country must emulate, pronto! Usha Hariprasad narrates the very impressive story of the 'fully-organic' Sikkim.*

**A**S we passed by Chungthang in North Sikkim, we were politely asked to dispose of all plastic bottles at the check-post. The area ahead was free of bottled water—especially Lachen, a remote village at 8,838 feet. The driver, Nishanth from Lachenpa community, informed us rather proudly that his village was one of the first to ban the mineral bottles high up in the mountains.

He added further that Sikkim was fully organic – the only state in our country to have been conferred this title. What's more, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling was also given the sustainable development leadership award by the President last year. I was suitably impressed. The tiny state of Sikkim in the Eastern Himalayas is giving lessons to the world on sustainability.

Just 7,096 square km with roughly six lakh population, and Sikkim has managed to convert around 75,000 hectares of farm land into organic farms. A slew of measures taken for more than a decade has made the state environmentally sustainable.

This green revolution began in Sikkim as early as 1995. While the year was declared as 'Harit Kranti year', the period from 2000-2010 was declared as 'Harit Kranti decade' with the intention of increasing the green cover in the state through people's participation. A lot of initiatives and efforts have gone in to achieve the mission of Green Sikkim. Here are a couple of them.

## Banning plastics

The non-recyclable plastics end up



**This landscape in Sikkim looks more sylvan when you realise it's fully organic**

in huge numbers in landfills. So that was one of the first things to be banned in the state. Plastic bags and non-biodegradable materials like polythene had been banned way back in 1997. The year 2016 saw the banning of Styrofoam cups, plates, spoons etc., as it was contributing majorly to the landfills – the disposable items were being used in bazaars and in the villages.

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Styrofoam cannot be disposed off easily. The burning of Styrofoam releases chemicals like Styrene – a possible carcinogen, carbon monoxide etc., polluting the environment and leading to respiratory problems. So it is best to minimise its usage. The state also managed to ban mineral water bottles from state functions, and instead encourages people to use filtered water in reusable bottles.

## Burning of waste banned

While 2014 banned the burning of fire crackers in the state, the following year saw the ban on burning of agricultural waste as well. Agricultural burning is a practice traditionally followed by the farmers. It is a cost effective method – the farm land gets cleared faster after a harvest, the excess waste/vegetation is gotten rid of and often it reduces the incidence of pests in the fields.

Unfortunately, the burning releases carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and a host of pollutants into the air. This can cause respiratory disorders like wheezing, coughing etc., in the long run. Plus, burning vegetation means there is loss of valuable organic matter addition to the soil. Thus 2016 saw the state banning the burning of agro-waste, leaves, paper waste and litter.

### Mission of going organic

The goal of going organic was taken more than a decade back in the state. Chemical fertilisers and pesticides were banned in the state as early as 2002. So farmers had to rely on traditional methods instead – composting, manure etc. With the result that today Sikkim produces 80,000 million of the total 1.24 million tonnes organic yield in the country.

### People participation

A lot of programmes have been aimed at making people aware of the importance of greening Sikkim and ensuring their participation. Smriti Van (Memorial forest) is one such beautiful concept. People are encouraged to plant saplings on important events in their life – birthdays, anniversaries, etc. There is a memorial forest at every Panchayat unit. So far, the state boasts around 40 Smriti Van-s.

Another programme called '10 Minutes to Earth' sees people planting saplings on June 25<sup>th</sup> every year. The time of planting is pre-announced. Free saplings get distributed in forest check-posts for this activity.

In 2006, the 'State Green Mission' was launched. The programme was launched to increase green cover in the state by utilising vacant and waste land, along road side and water bodies with the involvement of the public. And the help of NGO, Eco Clubs, and state departments. Saplings of fruit bearing trees, conifers, herbs etc., get planted.

In 2013 it completed its eighth year, and from then on it is being celebrated as 'Paryavaran Mahotsav' every year for a fortnight.

### Schools for environmental awareness

Environmental education is a part of the State's school curriculum. In 2011, to encourage environmental conservation, Chief Minister's Green School Rolling Trophy and Green School award were rolled out. Furthermore, Eco Clubs in schools conduct seminars, workshops, tree plantation drives, cleanliness campaigns regularly to sensitise children on environmental issues.

**The goal of going organic was taken more than a decade back in the state. Chemical fertilisers and pesticides were banned in the state as early as 2002. So farmers had to rely on traditional methods instead – composting, manure etc.**

### Afforestation initiatives

Numerous initiatives have been done on this front.

- Most often trees are rampantly cut for fuel, making way for housing projects, to harvest timber etc. One of the first initiatives taken during 1995 was to stop cutting of trees from reserved forests and exporting of timber outside the State.
- Another factor in decrease of forest cover was cattle grazing. In 1998 the government banned grazing in forests, plantations, near water sources leading to increase in forest cover.
- Plants of economic and medicinal benefit are often collected from

forests. This has often led to lopping or felling of trees leading to reduction in the plant species. In the year 2000, this practice of collection of trees such as Mosses, Cryptomeria japonica etc., was banned.

- Also, rules were formed to monitor quarrying. Twenty-one trees in the State have been tagged as 'Heritage Trees'. Some of these include Rani Champ, Toona ciliate, Buk, Phalat etc., that cannot be damaged. The help of locals were taken to trace old heritage trees.

### Increase in wildlife areas

Sikkim is one of the states that has the maximum area under wildlife protection area. It has one national park, seven wild life sanctuaries, a conservation reserve – all protected areas. Eleven bird areas have been declared in the state. Due to all these efforts, the state has got the 'Greenest State' tag with over 47.3% under forest land.

The areas in most of these zones have been declared eco sensitive to conserve and protect wild life. In 2001, Mount Khangchendzonga was banned for mountain expeditions. Also, stringent rules have been formed for trekking bodies. Camping and trekking outside the designated trails is disallowed and is an offence.

This tiny state in the Eastern Himalayas is giving us big lessons on sustainability. Over the years it has bagged many awards in environmental and development sectors. It is time the rest of the country looks up to the state's efforts and takes a leaf out of it. ■

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# Gandhians against GM

*While India is still dithering over adopting genetically modified or GM crops, over a hundred Gandhians have signed a petition against it. **Bharat Dogra** explains why.*

**R**ECENTLY, over a hundred Gandhians, most of them activists involved in several justice-based struggles, signed a petition against the commercial release of a genetically modified mustard variety DMH 11 {GM (genetically modified) mustard, in short}. In addition to this petition sent to the Prime Minister on 14<sup>th</sup> June, they made a strong statement against other GM crops as well, particularly GM food crops.

This petition came at a time when the controversy surrounding GM food crops is about to peak with the final decision on commercial release of GM Mustard still pending before the government. Mustard or *sarson* is a very important oilseed crop of India, and its leaves are also cooked as a much relished vegetable (*sarson ka saag*); additionally, mustard has several medicinal uses, including in home remedies.

As no GM food crop has yet been approved in India, this decision will have wide reaching impact. There has been a lot of international interest in this issue as well; a decision taken by India is likely to influence some other developing countries as well.

Earlier, this controversy had peaked during the tenure of the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government in 2009-10, when Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh had called for public hearings to be held on this issue all over the country. Finally, on 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2010, Jairam Ramesh announced the important decision of moratorium on Bt brinjal which was widely welcomed. This time around also there is a lot of public interest, but the transparency of the earlier process is missing.

## Right timing

The petition by the Gandhians against GM Mustard and other GM food crops has come at just the right time, when people have started asking a lot of questions about GM Mustard. This petition has been signed by senior Gandhians like S.N. Subba Rao of 'National Youth Project', and P.V. Rajagopal of 'Ekta Parishad'.

The petitioners say that there is sufficient evidence to show that GM crops are not safe for human health. "Apart from the bio-violence that forms the inherent basis of genetically modification technology", the petitioners note that transgenic varieties can contaminate all other crops as well, and if GM varieties keep spreading, after a point there will be no GM-free agriculture.

The claim of promoters of GM Mustard that this is necessary for increasing yields is rejected in this petition, which goes on to say, "Worldwide, experience shows that in the case of rapeseed which is of the same family as mustard, countries which grow non-GM rapeseed such as Germany, France, England and Czech Republic show yields much higher, almost double, compared to the ones which grow GM-rapeseed such as Canada and USA." Further, there are other non-seed based agronomic approaches to increasing mustard yield such as the system of Mustard Intensification. This has already given good results in several parts of India.

Regarding ecological and health risks of GM Mustard this petition says that this is likely to increase herbicide and agri-chemical use. This will have a very adverse impact on a very important

pollinator like honeybee, and on the production of honey.

The petitioners have demanded that in view of the adverse impacts of GM Mustard in particular, and GM food crops in general, the government should reject GM food crops to protect the interests of farmers, consumers, the interests of environment as well as the larger national interest. Alternatives of eco-friendly agriculture are available.

What this statement has said is in conformity on the one hand with the views expressed by several senior scientists or groups of scientists such as the Independent Science Panel and the Union of Concerned Scientists, as well as some eminent scientists of India such as the late Dr. Pushpa M. Bhargava, who passed away on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017. One of the signatories and founders of Ekta Parishad P.V. Rajagopal has said that the basic principles of Mahatma Gandhi are for decentralisation and increasing self-reliance of rural communities, while technologies such as GM crops are taking us in the opposite direction of making farmers excessively dependent on big corporates. Ran Singh, another signatory and one of the coordinators of Ekta Parishad said that Gandhi emphasised concern for the poorest and respect for all life forms, and technologies such as these which increase the expenses of poor farmers and have adverse impacts on bees and

other life forms should be

opposed. ■

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



# Sea-ize the solution

*India is going to face a severe shortage of potable water in the near future. We must think of various options including desalination as a solution, says Jagdish J. Doshi.*

OUR Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, while recently dedicating the water of Narmada Dam in an important link at Botad, Saurashtra, gave a clarion call emphasising that “Water is the most important resource for economic growth of the country”. Other recent headlines such as “India water stressed, can sustain only one more drought” and “The rain gods have failed Tamil Nadu, and farmers are the first casualties as crop losses push them to the brink of despair”, are indicative of the huge problems of the water woes being faced by the country, and which will continue to impact our future in spite of India having two important and most vital major resources – the long, maritime coastline, and abundant, free solar energy.

It is now critical that governments (both Central and States abutting the coast line), Municipal Corporations, Farmers Co-operatives, Industries, NABARD, and others take a serious view and develop a road map, both short-term and long-term, with some innovative approach for using the free solar energy to treat the large body of sea water available all along our coast line to augment substantially our scarce water resources, and that too at the lowest cost.

## Desalination plants, the only solution

The central and various state governments have encouraged, apart from building storage dams, the installation of check dams, water harvesting, micro and sprinkler irrigation for farms and taken other measures as part of their water conservation and management policy, but this has not



The Minjur Desalination Plant, Tamil Nadu: Is this the way forward?

helped to stop substantial depletion of ground water resources of the country on which a majority of the population of about 68 crore (56% or so) is dependent, since population receiving piped water is only about 48 crore (40% or so). Almost 50% of the 320 out of 640 districts in the country are affected by ground water contamination.

Further, it is expected according to the government statistics, that per capita availability of water will come down from the current 1545 cubic meter to 1,340 cubic meter by 2025, and 1,140 cubic meter by 2050, a very serious situation when 1,700 cubic meter per capita availability is the border line for stressed water condition.

These are ominous signs and it is very important that the country must plan on a war footing to solve the immense problem of scarcity of water which could impede the economic growth as well as the increased misery of population (also farmers) as currently evident in southern districts of Tamil Nadu, where the situation is absolutely dismal. Fortunately, India with its long coastline is very well placed to tackle

the situation on water woes with the below options:

- **German concentrated solar technology:** It has a wide range of applications – a huge value chain – with its capability to generate both GREEN PV power and thermal heat and has an energy efficiency of 75% to absorb direct natural irradiation or DNI, the highest so far achieved. It has also the flexibility of being set up anywhere on land, water canals, sea and even on a roof of a building or with a trestle on a sloping roof.
- **Novel adsorption desalination (AD) technology:** Adsorption Desalination is a thermal based technology recently developed, which employs waste heat source or solar thermal energy to power the absorption cycle, using a highly porous silica gel. In this method, water adsorption/desorption occurs in an evaporator followed by vapor adsorption/desorption onto silica gel and the condensation at the condenser. The adsorption desalination cycles are operated in batches in one or more



pair of reactors. A further variation of this basic AD technology to improve overall efficiency and water yield is now currently gaining ground. It is the hybrid of conventional Multi Effect Distillation (MED) and Adsorption Desalination (AD) called MEDAD.

Specific energy consumption of less than 1.5 KWH/ 1000 liters has been reported for seawater using AD technology, which is one of the lowest so far achieved by any desalination technology, and the big plus is that it has immense synergy with the German concentrated solar technology generating, concurrently both PV power and thermal heat, which are the two most important green energy inputs for the AD technology, again being produced at the lowest cost.

### **An overview of water shortfall by 2025**

Assuming 1,700 cubic meter per capita water availability is a stressed condition and based on prediction of 1341 cubic meter availability by 2025, the shortfall for our country will be say 350 cubic meter per capita by that year, but based on the current per capita availability of 1545 cubic meter, the shortfall will be say 200 cubic meter per capita.

Assuming that we try to make up even to the per capita figure of current availability of 1545 cubic meter, we shall have to plan to set up an additional annual water capacity of 1.3 billion x 200 cubic meter=260 billion cubic meter, which works out to say 700 million cubic meter on a daily basis, i.e., almost 200 times of the current supply of Mumbai city which receives 3.5 billion litres of water per day.

### **A new water paradigm of reduce, reuse and recycle**

By 2030, it is expected that about 65% of the total world demand for water will be for agriculture requirements, while for industries 22%, and the balance 13% for domestic requirements. Apart from producing desalinated water

at a competitive cost, a combination of the technologies proposed above can also play a very vital role to treat the waste water, presently going waste, from almost all the sewage plants in cities and towns. The treated water of good quality (which may not be accepted for domestic supply) can be given to agriculture and industrial sectors, so as to help to save the harvested ground water and/or desalinated sea water resource (near the coast) for domestic use.

The treatment of waste water must be made mandatory by the government and also be classified as an important infrastructure for receiving funding, the cost of such treated water (or even desalinated water) supplied to the farmers could be subsidised like other inputs of fertiliser, seeds being given to them currently while supply of the same to industries could be on pure commercial basis.

Further, to stop the heavy depletion of ground water, for industries involved in manufacturing soft drinks, bottled water, sodas etc., it must be made mandatory for them to use only desalinated water (with necessary addition of minerals) in the various states abutting the coast, and if their plants are located in interiors, they should be relocated near the coast and should be asked to set up such desalination plants to source their water. Railways are also wasting immense water by supplying one litre bottle to passengers in the trains – almost more than half of which goes waste, they should switch over to 300 or 500 millilitres bottles and should be asked to source their water only from such desalination plants except in the northern states.

### **Setting up small and medium desalination plants**

Thus, two major disruptive technologies: 1. Concentrated solar power and thermal generation and 2. Adsorption Desalination (AD) or hybrid one of MEDAD, if put in tandem at any location near the coast, will have the flexibility of not only generating

substantial quantity of potable water from sea water, but will immensely add to the overall value chain by supplying the surplus balance PV power (after being used for requirements of the AD or MEDAD systems) with its captive micro DC or AC grid for household and other requirements for lightning, irrigation, pumps, etc., the balance thermal heat of course being available for hot water supply and space cooling.

The capacity of desalination plants with the above combination can be as low as say 5,000 liters/day, to say one million to five million liters/day or even larger of 100 million liters/day. And they can be set up at a reasonable cost with German concentrated solar technology of green power generation (less than ₹2 per KWH) and a well-designed desalination plant manufactured in India with simplistic dual system using AD (or even MEDAD) technologies. It is expected that the cost of water produced will be about four to five paise per litre (for plants having a capacity of 1 million litres/day), and it will be about twice this value for small plants of say 5,000 litres/day.

It would be of great interest if the Ministry of Water Resources/ Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation and NGOs involved in the field can take up the challenge to set up DEMO plants using the technologies mentioned above either at IIT (Delhi) or IIT (Madras), or even at BARC, Trombay and/or Central Salt Research Centre, Bhavnagar. These are institutions which have been active in promoting desalination technologies in the country for a gainful utilisation of the abundant sea water available on our long coast line, as well as the immense solar direct natural irradiance impinging throughout on

our well located tropical land mass. ■

**Jagdish J. Doshi** is an international Consulting Engineer based in New York and Mumbai.



# The eventful journey

The play *Anand Express*, which was staged at Mumbai's NCPA, was a lovely coming of age saga about three friends. **Prof. Avinash Kolhe** reviews the play.

**A**NAND Express is the fourth offering of the ongoing session of 'Aadhyam 2017' produced under the banner of Rage Productions, and directed by Nadir Khan. The story of *Anand Express* is simple, and yet complicated. Since it is a journey, both inwards and outwards, of three boys from Bandra to Baroda, putting it on the limited space of a stage was quite a challenge. The whole experiment was mounted at Jamshed Bhabha auditorium of the NCPA, and turned out to be a top-class job.

Keith Gray, (born: 1972), a British novelist wrote *The Ostrich Boys* in 2008. It was adapted to stage by another British playwright Carl Miller. Akarsh Khurana adapted the same to Indian conditions and locales, and this is how one *Anand Express* came to be.

## The story

Three college buddies – Kenny (Siddharth Kumar), Wasim (Chaitanya Sharma) and Neeraj (Vivaan Shah) decide to give their deceased friend Anand (Sukant Goel) a meaningful send-off. When alive, Anand often talked about visiting Anand, a town in Gujarat, famous as the milk capital of India, which was created by the late Dr. Verghese Kurien. The three decide to take Anand's ashes to Anand and give him a fitting funeral.

They switch off their cell phones and leave Mumbai for Baroda. As is expected in such situations, they take the wrong train, forget their belongings, run short of money on the way. They earn some money by



A still from *Anand Express*

bungee-jumping and finally reach Anand, the town. This journey itself is a revelation of sorts. It brings to light those things which they would have loved to forget completely. It is also an act of atonement for the three friends. Each is guilty of some less honourable act in Anand's life.

One friend had not made time to meet Anand when he was informed by Anand that by mistake, he had deleted all files of the novel written by his father. Anand had felt shattered. The second friend confesses that he had seen Anand being beaten up in the garden, but did not have the guts to go to Anand's rescue. Unfortunately for him, Anand had seen him and this guilt weighs on his mind. Then there is the third friend who was dating Tanya, Anand's ex-girl friend. Anand got wind of this, and was heartbroken. These

secrets spilling out forces the audience to question the nature of friendship, trust and betrayal. Slowly and steadily the three realise that perhaps it was not an accident that claimed Anand's life, perhaps it was suicide? The truck driver under whose truck Anand died, kept claiming that Anand threw himself in front of the truck. The play that begins on a playful note starts getting somber, sad and serious.

Akarsh Khurana's version uses Indian English liberally which makes the audience feel at home, and the story becomes that much more credible. The play has a non-linear fragmented narrative, and yet the tempo never goes down thanks largely to the boundless energy of the youthful cast. Though we get to see four young actors on stage, they play many other characters that are incidental to the story.

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# A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, A Life

**Author:** Arun Tiwari  
**Publisher:** Harper Collins Publishers India, 2015.  
**Pages:** 576  
**Price:** ₹ 799

**A**.P.J. Abdul Kalam – *A Life*, a biography of this unique man, a ‘godsend-to-earth’, by Arun Tiwari, was published by Harper Collins Publishers India not very long ago. What M.K. Gandhi was in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Kalam was in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the first decade and half of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

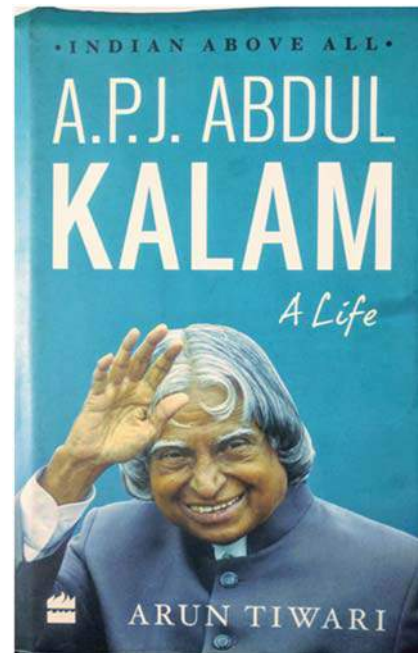
I have often heard from people that ‘It is not possible to emulate Gandhi in modern times...it is a crooked world we are living in.’ Well, who said that it was not a crooked world when Gandhi walked upon the earth? Perhaps it was more so. When you read about Kalam’s life in this book, you at once know that that popular belief is to be challenged.

If the Thirukkural – by sage Thiruvalluvar (one of Kalam’s four favourite books), is a treatise on virtuous and purposeful living, this biography is an application of the theory expounded in the Thirukkural. Kalam started off learning physics and then moved on to the ‘applied sciences’ (engineering), and finally to the application of this knowledge during his work-life at HAL, DRDO, ISRO and TIFAC. Quite like learning the Thirukkural by rote, believing firmly that ‘knowledge without action is useless and irrelevant’, and putting the sage’s precept to practice.

This six-part biography which runs into over 500 pages, has a foreword by Sadhu Brahmaviharidas of Ahmedabad. In a wonderful blend of the spiritual,

scientific, managerial, and ‘cradle-to-cradle cyclical thinking’. Tiwari has titled the six parts as: Simulation, Creation, Realisation, Expansion, Dispersion and Emancipation. The epigraphs of the parts and the chapters have poignant quotes from the likes of inter alia, Seneca, Aristotle, Plato, GB Shaw, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Swami Vivekananda, Lao-Tzu, Leo Tolstoy, John Quincy Adams, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ferdinand Foch, Robert Oppenheimer, Vincent van Gogh, Friedrich Nietzsche, St. Francis of Assisi, FDR and the Holy Bible. Quotes from accomplished greats to embellish the story of Abdul Kalam, a good-to-great genial giant, who has left behind a legacy which needs to be honoured, preserved, and most importantly, lived!

The biography takes you from Kalam’s birth and childhood on Pamban Island, graduation from the Madras Institute of Technology, before he started his work-life at Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, and moved on subsequently to work for the ISRO, DRDO and TIFAC. While he was President of India, he promoted technology as an instrument that can be put to good use for sustainable development of all the nations of the world, not just India. He believed that conflicts must be replaced by collaboration, coercion by concord, confrontation by cooperation and religiosity must metamorphose into ‘nameless’ and ‘formless’ spirituality.



A top-rated scientist, he was a realist who believed that technology must be transferred, absorbed and applied to the needs of the hoi polloi for development to be complete.

Readers would have read the other books by Dr. Kalam written before this one – starting from *Wings of Fire*, which was a birthday gift from my wife to me, just after we got married. This one, which is being reviewed, has excerpts from several speeches, lectures and addresses given/delivered by Dr. Kalam in his multiple capacities as scientist, teacher, philosopher, reformer and statesman. Here are some of them:

- Thinking is progress, non-thinking is stagnation.
- Education systems around the world will have to work to create enlightened international citizens.
- Spirituality has to be introduced to young students without bringing in religious terms.
- Physical connectivity, electronic connectivity, knowledge connectivity and financial connectivity need to be pursued in an integrated manner so that economic connectivity will emerge leading to a self-actuated people and economy.

- I have no doubt that the future of the nation is in the hands of the younger generation.
- All religions in their true form are one and the same.

You pick the book and follow his life from Pamban Island in the south to Rashtrapati Bhavan in the north, and beyond, becoming one with the Gods, whose will he carried out on Mother Earth from 1932 to 2015. Like Mahatma Gandhi, he was born in October. And though there have been many after Gandhi who laboured hard –

in thought, word and deed – to make the 'Unity in Diversity', that has often tended to slip away, an unshakeable reality. Dr. Kalam's efforts to knit religions together to form something transcendental – spirituality – and encourage and inspire children to think of themselves as custodians of a prosperous and noble India in the future, as a writer, orator, teacher, scientist and philosopher, makes him a smiling beacon (take a look at the book cover), a guiding light to look up to, to read about and to listen to (Youtube videos), whenever the going

gets tough.

Buy or borrow it. Read it. Ponder over it. Apply it. Treasure it and share it. ■

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



## The eventful journey

(Continued from page 49)

The initial ambience of the play is a bromance like *Dil chahata hai* and *Zindagi na milegi dobara*. But this similarity ends soon and *Anand Express* starts charting its very own journey. It is not only about journey of three young boys from Bandra to Baroda, but also an inward journey where they are called upon to face some bitter truths about friendship, betrayal, etc.

I was reminded of Satyajit Ray's *Aranyer din ratri*, a film made in 1970. Here too, four young friends go into the forest for a weekend party. Too many things happen in the forest and by the time they drive out on Sunday evening, all four have been transformed into mature adults. If one reads the story of *Anand Express*, one realises that to show all these scenes on the limited space of theatre would be a huge challenge.

Nadir Khan, the director of the play, has used multi-media technique and a huge multi-purpose bloc that is used to communicate change of scene, locale and characters. The trick of putting Anand often on the top of the



The young actors have done a brilliant job

bloc is quite impressive as he looks at the happenings on stage from heaven where he is supposed to be after his death. The projectors are used to communicate train journeys, and small changes in costumes add variety to the whole experience.

### Outstanding production

While watching *Anand Express* two things stood out. One is the set design (Fali Uniwala), and second is the light design (Arghya Lahiri). Both these aspects are under expert hands and hence add a lot to the visual effect of the play. Then there is top class acting by all four young actors. Kenny, Wasim, Neeraj and Anand – all four

express youthful energy and innocence. They have managed to convincingly communicate the changes in their mindset as the play progresses. From a group of well-meaning boys who are keen to give their best friend a fitting farewell, they end up losing their innocence and step into adulthood. *Anand Express* is surely an excellent entertainment, and definitely worth a watch. ■

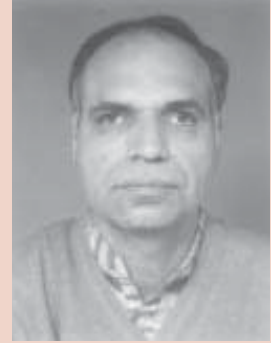


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# At your peril

*The need of the hour in India's agricultural sector is sustainable and eco-friendly farming. Can we resort to that even as GM crops' shadow looms?*



**Bharat Dogra**

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

SEVERAL aspects of problems faced by farmers have been highlighted in recent months. Yet, some important issues have not received the deserved attention. Firstly, there is the very important need to reduce the cost of farming. Secondly, there is the need to emphasise that the solutions we find for the farming crisis should definitely be along the lines of eco-friendly farm practices, or along the lines of agro-ecology. Only then, these solutions will be sustainable.

During the last five decades or so, the government has followed and favoured policies and technologies which have increased farming costs relentlessly – whether it is the costs of fertilisers pesticides, herbicides, seeds of big companies, or various kinds of farm machinery. Firstly, the government implemented policies which trapped farmers in this technology, and at a later stage, price of some of the inputs and implements went on increasing arbitrarily. The next phase is that of extension in some way or the other of intellectual property rights or patents to seeds and farming. This is also the phase of aggressive promotion of GM (genetically modified) crops, which are getting concentrated in the hands of fewer and bigger multinational companies bent on dominating the world food and agriculture scene.

India is predominantly a land of small farmers who have very low capacity to absorb losses. There are several uncertainties associated with farming, which have only increased in times of climate change, erratic weather, and declining water table. Hence, a relentless rise in costs over the years – which has accentuated further in more recent times – has been one of the most important factors behind the increasing debts and distress of farmers.

Fortunately, dozens of interesting experiments and initiatives all over the country have established that it is possible to reduce the costs on a sustainable basis. These possibilities will increase further if the government invests

in a much bigger way in water and moisture conservation, improving pastures and the green cover of indigenous trees of diverse species, protection of traditional diverse seeds and small-scale, low-cost irrigation projects, all this taken up with the involvement of local villagers. For sustainable and broad-based, deeply rooted well-being of farming and farmers, it is very important to maintain the fertility of soil, the water table, and also be protective towards the various pollinators and the various friendly birds, insects and micro-organisms. But the policies and technologies promoted and pursued in India have relentlessly destroyed the natural fertility of soil, depleted and lowered the water table, while perpetuating a genocide against bees and other pollinators, various friendly insects, earthworms and micro organisms. It is a measure of the distorted thinking that has dominated that wherever all this happened on the largest scale, those areas in official jargon are called the most developed areas. Now with the advent of GM crops and related technologies, the ground is being prepared for the next stage of irreversible ecological ruin. Fortunately again, there have been several experiments and initiatives which reveal that still it is possible to come out of the trap of this ecologically destructive farming and adopt sustainable, eco-friendly farming practices. The two challenges of reducing costs and protecting environment are mutually supportive of each other. The same methods, technologies and policies can be very useful in protecting environment and reducing costs. In some places, organic and eco-friendly farming has been made needlessly expensive by adding costly certification procedures. This is not for us. We need those eco-friendly methods which are so low cost as to be close to zero budget.

Very low cost methods and ecologically protective methods become more possible within the overall perspective of self-reliant communities. So the key issues are reducing costs, eco-friendly farming, and an overall perspective of increasing self-reliance. ■

# The excluded

*Has last year's demonetisation led to increased exclusion of the marginalised and poorest people of India?*



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

**E**ITHER the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) thinks that the demand for cash has fallen, or it believes that it should be curtailed. Eight months after demonetisation the RBI says that the re-monetisation process will not be completed. Currently, the currency in circulation is at 82.6% of the amount before 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2016, and likely to remain at that point. ATMs (Automatic Teller Machines) were running dry in the cities in May this year. The situation in cities may have improved, but reports from rural areas indicate that cash is still in short supply.

The mystery behind this decision like the decision of 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2016, remains. Some reports suggest that the decision to keep cash supply lower now is to control black economy and push people to digital transactions. There is some enigma to rationale number one, that is, control of black money, because western countries have in the past demonetised to check illegal weapons, drugs and money laundering (usually transacted in cash) by extinguishing large denomination currency in a phased manner. In India however, ₹ 500 and ₹ 1000 were removed and replaced by ₹ 500 and ₹ 2000.

The second rationale of forcing the process of digital transactions is simply untenable. The level of internet penetration is too low and skewed in favour of the well off classes. The Centre for Communication and Development Studies (CCDS) recently conducted a study in Pune, a city of three million residents, and a manufacturing and IT hub and found that it simply lacks the routers, fiber optic links and servers needed to expand access. Hardly any public Wi-Fi spots exist, and broadband connections with faster speeds require infrastructure that is rarely found in urban India, even less so in low-income areas, and much less in rural ones. While an estimated 27% of India's men use the internet, only 17% of India's women do so. Being able to afford an internet-connected device is expensive in a country where an

estimated 75% of the population earns less than ₹ 5,000 per month. Obviously, cash is the cheapest and for a vast majority, the easiest mode of transaction in India. So why is its use being limited? Is it only to eliminate untaxed incomes and illegal transactions of a minority?

What is perhaps more disquieting is the impact shortage of currency has had on the livelihoods of those at the bottom of the social pyramid. Petty manufacturers, vendors and traders found that their turnover shrunk, at first drastically in the months after November 2016 and then recovered, but to remain at below pre-November levels. In the immediate aftermath of 8<sup>th</sup> November, middle classes hastily shifted to large retail outlets that accepted card payments for their daily needs, thereafter only a section of that class has returned to petty vendors and traders. It took eight months for cash supply to reach normalcy in cities.

Online transactions increased after demonetisation and then fell, but they have remained above the November 2016 level. Only a section, usually the older generation and poorer have stayed with petty producers, local products and traders. GDP (Gross Domestic Product) estimates will not reflect this structural change immediately or the impact of demonetisation on this process. A larger class based survey of the impact of currency shortages on petty producers and traders is essential.

Processes that result in the exclusion of petty producing and trading classes must be analysed in the light of slow generation of jobs in the economy. If livelihoods in cities are threatened, what is the alternative for these people? The recent farmers' agitations in various parts of India is now widely acknowledged as the consequence of long term agrarian distress, rising farming costs, fluctuating prices, followed by cash shortages caused by demonetisation. What will be the likely impact of prolonged cash shortages resulting in deflation on rural and urban economies? ■





### DISASTERS IN HISTORY-3

# YOUNG

## Eruption of Tambora



Volcanoes offer a glimpse into the fiery interior of our planet. Unfortunately the awesome spectacle is also one of the most destructive forces of nature.

The world's deadliest volcanic eruption occurred in 1815 when Mount Tambora on Sumbawa Island, Indonesia, exploded, killing an estimated 80,000 people and affecting the global climate.

Tambora was a dormant volcano for centuries before it suddenly erupted on the evening of 10<sup>th</sup> April. Three columns of flames rose to a great height before uniting at the top. An eye witness said, "In a short time, the whole mountain next to Sangir appeared like a body of liquid fire, extending itself in every direction." 10,000 people died.

Within an hour, falling ash filled the air and pitch darkness descended on the land. The explosion was heard 2,600 km away, and ash fell upto a distance of 1,300 km. The lava spread at least 20 km from the summit. The volcano raged for two days, decimating the village of Tambora.

### Climatic Aftermath

The Tambora volcano released vast amounts of sulphur into the atmosphere, contributing to a global cooling. North America and Europe witnessed cold weather conditions during the summer months of 1816 with Canada getting 30 cm of snowfall in June! 1816 became 'the Year Without a Summer'.

Before the eruption, Tambora measured about 4,300 m high. The volcano blew off its top leaving behind a massive crater measuring 6 –7 km wide and 600 –700 m deep. Now the mountain measures only 2,851 m high!

The volcano destroyed all vegetation on the island. Famine followed and thousands died of starvation and disease.

### Fast facts

- ◆ Mount Tambora's gigantic crater can be seen from space via satellite!
- ◆ In 2004, archeologists unearthed well preserved cultural remains of Tambora buried by the 1815 eruption under 3 m of lava. Tambora is now dubbed the Pompeii of the East!
- ◆ The Laki volcano in Iceland (1783) killed 9,350 people, reducing 25% of the population!
- ◆ The Vesuvius volcano of 79 AD buried the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

### AMAZING LIVING WORLD

The oil beetle is called the blister beetle because of its unique form of defence. When attacked the beetle spurts oil from its leg joints. The oil contains a chemical called



## Blistering Oil

cantharadine that causes the skin to erupt in blisters. The beetle has a shiny black body that is 30mm long. The female that is usually larger than the male, lays over 1000 eggs in tiny holes in the ground. Once hatched the larvae crawl up the stems of flowering plants and hide in the pollen inside the flowers.

When a bee — usually a ground-nesting solitary bee — sits on the flower, the larvae attach themselves with hooklike projections to the bee's legs, thus getting a ride to the beehive. Once at the beehive, the larvae feed on the bee's larvae and honey and stay there till adulthood. The oil beetle is found in various parts of the United Kingdom.

## ART BEAT

## Sarangi Virtuoso

*The renowned musician passed away recently.*



Dhruba Ghosh was one of the reasons why the world applauds Indian classical music. He helped elevate the status of the *sarangi* as a solo instrument.

Born in 1957, Ghosh grew up in a musical family – his father was a renowned *tabla* player, Nikhil Ghosh. He was yet a teen when he began performing in his father's concerts. Since then, he performed at numerous concerts and festivals in India and around the world.

Ghosh propagated the *sarangi* by collaborating with foreign classical musicians. He was a founder member of the World String Orchestra in Japan, which



brings together the traditional string instruments of Japan, China, Korea, Uzbekistan and India.

One of his fruitful collaborations was with American saxophonist Paul Winter for Miho: Journey to the Mountains, a project inspired by the sounds of nature. He composed two tracks one of which was the Whale Raga – an unusual duet with Humpback whales. It won the 2010 Grammy award for the Best New Age Album.

He was the Principal of Bharatiya Sangeet & Nartan Shikshapeeth of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai.

## STORY TRAP

The following passage is taken from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe has made a small factual error while writing this paragraph. Can you spot the mistake?

A little after noon I found the sea very calm... I pulled off my clothes for the weather was hot to extremity and took to water; but when I came to the ship, my difficulty was still greater to know how to get on board... I spied a small piece of rope... and by the help of that rope got up into the fore-castle of the ship... the ship's provisions were dry and untouched by the water and being very well disposed to eat, I went to the bread-room and filled my pockets with biscuits and ate them as I went...



**Answer:** He says he undressed before getting into the water, so how did he fill his pockets with biscuits?

## CURIOSITY

## How is the age of a meteorite determined?

Meteorites are chunks of matter that fall from outer space. Their size ranges from small pebbles to huge rocks that weigh many tonnes.

Meteorites contain radioactive atoms of uranium. Some of these radioactive atoms gradually decompose to form the stable element, lead.

Scientists have estimated that it takes about 4.5 billion years for half the quantity of uranium in any sample to turn to lead. This time span is known as the half life of a radioactive element. So the amount of lead present in the meteorite sample is measured using a mass spectrograph and then by calculating how much of the original uranium has decomposed, the age of the meteorite is worked out.

This method, called the radiometric dating technique, has been used to find the age of several meteorites. For example, the over 60-tonne Hoba meteorite found in Namibia, the largest ever, is estimated to be 200-400 million years old.



# DR. R.K. SRIKANTAN

Vocalist par excellence (1920-2014)

**N**ONAGENARIAN vocalist Rudrapatna Krishnashastry Srikantan who passed away at Bengaluru on 17 February 2014, was perhaps the last surviving link to a golden age of Carnatic music, and as he was active on the musical circuit till almost his last breath, he also earned the distinction of being the oldest musician to train, perform and travel at such an advanced age.

Srikantan who was born at Rudrapatna in the Hassan District of Karnataka to Krishnashastry, an orator, playwright, poet and *Harikatha vidwan*, was initially mentored by his father, and later by his brother Venkatarama Shastry before he came under the tutelage of eminent musicians of the time like Subbanna and Chowdiah. He had a keen ear for music right from his early days, and was a regular attendee at concerts held in Mysore, and was highly influenced by *Nadaswaramvidwans* and vocalists who had mastered the Carnatic genre like Semmangudi Srinivasayyer, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Musiri Subramania Iyer, G. N. Balasubramaniam, and Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer.

However, he soon evolved his own style, and his singing was always characterised by 'Sahitya Shuddam' (correct pronunciation) and 'Shruti Shuddam' (refinement of pitch). Srikantan also attained the heights of popularity through his radio programmes where he clinically covered every minute detail of the songs he taught to his students. So dedicated was the musician to his craft that even in the penultimate year of his passing, he performed his normal quota of 75 concerts and lecture demonstrations in different cities in the country. He was also one of the very few musicians outside Tamilnadu who could storm the bastion of the Mecca of classical music, Chennai, and his concerts during the December festival were eagerly awaited by his aficionados who thronged the halls.

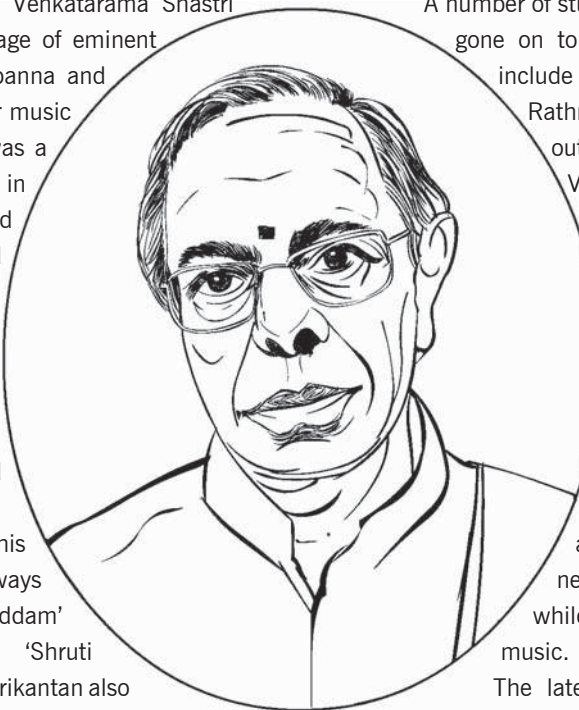
Srikantan, a vocalist of the Karnataka Sangeetha tradition also took great pains to set to tune the lyrics of some of the most famous poets of Karnataka including inter alia Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, Kuvempu, K.V. Puttappa, Da Ra Bendre, D.V.Gundappa and others. He also popularised the *vachana*-s

of Shaivite savants like Basaveshwara, Akkamahadevi and Allama Prabhu. The celebrated vocalist also held workshops on the compositions of the famous trinity, Thyagaraja, Shama Shastry and Muthuswamy Dikshitar. Karnataka's very own saint poet Purandaradasa was also one of his favourites. At the peak of his popularity, Srikantan was hailed as the 'Semmangudi' of Karnataka which was fulsome praise considering the fact that Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was one of the towering personalities in the field of Carnatic music for several decades.

A number of students who trained under him have gone on to carve their own niche and they include his son R.S.Ramakanth, daughter Rathnamala Prakash who branched out to *sugamasangeeth* (light music), Vidyabhushana, T.S. Sathyavathi, M.S. Sheela, H.K. Narayana, veenavidushi-s Suma Sudhindra and Shanti Rao, and former ISRO Chairman Dr.K. Radhakrishnan who was among his star pupils. The *vidwan* always emphasised the three aspects: humility, discipline and devotion as the pre-requisites to learn music, and instilled in his students the need to follow chaste traditions while pursuing their careers in classical music.

The late vocalist was held in very high esteem by the classical music fraternity across the country, and was also the recipient of several awards and honours. Apart from the Padma Bhushan conferred on him by the Union Government, Srikantan was also honoured with the Sangeet Natak Academy award by the Centre, the Karnataka State SangeetNataka Academy award, the prestigious Sangeetha Kalanidhi award instituted by the Madras Music Academy, the TTK Memorial award for Best Musician, the Karnataka Rajyotsava award, a honorary doctorate from the Bangalore University, and the Chowdiah National award instituted by the Academy of Music. A biography titled *The voice of a generation* chronicled the life and times of this immensely talented vocalist. ■

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





# AIR MARSHAL PARTHA KUMAR DEY, PVSM, AVSM

A pioneering and exceptional officer (1934-2014)

**P**ARTHA Kumar Dey was born on 30 March 1934. He was educated in the Bhartiya Indian Military College (RIMC). The Principal of the college had a high reputation, so much so that based on his recommendation Partha was accepted for IAF even before completing his High School. He was commissioned on 17 January 1953. His father S.K. Dey was an ICS officer who was seconded to the International Food & Agriculture Organisation with its headquarters in Rome.

Dey was posted to No. 7 Squadron where he acquired good experience of Vampire 52 fighter aircraft. He then moved to No. 10 Squadron equipped with Vampire NF10 night fighters. Service in this unit demanded night flying usually with the help of instruments only. He was deputed to the Empire Test Pilots School in 1957, and became an exceptional test pilot at the age of 24 years, in the rank of a flying officer—a record for any modern air force. After the course, he was attached to Hawkers for test flying experience, followed by deputation to Folland Aircraft Ltd, Chilbolton, for testing Gnat fighter aircraft. In this assignment, he worked under Wing Commander Suranjan Das. They completed a fair amount of work in the development of this fighter aircraft, the remaining work to be conducted in India. His contribution was greatly appreciated by the Follands.

Test pilot's assignment demands exceptional flying skills, keen observation and ability to take split second decisions under stress. An incident faced by Dey will bring out these qualities. At Chilbolton, a small probe was fitted on the nose ahead of the cockpit and wind shield. It was done to measure air temperature. It had to be tested at sub-sonic and supersonic speeds as well. It worked well at sub-sonic speed, but at supersonic dive, the aircraft swung to one side. This happened due to disturbance and deviation in the air flow caused by the probe. Dey promptly controlled it and avoided a fatal accident.

He was promoted to Wing Commander, and commanded 8 and 22 Squadrons in 1968. After working as the chief test pilot, he took over as Commandant of the Aircraft Systems Testing Establishment (ASTE) at Bangalore from 1 January 1976 to 1 July 1979, in the rank of Air Commodore. He had a second tenure there as Commandant in the rank of Air Vice-Marshal in 1989. This unit evaluated aircraft and systems, including new aircraft, for induction into service. ASTE's Air Force Test Pilot School is the fifth such institution in the world, and Dey commanded it with distinction.

The Gnat aircraft had not been fully evaluated in the UK, and the task of evaluating this compact fighter aircraft under tropical conditions was assigned to the ASTE in 1957. The ASTE established various flight test instrumentation laboratories and a detailed report were submitted in three months time. In 1959, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) began the production of Gnats in India, and Dey was the right choice for testing and developing this aircraft due to his earlier experience. He soon joined HAL and made significant contributions to flight testing and development of new aircrafts like HF-24. He was awarded the AVSM in 1975.

He met Asha Damle, daughter of Medical Officer Air Vice-Marshal Damle, and they got married in December 1961. They had two children, Nikhil and Deepshikha. Nikhil has dedicated his life to the service of poor farmers and artisans in Rajasthan, often collaborating with Aruna Roy, the Ramon Magsaysay Award winner. Deepshikha is the wife of Air Vice Marshal Anil Khosla, presently AOC, Jammu & Kashmir, at Udhampur.

Dey had moved up steadily in IAF, eventually becoming the AOC-in-C of South Western Air Command on 1 August 1988. He was awarded the PVSM in January 1988 for outstanding service in this command. He retired on 31 March 1992, and passed away on 10 January 2014. ■

— Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



# MANGESH TENDULKAR

The activist cartoonist (1934-2017)

**H**E handed over his hearing aid to my son Amol and said that he would be now going to 'out-of-coverage' area', recalls daughter Vaishali Deshpande. What a subtle way to go for veteran cartoonist and humourist Mangesh Tendulkar, who passed away due to bladder cancer on 11 July 2017 in Pune, at 83 years of age.

Born in Kolhapur, Mangesh Tendulkar's family shifted to Pune in the early stage of his life. After his BSc., though he started working at the Ammunition Factory in Khadki, he could not be separated from his passion of the brush and writing, and he put his love for politics and social issues into his artistic work, wearing many hats as a cartoonist, social activist and author.

Since 1954, he caricatured human foibles in an evolving Pune, chronicling the city through its steady transformation from a 'sleepy' township to a bustling city with metropolis pretensions. A series of 100 cartoons set forth his concerns and the preservation of Pune's once-leafy environs with his trademark good-humoured, gentle skepticism.

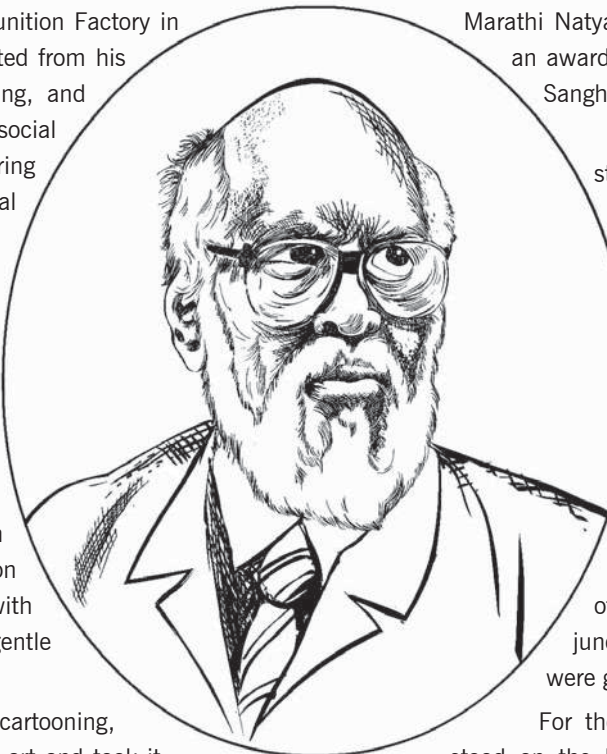
Despite no formal training in cartooning, he mastered the nuances of the art and took it beyond entertainment, by highlighting various aspects and issues ranging from politics, art, civic issues, and environment on canvas. His succinct depiction not only evoked awe in readers, but also stirred their conscience. He effortlessly exemplified the big truth that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Mangesh is incidentally the younger brother of acclaimed playwright, screenwriter, and social commentator, the late Padma Bhushan Vijay Tendulkar. He credited his brother for his guidance in achieving success as a cartoonist, saying a volume by a French cartoonist in his brother's collection spurred him on his vocation. In all, a total of 89 exhibitions of his cartoons were held. He was known for his take on various social issues through his cartoons. Every three months, he

would hold an exhibition of his cartoons which would always have a new set of ten cartoons to look out for.

He was an author who also penned several books, including *Bhuichakra*, *Sunday Mood* (compilation of 53 articles and cartoons), and *Kuni Pampato Ajun Kalokh* among others. His book titled *Cartoons* was published in 2001.

Among the several awards he was conferred with were the President's Medal in 1980, Pulotsav award in 2003, Marathi Natya Parishad Award in 1993, and an award from Mumbai Marathi Patrakar Sangh in 1994.



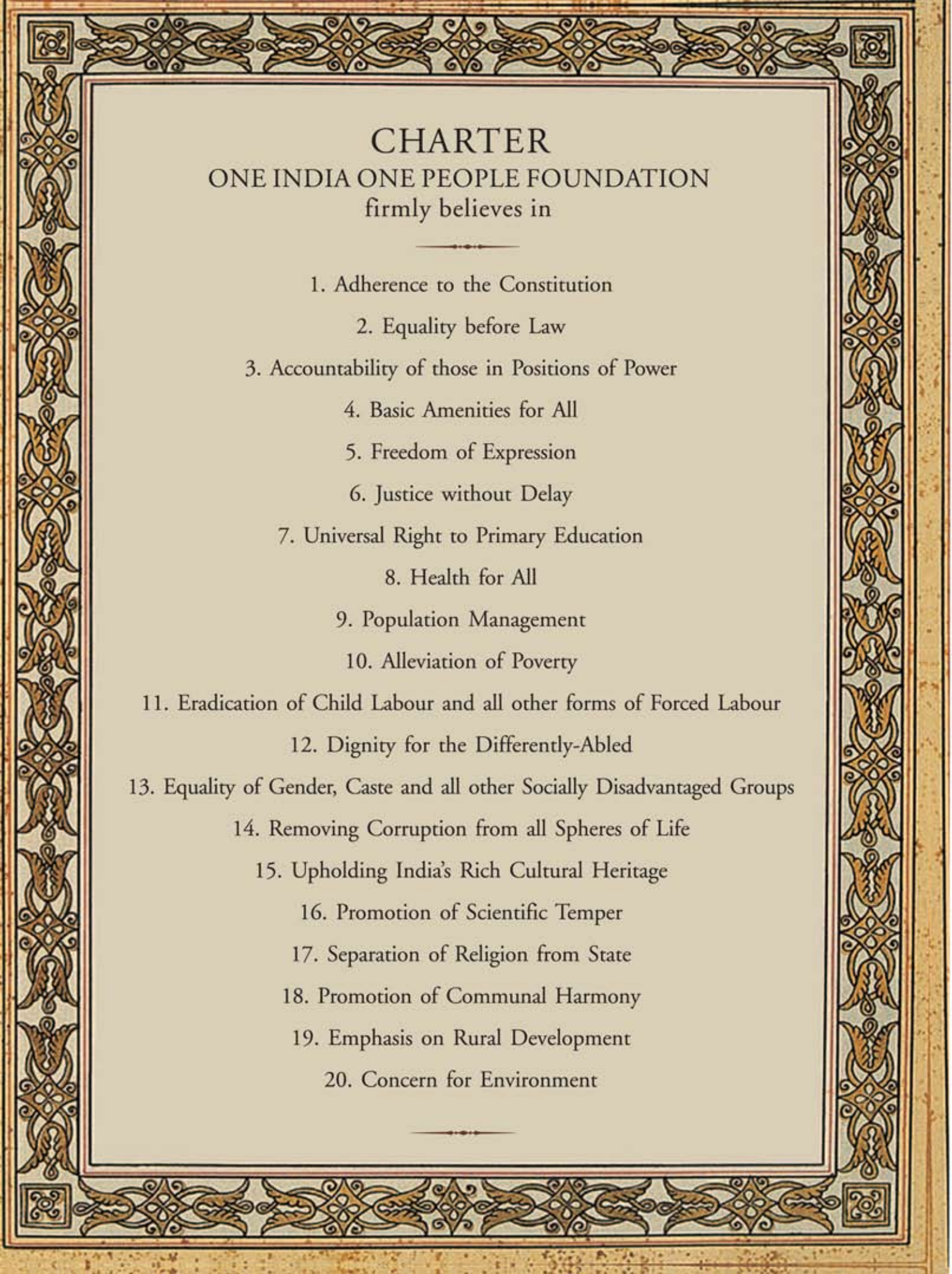
Tendulkar expressed his straightforward views about various civic issues. The postcard cartoonist who cared about traffic safety, he was instrumental in creating traffic awareness in Pune city, and gave great support to the Pune traffic police, in the backdrop of a hyper-burgeoning Pune riven with traffic lawlessness. His several cartoons and caricatures based on the theme of traffic displayed at various junctions and signals in the city were great hits.

For the past 17 years, he personally stood on the busy Nal Stop on Karve Road, Pune, holding placards, and distributed nearly 10,000 postcards, illustrated with his trademark funny cartoons generally on Diwali day, with a traffic message to commuters. While some would show respect by touching his feet, he had confessed that, "there were people who did not even bother to roll down their car windows when I knocked." Survived by his wife, a son and a daughter, his funeral was attended by social activists, politicians, associates and fellow cartoonists, who lamented '*about the loss of a multi-faceted born artist and personality, whose words created ripples, though he was soft-spoken*'. ■

– A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, short story writer, poet who wants the world to be happy always.

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





# CHARTER

## ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION

firmly believes in

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



# WHO AM I?

*Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?*

*Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?*

*Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?*

*Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?*

*Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?*

*Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?*

*Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?*

*Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?*

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

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

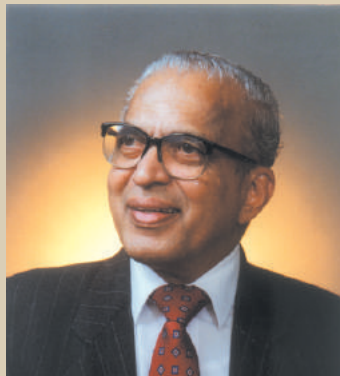
*Am I the Commander-in-Chief first or an Indian first?*

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

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

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

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

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

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE